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Sacrality and Worldmaking: New Categorical Perspectives

If we attend to the world not in terms of objects but in terms of categories, this is especially so in the study of religion where we face both the shaping and obscuring effects of basic, etic terms like myth, ritual, deity and sacrality. Depending on how any one of these is theoretically construed, a quite different set of data, comparisons, and explanatory issues is generated.

The category of the sacred in particular and the role of transcultural concept-formation in general have undergone an obvious crisis. For the most part, "the sacred," if not an empty label, has been linked with theologism, and transcultural concepts have been condemned for their general non-comparability and colonialist intent.

Yet I am convinced that without comparative modes of analysis the study of religion would be vacuous, lacking its defining ingredient, and that without any concept of sacrality we would have lost a crucial lens for describing, analyzing, and interpreting our subject matter. I believe we therefore need to reconstruct an understanding of cross-cultural perspective and its employments so that they are adequate to complexity and difference, as well as to commonality. We cannot take a step without concepts, and even thickly-described historical and ethnographic studies will not escape them. No object is noticed without a directing category.

Here, then, I would like to approach the matter of transcultural templates through an analysis of certain concepts of sacrality. Like the Finnish scholar Veikko Anttonen, with whose work (1996a, 1996b) I am in much sympathy, I not only think the old model of this concept has served its purpose but that analytical approaches are promising, and will discuss here some of my attempts to think through aspects of the issue. The format includes 1) proposing a de-centering, differentiating and secularizing of the category of sacrality, 2) describing one of its subtypes that needs more attention and which I call "sacred order," and 3) examining some of the key conceptual and methodological functions of that category.

I. De-centering Sacrality

With some exceptions, the discourse of sacrality has indeed been dominated by a single model, where "the sacred" became a reified noun—a substantive term for a supernatural reality, a label for the transcendent, or even an epithet for divinity, mystery, the wholly other. As such, the expression has functioned to bestow a sense of unity to the diversity of cultures, link that unity with a transcendent reality, and offer a simple way of making sense of otherwise foreign beliefs and practices by giving them a familiar, generic referent. These purposes are of course no longer taken for granted.

While critics take the sacred as a hopelessly privileged religious category, I consider it too important a behavioral and structural component of religion to abandon, and would make the case that sacrality should be semantically recontextualized as a taxic indicator for certain ranges of cultural actions.

Before the category of the sacred became a staple of the phenomenological movement, Émile Durkheim had already construed it as a behavioral category, a socio-religious "fact," a pattern of an "irreducible" kind, and a part of the nuclear classificatory apparatus of any religious system (cf. Paden 1994). His primary use of the word was as an adjective, as in "sacred things," and these objects comprised data to be explained. For Durkheim the sacred was not a term for the "wholly other" or for a supernatural force, but a socially ordained sign that marked off a class of objects which required ritual respect and access. In Mary Douglas's phrase, "The sacred for Durkheim and Mauss was nothing more mysterious or occult than shared classifications, deeply cherished and violently defended. That is not all: this idea of the sacred is capable of analysis" (1987: 97).

Because of his sociological stance Durkheim's system was shunned by historians of religion, who were inspired more by R.R. Marett's correlation of mana and "the sacred," and took the development of that trajectory through Nathan Söderblom, Rudolf Otto and the phenomenologists of religion. I will not elaborate here on my view that Mircea Eliade's concepts of sacrality have more links with the French secular discourses than with Otto's *Das Heilige*, or my view that Eliade's idea of the *sui generis* nature of the sacred as a world-forming category has more in common conceptually with the Durkheimians than with the Protestant phenomenologists, but only note that a current of secular discourse about the sacred does exist, that Eliade's notion of sacrality appears to straddle the secular and religious schemas, and that a fuller genealogy of the concept of the sacred itself will be helpful in sorting all this out.

I employ the class-term "sacrality" to cover a range of behavioral domains connected with objects, states and processes deemed sacred or holy. That is, I believe we need to take a polythetic approach to the whole cluster of actions to which these terms point, and that we will find then that they form quite heterogeneous regional patterns and logics, and presumably are even subject to different explanatory frames and cognitive transmissions. Religiously endowed objects come in every genre and correspondingly evoke a variety of behaviors, e.g. respect, loyalty, defensiveness, purity, as well as numinous awe.

Analysis of the notion of sacrality and its behaviors could and should take place along any number of conceptual lines, crisscrossing the terrain with as many mappings and scannings as possible. Some typologies of sacrality have already been suggested: the sacred as either the pure or the unclean (W. Robertson Smith); as either the tabued or the unrestrained (Durkheim, Roger Caillois 1959); as either the locative or the utopic (Jonathan Z. Smith); as either the extraordinary or the nomic (Peter Berger); as either the quality of ritualist, discursive "unquestionableness" or as the affective, numinous sense of the holy (Rappaport 1979: 208-217); as either respect for cultic tradition or the sense of numinous power (Baetke 1942). Émile Benveniste's etymological analysis (1973: 445-469) showed that words for sacrality lined up into two main semantic vectors, the meanings of 1) "to be marked off" (e.g. *sacer*, *qadosh*, *hagios*), or 2) that which manifests health, power, good omen, or luck (*heil*, *spenta*). Other secular models stress a particular feature of sacrality, like the "sanctity of cognitive boundaries" (Mary Douglas); or the transgressive destruction of self-contained order (Georges Bataille); or violence (René Girard); or the "safeguarding of identity" (Hans Mol); or a bounded threshold separating realms of cultural potency (Arnold van Gennep, Veikko Anttonen); or the hierarchic (François-André Isambert).

These types and polarities suggest that sacrality may have more dimensions than otherness. Classically, when theories of the sacred either stretched the word to the service of a singular conceptual template like otherness, or, in contemporary use, when textbooks simply take it as a general label for "the religious," the concept is either limited to a metaphor or drained of content altogether. I would argue that sacrality is too rich and strategic a behavioral territory to be so limited, and that the more lenses we use and the more we complicate the topic the more religious behavior we will see and be able to explain.

II. Sacred Order as a Type of Sacrality

As a point of focus and exercise in analysis I will briefly examine one such lens, the concept of system-inviolability or sacred order (Paden 1996).

Sacred order here refers to behaviors that defend and restore the integrity of one's world. In contrast with the idea of experiencing or mediating otherness, what is central here are the practices and allegiances of upholding a world against threats and incursions. A sacred object is not only a source of awe, but of loyalty and commitment. As alluded to, some theoretic resources for this concept are available in Peter Berger's connection of *nomos* and sacrality (1967: 3–52), Mary Douglas' idea of system purity (1966, 1975), Jonathan Z. Smith's notion of locative order (1978: 129–171), and Hans Mol's assimilation of sacralization and the protection of identity (1976). An emic prototype is the Hindu concept of *dharma*, from the root *dhr*, "to uphold." An etymological prototype is *sancire* or *sanctus*, "ordained or secured as inviolable," and also some of the earlier pre-Christian senses of the category "holy." While the development of the term "holy" from its Indo-European base (*hailo*) is not entirely clear, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* it is with some probability assumed to have connoted "inviolable, inviolable, that must be preserved *whole* or intact, that cannot be injured with impunity" (Holy 1989: 318). Though theologians appropriated the terms holy and holiness as attributes of the divine, the concept of sacred order in some ways resonates with these pre-theological connotations of inviolateness. I would contrast *sanctus* here with terms that connote an empowered object, like *heil*, *numen*, Slavic *svyat* or even *mana*.

The relation of sacred and profane here is completely different than in the conventional mana model. In the latter the sacred represented the extraordinary or transcendent and the profane represented the mundane. But with sacred order, the sacred represents order and the profane is what violates it. In this second sense, they are dynamically oppositional. The profane is not just what is "outside the temple" (*pro-fanum*) but rather what subverts it. With sacred order, the sacred is not what points to the beyond, but to ways world-order is kept intact, and profanity is isomorphic with whatever actively threatens or offends that order through moral or ritual transgression, dishonoring infractions, apostate disloyalties, or chaotic anomy. In this template, then, sacred and profane are not different zones of experience but poles of a tension by which the system itself is kept honorable, clean, right and whole (Paden 1996: 5).

World, here, as the normative, inhabited program of highlighted or bounded categories, is not just a matrix where transcendental powers shine through, but one which humans uphold by keeping things rightly in place. As such, sacred order has at least the same level of urgency and strategic importance as encounters with the numinous. The one who reaches out to touch the holy Ark of the Covenant must die not only because of the mana of the Ark, but because of the profound system-violation.

Sacred order is not specific to religion, but is a factor in all social worlds, a basic set of responses related to the cognitive contrast, system/anti-system. This is to say that it is a fundamental structuring mechanism linked with the need for self-maintenance in the natural behaviors of any organism. Religions, however, form prototypical cases because of their explicit interpretation of system boundaries in cosmicized, superhuman terms, their ontologized coding of the system in social hierarchies and categorizations, and their inhibitory threats of supernatural punishment. As Peter Berger put it, "To go against the order of society is always to risk plunging into anomy. To go against the order of society as religiously legitimated, however, is to make a compact with the primeval forces of darkness" (1967: 39).

Naturally the threat to order comes in degrees. There are life-threatening matters and passing disturbances, threats to one's religious identity and daily annoyances. The degree to which order is sacred is expressed in the weightiness of the rules and observances which guard its infraction, in the state of horror, confusion or despair that occurs when boundaries are disturbed, and in the extremity of the purgative, restorative measures exacted once violation has in fact taken place. Sacred order, then, is not simply a template for cosmic design and organization but rather a dynamic process of territorial maintenance in the face of threatened or actual impurity, wrongness, or guilt. The world, above all, must be kept "right"—understanding "rightness" here as always culturally defined.

There are a large number of natural and social forms of commitment which are isomorphic with sacred order and constrain the sense of inviolate boundaries. In some respects these are the generating forces for constructing and transmitting this type of sacrality. Just as the classical phenomenologists identified the various forms of nature in which hierophanies can occur—such as sky, earth, stones, mountains and trees—so the very different expressions of sacred order also have typical matrices and zones, such as territory, bonding, tradition, hierarchy, social roles and memberships, and honor.

Territory. Habitation is a fundamental form of life, and for humans territorial behaviors, "place" and ownership take numerous genres.

In these spaces, humans, like other organisms, make worlds prone to danger and ambiguous boundaries, and devise techniques for self-defense and for expelling invaders. Here, most evidently, "the sacred" is not supernatural but biological, driven by the circuitries and instincts of self-preservation and species-survival; here sociobiology and the study of sacrality join interests; here inviolability is a strategy of life-space and self-maintenance.

Bonding. W. Robertson Smith described the first form of sacrality as "the sanctity of the kindred bond," where "all sacred relations and all moral obligations depend on the physical unity of life," and where the bond with the god is a reflection of the bond with the clan (1956: 47, 400). It is, he said, "...the one sacred principle of moral obligation" (1956: 53). The very nature of belonging to a group has an elemental obligatory character, whether in ascribed membership in a family, clan, ethnic group church, or nation, or in elective group affiliation. Nor is it surprising to find biologists noting that "the basic infrastructure of human solidarity is rooted in a biogenetic capacity and predisposition for bonding" (Bolin and Bolin 1984: 15). Loyalty to one's survival unit is surely one of the primordial, albeit raw, forms of sacrality.

Tradition. By tradition I do not mean a vague, disembodied world view of ideas, but the behavioral commitment of "doing things the way they have been done," and thus maintaining the normativeness of lineage-categories. In this sense, tradition, like territory, is best understood when disrupted. Tradition-behaviors replicate maps and scripts that ascribe defined identities and behavioral prototypes, and to break with these exemplars and guidelines is to rupture the world's a priori coherence. For example, it is believed by adherents that since its founding in the tenth century, every initiated monk in the Sakya lineage of Tibetan Buddhism has faithfully practiced a daily iteration acknowledging the continuous transmission of the dharma from each and all of the successive teachers in that tradition. This obedient ritual chain of the "River of Consecration" has ostensibly never been broken. One could cite similar examples of system-allegiance elsewhere. We have here I think an important modality of sacrality, but one paid scant attention in the works of the phenomenologists.

Hierarchy and authority. Hierarchy creates the behaviors of fealty, submission, levels of unapproachability, scales of deference and loyalty, and degrees of status purity. The phenomenon of subordination and rank has links with pre-human behaviors (Burkert 1996: 80-101). Political centralization ritualizes and mythologizes the sacrality

of its own authority, the violation of which puts world foundations at stake.

Social roles. In traditional societies, essentialized internal classifications of social structure embody cosmic order, and these ordained roles constrain behavioral boundaries. Faithfulness to role and the sacrifice of individuality to its requirements are strong factors in the production of systemic order. "High grid" societies create strong internal gradations of status (Douglas 1982: 183–254; Dumont 1980). Role subversion provokes system subversion and may lead to the creation of wholly new groups, as we see in the controversies and schisms over the ordination of women. One also thinks of the sacrality of ordained relationships of obligation in Confucianism, and again, its non-inclusion in western versions of the so-called phenomenology of the sacred.

High-definition membership. Some groups also operate by strong criteria of exclusive memberships, requiring clear-cut definitions and practices differentiating the insider's world from the non-insider's. Monasticism, new religious movements or revival movements, and separatist communities show this factor. Again, the identity markers—what one wears, eats, or avoids—become synecdochic codes for world maintenance, and become weighted and protected accordingly.

Honor. Finally, a promising area of research on sacrality would be to investigate its relation to the phenomenon of honor, understood here as a form of critical integrity (rather than as acclaim). The extremities people have performed and the lives sacrificed in the name of honor—whether personal or institutional—should be another clue to the compelling nature of sacredness as system inviolability.

Clearly none of these factors which generate the possibility of sacred order are specific to religion. But religion puts its own cast on sacred boundaries through its pre-eminent superhuman ethos, its strong, persistent ritualization (which in itself imposes stability on a chaotic universe), and certainly its hypostasized and institutionalized emic versions of sacred order. Indeed, if interpreters claim to find a structuring, constraining concept or norm at work in religion, but religions themselves have no categories that correspond to it, one might be suspicious of the concept. But religions abound with such terms. Apart from the already mentioned Hindu concept of *dharma*—the eternal, divinely endowed socio-cosmic order, upheld by righteousness, duty and law—one could also note the Muslim *Sharia*, Jewish *Torah*, general monotheistic notions of "the Word of God," the Confucian "Order of Heaven" (*T'ien*), the ancient Egyptian *Ma-at*, or the Greek *Themis*.

III. Issues

At this point we may turn to examine directly some of the conceptual factors embedded in the use of such a category. How does it function, what are its schematic purposes and linkages, what is it "good for"?

At the outset, skeptical questions arise. Isn't sacred order just an abstraction, an academic invention? Isn't it hopelessly malleable, non-unitary, and ambiguous at the edges, and thus incapable of clearly defining its own limits? As a comparative concept does it not merely impose itself on cultural data rather than illumine their complexity? Is it not just one more hegemonizing reflex attempting to corral the universe into a singular form? Doesn't the idea of "order" or "system" obscure the reality of plural systems of authority and of behavioral expectations that obtain within a single society?

I would like to show that a concept like this, while not a perfect descriptor in a tidy world to be sure, carries a useful and complex agenda of employments and networkings. It can operate in many contexts, and as a starting point for inquiry, heuristically uncovers and generates others, more or less productively differentiating and complicating itself along the way. As Nelson Goodman puts it, "For a categorial system, what needs to be shown is not that it is true, but what it can do" (1978: 129).

Here, then, are some of its relevant functions:

1. As with any interpretive concept, it is a device for "taking notice" (Salter 1992: 254). What we notice depends on the mappings we bring to the field. As describers of religion we cannot see something that we do not first have a category for. Without a word for it, most of the universe just goes by. Looking comes with a program, and the history of the study of religion is the history of generating themes and concepts that show us what to look for.

As a pointer in such study, the category of sacred order calls attention to areas of behavior that have a place and function in the construction of worlds that parallels the role of empowered, numinous objects in strategic effect. Thus we need to look for sacrality not just in the sky, in the hierophany, in the encounter with the gods, but in other places too, like the domains of bounded loyalties, fidelities and commitments. In this sense, the category has a topographic function, profiling additional regions and subregions to be explored.

2. A concept like sacred order forms a matrix of *comparative* inquiry that both connects and differentiates. On the one hand it shows common, analogical factors in human behavior, finding linkage between data that would otherwise remain isolated by culture and foreignness. Recurring patterns of human action are comparable here

not because they manifest the same transcendental reality, "the Sacred," but because humans behave in common ways around the world. On the other hand, a comparative concept like this sets a standard against which cultural differences may be highlighted, and to that point I will return.

3. The concept of sacred order is a relational entity that works by virtue of its contrastive and juxtapositional linkage in a larger spectrum of kinds of sacrality, and in this network gives them all better delineation.

For example, any object could have both manic and nomic functions. The realms of sacred order and numinous objects have a circular relation: Systemic authority grounds the reality of the object of belief while the object itself grounds that authority. And if the gods lend prestige to the system, without the authority of the system as a whole they have no existence (Isambert 1982: 270). To uphold the order of the system is then to uphold the reality of the gods themselves.

Sacred order also forms a contrastive concept with several kinds of anti-order. If there is category maintenance, there is also sacred opposition to regnant norms. Not all religiousness is conserving or defensive any more than it is all about otherness or numinousness. Order can become profane, and the system evil. Thus, counter-hegemonic sacred objectives emerge which are liberative or salvific, antinomian and levelling, and inviolability becomes a feature of those freedoms—freedom from tyrannical orders, suppressive captivities, or even the banality of structured norms. Here, in anti-order, factors like systemic honor, hierarchy, territory and social status can become perceived as traps to be abandoned, and authority something to be overthrown in the emergence of new identities. Enter the practices and mythologies of category reversal, the sacralities of world renunciation and salvation, of the interstitial spirits and their free play, of prophetic revitalization movements.

Insofar as sacred order is conservative and rigid, it also has another opposite: tolerance for disorder, adaptability to anomaly and integration of otherwise threatening worlds. Such factors, which invite diachronic analysis, will be of as much interest for historians of religion as is boundary maintenance *per se*.

4. The concept of sacred order, we have seen, bridges or joins with categories that otherwise would not contribute to discourse about the sacred, for example, territory, authority and honor. It is linked in interesting ways with the notions of integrity and identity. Connected with and amplified by these other categories, a richer, more complex understanding emerges. The very connection of sacrality

and "order" draws attention to the sacral dimension of social and political orders, and at the same time the socio-political element in religious order. Likewise, the study of law and of "rights" becomes a resource and field for the study of sacrality, and vice-versa.

5. Sacred order generates subtypes and subset questions. First, there are different phases of system maintenance: establishing order, defending it, restoring it if violated. Each of these has endless variant forms and cultural inflections. Order can be defended by suppression of enemies or by self-isolation. Restoring order can be done through burning heretics or through accepting apologies.

Each subtype or successive trait of sacred order serves as a point of comparison which invites and enables the perception of differences relative to that common trait. In this sense, the theme or point of comparability functions not to obliterate differences but as a format for highlighting them.

6. A theme like sacred order can be used as a stable point against which to examine not only differences in type, but differences in *content*. The theme or subtheme is not just an a priori idea that only replicates itself in example after example, as though the variations were just clones, so that all we ever really see is just the idea of "sacred order" exemplified—as a cookie-cutter mold reproduces itself over and over again in rolled dough. One thinks of many kinds of classical comparativism where the exemplum only exists to say, "here is our theme one more time, here is another *axis mundi* and another, and another;" or "here is a world tree in India, and there is one in China, and there is one among the Kwakiutl," as if the only function of the comparative mode were to establish the general ubiquity of its topic, to illustrate only itself, to write its homogenizing signature across the world of many cultures.

What can one learn, by putting the theme to the data, that is not already pre-given in the theme? We can, I believe, see sacred order not just as a feature that every community "has" in some mode of intensity, some style of defense, or some type of pollution-riddance, but also as something of interest because of the particular nature or content of that which constitutes the sacred order itself. Just because sacred order is a function and not a content does not mean one will not be interested in the content. One may want to ask *what* it is that cannot be violated, or *what* it is that people think they are defending. What inviolable objects does a society protect with its greatest precautions, and for which infractions does a group reserve its severest punishments?

Here is one of the important differences between Durkheimian and Eliadean ideas of sacrality. For Eliade, the things that are sacred

tend to be instances of eternal archetypes, but for the Durkheimian model, societies attribute sacredness to specific social objects and values, and these have cultural content. For example, both Marcel Mauss and Durkheim wrote about how modern societies attributed sanctity to the individual person, the human being per se, and the rights of the individual, and how it safeguarded these objects from violation with the same respect given religious categories (Durkheim 1975: 61–67; Mauss 1979: 90). Normative principles like equality, democracy, and justice are further examples, and then, from this point of view, secular and humanistic norms become analogous to religious norms like the divinity of the monarch, the Samgha of the Buddha, the apostolic authority of the church, or even the decrees of a paranoid cult leader. It is all social teachings or values, but the *actual* values change and vary even within a culture and it is a central function of the history of religion to study those changing ingredients and local adaptations.

Thus, as the old comparative templates drew attention “upward” to the recurrent religious archetypes embodied in the data, the newer ones may be said to draw attention laterally or even downward to reveal the structures, empowerments and values of social existence. Presumably, in this vein, each society will manifest sacred order in a way that shows us not only something about sacredness but about itself and its culture-specific contents and strategies.

It also follows that sacred order, and this goes for sacrality generally, is not necessarily benign but has its raw, malignant contents and its pathologies. Sacred does not mean good. Sacred norms can be used to subordinate people on the basis of race, gender and ideology. The self-imputed sacredness of one group can automatically make other groups despised and impure. At the individual level, inviolate order can amount to a compulsive or obsessive component of neuroses and psychoses. In the many pernicious forms of self interest, sacrality inflates the ego, social status, the nation state, the group leader, with fear-laden, oppressive borders and unhappy consequences. We had better get used to the idea that the sacred—which was an adjective widely used in the rhetoric of the Third Reich, along with the language of “purifying and defending the honor of the Volk”—can manifest as a divisive behavior and is not necessarily something admirable or socially functional, and that the most outrageous human behaviors have been enacted under its constraints.

7. How to maintain control of such a broad topic? Conceptual control is needed both of the aspectual nature of the inquiry (Poole 1986) and of the contextual nature and function of the exemplum (Paden 1992: 110–124). Regarding the first, one builds in awareness of de-

limited focus and purpose. Thematic pursuits are always governed by specific goals which determine the choices of data. Are we interested in the institutional, aggressive sides of sacred order? That is one line of inquiry. Or, alternatively, are we interested in the power of the sacred to solicit the ultimate in individual *self-sacrifice*, thinking perhaps of martyrs who give their own lives to *protect* the honor of their sacred categories—their Sabbaths and Korans, Daimyos and Christs—from desecration? Reflexive awareness of one's delimiting choices and positionings of interest helps clarify and guide the otherwise rampant and complex nature of generalizing about a topic like this.

Grasping the context of the actual data of sacred order is of course most challenging and methodologically problematic. One is faced right away with the situation that any society has multiple forms or contexts of order, that these domains and matrices overlap identities in a way that cannot definitively be untangled, and that they are in large part culture-specific. There are physical and mental orders, private and public, domestic and national, ritualistic or linguistic. The possibility of control lies in generating a conceptualization of order that acknowledges plural systems of order and their relative functions in a given case. The complexity of order is then an opportunity as well as a challenge—it ultimately forces students of religion to understand how world systems and identity formations work and interact on the ground.

8. The behaviors of sacred order have both humanistic and scientific implications, and lend themselves to sociological, phenomenological, psychological, and cognitivist scrutiny. Though outlining a research program is not the burden of this essay, one can see that lines of questioning abound: How is systemic sacrality a reflex of social structure? How does its intensity correlate with the subversive presence of alternative systems, or with male authority patterns, or with territorial insecurity? Under what social conditions does it disappear as a salient category?

9. The way in which sacrality is a category of *behavior* can now be reiterated, because it is in this sense that it creates a framework of cross-cultural comparability based not on meanings, significations, or the noumenal, but on what humans do. By the same token, sacred order does not refer to world views but to what could neologically be called "worlding," thus putting the configurative features of culture in a verbal form and emphasizing the adverbial dimension of sacredness itself. People *do* things to prevent and remediate violation, and this is a different level of analysis than noting that all cultures have beliefs in a cosmic or superhuman order. In this way I see

sacred order within the context of the notion of worldmaking, understanding the latter to have the same naturalness as building nests, spinning webs, defending stamping grounds, expelling invaders, or returning to one's streambed of origin. Walter Burkert's recent work, *Creation of the Sacred*, illustrates well this natural mode, as in this sample:

"Life's achievement is self-replication, self-regulation, and homeostasis. Hence the gods are the most persistent guarantors of order, the forceful regulators. Life needs seclusion for its own protection, building up cells to separate what is inside from the outside; the religious worldview usually adopts some privileged center to keep in touch with the divine despite chaotic or diabolical surroundings". (Burkert 1996: 33)

I see here a certain trend in the study of religion. It goes from looking at religions of the world, to looking at the phenomenological world of religion, to looking at the social construction of religious worlds, to looking at the naturalism and universality of worldmaking processes, in which religion plays a prototypal role. This suggests prospects for thinking about universals in religion in terms of behavioral commonalities rather than in terms of common objects or ideas. The extent to which the various domains of sacrality per se or sacred order in particular are successful material for scientific theory or the epidemiology of behaviors remains to be seen (cf. Boyer 1994: 227–262; Sperber 1996).

The concept of worldmaking forms a mediating ground between the idea that behavior is explained by world views and the idea that behavior is explained by built-in cognitive transmissions. Constraints on behavior seem to work in both directions. But the mind is always an inhabitant in a world of objects, an actor in a world to be organized and bounded, not a disembodied thought machine. Understanding mind and world as a single environment, we note that humans evidently form and develop strong relationships to empowered objects, make sacrifices to maintain stability, guard and restore classifications which protect the foundations of the life-world, and disengage from those same boundaries to form new identities and potencies. "World" is then both a determiner and a precipitate of these conducts: It is a determiner because behavior is guided by institutions and norms and it is a product because the cross-cultural recurrence of these behaviors suggests that a disposition to form them is natural.

In sum, a recontextualized, de-centered approach to sacrality will take seriously its diversity of forms and types, and its flexibility of

application. We have seen one such example. In the end, the factor of the sacred might even stand to gain back some of its role in the history of religions, in a new key, providing a wider source of materials, without the levelling of a one-dimensional hermeneutical purpose, and with an expanding repertoire of theoretic fronts and comparative lenses, each geared to its appropriate setting and form of inquiry.

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