

Making Religion

Theory and Practice in the Discursive Study of Religion

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BRILL

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Religion and Science in Transformation: On Discourse Communities, the Double-Bind of Discourse Research, and Theoretical Controversies

Kocku von Stuckrad

Unpacking Religion in Secular Environments

The narrative of secularization is a strange thing. On the one hand, scholars have argued that ‘modernization’ in ‘the West’ has led to a serious decline in religious convictions and practices; on the other hand, religion has continued to be an important element of public and private life in Europe and North America. A closer look at these dynamics reveals that the period between—roughly—1870 and 1950 was instrumental in creating new forms of religious understandings and practices, some of them outside of the more traditional institutionalized religions. These new understandings of religion fostered the emergence of a broad variety of religious communities (now often called ‘spiritual’ or ‘metaphysical’) in the second half of the twentieth century. A key element of the underlying dynamic is the fact that twentieth-century religious and spiritual convictions in Europe and North America make explicit use of scientific and secular interpretations of the world. Rather than constructing a clear distinction between religion and science, these understandings of religion incorporate scientific language into their own worldviews.

If we want to analyze the complex processes that have given religion a new place in contemporary European and North American culture, it is particularly helpful to apply the instruments of historical discourse analysis and of sociology of knowledge approaches to discourse (SKAD).¹ From this perspective, discourses are systematically organized forms of knowledge in a given community that are established, stabilized, and legitimized by communicative practices. These structures provide systems of meaning and regulate what is regarded as valid knowledge, be it explicit or tacit. Discourses are intrinsically

1 On my understanding of discursive study of religion, see von Stuckrad 2013 (with further references); see also Neubert 2014. On SKAD, see Keller 2011. The discursive link between religion and science is also explored in von Stuckrad and Vollmer 2016 (forthcoming).

linked to dispositives that provide the communicative 'infrastructure' in which attributions of meaning become operative.

It is the reorganization of discourse strands that has given religion a new place in European and North American culture since the nineteenth century. To unpack this discursive constellation and to reconstruct its genealogy, it is necessary to have a close look at the ingredients of discursive knots and the re-entanglement of these ingredients, or discourse strands, in changing historical settings. This is a creative process that explores new ways of ordering historical sources. Such an unpacking and reorganization of data presents a new outline of what happened to religion in the twentieth century, very similar in its strategy to Michel Foucault's program of deconstructing and reconstructing analytical frameworks:

The [...] purpose of such a description of the facts of discourse is that by freeing them of all the groupings that purport to be natural, immediate, universal unities, one is able to describe other unities, but this time by means of a group of controlled decisions. Providing one defines the conditions clearly, it might be legitimate to constitute, on the basis of correctly described relations, discursive groups that are not arbitrary, and yet remain invisible. [...] [I]t is not therefore an interpretation of the facts of the statement that might reveal [the relations], but the analysis of their coexistence, their succession, their mutual functioning, their reciprocal determination, and their independent or correlative transformations.

FOUCAULT 2010 [1972]: 29

Discourses on religion that developed within secular frameworks are closely tied to 'scientific' ways of interpreting the world. When we disentangle and reconstruct discursive knots that have crystallized around the concepts of 'religion' and 'science', we can suggest new 'unities', again very much in line with Foucault's understanding:

I [...] will do no more than this: of course, I shall take as my starting-point whatever unities are already given (such as psychopathology, medicine, or political economy); but I shall make use of them just long enough to ask myself what unities they form; by what right they can claim a field that specifies them in space and a continuity that individualizes them in time; according to what laws they are formed; against the background of which discursive events they stand out; and whether they are not, in their accepted and quasi-institutional individuality, ultimately the surface effect of more firmly grounded unities. I shall accept the groupings that

history suggests only to subject them at once to interrogation; to break them up and then to see whether they can be legitimately reformed; or whether other groupings should be made; to replace them in a more general space which, while dissipating their apparent familiarity, makes it possible to construct a theory of them.

ibid.: 26

In a recent book I have suggested such a new grouping, based on unities that are configured in discursive processes (von Stuckrad 2014). The result is an interpretation of twentieth-century cultural history that demonstrates the far-reaching entanglements between the work of academics—both in the humanities and in the natural sciences—and religious convictions and practices. What I call the ‘scientification of religion’ captures a similar process of interaction to that which underlies the excellent new study by Egil Asprem (2014). Surprisingly, however, Asprem presents this research as counter-evidence to Max Weber’s interpretation of disenchantment (see particularly Asprem 2014: 47–49), which in my view is a one-sided presentation of Weber’s approach (cf. Kippenberg 2015). Weber was much more of a relativist than is often assumed, and his idea that religion should be studied as meaning-making in situational settings was for him also true when it came to academic meaning-making (see von Stuckrad 2010a: 197–198). Or, as Reiner Keller puts it: “Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic*, a work of discourse analysis *avant la lettre*, traced the importance of religious knowledge back to the dynamics of the development of capitalism. Sociology, as conceived by Weber, is from its onset a kind of ‘Kulturwissenschaft’, since social sense making or interpretations of the world are a central subject of analysis” (2011: 44).

In Max Weber’s view, modernization implies the reorganization of *gesellschaftliche Mächte*, i.e., domains and powers that are operative in societies, such as science, law, religion, and economy. These domains can easily be understood as discursive fields, driven by specific regulations and rules. When it comes to contemporary discursive constellations in Europe and North America, where secular science is a major element in the legitimization of knowledge, the relations between the discursive fields of science and religion are particularly relevant. Indeed, what we see is a blending of domains rather than a simple differentiation and polemical disjunction of knowledge systems. The entanglement of discourse strands related to science and religion has produced a whole new field of religious convictions and practices in the twentieth century.

My intention in this chapter is twofold. By using selected examples from my study of the scientification of religion, I want to demonstrate how a discursive

approach to religion can foster new insights into the dynamics of cultural processes. Subsequently, I want to use these concrete examples to reflect on some of the major controversies in the field of discourse research in general, including a number of critical issues raised against historical discourse analysis and sociology of knowledge approaches to discourse.

Rearranging the Discourse on the Living Power of the Cosmos

Among the new disciplines that established themselves in the nineteenth century are chemistry and physics. In a process of differentiation, these disciplines had been increasingly distinguished from alchemy, magic, and other 'occult sciences'. However, similarly to the differentiation of astrology and astronomy (on which, see von Stuckrad 2014: 23–55), these processes did not lead to a clear separation between domains. What we see instead is a changing description of what 'real science' and 'pseudo-science' means. Roger Cooter noted that the "eighteenth century had understood quackery as blatant fraud (especially in relation to medicine) but lacked a developed concept of 'pseudo-science'. For the stuff of belief (religion) and the stuff of experiment and analysis (science or natural philosophy) had not yet undergone their rhetorical separation and ranking" (2003: 683). Cooter draws the only feasible conclusion: "From the history of phrenology and other such pseudo-sciences, it is clear there is more to be lost than gained historically by seeking retrospectively to draw sharp distinctions between the 'real' and the 'pseudo' in science" (2003: 684). Therefore, it is better to avoid the terms 'alchemy' and 'chemistry' as generic analytical concepts and rather look at their respective configurations in scientific, philosophical, and religious discourse. If we disentangle the discourse strands that constitute ALCHEMY² (or, in the old parlance, CHYMISTRY), and do the same with CHEMISTRY, we will be able to see the transformations of meaning that have taken place since the eighteenth century. We can then also identify the points at which certain elements of this discourse have adopted new meanings as well as the forms in which these meanings have perhaps been continued in contemporary science (for a more detailed version of the following analysis, see von Stuckrad 2014: 61–75).

2 With small capital letters I indicate the discourse on something, rather than the thing itself; in other words, and using Foucault's terminology, small capital letters indicate unities or groupings.

From Alchemy to Chemistry

For the emergence of today's order of knowledge in physics and chemistry, the turn of the nineteenth century was an important break. One of the major shifts in the evaluation of alchemy was the move away from its understanding of the nature of matter. What does that mean? While alchemy had been linked to the idea that the elements can be reduced to a *proto hyle*—*prima materia* or primary matter—now chemists held that the smallest particles were atoms (Keller 1983: 9–10). John Dalton set the new tone in his *New System of Chemical Philosophy*, which was published in two parts between 1808 and 1810. Interestingly enough, the work originated from his “Lectures on Natural Philosophy” at the Royal Institution in London. “The author has ever since been occasionally urged by several of his philosophical friends to lose no time in communicating the results of his enquiries to the public, alledging [sic], that the interests in science, and his own reputation, might suffer by delay” (1808/1810: v–vi). Dalton still referred to his scholarship as “natural philosophy,” and throughout his book he spoke of “philosophical chemists,” “philosophers,” “experimental philosophy” (as in the title), etc. At the same time, it is characteristic that the terms ‘alchemy’, ‘chymistry’, ‘transmutation’, ‘god’, and related concepts were completely absent in Dalton’s work. The new configurations were ‘atom’, ‘elementary bodies’, and the material basis of ‘chemical science’ (see, e.g., page 474). Not surprisingly, then, Dalton dedicated the second part to Humphry Davy and William Henry, “as a testimony to their distinguished merit in the promotion of chemical science.” Dalton also introduced the genre of chemical tables: “Nothing of the kind has been published to my knowledge; yet, such tables appear to me so necessary to the practice of chemical enquiries, that I have wondered how the science could be so long cultivated without them” (496). This new aesthetic device changed the way the ‘systematization’ of chemical knowledge was (and still is) legitimized. As with tables of historical epochs (on which, see Steiner 2008), this dispositive stabilized the new order of knowledge.

The new ideas about the nature of matter and the new vocabulary that found expression in works such as Dalton’s—with a complete absence of terms that had been related to alchemy, while retaining the link between science and philosophy—paved the way for the new understanding of alchemy as the ‘Other’ of scientific chemistry. It was the same period that saw the general introduction of the English terms ‘pseudo-science’ and ‘pseudo-scientist’. After William Whewell had coined the term scientist in 1840 (see Ross 1962; Yeo 1993), the term pseudo-science gained popularity and was used to critique, for example, Samuel Hahnemann’s homeopathy or Gustave Le Bon’s mass psychology (Hagner 2008: 24). But most scientists, like Dalton, simply neglected

the older vocabulary, and it was the job of nineteenth-century historians to make the shift visible in explicit wordings. When Heinrich Wilhelm Schaefer in 1887 defined alchemy as “the art of transforming ignoble metal into silver and particularly into gold” (1887: 1), he expressed the now-common understanding of alchemy as something distinct from modern science. For these authors, alchemy only continues to be interesting from an historical point of view—for those who want to understand the psychology of human folly and the achievements of contemporary science.

Alchemy is of rich interest to the scholar in various regards. We may want to study it from a psychological perspective, which offers particularly good insight into how, based on a few facts, which were observed inaccurately, using a few unclear words behind which one suspected mysterious content that people thought they usefully interpreted, there developed a huge network of false doctrines; these doctrines occupied the human mind for over a millennium and, in combination with mystical ideas, held it captive entirely. We may also discuss, from a practical point of view, the value of the chemical processes that alchemy applied to reach its goal; in doing so—by reviewing, from the perspective of scientific chemistry, the importance of the existing theoretical ideas and the results that alchemists achieved as a preliminary stage of contemporary chemistry—we also contribute to the history of this science itself.

SCHAEFER 1887: 1; author's translation

In Schaefer's account, representative of the understanding of alchemy in his time, this discipline is historically distinct from science, although perhaps in part a forerunner of modern scientific chemistry and physics. Schaefer is at pains to identify the Egyptian-Greek Hermes Trismegistus as the imagined origin of alchemical thinking (1887: 2–12), which also links alchemy to its superstitious sister, astrology (11). Terms that belong to the groupings of RELIGION, MYSTICISM, and METAPHYSICS—combined with discourse strands such as ‘fraud’, ‘trick’, ‘superstition’, or ‘credulity’—legitimized the ‘modern’ contempt of alchemy as a counter-concept of science.

Yet, although Schaefer noted that serious alchemical practice could no longer be observed in the nineteenth century (1887: 33–34), he reminded his readers of one structural parallel between modern chemistry and alchemical endeavors—the chemical search for the smallest atoms offered the possibility of recombining elementary particles, thus creating new metals. As an example of this ‘transmutational quest’, he referred to the British physicist Norman Lockyer, who, eight years earlier, had thought that he had transformed copper

into calcium and nickel into cobalt through the use of electricity (Schaefer 1887: 34). Sir Norman Lockyer's spectroscopic studies of stars and his hypothesis that the chemical elements were compound bodies, which he explained in a lecture on 12 December 1878 at the Royal Society, experienced a mixed reception and were considered very controversial; it is characteristic of the discursive configuration of the day that Lockyer was ridiculed as an "alchemist" by the popular press and by some of his colleagues (Brock 1985: 189). However, Lockyer's studies are also an indication that the neat distinction between alchemy and chemistry was not always easy to maintain in the light of emerging theories of the nature of matter.

The discursive reconfiguration that has taken place since the eighteenth century can also be framed as a conflict between the Aristotelian philosophical tradition and Greek atomic, corpuscular philosophy. This new development dramatically challenged the Aristotelian interpretation of material change that was common until the seventeenth century, which explained alterations of chemical properties or substances as the addition or subtraction of 'forms'. As mentioned above, underlying these processes was a speculative substrate of matter, called the *proto hyle* or *prima materia*, that remained unchanged throughout the process. Linked to the forms or qualities of wet, dry, hot, and cold, the *proto hyle* produced the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, which in turn could be mixed to generate the material substances the chemists examined. Over against this Aristotelian theory, Greek corpuscular philosophy gained influence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, speculating about atoms being the smallest units of material substances, which may or may not be understood as unsplittable. However, as William H. Brock aptly remarks,

although enlivened by Boyle, Newton and their successors with gravitational force, chemical affinity and electrical properties, the earlier corpuscular philosophy or atomic theory was of little use to chemists until it was married to the modern doctrine of elements by John Dalton at the beginning of the nineteenth century. [...] Dalton abandoned at a stroke the age-old belief of philosophers in the simplicity of matter—that there was a unique, homogeneous primary matter.

1985: vii–viii

For many, however, giving up the idea of a simple and unifying principle that underlies the processes of nature was too high a price to pay for scientific progress (cf. also the detailed discussion in Asprem 2014). One of these was William Prout (1785–1850), who in 1816 put forward his hypothesis that all of the elements

and their constituent atoms were in fact compounds of one basic homogeneous material. He coined the term *protyle* for this speculative basis, which he then identified with hydrogen, the lightest known element. Prout became known for a second hypothesis as well—namely, the idea that if we accept the expression of the atomic weight of hydrogen as a unity, the relative atomic weights of all of the known elements are whole numbers. Consequently, hydrogen came to be regarded as the primary matter from which all of the elements were composed. What was subsequently discussed as “Prout’s hypothesis” had an influence on nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of matter that should not be underestimated. Brock points out that “[a]s a tantalizing and attractive simplifying view of matter it was to be a continuous source of inspiration to chemists and physicists until the work of F W Aston on isotopes in the 1920s” (1985: viii).

It is important for my analysis to note that the *protyle* also became a favorite topic in theosophical and occultist discourse at the end of the nineteenth century. For instance, in 1893 Wynn W. Westcott, a founding member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and a noted authority on alchemy, published a pamphlet under his Golden Dawn pseudonym “Sapere Aude” on *The Science of Alchymy: Spiritual and Material*. He argued that alchemy “must be regarded as a science uniting ancient chemistry with a religious basis” (1893: 4). But while he, like Heinrich Wilhelm Schaefer and others, drew the historical line from ancient and medieval alchemy to modern chemistry (1893: 5), he did not support the triumphant self-esteem of modern chemists. “No modern science has shown more intolerance towards its ancestors than the chemistry of our era has shown to the discoveries of those Egyptian, Arabian and Mediæval sages who were the founders of chemistry in the dim and distant past” (1893: 8). In his attempt to reconcile alchemy with the most modern chemical findings, Westcott referred to Prout’s *protyle* as evidence of the unified quality of matter, or the *prima materia* of the alchemists. He found support from the leading chemist Sir William Crookes. History books of modern science usually do not mention that Crookes was also a member of the Theosophical Society and secretly a Golden Dawn initiate (see Morrisson 2007: 39–40).

By the end of the nineteenth century, Theosophists and scientists—partly in collaboration—had developed a new entanglement of discourse strands. Indeed, as Morrisson points out:

When scientists such as Crookes and Lodge, and Theosophists such as Besant and Leadbeater, melded physics with spiritual and psychic forces via theories of the ether (and the additional particles that Theosophy added to the equation), they were lending scientific credibility to spiritual

ideas. Paradoxically, in their critique of scientific materialism, they asserted a mechanical theory of spirituality. Theosophy thus required a form of vitalism to counterbalance the mechanistic tendencies of its physics.

2007: 83

The Formation of VITALISM

Let us broaden the perspective a little bit and, as Morrisson suggests, include vitalism in our analysis. What I call VITALISM here is a grouping of discourse strands that are linked to the historical tradition of vitalism but are not limited to it. The form of scientific and philosophical vitalism that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century took on features from various new disciplines. Hans Driesch (1867–1941), the German biologist noted for his early experimental work in embryology and for being one of the first to perform the cloning of an animal in the 1880s, is certainly the best-known representative of what he himself called neo-vitalism (Driesch 1922: 167). In various publications, he positioned himself against materialistic philosophies of science, particularly Darwinism, and he made explicit a major component of the formation of new discourses in the twentieth century—the emergence of psychology as an integrating factor between religion, philosophy, and science. “As is well known,” writes Driesch, “the problem of vitalism is expanded considerably when we include in it the question of the relations between the ‘inner life’ [‘*Seelenleben*’] and nature.” Against this background, Driesch is surprised that psychologists do not really engage the issue: “almost nobody has seen the close relation between the body/mind problem and vitalism as such in its actual sharpness; indeed, it is strange that not even physiologists such as Pflüger and Goltz have seen the close link that is operative here” (1922: 157; author’s translation).

It is through psychology that Driesch also endorsed the work of another famous vitalist—Henri Bergson (1859–1941; see Burwick and Douglass 2010). Both scholars fought against mechanistic and ‘finalistic’ philosophies of science, even though their conclusions differed in some ways (Driesch 1922: 178–180). Driesch was convinced of the relevance of occultism and psychology to the emergence of a new understanding of science, and he used the label ‘para’ for these sciences without the pejorative charge that this label assumed in other contexts.

Now at last a field seems to become “science” on which as yet only casual statements have been made, more guessing than knowing: the field of *parapsychology* and *paraphysics*, i.e., those fields that are unfortunately

still called “occultism” [*Okkultismus*], even though, it seems to me, not much is still “occult” [*verborgen*] here. [...] We state it frankly: Paraphysics is our hope when it comes to biology, just as parapsychology [*Parapsychik*] is our hope when it comes to psychology. Together, however, they express our hope when it comes to a well-founded metaphysics and “worldview” [*Weltanschauung*].

1922: 208–209, emphasis original

Statements like these make it clear how closely this discourse is linked to the grouping of MONISM (on which, see von Stuckrad 2014: 76–93). We can see the link between these discourses in what Monika Fick calls the “sensualization of the spiritual” (*Versinnlichung des Geistigen*) and the “spiritualization of the physical” (*Beseelung des Physischen*); at the end of her study of *fin de siècle* literature, in which Gustav Theodor Fechner and other Romantic authors were positively received and linked to spiritualism as a “biology of the beyond,” she draws the conclusion that we can even speak of (literary) “modernity as a monistic movement” (Fick 1993: 354–365). It is noteworthy in this regard that Fechner had decisive influence on Sigmund Freud in particular, and on psychoanalysis in general. “A large part of the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis would hardly have come into being without the speculations of the man whom Freud called the great Fechner” (Ellenberger 1970: 218). In a parallel dynamic,

vitalism has powerfully inflected the literary sensibility of the last two centuries, and these cultural effects were empowered by the residual prestige vitalism enjoyed from its discursive apprenticeship in the scientific academy. The transition of vitalism from science, to a scientific ideology, to a social ideology shows this complex historical dynamic in action.

CLARKE 1996: 28

William Prout contributed to this discourse as well, since he argued that living systems also contained ‘vital principles’. With this thesis, Prout was part of a heated debate among chemists of his generation (Brock 1985: 70–80), long before occultists and Theosophists jumped on the bandwagon and spiritualized the ‘life force’ and at the same time ‘scientificized’ spirituality.

New Meanings in Academic Writings

Therefore, if we want to understand the ambivalent role that alchemical discourse played in the twentieth century—waving between rejection and fascination—we will have to include psychology in our analysis. The intellectual relationship between the physicist Wolfgang Pauli and the psychologist Carl

Gustav Jung is perhaps the clearest example of the discursive repositioning of alchemy between psychology and modern science. This conversation had a lot of impact: “Jung ultimately set the terms of a psychological interpretation of alchemy for much of the rest of the century” (Morrisson 2007: 190). Jung was interested in alchemy early on, after he had encountered this field through the works of Herbert Silberer in 1914; but his fascination with alchemy fully blossomed only later, at the end of the 1920s, when he started to link mandala symbolism to alchemical motives (Ellenberger 1970: 719–723; Gieser 2005: 198–200; Miller 2009: 47–50; see Jung 1980: 118–260). Jung presented a lecture at the Eranos meeting, published in the *Eranos-Jahrbuch 1936* under the title “Die Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Alchemie” (“The Redemption Motives in Alchemy”). This lecture was integrated, although in a completely new form, as one part of Jung’s monograph *Psychologie und Alchemie* (“Psychology and Alchemy”), which was first published in 1944, but of which a second edition was already necessary in 1952, much to the astonishment of the author (see his 1951 preface to the second edition in Jung 1980).

Jung was interested in alchemy particularly because he was struck by the apparent similarity between alchemical symbolism and the dreams of modern individuals. In a fairly eclectic way, Jung seriously immersed himself in the history of alchemical literature and ideas, which led him to the construction of alchemy as a tradition mainly interested in psychological and spiritual dimensions (Jung 1980: 282–331). According to Jung, alchemical symbolism is concerned with an evolutionary process striving to attain its highest form. The ‘maturing’ of the metals can be compared to the ‘individuation’ of the human psyche in its passing through various stages of purification. The Philosopher’s Stone was essentially the psychological process of individuation (McLynn 1996: 428–432); the ‘Great Work’ (*opus*) is the combination of conflicting forces into a new, unified harmony. “The basis of the *opus* is the *materia prima*, which is one of the most famous secrets of alchemy,” Jung noted (1980: 364, emphasis added; author’s translation; see the entire chapter on *prima materia* in Jung 1980: 364–394). Jung described the *prima materia* as a universal category characterized by ubiquity: “we can have it always and everywhere; i.e. the projection can take place all the time and everywhere” (Jung 1980: 371). This speculation about a primary matter underlying physical and spiritual processes is a reconfiguration of discourse strands that belong to the groupings of SCIENCE and PSYCHOLOGY. The “procedure of disintegration and reconstruction has its equivalent in purely experimental science and also in therapeutic work” (Gieser 2005: 200). And this is where Wolfgang Pauli enters the stage.

Pauli encountered alchemy as powerful symbolism in his own dreams, and he discussed the theory of alchemy and its implications with Jung in his own

analysis and also in extended conversations that we know of from their letters (see the very good analysis in Gieser 2005: 198–211). Pauli thought that there must be a ‘fine structure’ (a recurring motif in his dreams) and a ‘neutral language’ underlying the principles of both physics and psychology (see also Jung’s approval of the term “neutral language” in Jung and Pauli 1952: 99). In his essay “Science and Western Thought,” Pauli referred to Kepler as an antagonist of Fludd, to Goethe’s “Faust” as an antagonist of Newton, as well as to Jung and the traditions of Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism (Pauli 1994: 146). He asked whether modern science would now “be able to realise, on a higher plane, alchemy’s old dream of a psycho-physical unity, by the creation of a unified conceptual foundation for the scientific comprehension of the physical as well as the psychical” (*ibid.*). In this question, which Pauli regarded as “vital for contemporary science” (*ibid.*), the discursive combination of ‘psyche/psychology’, ‘physics’, ‘science’, and ‘alchemy’ materializes in a nutshell. What is more, Pauli’s unified language is nothing other than the ‘language of nature’ that is known from European intellectual history (Gieser 2005: 207, with reference to Pauli’s letter to Fierz, dated 21 August 1948). Suzanne Gieser’s conclusion is to the point:

Pauli’s vision is a unified worldview, in which the gap between psychological and physical worlds is suspended, just as the gap between the chemical and the physical has been suspended at the atomic level. The idea is that the closer one gets to the core of things, to their intrinsic structure, the more the differences perceived on the everyday macro level are suspended. Here we recognize again the positivistic wish to create a unitary science. The important difference is, however, that Pauli did not want to see a reductionist model, in which everything can be reduced to an existing science, like logic or physics. He sought rather a wholly new scientific approach which does not disregard the unique character of the individual sciences, but which attempts to find certain common denominators—a deep level based on the belief in certain universal structural elements which reveal themselves in all areas of experience.

2005: 208

It is no surprise that this reconfiguration of psychology and physics in a quest to discover the universal patterns of the cosmos was also highly interesting to occultist or magical discourse communities. An influential example is Israel Regardie (1907–1985), who had a solid knowledge of Jungian psychoanalysis, which he combined with his immersion in Golden Dawn and Enochian magic traditions. In 1937, Regardie published *The Philosopher’s Stone: A Modern*

Comparative Approach to Alchemy from the Psychological and Magical Points of View, followed by a major publication entitled *The Middle Pillar: The Balance between Mind and Magic* (1938). The author claimed that there is an intrinsic relation between ritual magic and psychology, which finds expression in the alchemical work and the Philosopher's Stone, "a symbol for spiritual illumination and expanded consciousness" (quoted in Morrisson 2007: 191). He even recommended that psychotherapists should use the Lesser Banishing Ritual and the Middle Pillar exercise from the Golden Dawn in their sessions (Morrisson 2007: 191).

This interpretation is not far from Mircea Eliade's construction of alchemy. Only a few years after Regardie, Eliade published *The Forge and the Crucible* (the French original appeared in 1956). In his foreword, he leaves no doubt about his real interests:

Wherever possible, the historic-cultural context of the various metallurgical complexes has been taken into account; but my main concern has been to pierce through to the mental world which lies behind them. Mineral substances shared in the sacredness attaching to the Earth-Mother. [...] To collaborate in the work of Nature, to help her to produce at an ever-increasing tempo, to change the modalities of matter—here, in our view, lies one of the key sources of alchemical ideology. [...] what the smelter, smith and alchemist have in common is that all three lay claim to a particular magico-religious experience in their relations with matter; this experience is their monopoly and its secret is transmitted through the initiatory rites of their trades. All three work on a Matter which they hold to be at once alive and sacred, and in their labours they pursue the transformation of matter, its perfection and its transmutation.

ELIADE 1978: 8–9

All of the ingredients of the new discursive constellation are clearly visible here; Eliade, the professor of religion, lends authority to the combination of RELIGION, SCIENCE, NATURE, MAGIC, EXPERIENCE, MOTHER EARTH, VITALISM, TRANSMUTATION, and ALCHEMY.

The discursive constellation that I have described in this analysis is by no means a marginal, 'esoteric' movement. It has had a decisive impact on holistic understandings of nature and the cosmos as well as on practices and convictions in the field of nature-based spiritualities and the emerging discourse on nature, environmentalism, and 'Gaian' religious practice at the end of the twentieth century (on "dark green religion" as a global phenomenon, see Taylor 2010).

Discourse analysis is a very useful instrument if we want to understand and explain the emergence of contemporary views about nature, religion, spirituality, and science.

Discursive Study of Religion: Controversies and Clarifications

Addressing the transformation of the discursive field of religion and science is an example of historical discourse analysis. This example shows that the analysis of terms and texts—in other words, linguistic dimensions—is also an important part of historical analysis and genealogical approaches. Hence, I agree with Titus Hjelm and Teemu Taira (Chapters 1 and 6 in this volume, respectively) that the distinction between linguistic and historical approaches to discourse should not be overestimated; when I make this distinction, I am referring to the different *focus* of those approaches, and I argue that a linguistic focus easily overlooks the practices, functions, non-linguistic elements, and dispositives of a discourse and thus resembles a content analysis more than a discourse analysis (on the difference between those two methods, see Wedl, Herschinger, and Gasteiger 2014).

Within the larger framework of discourse research, many forms of discourse analysis are possible; the historical reconstruction of the genealogy of a certain discursive ensemble is only one of them. Different forms of discourse analysis may need to apply different methods and discursive practices, but what they have in common is the fact that ‘doing’ a discourse analysis is always an attribution of meaning that is itself part of the discourse (Wrana 2014; see also Moberg 2013: 12, referring to Taylor 2001: 39). Hence, constructing a discourse is a discursive practice that needs to be reflected upon from a meta-discursive perspective (von Stuckrad 2010b: 157–158). The endless regress this self-reflection entails is an unavoidable feature of all constructivist approaches, including discourse analyses (Knorr-Cetina 1989: 93). This brings me to a few methodological issues that are intrinsic to discourse research in general and have been raised with regard to a discursive study of religion in particular.

The Ontology of Discourses and the Double-Bind of Discourse Research

One recurrent topic in methodological discussions is the question of how ‘real’ discourses are. Was there ‘really’ a discourse on alchemy that ‘influenced’ what people today think about the world? To answer this question, it is worthwhile to go back to Max Weber, who famously noted, “It is not the ‘factual’ associations of the ‘things’ [*die ‘sachlichen’ Zusammenhänge der ‘Dinge’*] but the intellectual

associations of the problems [*die gedanklichen Zusammenhänge der Probleme*] that underlie the fields of scientific research” (“Die ‘Objektivität’ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis” [1904], quoted from Weber 1982: 166; author’s translation). I hope this helps to clarify a problem that Frank Neubert has identified in my work on the discursive study of religion: “It seems that religion is still thought of as a pre-discursively ‘existing’ phenomenon” (Neubert 2014: 269; author’s translation). Christian Funke and Lisa Züfle argue similarly when they claim that my approach simply shifts the definitional problems from the term ‘religion’ to the term ‘discourse’; “discourse theory,” according to these authors, “cannot substitute the concept of religion. To analyze what is specifically religious in discourses, this has to be defined in a theoretically sound way first” (Funke and Züfle 2009: 36; author’s translation). Over against such an understanding, I want to point out that “what is specifically religious in discourses” is not dependent on a definition of religion, but rather on the discursive constellation that uses the term ‘religion’ and the concepts entangled with it. Rather than defining what religion ‘is,’ my approach takes as its point of departure what people think religion is, which can be determined through an analysis of its discursive use (see Taira, Årsheim, and Horii in this volume, each of whom address this question in diverse contexts). This does not mean that ‘religion’ is presumed to ‘exist’ in a pre-discursive way, as Neubert writes; rather, it assumes that if people use the term ‘religion,’ and if discourses on religion are re-entangled in changing historical constellations, these discourses ‘exist’ because people are basing their interpretations of the world on them. It is the same mechanism described in the Thomas Theorem: Situations defined as real are real in their consequences (see Merton 1995).

There are no objectively given ‘discourses’ just waiting to be studied by historians or social scientists; the description of a discourse, or Foucault’s project of suggesting new ‘groupings’ of ‘things,’ is a constructive process that follows the interests of the researcher. The selection of data and the building of a corpus are part of the researcher’s constructive work. It would be too simple to say that ‘facts’ are ‘fabricated’ in historiographical work, but the transition from ‘traces’ to ‘sources’ and ‘data’—and thus the generation of facts *as* facts—is by no means an objective and straightforward process (von Stuckrad 2010a: 195–196). In many ways, the researcher is both the product of the discourse she or he describes and the producer of it through the attribution of meaning to things; we can call this the ‘double-bind of discourse research’ (on “Western esotericism” and “Pagan studies” as examples of such a double-bind, see von Stuckrad 2014: 152–158).

We will have to take the double-bind of scholarly work seriously. This also means, as George Ioannides and Jay Johnston point out in their contributions to

this volume, that we have to take seriously the impact of factors (such as ‘materiality’) that are outside of the discourse as well as systems of knowledge that run against the commonly accepted forms of knowledge. The intriguing question, then, is whether we want to appreciate the plurality of (equally valid) systems of knowledge, or whether we want to move a step further and integrate those alternative systems of knowledge into the ‘business’ of scholarly argument. I have been confronted with this question in my own research repeatedly and for a long time (see, for instance, von Stuckrad 2007). My own experiences with astrological hermeneutics and knowledge systems, as well as my experience with nature-based religious systems such as shamanism, have given me a deep respect for systems of knowledge that are ultimately incommensurable with the ‘genre’ of academic reasoning. As a teacher, I encourage my students to engage in these systems explicitly in order to broaden their horizons and to relativize their positions as scholars. As a researcher, I critically address the fact that these systems are considered ‘discarded knowledge’ in academic contexts (and in other contexts as well, certainly in Europe and North America), and I reconstruct the genealogy of what we think of today as accepted and valid knowledge.

But—and this is important—the appreciation of a plurality of knowledge systems does not mean that we have to integrate those systems. Various systems of knowledge have their cultural location (to borrow Jay Johnston’s expression in her chapter above), which is fine. I would claim, for instance, that shamanic knowledge provides a method for healing, not so much for addressing questions in the social sciences. I want to maintain the prioritizing of (self-)critical reflection when it comes to the core business of academia. This includes the deconstruction of what we think we know, the open acceptance of the double-bind of scholarly work, and the appreciation of alternative systems of knowledge that have their own cultural location.

The Power of Discourses and the Discourses on Power

With the double-bind of discourse studies in mind, I can also address Titus Hjelm’s critique that my approach—and perhaps similar approaches that Hjelm does not mention, such as SKAD—are “devoid of questions of power” (p. 15 above). This interpretation misses an important nuance, because power and criticism (Hjelm’s second theme) are two things to be separated. Power is an element of discourse that plays a role in any form of analysis. Despite many differences, all theories of discourse have this in common: they are problematizing the triangle of power, knowledge, and subjectivity.

Discourses are formed by power structures, but because discourses represent power structures, they can also produce and reproduce them.

Power and knowledge are inextricably linked to each other. Power can make knowledge ‘true’ or ‘ideological’, and it is through knowledge that power can be exerted. Through discourses a body of knowledge circulates in social groups and establishes itself in communities. Discourses are central to the construction of subjectivities, identities, and relations, because those who enter a discourse are assigned a certain position in the discourse and thus are enabled to gain recognition and visibility.

ANGERMULLER 2014: 23; author’s translation

When it comes to the question of criticism, discourse-analytical approaches part ways. What is referred to as critical discourse analysis entails a common, normative claim that the discourse analyst should ‘take sides’ and ‘uncover’ the power structures that undermine the agency of the underprivileged. The problem with such a claim is not its Marxist background (as Hjelm suggests), nor the fact that Marxist ideology forms a bias that compromises the ‘objectivity’ of the researcher; the double-bind of discourse research makes it clear that biases are part and parcel of discursive practice. The problem is that the bias is built into the claims in a way that insists that all other researchers should also include a critique (and not just a description of power relations) in their analysis (which seems to be in tension with Hjelm’s claim that his “intention is not to regulate” [p. 16 above]). This normative claim also tries to escape the infinite regress of self-reflection that I mentioned above. Normative claims are the objects of discourse analysis, not its instruments. And in response to Hjelm’s claim that Muslims do not have the power to influence their depiction in ‘Western media’, we should not forget that—if you will allow me the play on words—the (under)dog of one discursive constellation (‘Islam’) can be the god of another (e.g., in Occidental discourses). Hence, I tend to agree with Reiner Keller’s comment:

I doubt that discourse analysis should *per se* be critically oriented—in my view this is an attempt at uniformization and a prohibition of thinking. [...] Of course, aligning oneself with the family of critics gives a “cozy feeling,” as Bruno Latour wrote some time ago. To me it seems more important to make clear that we are dealing with more than ‘newspaper analysis’ and that from a discourse-theoretical perspective you see something different than from other perspectives. Ultimately, it is only the reception that decides on critical potential and effects.

FEUSTEL ET AL. 2014: 500; author’s translation

Everything is Discourse? How Do We Select Data?

Another recurrent theme in discussions about discourse research is the question of how we determine the limits of a discourse. People often ask: If everything is discourse, and if discourses are all we have, how can we come to any meaningful statement and analysis? Indeed, the limits of discourses present an important challenge to discourse research, even if perhaps in a different way than the question assumes. To begin with, not everything is discourse; rather, everything can be ‘discursivized’, which means that basically everything can—under certain conditions—become part of a discursive constellation. There are two conditions in particular that should be mentioned here: the seriality of a discourse, as well as the simple fact that scholars have to construct a discourse *as* discourse and convince their peers of its significance.

The seriality of a discourse means that, although in principle everything can become a discourse, only those signs and communicational practices that are repeatedly visible and display a series of significant uses are likely to become a discourse. For instance, if someone comes up with the idea of a flying spaghetti monster and jokes about it among his friends in a bar, this does not necessarily constitute a discourse worthy of discussion; but if that idea takes off and gains significance in various contexts and groups, and if the idea materializes in institutions and juridical controversies, it makes sense to study the discourse on the flying spaghetti monster (as Teemu Taira does in the present volume).

The second condition is a tricky one because it is part of a relativist and pragmatist outlook that many people find hard to accept. Theoretically, there are an infinite number of possible discourses that scholars could identify as discourses. But the scholarly identification of discourses, or their grouping, is itself steered by the order of knowledge, tacit assumptions, and other determinants of which the researcher can only be partly aware. What is more, discursive events (such as “9/11”) can change—almost arbitrarily—the focus of interest in a scholarly and public community. Again, the double-bind of discourse research has a major influence on the ‘discursivization’ of events.

Apart from this double-bind, however, scholars need to convince their audience of the meaningfulness of their groupings and their (re)construction of discursive constellations. They have to select and present their data in a way that their peers and readers accept as evidence of a point well made. This is even more important when it comes to groupings and constellations that run against the tacit knowledge and more common groupings of ‘facts’ within that community. In historical discourse analysis—and perhaps in most research areas in the study of religion—the selection and interpretation of data has to be done ‘by hand’. Going back to the example in this chapter, a quantitative

collection of all usages of ‘alchemy’ and ‘science’ could only be the beginning of a qualitative interpretation of every single use of these terms, because it is the context (of irony, for instance, which is impossible to detect using a search machine) that determines the meaning of the discursive constellation. Identifying patterns of meaning is something that escapes quantitative methods; it is a hermeneutical process that requires the active work of the researcher and the combination of quantitative and qualitative research.

To convince our audiences, it makes sense to use data that has a clearly visible discursive impact (evidenced by numbers of books sold, the status of the author as a leading scientist, national laws, large institutions, etc.). Often, it is these sources that subsequently determine discourses on other levels as well—even down to the names of grocery products and fashion labels—which in turn stabilize the overall discourse. Theoretically, we could start our collection of data at any level, and there is no hierarchy in discursive significance; that I start my analysis of ‘science’, ‘alchemy’, ‘religion’, and related terms on the level of scholarly data—rather than on the level of popular culture, music, or fashion—is simply a pragmatic decision, because I can demonstrate the discursive impact of this data more easily than the discursive impact of, say, Dire Straits’ 1984 “Alchemy” album. But in a final analysis, all of these levels together constitute the discursive field of “alchemy.”

The fact that discourse research is potentially limitless (even if in practice the researcher has to make strategic decisions and set up a comprehensive research design) should be embraced as a virtue of our field, not seen as a vice. Selectivity is nothing to be ashamed of, as long as the selections are based on—to recall Foucault’s notion—“a group of controlled decisions” (Foucault 2010 [1972]: 29) that are capable of convincing our readers and discourse communities.

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