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Mr. Smith's Cabinet of Wonder

On Data, Examples, and Scale in the Scholarly Imagination of Religion

Luigi Walt
(University of Naples « L'Orientale »)

Abstract : « There is no data for religion », Jonathan Z. Smith famously claimed in his programmatic introduction to *Imagining Religion* (1982) – but what kind of imagination is required to make data out of religion ? This paper seeks to revisit Smith's provocation by comparing his scholarly project to the logic of the Wunderkammer, the early modern cabinet of curiosity where *naturalia* and *artificialia* were assembled, juxtaposed, and classified in ways that were both idiosyncratic and generative. As in those cabinets, the scholarly imagination of religion, for Smith, does not discover but actively produces its objects, through the scholar's « imaginative acts of comparison and generalization ». A telling illustration is offered by the two micro-experiments proposed by Smith in his essay « Fences and Neighbors », where discussion of the taxonomic value of male circumcision serves as a testing ground for evaluating both academic and normative definitions of early Judaism. What emerges is a sharp critique of any monothetic definition of religion, whether formulated at a generic or specific level, and a compelling argument in favour of polythetic, data-driven models in the analysis of religious « species ». At the heart of this effort, however, lies not only a disciplined play of scale, but also an understanding of scholarly translation not as a search for congruence, but as a construction of difference – a difference that, for Smith, simply marks our shift from territory to map, from a language that is intelligible, yet not of our own making, to another language that is more intelligible because we have made it ourselves.

Keywords : Jonathan Z. Smith ; Classification and Generalization in History ; Definition of Religion ; History of Early Judaism ; Method and Theory in the Study of Religion

He sets out from his home on Utopia Parkway without knowing what he is looking for or what he will find. Today it could be something as ordinary and interesting as an old thimble. Years may pass before it has company.

(Charles Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy : The Art of Joseph Cornell* [1992])

This article returns once more to the (in)famous programmatic statement at the opening of Jonathan Z. Smith's introduction to *Imagining Religion* – « There is no data for religion » – in order to reassess the theoretical and methodological lesson that could have been drawn from it, but largely was missed. Over time, Smith's provocation has acquired an almost canonical status, inviting everything from the ritual nod of disciplinary belonging to the more assertive appeal to authority – frequently in view of purposes that Smith himself would never have endorsed. One may reasonably assume that canonization, by its very nature, orients interpretation by assimilating texts to broader intellectual agendas, often at the cost of distorting their original force and intent. In this case, however, the distortion is all the more serious, insofar as it fails to take into account that Smith's claim was itself, in its own way, a reflection on processes of canonization internal to a discipline.

To correct the course of this free-ranging use of Smith, the following pages will pursue two operations. First, we will ask not only what Smith was *saying* in his introduction, but also what he was *doing* in saying it : how his claims functioned as interventions within specific scholarly debates rather than as timeless definitions. Second, we will try to complicate our picture of Smith's intellectual topography, freeing it from an exclusively disciplinary framing – one focused primarily on his polemical engagement with problems and figures internal to the field of the history of religions – and situating it instead within a broader conversation in the human sciences, concerning the role of *history* as a critical key to other forms of knowledge, with the history of religions serving as a privileged test case.

Starting from this premise, the article unfolds in three movements. The first revisits Smith's central assumption that there is no data for religion, focusing on the constitutive relationship he envisioned between data and imagination in the academic study of religion, and drawing a heuristic comparison between Smith's procedure and the logic of the Wunderkammer. The second applies this insight to the case of circumcision discussed by Smith in his essay « Fences and Neighbors », to clarify the limits Smith identified in prevailing taxonomic understandings of religion, both at the generic and at the specific level. The final section turns to the problem of generalization, assessing the implications of Smith's proposals not only for the study

of religion, but also for redefining its place and purpose within the broader framework of the human sciences.

Why (and How) Imagine Religion ?

In the opening paragraph of Imagining Religion, Smith begins with what appears to be a relatively unassuming observation of a historical and anthropological kind, only to pivot rapidly towards a claim with far-reaching disciplinary consequences. If the archaeological and textual record is to be trusted, he notes, human beings seem to have had « their entire history in which to imagine deities and modes of interaction with them ». Yet it is only in the last few centuries – and more precisely in the modern « West » – that humans have begun to imagine *religion* itself. « It is this act of second-order, reflective imagination », Smith argues, that « must be the central preoccupation of any student of religion ». Hence the striking conclusion :

> « [W]hile there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious – *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 »[1].

I would suggest that these statements can only be properly understood by appealing to what we might call the « rule of Collingstein » – or, if one prefers, Wittgenwood : that is, Robin George Collingwood's « logic of question and answer », with its basic lesson that any statement must be understood historically, as the specific answer to a specific question, given at a specific time and under specific circumstances ; supplemented by the pragmatic insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein (as refined by J. L. Austin and others), according to which, if we wish to interpret any utterance, we cannot limit ourselves to considering what a speaker is saying, but must also ask what they are doing in saying it[2].

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[1] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Introduction », in *Imagining Religion : From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. xi-xiii, here xi.

[2] See the seminal article by QUENTIN SKINNER, « Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas », *History & Theory* 8.1 (1969), pp. 3-53, drawing on ROBIN G. COLLINGWOOD, *An Autobiography*, Oxford, Oxford

Once approached in this way, Smith's opening remarks yield at least two important observations. What question, indeed, was Smith answering here ? A careful reading makes clear, first of all, that these lines do not function as a definition of religion in any straightforward sense. Rather, they operate as a meta-definition. What Smith offers here is not an account of what religion *is*, but an elucidation of what scholars are doing whenever they decide to designate something as « religion ». As a second-order category, religion does not present itself as an object waiting to be discovered in the world ; it is an analytical frame through which a heterogeneous array of data is selected, ordered, and rendered intelligible – data that might, under different theoretical assumptions, be claimed by entirely different domains of inquiry. To see this, it suffices to consider four of the major scholarly works that helped institutionalize the academic study of religion between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century : Max Müller's *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1874), James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and Émile Durkheim's *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912). Respectively authored by a philologist, a classicist-turned-anthropologist, a psychologist, and a sociologist, these texts had little in common apart from their broadly comparative outlook. Yet together they confirm Smith's intuition : religion is not the prerogative of any single discipline, and the boundaries of its subject domain are at once unstable and generative.

From this perspective, a second widespread misunderstanding can also be addressed : the claim that Smith was advocating the abandonment of the category of religion altogether. On the contrary, while he consistently acknowledged the historically contingent genealogy of the concept, he just as unfailingly defended its usefulness as a theoretical construct – one that provides a « disciplinary horizon » and should play « the same sort of role as 'language' in linguistics or 'culture' in anthropology »[3]. In the absence of a univocal definition of religion – and precisely in light of the proliferation of competing definitions – the historian's most urgent task could only be, for Smith, to do history of religions in a literal sense : not merely examining primary sources, but also scrutinizing the scholarly imagination that has made it possible to assemble those sources within a shared disciplinary horizon. Although this position anticipates, in certain respects, later anthropological and post-colonial critiques of the presumed universal

University Press, 1939, pp. 34-35 ; and LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1958, esp. § 546.

[3] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Religion, Religions, Religious » [1998], in *Relating Religion : Essays in the Study of Religion*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 179-196, here 194.

applicability of the concept of religion, Smith's intervention operates on a partially different plane. One might characterize it as a form of *critical ethnocentrism*, provided that the *ethnos* at stake is identified as the scholarly community itself.

These considerations invite us to complicate the intellectual topography within which Smith's theoretical and methodological assertions are usually situated. Some of Smith's main intellectual anchors are well known. Beyond his oft-remarked fascination with natural history and botanical taxonomy, Smith explicitly aligned himself with a series of intellectual traditions that, despite their internal differences, can be seen as unfolding in the wake of Kant's legacy : from Austro-Marxism (associated with the figure of Max Adler) and German neo-Kantianism (especially Ernst Cassirer), to the French tradition of social and anthropological thought (Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss), and extending to an influence that he himself distinguished from the preceding ones as « not subsumable under the rubric of Neo-Kantianism », namely his « long-standing obligation » to the Scottish Enlightenment[4]. To this constellation one might add further figures, not always explicitly cited by Smith but philosophically consequential nonetheless : Martin Heidegger, crucial for his reflections on space ; Jean-Paul Sartre, from whom he derives the notion of situation ; and Ludwig Wittgenstein, not least for his sense of philosophy as an activity of redescription and conceptual clarification. One might also recall Smith's invocation of Sigmund Freud among his intellectual « patron saints »[5], a gesture that resonates with his sustained engagement with the Jewish hermeneutic tradition and, more broadly, with what may be defined as the « commentarial modes of thinking », an arena in which figures such as Jacques Derrida and Jacob Neusner may, at times, even agree without argument[6]. Finally, one should not overlook Smith's literary influences – admittedly more difficult to chart, yet extending from Laurence Sterne (mobilized by Smith in his reading of

[4] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Conjectures on Conjunctures and Other Matters : Three Essays », in BARRY S. CRAWFORD, MERRILL P. MILLER eds., *Redescribing the Gospel of Mark*, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2017, pp. 17-98, here 55-56 and n. 99. Cf. also the autobiographical musings in JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « When the Chips Are Down », in *Relating Religion*, cit., pp. 1-60, esp. 1-9 and 32-38.

[5] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Reading Religion : A Life in Learning (2010) », in WILLI BRAUN, RUSSELL T. MCCUTCHEON eds., *Reading J.Z. Smith : Interviews and Essay*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 111-127, here 114.

[6] On the « commentarial modes of thinking », see JOHN B. HENDERSON, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary : A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991. See also the locus classicus of Smith's reflection on canon : JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Sacred Persistence : Toward a Redescription of Canon » [1979], in *Imagining Religion*, cit., pp. 36-52.

Frazer's « joke » and continuous digressions in *The Golden Bough*[7]) to twentieth-century modernism – the familiar triad of Kafka, Joyce, and Proust, among others – and culminating in the figure of Borges, aptly described by Smith as « the mythographer of scholarship »[8].

Appealing to this last constellation may be less audacious than it initially appears. The affinities between Smith's scholarly poetics and Borges's literary practice are difficult to deny, beginning with the almost « transcendental » status both assign to reading and translation[9]. Borges has been defined as a practitioner of a « second-degree literature », one unafraid of making the rules of its own functioning visible, and grounded in a fundamental poetic principle – the extrapolation of pre-existing material and its systematic insertion into new, surprising contexts :

> « The formula is simple, economical, with an almost chess-like elegance. It encompasses practically everything : the politics of parasitism ; the praise of subordination ; the pleasure of reading and commentary ; the subversion of hierarchies, classifications, and categories ; the relationship between the Same and the Other, repetition and difference, what is one's own and what belongs to the other – it is the key idea of a literature that only makes sense if it uproots itself, if it puts its own identity at risk. [...] Reading, annotating, reviewing, and translating are just some of the visible forms of this parasitic stance »[10].

This characterization could apply equally well to Smith. More importantly, however, Borges's oscillation between the fictive and the actual offers a decisive key for rereading *Imagining Religion*. The key term here, and throughout Smith's pages, is *imagination*. In an unpublished paper from 1996, significantly entitled « Why Imagine Religion ? », Smith explained he had chosen this vocabulary because he « wanted a constructive verb that allowed a parallelism between "their" activity and "ours" and which allowed, as well, an ambivalence as to the status

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[7] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, *The Glory, Jest and Riddle : James George Frazer and 'The Golden Bough'*, PhD diss., Yale University, 1969. Cf. also the afterword to JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « When the Bough Breaks » [1973], in *Map Is Not Territory : Studies in the History of Religions*, Leiden, Brill, 1978, pp. 208-239, here 239.

[8] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « The Bare Facts of Ritual » [1980], in *Imagining Religion*, cit., pp. 53-65, here 57.

[9] On both points, see my observations in LUIGI WALT, « Is There a Bible in This Class ? Rethinking Biblical Studies with Jonathan Z. Smith », *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 37.2 (2020), pp. 471-503.

[10] ALAN PAULS, *El factor Borges*, Buenos Aires, Anagrama, 2004, which I quote from the Italian edition : *Il fattore Borges*, Rome, Sur, 2016, pp. 116-117.

of the endeavour with respect to the fictive and the actual »[11]. This choice sheds light not only on the title *Imagining Religion*, but also on the opening reference to human beings who have spent their entire history « to imagine deities and modes of interaction with them » – a formulation that almost amounts to a working definition of religion – and on the subsequent claim that we « have had only the last few centuries to imagine religion », understood as an « act of second-order, reflective imagination ».

Smith's remarks cannot, in fact, be fully understood unless they are placed within a broader intellectual landscape shaped by Western debates on the faculty of imagination[12]. It is within this wider genealogy that his vocabulary acquires its full resonance, and it is here that another figure – absent from Smith's explicit references yet strategically significant – comes into view : Giambattista Vico. Vico was, among other things, the most radical modern proponent of a principle that Smith himself identified as foundational to his scholarly ethos : looking at « philology », in the widest sense of the term, as « an emblem of the totality of the liberal arts »[13]. In his 1744 *Scienza Nuova*, we find a statement that more than any other leads us to the core of Smith's reasoning : « Disciplines must take their beginning from that of the matters of which they treat » (§ 314)[14]. Behind this principle lies another, expressed in the Latin motto *verum ipsum factum* – « the true and the made are the same ». Vico's contention is that humans can have « true », that is certain, knowledge only of what they themselves make – not of « nature », but only of « culture », which for the Italian thinker encompasses every form of human expression, from language to social institutions to religion itself. If culture is, for Vico, what defines humanity as a process of self-invention, it follows that « its principles are to be found within the modifications of our own human mind » (§ 331). From this derives his project of

[11] Quoted from RUSSELL T. MCCUTCHEON, *Fabricating Religion : Fanfare for the Common e.g.*, Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2018, p. 2. Cf. also Smith's references to this unpublished essay in JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « When the Chips Are Down », cit., here 28 and 57 nn. 104-105.

[12] In the following paragraph, I take up and further develop some considerations outlined in LUIGI WALT, « Biblical Studies and the Scholarly Imagination of Religion », in RODRIGO FRANKLIN DE SOUSA, ELIZABETH SHIVELY eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Interdisciplinary Approaches to Biblical Studies*, London and New York, Routledge 2026, forthcoming.

[13] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Reading Religion », cit., p. 117. For Vico as for Smith, philology understood in this sense consists of two components : « the history of words and the history of things » (chapter 1 of GIAMBATTISTA VICO, *De constantia philologiae* [1721], in *Opere giuridiche*, ed. PAOLO CRISTOFOLINI, Florence, Sansoni, 1974, pp. 386-729).

[14] All quotations are taken from GIAMBATTISTA VICO, *The New Science*, trans. THOMAS GODDARD BERGIN and MAX HAROLD FISCH, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1965 (orig. 1744).

inaugurating a « new science », where imagination emerges as the faculty presiding over all forms of human creativity across history, mediating between the sensible contents preserved by *memory* and their conceptual elaboration, the work of *ingenuity* (§ 699). The connection between Vico and Smith becomes even more tangible when one turns to another passage in *Imagining Religion*, where Smith invokes Aristotle and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as the polar anchors of Western thinking on imagination and memory, and thus on imagination and history[15]. On one side stands Aristotle, who laid the groundwork for subsequent reflections on the representational character of memory ; on the other, Coleridge, the foremost bard – deeply indebted to Vico – of poetic imagination, of « that synthetic and magical power [...] which instantly, out of the chaos of elements or shattered fragments of memory, puts together some form to fit it »[16].

The crucial point is that, for Smith, it is one and the same faculty – imagination – that governs both religious activity and the scholarly practices devoted to its analysis. This makes it possible to approach religious representations as *human* data, open to historical and anthropological inquiry. At the same time, it imposes a demand for critical reflexivity with regard to second-order conceptualizations, as these are historically situated outcomes of « imaginative acts of comparison and generalization ». Such reflexivity entails, for Smith, a deliberate gesture of defamiliarization – what Russian literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky famously called « estrangement »[17]. This, for Smith, is the first and indispensable critical move, for only by making the familiar strange can we interrupt the automatisms of our perceptions. As he once put it : « There's a necessary estrangement to know why certain things are happening, [...] and scholars are professional estrangers »[18].

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[15] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « In Comparison a Magic Dwells », in *Imagining Religion*, cit., pp. 19-35, here 20-21. On Vico and the problem of historical imagination, see at least DONALD P. VERENE, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1981 ; and CECILIA MILLER, *Giambattista Vico : Imagination and Historical Knowledge*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993.

[16] See JOHN LIVINGSTON LOWES, *The Road to Xanadu : A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1930 (2nd rev. ed.), p. 52. Among his youthful *livres de chevet*, this is also the work from which Smith drew inspiration for a set of reading rules he followed throughout his life : cf. JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « When the Chips Are Down », cit., p. 37 n. 27.

[17] See VIKTOR B. SHKLOVSKY, « Art as Technique », in LEE T. LEMON, MARION J. REIS eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1965, pp. 3-24 (orig. 1917). On the technique of estrangement and its theoretical background, cf. also CARLO GINZBURG, « Making Things Strange : The Prehistory of a Literary Device », *Representations* 56 (1996), pp. 8-28.

[18] Cf. « The American Scholars of Religion Video Project : Interview with Jonathan Z. Smith (1999) », in WILLI BRAUN, RUSSELL T. MCCUTCHEON eds., *Reading J.Z. Smith*, cit., pp. 29-44, here 43.

Seen from this angle, Smith's approach to religion can fruitfully be likened to the logic of the Wunderkammer, the early modern cabinet of curiosities identified, not by chance, as « a crucial site for the history of early modern science »[19]. The Wunderkammer, with its playful assemblage of *naturalia* and *artificialia*, operates according to the very principles that Smith elevates to methodological virtues : surprise, incongruity, recombination, and experimental scale[20]. Its marvels are not classified by rigid taxonomies, but arranged to provoke wonder. In this sense, the cabinet of curiosity stands as the opposite of its monozygotic twin, the museum inasmuch as it privileges eccentricity over order, open series over closed systems. This helps explain why so many of Smith's thought experiments begin with a deliberate gesture of disorientation : like in the Wunderkammer – and, for that matter, in the modernist poetics of the decontextualized object as well – the method at work is one of montage.

Walter Benjamin, in his vertiginous essay entitled *Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus* (1931), offered a powerful portrait of the modern collector, as a figure suspended over « the chaos of memories » and governed by a « dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order ». The collector's existence, Benjamin writes, « is tied to a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value [...] but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate [... For book collectors] not only books but also exemplars of books have their fates »[21]. The same, we may argue, can be said of the historian of religions – at least of the kind defended by Smith, one concerned both with « the history of religious representations and the history of the academic conceptualizations of religion »[22]. For Smith, the most significant

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[19] MARIA ZYTARUK, « Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge », in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 80.1 (2011), pp. 1-23, here 3. On the history of the Wunderkammer, cf. esp. OLIVER IMPEY, ARTHUR MACGREGOR eds., *The Origins of Museums : The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 2017 (3rd rev. ed.) ; and ARTHUR MACGREGOR ed., *Curiosity and Enlightenment : Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007.

[20] When Benedetto Croce dismissed the comparative project of Raffaele Pettazzoni – widely acknowledged as the noble father of the history of religions in Italy – as little more than a form of « bibliographic and antiquarian collecting », he was thus unwittingly pointing to a revealing connection : see BENEDETTO CROCE, « Raffaele Pettazzoni, *Svolgimento e carattere della storia delle religioni* », *La Critica* 22.5 (1924), pp. 312-313.

[21] See WALTER BENJAMIN, « Unpacking My Library : A Talk about Book Collecting », in *Illuminations : Essays and Reflections*, ed. HANNAH ARENDT, trans. HARRY ZOHN, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1967, pp. 59-67 (translation slightly modified).

[22] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Manna, Mana Everywhere and /ˇ/ˇ/ » [2002], in *Relating Religion*, cit., pp. 117-144, here 117. Smith's self-description as an « historian » was occasionally accompanied by the more generic –

data are those that can be treated as both « examples » and « exemplars » : data that call for a double archaeology, an inquiry into their original, situated formation and an inquiry into their scholarly, resituated appropriation. This is why Benjamin's poetic evocation of the stage of objects' « fate » proves so telling here : it captures the historian's task of attending not only to what « data » once were, but also to what they have become – and may yet become – within the space of their second-order imagination.

« Take Judaism, for Example »

If *Imagining Religion* can be read as a Wunderkammer, arranging its specimens according to a logic of juxtaposition, contrast, and experimental scale, its opening essay – « Fences and Neighbors » – offers a particularly revealing illustration of that logic at work[23]. The essay's placement is strategic. Smith begins *in medias res* with a specialist puzzle, as one might expect from a scholar acutely aware of the perturbing effects of « introductions ». To introduce is to intrude – much as the intentional or accidental introduction of a plant or animal species destabilizes an ecosystem. As Smith announces at the outset, his task is « to inquire whether we have made some "progress" in naming "the differential quality" of what has been termed "early Judaism" »[24]. His aim, therefore, is not to rehearse the « defining traits » of a religious system whose existence is hypostatized in advance, but to interrogate the procedures by which scholars identify those traits under the label « early Judaism ». Why early Judaism ? Because Judaism, as Smith has already remarked in his introduction, is « foreign enough for comparison and interpretation to be necessary ; close enough for comparison and interpretation to be possible »[25]. It is exemplary – near and far at once.

Smith's first move is brilliantly odd. He opens with a botanical puzzle : the apparent similarity between two kinds of nuts – a common walnut and a pecan. The entrée takes the form of

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and deliberately provocative – label « student of religion ». Yet the former remains the more consistent designation in light of his intellectual trajectory, which was never that of a pure « theorist » of religion.

[23] For this section of the article, I draw on some arguments more fully developed in LUIGI WALT, « Il Signor Smith e l'ornitorinco », in JONATHAN Z. SMITH, *Una questione di classe. Saggi di introduzione alla storia delle religioni*, ed. Luigi Walt, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2024, pp. 11-94, esp. 32-56.

[24] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Fences and Neighbors : Some Contours of Early Judaism » [1980], in *Imagining Religion*, cit., pp. 1-18, here 1.

[25] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Introduction », cit., p. xii.

a quotation from Francis Ponge on the cognitive value of difference, a literary reference that is anything but accidental[26]. As Italo Calvino once observed, Ponge was a poet of exactitude, intent on reconstructing « the physicality of the world through the impalpable dust of words »[27]. The citation authorizes a poetics of minuteness and contrast ; it also allows Smith to note a playful coincidence : in the fifteenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1974), the entry « Judaism » happens to be followed immediately by « Juglandaceae », the plant family that includes both *Juglans regia* (the walnut) and *Carya illinoinensis* (the pecan). Similar fruits ; yet different genera.

The botanical excursus that follows condenses a lesson in classification. The now traditional method of Linnaean taxonomy, Smith recalls, works through hierarchically ordered taxa, moving from likeness to difference by a sequence of binary decisions[28]. In this monothetic procedure, one seeks the single differential trait that isolates a species – the « discriminating question » that reduces many features to one decisive criterion. In the walnut/pecan puzzle, the classificatory process proceeds through a series of exclusions until it reaches its final question : « If it has a four-toothed calyx, does it have petals or not ? If it has petals, it *must* be a walnut; if it lacks petals, it *must* be a pecan ». Smith immediately adds that no modern botanist would actually proceed so naively. The point is pedagogical : to expose the liabilities of strictly monothetic keys. A single trait may be arbitrarily chosen ; classificatory names may shift as theory shifts ; and once evolutionary kinship comes into view, morphological convenience may give way to cladistics, the branching depiction of descent based on homology. Yet even here the one-trait ideal persists, and ambiguities proliferate. Accordingly, twentieth-century biology also developed a rival methodology : phenetics, or numerical taxonomy, which groups organisms by overall similarity across multiple traits without privileging any single one[29]. Phenetics is polythetic :

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[26] Cf. FRANCIS PONGE, *Le Grand recueil*, vol. 2, *Méthodes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, pp. 41-42.

[27] ITALO CALVINO, *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*, Milan, Garzanti, 1988, p. 84.

[28] For a technical discussion of Linnaeus's taxonomy, see MARC ERESHEFSKY, *The Poverty of the Linnaean Hierarchy : A Philosophical Study of Biological Taxonomy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

[29] Smith refers to the seminal work of two American biologists, ROBERT R. SOKAL, PETER H.A. SNEATH, *Principles of Numerical Taxonomy*, San Francisco, W.H. Freeman & Co., 1963, which paved the way for the development of this method drawing on some insights from the French naturalist Michel Adanson. For a reconstruction of the heated debates that followed Sokal and Sneath's proposals, see DAVID L. HULL, *Science as Process : An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1988 ; for a more recent assessment, see TOD F. STUESSY, « Paradigms in Biological Classification (1707-2007) : Has Anything Really Changed ? », *Taxon* 58.1 (2009), pp. 68-76. For an excellent overview of

it clusters by family resemblances, that Wittgensteinian mesh of « overlapping similarities » in which no single feature is either necessary or sufficient across the entire set. Put crudely, the first model is theory-forward ; the second is data-forward.

Smith's insight is that religious classification faces homologous difficulties. What distinguishes religion, as a generic taxon, from other domains of human activity ? What distinguishes religion, as a specific taxon, from others ? And which criteria justify the identification of subtaxa within a single species of religion ? Rarely, Smith argues, have such questions been framed with sufficient epistemological care or in dialogue with scientific debates on classification. In practice, scholars have preferred monothetic strategies. Yet it strains credulity to suppose that a single sine qua non could gather under the rubric of « religion » such disparate materials as those Smith himself assembles in *Imagining Religion* : ancient texts on male circumcision, circumpolar bear-hunting rituals, ethnographic accounts of African divination, Euripides's Bacchae, a Māori cosmogony, narrative fragments from Plutarch and Kafka, North American scholarship on early Judaism, reports on the 1978 Jonestown massacre, or the repellent list of ingredients which make up the witches' brew of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. And yet, starting from almost any inherited definition of religion, one can plausibly argue for including or excluding each of these items as religious « data ». The deeper problem is theoretical : monothetic procedures are routinely bent to apologetic ends, elevating « religion », or a single religious tradition, into a unilateral uniqueness. By contrast, in scientific classification « uniqueness is both ordinary and reciprocal » : walnut and pecan are each unique by the trait that sets one off from the other.

To overcome these difficulties, Smith's proposal is both theoretical and methodological. On a theoretical level, he rejects monothetic definitions of religion at both the generic and the specific level, albeit for different reasons. At the generic level, the danger lies in conceiving religion as a *summum genus*, thereby restricting the field too narrowly and severing its elements from other taxa of human experience – this is the point encapsulated in a title such as *Relating Religion*. At the specific level, the risks are no less serious, since what becomes essentialized are the individual social formations we conventionally identify as « religions », whose boundaries are too often drawn on the basis of criteria of boundary-making produced within those

Smith's arguments and their relationship to these debates, cf. CHRISTOPHER I. LEHRICH, *Jonathan Z. Smith on Religion*, New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 16-48.

very formations[30]. This accounts for Smith's apparently inconsistent endorsement, in later essays, of a strictly monothetic definition such as that proposed by Melford Spiro : however limited, such a definition allows religion to be subordinated to a higher taxon[31]. It also sheds light on the only analytical definition Smith ever sketched himself : his polythetic, spatial definition of religion, which deliberately brackets emic self-classifications and allows scholars to track modes of religion across and beyond religious traditions[32].

Methodologically, Smith thus urges polythetic procedures that let the data lead and refine the value of our taxonomies. To exemplify this approach, « Fences and Neighbors » advances two micro-experiments applied to early Judaism. In the first, a single indicator that demonstrably functioned as a boundary marker is selected and its multiple applications examined. In the second, the procedure is inverted : starting from a bounded corpus, one extracts as many indicators as possible and compares their distribution. In neither case is the aim monothetic.

For the first experiment, Smith chooses circumcision – a practice that certainly functioned as a taxonomic indicator in early Judaism, even though, as he shrewdly observes, « within the bulk of the Hebrew Scriptures », it appears assumed rather than explicitly enjoined. A key text is the foundational narrative of Genesis 17,1-14, where circumcision of male children is designated as the « sign of the covenant » between the god of Israel, on the one side, and « Abraham and his descendants » on the other. Abraham thus functions as a mythical ancestor, while circumcision operates as a physical marker of belonging (cf. also Genesis 34,14-17 ; Exodus 12,43-49). If we relied on this passage alone, Smith observes, we might mistake circumcision for the one decisive differential trait – the monothetic key that classifies an individual as belonging to a species we might call *Judaica priora* (and perhaps, climbing the ladder, to the genus *Judaicae*, family *Abrahamiae*, order *Revelatae*, class *Religiones*). Translated into the

[30] In principle, Smith observes, one could someday draw more accurate « phylogenetic » graphs among religious traditions : « But this would have to eschew the impossible presupposition of a common ancestor, replacing it by a model of multilinear evolution » (JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Fences and Neighbors », cit., p. 8). Later, Smith would recast the unit of analysis away from « species », with its essentialist allure, towards the more ecological notion of « population », better suited to modelling interaction and multicausality : see esp. JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « A Matter of Class : Taxonomies of Religion » [1996], in *Relating Religion*, cit., pp. 160-178, here 171. Smith's implicit reference is to « population thinking » : see esp. ERNST MAYR, *Animal Species and Evolution*, Cambridge, MA and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963.

[31] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Religion, Religions, Religious », cit., p. 193.

[32] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Map Is Not Territory », in *Map Is Not Territory*, cit., pp. 289-309, here 291 ; and his further elaboration in « Here, There, and Anywhere » [2003], in *Relating Religion*, cit., pp. 323-339.

walnut parable – an analogy Smith would surely have relished, given that *Juglans* shares its root with « gland » and « glans » – the final discriminating question would read : « If male, is he circumcised or not ? If circumcised, then he *must* be... ».

Two problems immediately follow. The first, which Smith does not pursue, concerns gender. If circumcision were taken as the decisive marker, women would be excluded *ipso facto* from the taxon « Judaism » or « Israel ». One might object that sexes belong within species even when they differ markedly,[33] but this merely sidesteps the real issue : any monothetic classification is guided by a theory. What matters, therefore, is not simply *whether* circumcision can function as a differential trait, but *for whom, in which contexts, at what level, and to what ends* – questions that must be posed both on the *emic* level (with respect to the implicit or explicit classifications recoverable from our sources) and on the *etic* level (with respect to our own second-order classifications).

The second problem is ubiquity. Already in the fifth century BCE, Herodotus described circumcision as a widespread custom among Mediterranean and Near Eastern peoples, especially Egyptians and Ethiopians (*Hist.* 2,104,2-4). Learned Jewish circles could hardly ignore this. Genesis 17 itself, with its late reworking of the covenant narrative of Genesis 15 and its projection of Mosaic circumcision into patriarchal time, can be read as a response to such challenges. Other texts register further shifts : Jeremiah can speak of peoples « circumcised and yet uncircumcised » (9,25-26) or of a « circumcision of the heart » (4,4 ; cf. Deuteronomy 30,6), thereby moralizing and interiorizing the practice. Hellenizing Jews would later reject circumcision, though they surely still regarded themselves part of Israel ; the Maccabean revolt would reassert the practice after Antiochus Epiphanes's band, if not without coercion (1 Maccabees 2,46-47). Philo of Alexandria, by contrast, would largely deflate its taxonomic role, praising its hygienic value precisely after noting its wide diffusion.

In short, the marker's semantic range was wide, and its classificatory power unstable. The most dramatic case is probably Paul. Smith rightly includes the apostle among key sources for early Judaism, resisting any anachronistic Christian capture of his figure and restoring him instead to a landscape of persistence and change in the ancient religions of the Mediterranean[34].

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[33] See, e.g., CHARLES DARWIN, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, London, John Murray, 1872 (1st ed. 1859), p. 372.

[34] See now the essays in ALEXANDER CHANTZIANTONIOU, PAULA FREDRIKSEN, STEPHEN L. YOUNG eds., *Paul within Paganism : Restoring the Mediterranean Context to the Apostle*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2025. Cf. also STANLEY STOWERS, *Christian Beginnings : A Study in Ancient Mediterranean Religion*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2024.

Smith describes Paul as « preeminently a boundary-crossing figure » who nonetheless made the « strongest and most persistent use of circumcision as a taxic indicator ». In Paul's letters, *peritomḗ* (« circumcision ») and *akrobystía* (« foreskin ») consistently function as shorthand for Israel and the Nations. Yet one may slightly redirect Smith's claim that Paul was attempting to establish a new taxon. Paul's rejection of circumcision, addressed to Gentile audiences amid fierce controversy, is best understood as a situational suspension rather than as the creation of a third category. His apocalyptic and ethnocentric horizon implies either that Gentiles need not become Jews (because this is not the eschatological plan for them), or that they cannot (since, for Paul, only circumcision at birth was valid)[35]. In neither case is a new taxon invented. What Paul offers instead are new descriptors – faithfulness to Jesus as the Messiah, the rite of baptism, or the charismatic possession of the « Spirit » – that function as internal discriminators within a polythetic mapping of early Judaism. These operate differently within each pole (Israel/Gentiles) without eroding the poles themselves. Jews who reject Jesus remain Israel, albeit with « something less » ; and Gentiles who accept him remain the Nations, but now with « something more ». This logic of « more and less » underlies Paul's apologetic strategy for reconfiguring the old taxon of Israel, not for supplanting it – and culminates in the paradox of Gentile « grafting » into Israel's olive tree « against nature » (*parà phýsin*, Rom 11,24-25).

From this first micro-experiment, the lesson is twofold. A putatively single differential trait is semantically labile across settings and agents, and because its range of application is broad, it can at most be *sufficient* for local classifications and never *necessary* for the taxon as a whole. That is the reversal a polythetic strategy encourages. Smith's second experiment implements that strategy. Taking three corpora of Jewish funerary inscriptions – from Rome, Bet She'arim, and Egypt – he extracts multiple indicators and compares their distribution, not as cumulative markers of a single identity, but as variables whose significance emerges only once they are disaggregated by provenance and examined in relation to one another. One could extend the exercise indefinitely – adding archaeological context, epigraphic formulae, onomastics, languages, social and economic indices ; zooming in on a single trait and its local ecology ; or comparing across different corpora and types of evidence. Even a limited survey reveals not a uniform, abstract entity called « Judaism », but a variegated landscape of populations of Judaisms, where variation is the only constant. « The cartography », as Smith notes, « appears far

[35] For a thorough discussion of these points, see CAROLINE JOHNSON HODGE, *If Sons, Then Heirs : A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007 ; and MATTHEW THIESSEN, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016.

messier ». Yet this is exactly what historical analysis should expect. In this frame, what canonical normativity might dismiss as « anomalies » – like Paul's Gentiles or Hellenizing Jews who effaced circumcision – become taxonomically productive. As in the theorizations of microhistory, it is the « normally exceptional » that opens the path to generalization, since anomalies include the norm, « but not the other way round »[36].

Towards Generalization

Returning to the opening pages of *Imagining Religion*, Smith's corollaries from the claim that « there is no data for religion » come into sharper relief. The first is that « no datum possesses intrinsic value ». A datum matters only insofar as it can serve as an example to clarify a fundamental problem in the study of religion. This is what Smith sought to demonstrate in the first of the micro-experiments in « Fences and Neighbors », where circumcision functioned as a test case for the taxonomic value of indicators. The second corollary follows closely : once scholars acknowledge the artificial and second-order character of the category « religion », they must also ask why they pause over one example rather than another. As Smith writes, « This effort at articulate choice is all the more difficult, and hence all the more necessary, for the historian of religion who accepts neither the boundaries of canon nor of community in constituting his intellectual domain, in providing his range of exempla »[37]. This principle likewise animates the second micro-experiment in « Fences and Neighbors », explicitly designed to expose the inadequacy of any normative conception of religion, confined to the limits authorized by canon or by a community's self-representations. Such constraints privilege some sources over others, and reproduce categories, conceptualizations, and ideological interests internal to the tradition under examination. From this follows a third corollary, tucked away – as so often with some of Smith's most valuable insights – in a footnote to another essay in *Imagining Religion* : « An historian of religion who seeks to undertake the tasks of preinterpretation on a variety of texts

[36] Thus CARLO GINZBURG, « Our Words, and Theirs : A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today », in SUSANNA FELLMAN, MARJATTA RAHIKAINEN eds., *Historical Knowledge : In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, pp. 97-119, here 114. On microhistory and the « normally exceptional », cf. also GIOVANNI LEVI, « On Microhistory », in PETER BURKE ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University, 1992, pp. 93-113.

[37] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Introduction », cit., p. xi.

must become involved in the study of traditions for which he has no expertise »[38] – with the crucial proviso that, for Smith, only micro-comparative analyses of carefully selected exemplary cases can prevent such engagement from lapsing into bad generalizations.

Smith accordingly conceives the history of religions as a discipline based on practices of interpretation and comparison that involve the very definition of its object of study. This work of definition is not ancillary but constitutive : it is what ultimately secures the genuinely academic character of the enterprise. The point is well illustrated by Smith's sharp response to a questionnaire circulated by the American Academy of Religion in the 1990s, where « survey of members' "primary research" [...] found it necessary to set out nine "geographic areas," eighteen "traditions," eleven "approaches," and twenty-eight "subject areas," with the doubtless unintended ironic result that if you, like me, understood religion to be the object of your studies, you had to write it in, under the rubric "other" »[39]. Too often, Smith complains, scholars of religion have neglected their very object – religion as a genus of human activity, and its modes as species of it – preferring instead to study particular traditions, reified as species. As we have seen, Smith's real concern in « Fences and Neighbors » was never simply to classify « Judaism » along these lines of reasoning. It was to interrogate the criteria by which we classify, and to draw from that interrogation general consequences for what we mean by « religion » at all[40].

Addressing the problem of « generalization » in the human sciences, Smith also notes that the very choice of the term « general » has carried unintended consequences. In Aristotle's

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[38] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, *Imagining Religion*, cit., p. 115 n. 155 (Smith's italics).

[39] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Connections » [1990], in *On Teaching Religion : Essays by Jonathan Z. Smith*, ed. Christopher I. Lehrich, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 49-63, here 49.

[40] It may be worth comparing Smith's call for a generalist approach with that of another historian of religions who, before Smith, had reached similar conclusions : Angelo Brelich. Although best known for his work on Greek religion, Brelich consistently emphasized generalization, critical reflection on scholarly categories, and the use of ethnographic materials for disciplined comparison. His landmark introduction to the history of religions (1966) is structured along these lines, with a set of prolegomena followed by a series of short thematic vignettes, focusing either on the generative moment of what we usually recognize as religious systems (Buddhism, Christianity, and so on), or on broad cultural areas of religious interest (ancient China, Vedic India, and the like). When addressing early Christian materials, Brelich formulates a claim strikingly consonant with Smith's methodological stance : «Historians of Christianity and historians of religions approach the study of Christian materials with different primary interests. It is true that the former may – and indeed must – concern themselves with the historical problem of Christian origins, and that in doing so they inevitably enter the field of the history of religions. Yet for them, Christianity is first and foremost a given reality, whose historical development they aim to reconstruct» (ANGELO BRELICH, *Introduzione alla storia delle religioni*, Rome, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1966, p. 323).

biological taxonomy, the « general » referred to the level of *genus* in contrast to the *species*. But once universities came to define themselves primarily through aims of professional specialization, « what was initially a term of relation, of reciprocal inclusion, became a term of opposition and exclusion ». Thus « general » came to stand against « specialized »[41]. Smith's corrective is crisp : « The general differs from the universal in that it admits exceptions; and it differs from the particular in that it is highly selective »[42]. Such a claim, however, must again be situated within Smith's broader intellectual horizon – specifically, his « persistent preoccupation » with reconciling morphology (the plane of generalization) and history (the plane of singularity and variation). This concern underlies his well-known dissatisfaction with Mircea Eliade's attempt – for Smith, a failed one – to translate Goethe's morphological project into the history of religions, most notably in the *Traité d'histoire des religions*. Smith has repeatedly identified morphology as one of four fundamental « modes » of comparison, aimed, in its ideal formulation, at «the arrangement of individual items in a hierarchical series of increased organization and complexity. It is a logical, formal progression which ignores categories of space (habitat) and time »[43]. Morphological comparison, in other words, yields formal rather than historical connections ; no temporal or causal connections can be drawn from it. For anyone seeking to do « history », this poses an obvious problem. Thus the challenge – the same that drew Smith's critical attention to Eliade – is how to articulate a point of connection between morphology and history, also because, as Smith readily acknowledged, « in both the biological and the human sciences, morphology has produced major comparisons that have stood the test of time »[44].

At this juncture, scale becomes decisive. The task of the historian of religions is to shuttle between microscope and telescope : to examine up close what we think we see distinctly from far away, and to check from afar what dazzles at close range. For this reason, Smith, in what

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[41] Cf. JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education », *Teaching Theology and Religion* 1.2 (1998), pp. 73-78. As Marc Bloch once noted with his customary acuity, specializations find their justification only « as correctives to the lack of breadth of our minds, and the short span of our lives » (MARC BLOCH, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953 [orig. 1949], pp. 146-147).

[42] JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « When the Chips Are Down », cit., p. 31.

[43] See JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « In Comparison a Magic Dwells », cit., pp. 23-24. Cf. also Smith's previous description of the morphological mode of comparison in « Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit » [1971], in *Map Is Not Territory*, cit., pp. 240-264, esp. 253-259.

[44] See esp. JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Acknowledgments : Morphology and History in Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1949-1999) », Part I and Part II [2000], in *Relating Religion*, cit., pp. 61-79 and 80-100.

can be read as his methodological manifesto on comparison, *Drudgery Divine* (1990), defines comparison as a kaleidoscope-like operation[45]. Comparison is neither a lens that sharpens an object, nor a mirror that faithfully reflects it. It is a device for creative distortion, producing ever-new patterns and configurations. It is a technique of estrangement and redescription, a movement from a language that is intelligible, yet not of our own making, to another language that is more intelligible because we have made it ourselves[46]. This is the « drudgery divine » to which Smith alludes, echoing a line from George Herbert : an alchemical operation not unlike that associated with the modern cabinets of curiosities, whose latest ironic incarnation may be found in the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles (founded in 1988), a deliberately enigmatic museum that playfully blurs the boundary between fact and fabrication, where nature is described as « more incredible than the products of human imagination », and the museum's motto proclaims *Ut translatio natura* – to see « nature as metaphor »[47].

In a sense, all this brings us back to Goethe's morphological dream, encapsulated in his famous dictum : « What is general ? The individual case. What is particular ? Millions of cases »[48]. As in natural history, objects are to be grasped as historical singularities, approached through conceptual models that are always provisional and shaped by scholarly interests. It has been rightly observed that one of the decisive operators of objectivity in physics – the fixed space of observables and parameters – is overturned in biology[49]. Whereas physical trajectories presuppose a space fixed *a priori*, biological processes constantly reorganize their own space of possibles, the ecosystem, rendering outcomes fundamentally unpredictable. This, in brief, is the lesson one may draw from Smith's opening pages : to treat data as what we observe within

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[45] Cf. JONATHAN Z. SMITH, *Drudgery Divine : On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 53 : « Comparison [...] is an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstitution which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary ».

[46] Cf. LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *The Big Typescript : TS 213*, ed. and trans. C. GRANT LUCKHARDT and MAXIMILIAN A. E. AUE, Malden and Oxford, Blackwell, 2005 (orig. 1932-1937), p. 305e.

[47] See LAWRENCE WESCHLER, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder : Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1995.

[48] JOHANN W. GOETHE, *Maximen und Reflexionen. Nach den Handschriften des Goethe- und Schiller-Archivs herausgegeben von Max Hecker* (= ERICH SCHMIDT, BERNHARD SUPHAN Hrsg., Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft, Band 21), Weimar, Verlag der Goethe-Gesellschaft, 1907, § 558.

[49] See GIUSEPPE LONGO, « The Consequences of Philosophy », ed. and trans. ANDREA CAVAZZINI, *Glass Bead* (2016), online [https://www.glass-bead.org/article/the-consequences-of-philosophy].

a space of possibles ; to use comparison as a means of redescribing their concrete historical configurations in view of specific theoretical interests ; to take imagination – both « theirs » and « ours » – seriously as a shared operator ; and to allow our discipline to confront what grounds it in the first place : the art, or technique (some would say the science), of gathering dispersed signs, remains, and fragments so as to compose the most vivid possible image of other presents, of other worlds that humans have built and inhabited – and that, in some cases, may still wish to inhabit.

Yet Smith's appeal to generalization carries a final implication. It is a claim of authority and responsibility : of the historian of religions over the object « religion » ; of the generalist over the specialist ; of the humanist enterprise over the field of religious studies. Fidelity to the project of a critical Enlightenment is clearly at stake here, and the logic should be one of progressive empowerment. Classification and comparison, however, are not wielded as techniques for mastering reality but rather embraced as creative attempts to negotiate our own « situation » – and, ultimately, as fundamental expressions of our being in the world. They belong, in this sense, to what we may call Smith's model of an academic « religion ».

Luigi Walt
University of Naples « L'Orientale »
Largo S. Giovanni Maggiore, 30
IT-80134 Napoli
lwalt@unior.it