THE "NOStALGIA FOR PARADISE" IN
MIRCEA ELIADE'S QUEST FOR
HOMO RELIGIOSUS

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines Mircea Eliade's treatment of the problem of religion and modernity. It shows how his effort to grasp the meaning of religion for modern man is a hermeneutical procedure which opposes reductionism and is essentially humanistic. It demonstrates that he aims to awaken the religious sensitivity of his contemporaries through a study of premodern religious behavior that avoids the clichés and categories of the Western rationalist tradition. This demonstration divides his thought into four areas: first, his polemic against reductionism, second, his non-reductionistic method of interpreting religious phenomena, third, his description of *homo religiosus* by reference to transhistorical structures, and, fourth, his plan to change modern spirituality through a recovery of archaic religious awareness.

The point of this thesis is to underline a certain nostalgia for the life of archaic man in Eliade's hermeneutics, but not an unhealthy one. It is a nostalgia for the origins of man's present situation, the essential condition which precedes actual human existence. It discloses itself in Eliade's quest for *homo religiosus*, which does not aim to return modern man to a mode of being lived in objective archaic history, but rather seeks to initiate him into
a new spiritual awareness through the rediscovery of the archaic modality in himself. This rediscovery is the starting point for a new humanism, a philosophical anthropology that can grasp the unity of the species at its highest level, which is, for Eliade, the religious level. His hermeneutics is thus a spiritual exercise itself, of which the "nostalgia for paradise" is a constituent element. An examination of this fact reveals the nature of Eliade's approach to the problem of religion and modernity, and contributes greatly to an understanding of his thought as a whole.
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INTRODUCTION

The problem of religion and modernity commands the attention of every contemporary scholar whose studies touch upon the subject of religion. The historian of religions, the theologian, the psychologist, the sociologist, and the anthropologist will each have an interest in one or more of the questions which this problem raises. Is religion no longer relevant to man in his modern state, and if so, will it slowly disappear? Is religion such an essential part of man that it cannot but survive, either in its traditional forms or in radically secularized forms: political ideologies, psychoanalytic therapies, or scientific dogmas? Or can one even speak of religion in general, especially in this age of individual autonomy, social mobility, and pluralism? These questions indicate the formidable nature of the problem of religion and modernity. The aim of this thesis is not to answer these questions or to offer a solution to this problem. Its aim is simply to show how one scholar, the historian of religions Mircea Eliade, defines the problem, how he approaches religion and determines its meaning for modern man.

Eliade considers religion an essential dimension of human existence; yet much of his work is concerned with its
attenuated significance for modern man. An effort to recover the religious sensitivity of his predecessors, Eliade argues, will benefit modern man for two reasons: first, because it will aid him in understanding the religious character of premodern societies, and second, because it will help him to complete his understanding of himself. While Eliade indicates there are two different aspects to this effort, they are for him inseparable because he considers the study of premodern man's religious behavior the vehicle by which contemporary observers can best attain a clearer understanding of man's religious dimension. In other words, the effort to recover the meaning of religion for the present day must be a hermeneutical one. The particular conception of hermeneutics underlying Eliade's approach to religion has been formulated by the historian of religions, Charles Long. Hermeneutics, Long says, "is the effort to understand the self through the mediation of the other."¹ This definition of hermeneutics provides the best starting point for a discussion of Eliade's approach to religion, for it discloses that he aims to make spiritual self-understanding attainable for modern man.

At each stage of Eliade's hermeneutics, he approaches

religion as an essential dimension of man which is always accessible to him despite his willingness to forget it or his attempts to oppose it. Eliade defines his approach against those approaches which reduce religion to non-religious factors (e.g., social, psychological, political, economic, etc.). Through this polemic against reductionism he establishes an approach to religion as something in and of itself. In the first chapter of this thesis the nature and background of this polemic will be discussed. In the second chapter, the nature of his method for the non-reductionistic understanding of religion will be outlined, showing the process by which he moves from the phenomena at his disposal to the "structures of the sacred." It will show how his method is related to other contemporary approaches to religion. In the third chapter these so-called "structures of the sacred" will be scrutinized by attempting to decide just what kind of structures they are, or what they are "structures of" aside from "the sacred." The purpose of the scrutiny is to reveal the function which these structures have in defining homo religiosus. It will be carried out largely through responding to critical commentary on the value and use of Eliade's structures. The final chapter will consider the role of the historian of religions in the renewal of thought in modern culture. Specifically, the idea will be considered whether the historian of religions is in a position to influence the spiritual situation of modern man by restoring his lost
spiritual awareness.

Eliade feels that the quest for homo religiosus is best satisfied by studying religion in the life of "archaic" man. In choosing this primordial being as the chief object of his study, one may wonder if he seeks the true nature of religion in its "original form" in human history—as most of the early students of primitive religions did. In view of all that he has written criticizing their so-called "quest for origins" this hardly seems likely. Yet, noting the differences between his purpose and theirs, this thesis will attempt to show that his quest is in some sense a "quest for origins."

While Eliade admires the early students of primitive religions for their broad philosophical concerns and their ability to arouse public interest in religion, he rejects the historical-evolutionary framework of the early theorists and has no interest in repeating their search for the earliest historical form of religion. Although Eliade's quest for homo religiosus is necessarily historical and takes archaic man as its model, it is not a quest for the archaic in objective history. It is rather a non-objective quest for origins which aims to show the importance of religion as an essential dimension of man. It

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presupposes a view of archaic man which is quite different from the simple, childlike, and nearly animalistic creature of the early theorists. His view is in fact closer to the Enlightenment vision of the "noble savage," living in the paradisaical state of man before the fall. However, for Eliade, this beatific creature lives in the relatively paradisaical state of man before his "second fall" into desacralized modern existence. The first search for the origins of religion attempted to show the low level of archaic man's religious awareness; Eliade's quest has the opposite aim.

The outstanding question is in what sense does Eliade hope to recover for man his originally acute predisposition for religious thought and behavior. The assumption to be analyzed is whether Eliade wants modern Western man to understand himself religiously through a recapitulation of archaic existence. It will be shown that such an assumption must be false because of the specifically hermeneutical nature of Eliade's quest for *homo religiosus*. The act of self-understanding which is the aim of his quest can never be considered an objective resurrection of archaic religious views because it presupposes modern man's preoccupation with history. This act of self-understanding is hermeneutical, and as Charles Long says, hermeneutics "presupposes modernity." 

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3 Long, p.79.
I. Eliade's Polemic Against Reductionism:
The Negative Basis of his Hermeneutics

Eliade's approach to the history of religions is exemplified in Charles Long's definition of hermeneutics as "the effort to understand the self through the mediation of the other". For Eliade, the other is constituted by religious materials, primarily from premodern cultures. The encounter with the other is valuable because the other is "foreign" or "alien" and therefore invites new thought, suggests new ways of relating to the world, and new categories of understanding. Eliade feels the informative function of the other is restricted when it is reduced to the categories of contemporary thought and its fashionable clichés. He aims to approach the other at its own uniquely religious and distinctly non-modern level.

The starting point of Eliade's hermeneutics is a negative polemic against reductionism. This polemic takes two forms: one arises out of Eliade's criticism of various approaches to premodern cultures and the other stems from his criticism of various efforts to treat religion as a function of political, economic, social, psychological, and other non-religious factors. Although the two forms combine in Eliade's thought, they are here treated separately because each is connected with a different area
in the study of religion: the first with the study of primitive religions, and the second with the historical and comparative study of religions. This chapter presents Eliade's reactions to developments in both areas as he forms his particular approach to religion.

Understanding Premodern Cultures

What does Eliade mean by "modern" culture and how does he distinguish it from premodern culture? At one point he states:

By the "modern world," we mean contemporary Western society; but also a state of mind which has been formed by successive deposits ever since the Renaissance and the Reformation. The active classes of the urban societies are in this sense "modern"--that is, the mass of mankind which has been more or less directly shaped by education and official culture.  

The successive deposits mentioned here constitute a line of thought leading through the Enlightenment, positivism, Marxism, behaviorism, and more recently, historicism and existentialism. Eliade refers to those types of culture that he finds furthest removed from this kind of modernity as "archaic," and places in this category ancient and primitive societies as well.

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as the traditional, popular, or peasant sectors of society in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Europe. He distinguishes modern culture from archaic cultures according to differences in the characteristic attitude of each toward time, or history, and space. Eliade believes that fully modern man is characterized by historicity, which means that he is a man who can live only in history, in the flux of linear time. In contrast, archaic man in his most radical form places no value on history. For this man, the events of linear time, and equally the geographical features of his spatial environment, have no meaning in themselves; the only meaning they have is one conferred upon them from a superhuman source outside of history.

More will be said about the gap separating modern man from archaic man in a later chapter. What one might now consider is the fact that Eliade has found it necessary to turn to premodern societies in order to inquire into man's religious nature. In his words: "To come to know the mental universe of Homo religiosus, we must above all take into account the men of these primitive societies." Eliade, of course, is not the only one who has turned to this source in order to understand the religious elements in man's character, or its other significant elements. In the introduction to his Theories of Primitive Religion, E.E. Evans-Pritchard remarks that,

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some of the most important political, social, and moral philosophers from Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau to Herbert Spencer, Durkheim and Bergson have considered the facts of primitive life to have great significance for the understanding of social life in general; and I would remark that the men who have been most responsible for changing the whole climate of thought in our civilization during the last century, the great myth-makers Darwin, Marx-Engels, Freud, and Frazer (and perhaps I should add Compte), all showed an intense interest in primitive peoples . . .

Although men did develop social theories and philosophical truths through their study of primitive cultures in the last century, their accomplishments remained small in the actual understanding primitive life itself, especially in the area of religion. Evans-Pritchard has convincingly demonstrated this in his work as has Eliade in various essays. Both scholars feel that few of their predecessors have been able to see through the cliches and categories of their own intellectual era to a clear understanding of their subject. Upon considering some of the developments during the last century in this field of study, one can well understand why Eliade feels it is necessary to study primitive religions from a new perspective in order to

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understand the essence of homo religiosus.

The philosopher Susanne Langer points out that an intellectual era is characterized above all by the kind of questions which it asks. In the late nineteenth century, the question of "origins" dominated the intellectual climate. Scholars in the field of primitive religions each proposed theories in an effort to define the "original form" of religion. Among these theories were Tylor's "animism", Marett's "pre-animism", Herbert Spencer's "ancestor-worship", Robertson Smith's "totemism", and Father Schmidt's "primordial monotheism". Moreover, most scholars sought an analogue to biological evolution in showing how religion developed from its simple origins to its "higher" forms.

Evans-Pritchard calls these early theories of the origin of religion "psychological" theories, because in one way or another each of them explained the origin of religion by some imagined act of the primordial mind. He suggests that progress was made only in moving from "intellectualist" psychological theories to "emotionalist" ones. The advent of sociology finally put an end to theories proposing that religion originated in a primal act of the individual mind. In particular, Émile Durkheim

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9 Evans-Pritchard, pp.20-47.
clarified Compte's proclamation, made fifty years earlier, that the individual was a mere abstraction. Yet, early sociologists persisted in trying to explain the origin of religion, in their case, its social origin. Their work marked a change in the intellectual climate only in that it went beyond individualistic hypotheses; it prefigured an era in which the question of "origins" would become obsolete, to be superseded by the question of "description", of the individual's multiple conditionings.

The new intellectual climate in which the student of primitive religions found himself did not simply result from developments in sociology: nor did it result from discoveries made by a new breed of "field" anthropologists who contradicted theories of the origin of religion. As Eliade remarks:

It was a new environment nourished by Nietzsche and Marx, Dilthey, Croce, and Ortega, and later on by Heidegger and Sartre; an environment in which the fashionable cliche was not nature but history, not "origin and development" but temporality and historicity.

In the study of religion this precipitated a strong reaction against the quest for "origins" and a heavy emphasis upon the depiction of religion in terms of its multiple conditionings. Scholars felt that inquiries should be restricted as completely as possible to the description of

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the relation of religion to other elements in its various socio-historical contexts.

This attitude persists among most scholars at present. For example, Evans-Pritchard writes in his Conclusion to *Theories of Primitive Religion*:

I hold that it is not sound scientific method to seek for origins, especially when they cannot be found. Science deals with relations, not with origins and essences. . . . A relational analysis of the kind suggested can be made at any point where religion is in a relation to any other social facts--moral, ethical, juridical, aesthetic and scientific. . . .

No contemporary scholar would challenge the view that the origin of religion cannot be found, and none would deny the importance of socio-historical contexts for understanding particular religions. But is this the final word? Eliade thinks not. He is more cautious in his reaction to early students of religion and, in fact, admires them for their breadth of purpose and their ability to arouse public interest in religion. He furthermore cautions against allowing the current interest in man's historicity to become as much an obsession as the problem of "origins" was for nineteenth century scholars.

The crux of Eliade's polemic is the warning that the discovery of man's historicity and, with it, the

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11 Evans-Pritchard, pp.111-12.

12 Eliade, "Crisis and Renewal," Chapter 4 of *The Quest*, pp.54-55.
recognition of conditionings of all sorts (social, economic, psychological, etc.) may lead into a new "historicistic" reductionism. At the end of his discussion of "The Quest for the 'Origins' of Religion," he asks: "Does the fact that we can't reach the origin of religion also mean that we cannot grasp the essence of religious phenomena?". He then offers his view of the problem of interpreting religious phenomena:

A pure religious phenomenon does not exist. A religious phenomenon is always also a social, an economic, a psychological phenomenon, and, of course, a historical one, because it takes place in historical time and it is conditioned by everything which had happened before.

But the question is: Are the multiple systems of conditioning a self-sufficient explanation of the religious phenomenon? When a great discovery opens new perspectives to the human mind, there is a tendency to explain everything in the light of that discovery and on its plan of reference... The discovery, at the beginning of the century, of the importance of history urged many of our contemporaries to reduce man to his historical dimension, that is to say, to the systems of conditionings in which every human being is hopelessly "situated"... We know that we can grasp the sacred only through manifestations which are historically conditioned. But the study of these historically conditioned expressions does not give us the answer to the questions: What is the sacred? What does a religious experience actually mean?13

Eliade believes we can ask about the essentials of religion even though its origin eludes us; he feels we must inquire into the specific nature and meaning of religion even though neither is apparent in its historical "situations".

13 Eliade, The Quest, pp.52-53.
Eliade considers this kind of inquiry especially important for the study of religion in primitive societies. While these societies do not contain the "original form" of religion, all of their significant cultural creations (myths, art forms, dance, etc.) are expressed on a religious plane. In order to approach them at their own level, Eliade argues, one must grasp the meaning of their religious creations. He doubts that reductionistic approaches which concentrate upon family structure, tribal law, social organizations, etc. will be able to comprehend the religious creativity of primitive societies. He states:

Reductionism as a general method for grasping certain types of "reality" may help to solve western man's problems, but it is irrelevant as a hermeneutical tool. It is irrelevant particularly in the case of archaic cultures. For primitive man's creativity is religious par excellence. His ethical, institutional, and artistic creations are dependent upon, or inspired by, religious experience and thought. Only if we take seriously these oeuvres—in the same way that we take seriously the Old Testament, the Greek tragedies, or Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe—will the Primitives find their proper place in the unfolding Universal History, in continuity with other peoples of past and present.¹⁴

Explanations of social organization, etc., may be sufficient to show that primitive man is "normal". The anthropologist or sociologist may be satisfied with this, but according to Eliade, the historian of religions has a special responsibility to appreciate the fact that the primitive

is also "creative".

The historian of religions will, of course, have a valuable role in understanding primitive religions. The value of a general knowledge of religious facts for the understanding of any particular form of religion is clear. Yet, for Eliade the matter does not end here. As he sees it, before one tries to understand a particular form of religion, he should not only possess a general knowledge of religious facts but also an idea of what religion is, in and of itself. While Eliade writes that "a pure religious phenomenon does not exist," and that "we can grasp the sacred only through manifestations which are historically conditioned," he feels the meaning of a religious phenomenon is not exhausted when it is reduced to its social, political, and economic components. It also contains an irreducibly religious element, which Eliade calls "the element of the sacred." As this element is central in his polemic against reductionism, it is now necessary to see how he has arrived at and developed his idea of the sacred.

Understanding the Sacred

The sacred, according to Eliade, appears only in historically conditioned forms. There are two subjects which therefore arise in his approach to the sacred: its nature and its manner of appearance in history. The first
concern here will be how he has developed his idea of the sacred from the works other scholars, and the second will be how he has added to this conception through what might be called the laws of sacred manifestation. With regard to the first issue, Jonathan Smith writes:

Indeed one might suggest that part of Eliade's "strategy" has been to substitute Otto's language of the Holy for Durkheim's more neutral and positional Sacred while maintaining the dynamics of Durkheim's dualism. 15

Otto is the scholar who has had the greatest influence on Eliade, for he has given him the principle of the irreducibility of sacred phenomena. However, the proper place to begin this discussion is where the idea of the sacred first became a tool of primary importance for the understanding of religion, i.e., in the sociology of Émile Durkheim.

Durkheim establishes a minimal definition of the sacred as that which is opposed to the profane. In The Elementary Forms of Religious Life he writes:

In the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another.... the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, two worlds between which there is nothing in common.16


According to Durkheim, the opposition between these two worlds is dynamic not static, for the sacred has a powerful propensity for spreading itself over the world of the profane; it is "contagious." The majority of religious rites function to keep the two worlds separated, and even those rites which allow passage from one world to the other put into relief the antagonism between them (e.g., passage from one to the other would be accompanied by a symbolic death or some break in continuity). The two mutually contradictory principles of antagonism and contagion describe the sacred's dialectical relation to the profane in Durkheim's sacred-profane dichotomy.

Durkheim's understanding of the sacred, however, goes beyond his definition of it as something opposed to the profane. It also includes his theory of the social origin of sacredness. He suggests:

Religious force is only the sentiments inspired by the group in its members, but projected outside of the consciousnesses that experience them, and objectified. To be objectified, they are fixed upon some object which thus becomes sacred.... the sacred character assumed by an object is not implied in the intrinsic properties of this latter: it is added to them.17

This constitutes a classic example of the effort to explain the sacred as a projection of some non-religious human dimension. Eliade's idea of the sacred is formed in opposition to this kind of explanation, although it is

17Ibid., p.261.
influenced by Durkheim's understanding of the sacred-profane dichotomy. Opposition to treating the sacred in terms of non-religious factors was established before Eliade, however; it can be traced back to the first comparative studies of religion.

When Durkheim states, "there is something eternal in religion", he refers to its permanent significance as a social fact. In the comparative study of religions, the idea of the eternal in religion means something quite different; it suggests a supernatural quality, an element above and beyond the empirical characteristics of any religious phenomenon, Ultimate Reality, the Holy, the Sacred, or simply, the Eternal. Through such conceptions, comparativists in religion seek to establish a discipline which, unlike sociology, for example, treats religion as something in and of itself. This can be traced to such early writers as Max Müller and C.P. Tiele, who suggest distinguishing what is unique and permanent in religion from its empirically conditioned appearances in history, its essence from its manifestations. It was Rudolf Otto who first offered a systematic argument against the reduction or rationalization of religion in terms of social, political, psychological, and economic factors. He established the model for such later scholars as Eliade,

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\(^{18}\text{Ibid.},\ p.474.\)
who argue that religion can be treated as something sui generis.

Otto argues for the specificity of religion in Kantian terms. In *The Idea of the Holy* he discusses "the distinction between holiness as an a priori category and holiness as revealed in outward appearance," that is, in history.¹⁹ He points to an element in religious experience above and beyond its manifest character, a presentiment of some sheer overplus in addition to empirical reality. What is experienced, he argues can only be described as the "wholly other;" i.e., "something which has no place in our scheme of reality but belongs to an absolutely different one, and which at the same time arouses an irrepressible interest in the mind."²⁰ Its nature suggests itself to us only in the state of mind it arouses. This state of mind, which he terms "numinous," eludes the comprehension of all but those who have experienced it. While akin to feelings of moral goodness and deep aesthetic appreciation, this state of mind has something irreducibly religious about it, which is an immediately felt presentiment of the "wholly other." Holiness or sacredness is the attribute attached to whatever is so experienced--deity, object, or event--simply and only because it signifies the utterly unfamiliar.

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²⁰Ibid., p.29.
Otto thus describes the irreducible nature of the "religious experience," which was for him the phenomenon *par excellence* of religion. In contrast to Durkheim's idea of the sacred as a conception of the human mind which is applied to a certain class of things, Otto understands it as something completely outside the mental and natural order. Eliade accepts Otto's idea of the sacred and, also, his principle of irreducibility, which maintains that each religious phenomenon must be viewed simply as an instance in which the sacred "shows itself." In moving on to the question of how the sacred shows itself, however, Eliade goes beyond Otto, taking his first cue from Durkheim.

In order to convey his view of religious phenomena, Eliade calls each a "hierophany," which means the sacred "shows itself." In Eliade's understanding of hierophanies, one can discern certain laws of sacred manifestation. Three such laws will be discussed here. The first law arises from Durkheim's sacred-profane dichotomy, and shows how Eliade superimposes the "dynamics of Durkheim's dualism" on Otto's idea of the Holy. The second law indicates hierophanies, or manifestations of the sacred, have a soteriological value which is immediately evident to religious man. According to the third law, hierophanies generate religious man's most fundamental idea, the idea of a transcendent reality which he considers absolute and axiomatic. Taken together these laws of sacred manifestation demonstrate Eliade's basic attitude toward religious
phenomena and suggest his definition of religion. For Eliade, as for Durkheim, the sacred-profane dichotomy has determining significance for all religious life. He states:

The dichotomy of sacred and profane is the invariable par excellence. For, while the sacred is manifested in an infinity of forms and objects, there is always a difference of an ontological order between sacred objects and those which are not.

This statement also shows an awareness of the principles of antagonism and contagion which characterize Durkheim's dialectical dynamics of sacred and profane. One particular aspect of this dynamic process seems especially important to Eliade. This is the fact that the sacred should actually appear in the profane world. He emphasizes this fact because, like Otto, he conceives the sacred as something wholly outside the mental and natural order. The great mysterium tremendum he says is that the sacred should manifest itself at all, "thereby limiting itself and ceasing to be absolute." Eliade usually has this fact in mind when he

21 This is mentioned because Eliade declines from beginning with an a priori definition of religion--Patterns in Comparative Religion, tr. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), p.xvi--yet seems to have a well-defined notion of what it is, as the following reveals.


23 Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p.125.
speaks of "the dialectic of the sacred and profane" or "the dialectic of hierophanies." Both Douglas Allen and Mac Ricketts point out that the relationship which Eliade so describes is actually more "paradoxical" than "dialectical." He verifies their observation when he remarks of the dialectic of hierophanies, "this paradoxical coming together of sacred and profane, being and non-being, absolute and relative, the eternal and the becoming, is what every hierophany, even the most elementary, reveals." Thus, Eliade's first law of sacred manifestation is that the sacred manifests itself in the profane in hierophanies. It is this quality of hierophanies which leads religious man to interpret them soteriologically.

A hierophany "calls" religious man to decision; as the sacred dimension is revealed he evaluates his profane existence negatively. Eliade's position on this point is well formulated by Allen in the following words:

The dialectic of hierophanies throws the realm of natural ordinary existence into


25 Eliade, Patterns, p.29.
sharp relief. After the "rupture" of the sacred and the profane, man evaluates his natural existence as a "fall."26

The religious man is impressed because something infinitely more real than ordinary existence has shown itself to him in his world. Eliade quotes an Indian mystic on the subject of Visnu's arkas (objects embodying the gods presence) to show what the appearance of the sacred in the profane world can mean to man.

"Though omniscient Visnu shows himself in the arkas as if he were without knowledge; though a spirit, he appears material; though truly God he appears to be at the disposal of man; though all-powerful he appears weak; though free of all care he appears to need looking after; though inaccessible [to sense], he appears as tangible."27

As this statement suggests; man is also moved toward a positive response, i.e., one which is the positive correlate of his negative evaluation of the ordinary world. Man's response is soteriological; he senses that his world must be "founded" and periodically "saved" by assimilating it to the sacred dimension. Thus, according to a second law of sacred manifestation, the hierophany points beyond itself; it expresses, in microcosmic form, the idea of religious man that his world must be "open" to a higher world, the world of absolute and axiomatic values.

26 Allen, p.183.

27 Eliade, Patterns, p.28.
The irruption of the sacred into the world, then, causes the religious man to orient himself toward some "other" world and to the sacred values which originate in that world. Eliade describes the "function" of religion in terms of the preservation of such values and ties this to the experience of confronting the sacred. The "principle function of religion" is one, he says,

of maintaining an "opening" toward a world which is superhuman, the world of axiomatic spiritual values. These values are "transcendent" in the sense that they are considered revealed by divine beings or mythical ancestors. They therefore constitute absolute values, paradigms for all human activity. The function of religion is to awaken and sustain the consciousness of another world, of a "beyond" whether it be the divine world or the world of mythical ancestors. This other world represents a superhuman "transcendent" plane, that of absolute realities. It is this experience of the sacred, that is, the meeting with a transcendent reality, that generates the idea of something which really exists and, in consequence, the notion that there are absolute intangible values which confer a meaning upon human existence.\(^28\)

This statement conveys a third law of sacred manifestation: the appearance of the sacred generates the idea of another reality, a transcendent and superhuman world which is the source of paradigms, or patterns, for all human activity.

To summarize Eliade's view of hierophanic manifestation; he considers each religious phenomenon a hierophany or manifestation of the sacred. Man's response to the sacred

begins with a negative evaluation of the ordinary profane world and ends with an effort to make his life sacred by modeling it after patterns received from the other world. Eliade believes these revealed patterns are the basic elements of the study of religion. He sees the structure of religious symbolism, the forms of ritual behavior, and the themes of mythical expression as each being connected with such patterns.

Although Eliade conceives religious life as an existence modeled upon patterns received from a superhuman source, this does not necessarily distinguish him from the sociologist, historicist, or existentialist. As Mac Ricketts points out:

To live by any "received pattern" or exemplary model which is regarded as absolute is to be religious, for Eliade. To subordinate one's own independent judgement to a standard from "outside" which is held to be of supreme validity is to follow a religious course of action. In other words, Eliade defines religion in exactly the same terms as do existentialists such as Sartre; only instead of choosing historicism, Eliade chooses the religious mode of being as more human.29

Defining religion in the same way as they do, Eliade is distinguished from the various reductionists primarily by his sympathetic approach to religion. But his approach is also distinctly different from theirs at a more

significant level.

In defining his approach against reductionism, Eliade differentiates between "spiritual morphology" and "spiritual embryology." The latter is characterized by the view that religion is an epiphenomenon of some other aspect of human existence. In its rudimentary forms it sees religion as a fear of the unknown, subconscious drives, or the projection of social forces, and in its more advanced forms, as a screen raised for economic and political reasons or a complex set of socio-historical factors. "Spiritual morphology", on the other hand, is characterized by the view that, even should religion seem to have its birth in something else, it can be fully understood only on its own plane of reference; as Eliade says, "the embryonic state does not account for the mode of being of the adult." This means one must treat religion as a function of the sacred rather than a function of political, economic, psychological, or social realities. No alternative explanation is offered for the fact that religious life is built upon the idea (however incongruous to empirical inquiry) of an absolute, transcendent reality; this fact is simply stated. In order to account for the nature of religion as something in and of itself one must

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30 Eliade, The Quest, p.21. Eliade differentiates the two in a discussion of "Freud's reductionism", but they are suggestive of the whole of his thought on the matter.

31 Ibid.
take the morphological path.

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Thus at this point in our discussion of Eliade's approach to religion, the importance of finding a way to study religious phenomena on their own plane of reference should be clear. Eliade laments the unfortunate fact that all the "general theories" which have dominated the history of religions have come from its auxiliary disciplines,\(^{32}\) which have quite naturally explained religion on their individual planes of reference. He feels that the existence of the history of religions as an autonomous discipline may very well depend on its arriving at a clear general understanding of its particular subject. As he puts it:

> In short, we have neglected this essential fact: that in the title of the "history of religions" the accent ought not to be upon the word history, but upon the word religions. 
> . . . Before making a history of anything, we must have a proper understanding of what it is, in and for itself.\(^{33}\)

It has been indicated that the path to such an understanding is a morphological one. In the next chapter, we will examine Eliade's "morphology of the sacred" and see how it constitutes a non-reductionistic approach to religion.


II. Eliade's Morphology of the Sacred: A Non-Reductionistic Method of Interpretation

Eliade's approach to a religious phenomenon involves understanding the element of the sacred which it contains. In order to understand the sacred, he seeks to comprehend the religious object, the religious subject, and the relation between the two. He moreover recognizes every instance in which the sacred appears as being a historical phenomenon (thus also a social phenomenon, a psychological phenomenon, etc.) as well as a hierophany, for it is not only to a certain extent historically conditioned but also an independent manifestation of the "wholly other." A particular religious phenomenon thus operates upon two levels. In Eliade's words:

Each is valuable for two things it tells us: because it is a hierophany, it reveals some modality of the sacred; because it is a historical incident, it reveals some attitude man has toward the sacred.34

In studying hierophanies, one can first discern the modes of sacred appearance which they reveal; one can discern the element of the sacred in any given hierophany by identifying the morphological structure of the sacred which it expresses.

34Eliade, Patterns, p.2.
In this chapter, it will be shown how Eliade goes about identifying such structures, for this is the salient feature of his non-reductionistic morphology of the sacred. The other half of the problem, how he defines *homo religiosus* according to the way he relates to the sacred, will be the subject of the next chapter.

To begin our discussion of Eliade's morphology of the sacred, we will introduce certain criteria to show how a reductionistic method may be said to differ from Eliade's non-reductionistic method. Second, we will situate his approach among contemporary approaches to the study of religion, specifically, by considering his affinity with the "phenomenology of religion:" Finally, we will show how Eliade carries out his morphology of the sacred, how he identifies the structures of the sacred and seeks to grasp the meaning of religious phenomena.

Non-reductionistic Understanding

What criteria can be used to determine the extent to which a certain method may be said to be reductionistic or non-reductionistic? In his article, "Mircea Eliade: Structural Hermeneutics and Philosophy," David Rasmussen states:

To the extent that a theory is imposed upon the object of interpretation it may be said to be reductionistic. To the extent that a theory may be said to be the result of
investigation it may be said to be consequential, or derived from the object. 35

Using the example of Eliade's method for studying religious phenomena, Rasmussen indicates what it means for a theory of interpretation to be derived from its object. He feels that, with Eliade, religious phenomena are shown to have certain innate tendencies toward organization; they are observed as always being part of a larger "system." According to him, "understanding occurs when the total system of associations is uncovered, or better, reconstructed." 36

As he sees it, Eliade's theory of interpretation succeeds in doing this by means of the "morphological classification" of religious phenomena and the "imaginative reconstruction" of their systems of associations. 37

Rasmussen's analysis thus discloses how Eliade studies religious phenomena upon their own plane of reference. When Eliade rejects approaches to religion which explain it in terms of economics, psychology, sociology, etc., he does so because these planes of reference constitute exterior norms. They are non-religious planes of reference, and are also influenced by a historicistic view of human existence that is the opposite of religious


36 Ibid., p.142.

37 Ibid., pp.142-43.
man's view. If there is a plane of reference which is not exterior to religion, using Rasmussen's criteria, it must be derived from the religious phenomena themselves. Such a plane of reference is to be found in Eliade's morphology of the sacred. It is arrived at by the systematic arrangement of religious phenomena into morphological groups. The phenomena grouped together are not subjected to any exterior norm; instead their meaning is arrived at by comparing them to one another. The process is suggested by the phenomena themselves in that the interpreter sees how religion permits a view of the world as a totality, revealing to man the associations between dissimilar aspects of his world, and tries to repeat the procedure in his studies. The systematic arrangement and comparison of religious phenomena is therefore conceived as a process of integration. As will later be shown, by studying religious phenomena through such a method of integration, Eliade establishes his approach as the exact opposite of reductionism.

Thus, Eliade's method or theory of interpretation may be considered an example of non-reductionistic understanding. In order to approach religious phenomena at their own level, Eliade engages in what can be roughly characterized as the systematic arrangement and comparison of these phenomena. These are the kind of methodological techniques which are generally used by the "phenomenologist" of religion. An awareness of Eliade's affinities with
phenomenologists of religion contributes greatly to an understanding of his method of interpreting religious phenomena.

Phenomenological Understanding

It is generally assumed that there are two distinct contemporary approaches to the history of religions. The "historical" approach is mainly concerned with the historical features of religions, while the phenomenological approach is mainly concerned with its transhistorical, "essential" features. Eliade writes of these approaches:

At present, historians of religion are divided between two divergent but complementary methodological orientations. One group concentrate primarily on the characteristic structures of religious phenomena, the other choose to investigate their historical context. The former seek to understand the essence of religion, the latter to discover and communicate its history.38

Although he is aware that historians of religions are generally divided into two groups, one whose approach to religion is definitely more "ahistorical" than the other, he is reluctant to situate himself squarely within the ahistorically oriented group known as phenomenologists of religion. Commentators on his work, critics and supporters alike, are not nearly so reluctant to do so. In order to

38Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, p.232.
clarify this problem, let us begin with what Eliade considers himself to be—a general historian of religions.

Eliade feels that the systematic arrangement and comparison of religious phenomena is best satisfied when the phenomena being studied are selected from numerous and diverse historical contexts. He believes that this kind of broad scope is absolutely necessary for arriving at a clear general understanding of religion. To show the breadth of scope required of scholars in the field of allegemeine Religionsgeschichte, he points to the example of Raffaele Pettazzoni, who "did not hesitate to handle central, though immense, problems—the origin of monotheism, the Sky gods, the Mysteries, the confessions of sin . . . etc." For this same reason, Eliade considers himself a general historian of religions. Eliade also points out that Pettazzoni became aware, late in his career, of the value of the phenomenological approach to religion for handling its central and general themes. He praises Pettazzoni, above all, for his recognition of the complementary roles of "phenomenology" and "history" in the study of religion. He quotes Pettazzoni as follows:

"Phenomenology and history complement each other. Phenomenology cannot do without ethnology, philology, and other historical disciplines. Phenomenology, on the other hand, gives the historical disciplines that

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39 Eliade, The Quest, p.29.
sense of the religious which they are unable to capture. So conceived, religious phenomenology is the religious understanding (Verständniss) of history; it is history in its religious dimension. Phenomenology and history are not two sciences but are two complementary aspects of the integral science of religion, and the science of religion as such has a well-defined character given to it by its unique and proper subject matter. 40

Eliade tells us that his own view of the relation between phenomenology and history is similar; he chooses to describe this relation as a "healthy tension" and says it is one that will never be done away with. 41 What he does not tell us, either in his remarks on the general history of religions or on the tension between phenomenology and history in the study of religions, is whether he considers himself a phenomenologist or a historian in the strict sense.

When he does bring up this issue, as in his "Foreword" to *Shamanism*, he suggests that his work as a historian of religions is different from that of the phenomenologist. They are different he says:

For the latter, in principle, rejects any work of comparison; confronted with one religious phenomenon or another he confines himself to "approaching" it and divining its meaning. Whereas the historian of religions does not reach a comprehension of a phenomenon until he has compared it with thousands of similar and dissimilar phenomena, until he

40 Ibid., p. 9, n. 8.
41 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
has situated it among them; and these thousands of phenomena are separated not only in time but also in space. 42

From this description of his aims we can draw our own conclusions about Eliade's affinity with the phenomenologist of religion, despite what he says the phenomenologist does, or ought to do, "in principle." By pointing out the comparative nature of his studies Eliade discloses the most basic affinity between himself and the best known representatives of the phenomenology of religion. C. J. Bleeker, for example, leaves no doubt concerning the comparative nature of the phenomenology of religion as he sees it. He says: "one can rightly state that this science is using the method of comparison. For it places analogous religious phenomena, e.g., certain forms of the idea of God, side by side and tries to define their structure by comparison." 43 Brede Kristensen's emphasis is similar; he groups together numerous phenomena of diverse origins so that they may, as he simply puts it, "shed light upon one another." 44

Thus, one should not be prevented from considering Eliade a phenomenologist of religion because the phenomenologist


of religion "rejects any work of comparison." It is clear that the phenomenology of religion sees itself as a comparative science, which gives it at least one affinity with Eliade's work as a general historian of religions.

Eliade's interpretive work has been described as involving the "systematic arrangement" and the "comparison" of religious phenomena. Put another way, the systematic arrangement of phenomena establishes the necessary basis for their comparison. This means that before certain phenomena can be compared it must be shown that they belong to the same group and that they share some basic similarity. Eliade attempts to show these two things in exactly the same way as most phenomenologists of religion do, which is through the use of typology and structure. The studies of phenomenologists of religion are considered ahistorical and morphological because they involve the use of transhistorical types. That is to say, the basic categories of interpretation in these studies are transhistorical rather than historical; each includes phenomena of a type found in numerous different religious contexts, e.g., "initiations," "creation myths," "sky gods," etc., and are thus distinguished from the normal categories for the historical study of religion, e.g., "Buddhism," "Hinduism," "religion in India," "religion in the Far East," etc. As this suggests, the path followed by all phenomenologists of religion in interpreting their data is one which leads from the particular to the universal. The underlying
assumption of this kind of interpretation is that the phenomena grouped together, though dissimilar in their outward historical appearance, are homologous at some other (non-historical) level. The phenomenology of religion maintains that this is a structural level.

Phenomenologists of religion recognize the use of structure as the most valuable means for homologizing historically dissimilar phenomena and arriving at their meanings. The discovery of structure has had great importance for comparativists of all kinds because it allows them to pass from one context to another without losing stability. Through the structural approach, they can discover an interpretability of religious phenomena which transcends the meanings the phenomena have in particular historical contexts. When certain religious phenomena are shown to have the same structure, they may reveal meanings which are not expressed by any one of them alone. Inquiry into structure thus enables phenomenologists of religion to grasp the basic forms of diverse religious phenomena and to establish interpretative categories which cut across historical lines. The phenomenology of religion shows that "initiation rites" or "creation myths," for example, taken from all kinds of separate historical contexts form a total configuration or "system" independent of exterior factors governing their operation within a particular religion. This act of transforming numerous and diverse historical phenomena into a coherent whole is what
gives the phenomenology of religion its systematic or morphological character.

It is often said, however, that the wholistic understanding of a set of phenomena which the phenomenologist offers is primarily the result of his own intuitive understanding rather than of any distinct and repeatable method of interpretation. One of the outstanding critics of the phenomenology of religion, Willard Oxtoby, presents this view in his discussion of "the eidetic vision," a term used by certain phenomenologists to describe their effort to grasp the meaning of a set of religious phenomena as a whole. He states:

Thus having set aside the procrustean beds of preconceived critical notions, the phenomenologist applies to his subject "the eidetic vision," a grasp of a religious configuration in its totality. . . . There is nothing outside of one's intuitive grasp of a pattern which validates that pattern. The phenomenologist is obliged simply to set forth his understanding as a whole, trusting that his reader will enter into it. But there is no procedure stated by which he can compel a second phenomenologist to agree with the adequacy and incontrovertibility of his analysis, unless the second phenomenologist's eidetic vision happens to be the same as the first's.45

It is not contestable that intuition may play a large role in the phenomenologist's grasp of the meaning of a type of religious phenomena; however, the presence of intuition

does not necessarily imply the lack of a distinct and repeatable procedure for verifying the phenomenologist's conclusions. If there is one thing that makes phenomenological understanding at all unique it is the fact that it raises intuition to the level of a valid interpretive technique. All phenomenological investigations strive to provide theoretical justification for an intuitive understanding of reality. Thus phenomenologists construct theoretical frameworks to systematically arrange and compare religious phenomena. A more specific demonstration of how such a theoretical framework may be utilized will be given in the following discussion of Eliade's distinctive method of interpreting religious phenomena.

The Features of Eliade's Method

The features of Eliade's method will be presented here as a continuous series of procedures by which he arrives at the meaning of religious phenomena. This outline of his method is derived from his various interpretive works; it is not one which Eliade presents as such in any of his writings on methodology in the history of religions. According to a list which he provides in The Quest, p.8, n.6., his writings on methodology include the following: Patterns, pp.1-33; Images and Symbols, pp. 27-41 and 161-78; Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, pp.13-20 and 99-122; and "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, ed. M. Eliade and J. M. Kitagawa (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 86-107. This last article also appears as Ch. V. of The Two and the One and will be cited here as such.
essentially consists of the following four stages: first, the introductory stage in which he suggests how the proper interpretive categories can be derived; second, the typological stage; third, the structural stage; and fourth, the end product, the meaning of religious phenomena as arrived at through comparison.

The particular way in which Eliade conceives ahistorical interpretive categories results from his belief that all religious phenomena, by their hierophanic nature, point beyond themselves; that is, they have an ultimately "symbolic" character. He remarks:

No assumption could be more certain than that every religious act and every cult object has a metaempirical purpose. The tree that becomes a cult object is not worshipped as a tree, but as a hierophany, a manifestation of the sacred. And every religious act, from the moment that it becomes religious is charged with a significance that is, in the final instance, "symbolic" since it refers to supernatural values or forms.47

The categories of religious phenomena which he attempts to identify and understand are considered, in this broad sense, "symbol systems." Furthermore, these categories of phenomena are derived from examining certain systematic tendencies which religious phenomena have as symbols. The systematic tendencies of religious phenomena were described previously in general terms; their specific nature can now

47 Eliade, The Two and the One, p.199.
be more fully disclosed.

Eliade speaks of two kinds of systematic tendencies which he has found applicable to religious phenomena of all types: one is the tendency of each toward an archetype and the other is the tendency of each to imply the whole system to which it belongs. With regard to the first, he states: "However many and varied are the components that go together to make up any religious creation (any divine form, rite, myth or cult) their expression tends constantly to revert to an archetype." 48 Of the second, he tells us: "The tendency of each to become the Whole is really a tendency to fit the 'whole' into a single system, to reduce the multiplicity of things to a single 'situation' in such a way as to make it as comprehensible as it can be made." 49 This means that every hierophany refers both to an archetypal form and to some larger unity (e.g., society or the cosmos). The sacred thus reveals itself not only as something "wholly other" and irreducible, but also as something structural, i.e., as archetype and system. Eliade writes:

On the one hand, the sacred is, supremely, the other than man--the transcendent, the transpersonal--and, on the other hand, the sacred is the exemplary in the sense that

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48 Eliade, Patterns, pp.58-59.

49 Ibid., p.453.
it establishes patterns to be followed; by being transcendent and exemplary it compels the religious man to come out of personal situations, to surpass the contingent and the particular and to comply with general values, with the universal.50

Because the sacred reveals itself in the form of exemplary patterns, it is possible to speak of a morphology of the sacred, or of "structures of the sacred."

The chief aim of Eliade's method is to identify the structures of the sacred, and its chief problem is that these symbolic structures never appear in pure form in history. In order to reconstruct the transhistorical symbol systems which the historically given religious phenomena are said to participate in, it is necessary to pay special attention to the systematic tendencies of the phenomena; that is, to place each in its total system and discover the archetypal form to which it refers. David Rasmussen pointed out that this is a two-stage procedure, involving "morphological classification" and "imaginative reconstruction." The first corresponds to the typological stage of Eliade's method, and the second to its structural stage.

As Eliade arrives at a basic definition of religious phenomena through the notion of hierophany--the sacred

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50 Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p.18.
showing itself—he arrives at a typology of religious phenomena by detecting the various modes of sacred manifestation. He classifies phenomena under the headings of various hierophanies: lunar, solar, vegetal, and ones pertaining to water, stones, earth, sky, etc. These morphological types are not, however, mutually exclusive; within each the broadest possible spectrum of phenomena is incorporated, allowing for a great deal of overlapping. It is in terms of the whole that each part is understood, and this understanding can only be satisfied with a view of the whole which encompasses the greatest number and variety of related phenomena. When Eliade studies lunar hierophanies, for example, he brings into his analysis phenomena from all areas of human life—agriculture, sex, initiations, chronologies, funerals—which have at one time or another been associated with the moon. He feels that only through an analysis of this scope can one grasp the sense of "system" which emerges when the phenomena of a certain type are taken together. He also feels that the meaning of any system so arrived at can be understood only after its "total pattern" is discovered. This leads to the structural stage of Eliade's method, which involves the reconstruction of the total system of associations in which phenomena of a type participate.

When Eliade speaks of the "structures of the sacred" he refers to certain patterns through which the sacred reveals itself. When he says that each such pattern must
be grasped in its totality he means that one must take into account all of the different symbolic themes which can be expressed through a certain hierophanic mode. For example, he writes of lunar hierophanies that "the whole pattern is moon-rain-fertility-woman-serpent-death-periodic-regeneration," and argues that a pattern of any lesser scope will tend to obscure the overall meaning of this symbol system. 51 To understand such a system as a coherent whole it is necessary to discover its archetypal significance. Eliade tells us all the themes expressed through lunar symbolism are permeated by a single "dominant idea", which is "one of rhythm carried out through the succession of contraries." 52 The structural stage of his method thus shows how a symbol system holds itself together and reveals how superficially disparate phenomena can be integrated into a coherent whole.

The reconstruction of a religious symbol system in this fashion, i.e., by a process of integration, contributes in two ways to arriving at its meaning. First, imaginative reconstruction shows how a symbol system functions to integrate heterogeneous realities; second, it establishes the basis for a comparative analysis of meaning by uniting superficially disparate phenomena at the level of structure.

51 Eliade, Patterns, p.170.

52 Ibid., p.183.
In the first instance, description of the system as an integrated whole reflects its meaning as an integrator of heterogeneous realities (man, the various aspects of his existence: sex, agriculture, time, etc., and the things in his environment: earth, waters, sky, etc.). Hans Penner underlines the importance of this descriptive procedure for the phenomenological understanding of religion as follows:

This description of the meaning of religious symbols is an exact parallel of Eliade's description of the historian of religion's task. It is the best example I know of where the meaning of religious symbolism as an integrated, coherent unity and the interpretive work as an integration of the various religious phenomena form a single and consistent correlation. It is the exemplification of the maxim that the "method should fit the phenomena." This correlation prevents the reduction of the meaning of religion as it appears in and for itself, and it thus represents the aim of all phenomenologies of religion.\(^{53}\)

This statement by Penner echoes previous comments on the non-reductionistic nature of Eliade's method: the method "fits" the phenomena being interpreted because it is derived from their own function of integration, and is the opposite of reductionism because it utilizes this function itself.

In addition to revealing the coherence of a set of religious symbols, imaginative reconstruction provides the

basis for a comparative analysis of their meanings because it incorporates them under the same "total pattern", a specific structure of the sacred, Eliade's aim with regard to the meanings expressed by religious symbols is to show how they have become attached to a specific structure; this is, for him, just the opposite of their reduction. He states:

One cannot sufficiently insist on this point; that the examination of symbolic structures is a work not of reduction but of integration. One compares and contrasts two expressions of a symbol not in order to reduce them to a single pre-existent expression, but in order to discover the process by which a structure is capable of enriching its meanings.54

Eliade both incorporates the broadest possible spectrum of related phenomena under a morphological type and seeks to take into account the multiplicity of meanings which have become attached to a structure of the sacred in history. He feels all of these meanings are important for understanding each particular instance in which a structure appears. This idea underlies the process of comparative analysis which consummates his method.

Eliade believes that each religious phenomenon implies the whole system to which it belongs and reflects the totality of meanings that can be expressed through its structure. Every appearance of a structure delivers its full meaning, the meaning of the whole, whether or not this

54Eliade, The Two and the One, p.201.
is consciously recognized. Thus, each particular phenomenon must be understood in terms of the totality of meanings that can be expressed through its attendant structure. This determines the underlying principle of Eliade's comparative analysis of meaning, which is that all phenomena with a common structure may be said to share in the same meanings. On this basis he feels justified in using instances in which the meaning of a structure is apparent—so-called "clear" hierophanies—in order to decipher those in which the meaning is less obvious—so-called "obscure" hierophanies. In its most common form this technique involves applying the meaning revealed by a symbol in its "maturity" to the understanding of its more elementary forms. In support of this approach, Eliade refers to modern psychology. He states:

...one has not the right to conclude that the message of the symbol is confined only to those significances of which these individuals [of one particular tradition] are fully conscious. The depth psychologist has taught us that a symbol delivers its message and fulfills its function even when its meaning escapes the conscious mind.55

An example of this particular approach which will show how the comparative stage of his method works in general can be found in his study of ascension symbolism.56 The meaning revealed through the structure of ascension symbolism on the plane of metaphysics and mysticism,

55Ibid., p.211.
56Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, pp.99-122.
he says, will guide us to a clearer understanding of its role in ritual, myth, and dream-life. He feels that the meaning which is clearly expressed on this plane—of freedom, of ecstasy, and of surpassing the human condition—can be applied to the simplest ritual acts of preliterate men in which the structure of ascension symbolism is involved. He thus finds that the shamanic rite of climbing a tree carries with it the meaning expressed by ascension symbolism in its maturity; the role of the shaman in his society as "psychopomp," the guide of men's souls and their mediator to the world of spirits, coincides with his ascensional activities and their essential meaning of surpassing the human condition. Comparative analysis of this kind not only sheds light on these ritual activities of the shaman but also corroborates the meaning expressed through ascension symbolism on another plane.

Comparative analysis of meaning in this manner provides theoretical justification for an intuitive understanding of reality. It must be admitted, initially, that the meaning of a single phenomenon is often arrived at by an intuitive procedure, on a non-discursive, unconscious level. This follows Eliade's belief that "a symbol delivers its message and fulfills its function even when its meaning escapes the conscious mind." Recognizing the limitations imposed by this situation, Eliade does not attach conclusive importance to the meaning revealed to intuition from looking at a single hierophany. He draws
his conclusions about the meaning of one such phenomenon only after situating it in a system along with structurally related phenomena and comparing it with them. The intuitive grasp of a phenomenon's meaning, enhanced by its being viewed within its own proper system of associations, becomes susceptible to verification through comparative analysis.

To reiterate, intuition is verified through comparison. What makes this possible is an interpretive principle connecting meaning and structure: structurally similar phenomena supply meanings for one another; the meaning of a phenomenon is the correlate of its structure, and every other appearance of that structure provides an opportunity to corroborate its meaning. Thus, Eliade's method of interpreting religious phenomena succeeds in providing a theoretical justification for intuitive understanding.

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In conclusion, the importance of structure is evident throughout Eliade's approach to the study of religion. His spiritual morphology is made possible by the idea that the sacred reveals itself as structure. The aim of spiritual morphology is to treat religious phenomena non-reductionistically, to discern their unique interpretability as something religious. Eliade grasps this interpretability through understanding the modes of sacred manifestation and the structures which govern them. The various modes of sacred manifestation (lunar, solar, vegetal, etc.)
provide the interpretive categories or morphological types for grouping the historically diverse phenomena, Eliade integrates the phenomena grouped together into a total pattern, a system of meaning which is said to be implied by any one of them because it is expressed through their common structure. He arrives at a morphology of the sacred when the various structures and the systems of meaning connected with each of them are identified.

This method of approaching religious phenomena by means of identifying the structures of the sacred does not impose a theoretical framework upon the phenomena. Eliade's morphology of the sacred is not a deductive typology; rather, it is a description of the inherent unity and the necessary, pre-objective structure of religious life. This morphology does serve the relatively modest purpose of providing a heuristic framework for discussing religion as something in and of itself, apart from its conditionings in objective history. In a sense analogous to Art History, for example, it provides the categories, themes, and vocabulary needed for cross-cultural understanding. But it also has a more ambitious aim; it attempts to identify the structures of the sacred and seeks to discover the foundation of human religiousness. This aim will become more apparent as we investigate further the claims Eliade has made concerning his structures of the sacred, and the role these structures have in his description of homo religiosus.
III. The Structures of the Sacred and
The Mode of Being of Homo Religiosus

The greatest controversy in commentaries upon Eliade's work arises over the nature and status of his structures of the sacred. In Eliade's view, these structures have significance above and beyond simply being heuristic devices for discussing religion as a cross-cultural phenomenon. Though derived from historical investigation, they pre-exist their actual appearance in history; moreover, though identified through study of religions of past cultures, they also survive on all sorts of levels (in literature, dreams, art, the cinema) in the desacralized world of modern man. In his claims for pre-objective existence and survival in nonsacred societies, Eliade suggests that these structures are necessary and universal. They possess a fundamental quality which is unaltered by history. The problem of determining the actual nature of these structures, however, still remains.

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, according to Eliade, these structures are patterns which govern the sacred's mode of manifestation. This is but half of the definition, for these structures must also be related to patterns of human religious behavior. Eliade's hermeneutics, understood as "the effort to understand the
self through the mediation of the other," has the final aim of transforming the materials at his disposal into a picture of religious man's mode of being-in-the-world, and leading contemporary man to interpolate this "other" mode of being into his modern consciousness. Any inquiry into the nature and status of Eliade's structures of the sacred must ultimately show how they function in relation to the mode of being of *homo religiosus* as a particular dimension of human existence.

As the nature and status of Eliade's structures has been the subject of much commentary, it is necessary to introduce and evaluate these critiques before dealing with the function of his structures in the description of *homo religiosus*. In general, critics complain that they find it impossible to follow Eliade from his historical starting point to his "transhistorical" structures. Douglas Allen calls this complaint "the most frequent criticism of his phenomenological approach," and describes it as follows:

This general criticism usually contends that Eliade, while investigating particular religious manifestations, arrives at his universal structures by means of highly uncritical generalizations; thus he "reads into" his specific religious data all kinds of "sophisticated" universal structures and meanings.

It seems to me that underlying most of these methodological criticisms is the assumption that Eliade proceeds by some kind of inductive inference. . . . Critics submit that they cannot follow Eliade's inductive procedure: they do not find it possible to
generalize from the particular examples to his "profound" universal structures of religious experience.57

This general criticism can be found in the commentaries of Edmund Leach, a leading British anthropologist, and Robert Baird, an American historian of religions who has been a consistent critic of the phenomenological approach to religion in general. The special significance of their criticisms for purposes of the present discussion lies in the fact that each assists in answering, respectively, one of the two crucial questions that bear upon the nature of Eliade's transhistorical structures: in what sense are they "structures"?; and, in what sense are they "transhistorical"?

Eliade's View of Structure

In light of the current vogue for structural analysis in the humanities and the social sciences, this inquiry into the nature of Eliade's structures must examine the way in which his analysis compares to that of "structuralism" as it is most usually practiced. Structuralism in its most common form is a method of study whose aim is to abstract from a set of symbols its formal syntactical properties; it is indifferent to questions of content and

57 Allen, p.85.
subjectivity. Edmund Leach,\textsuperscript{58} as well as other scholars,\textsuperscript{59} has pointed out that this kind of structural analysis differs from Eliade's in general aim and bias. While Leach's assessment of the difference between Eliade's interpretative work and structuralism per se is clearly partial to the latter and generally misleading in its attempt to describe the nature of this difference, it at least shows where the two seem to differ and thus gives us a basis for furthering our understanding of Eliade's structures of the sacred.

Leach argues that the kind of structures which Eliade arrives at through his comparative interpretation of religious symbols are not "structures" at all from the viewpoint of structuralism. The basic character of his argument appears in the following statements:

\begin{quote}
. . . comparative ethnography in the style which Eliade employs, can only illustrate by example, it can never properly be used as a basis for generalization . . .
\end{quote}

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. . . the most interesting parts of Eliade's work become fogged by his failure to distinguish clearly between the content of a set of symbols and its structure.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{59} See, for example, the article by David Rasmussen which was cited above, esp. p.143; and also, Paul Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Double-sense as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic Problem," \textit{Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade}, ed. J.M. Kitagawa and C.H. Long (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), pp.63-79.

\textsuperscript{60} Leach, p.28.
In terms of Allen's formulation of the general criticism of Eliade's approach, these statements suggest Leach does not find it possible to generalize from Eliade's particular examples to his "profound" universal structures; the only guideposts he can find are some snippets of ethnography provided in Frazerian fashion, and a concept of structure which confuses it with content. His basic criticism of Eliade, then, is that Eliade grants to particular kinds of religious symbols the sort of general significance that belongs only to genuine structures, which are solely concerned with the relations between symbols.

The nature of Leach's criticism is most clearly expressed in an example he gives of Eliade's interpretation of the ethnographic data. The example concerns the fundamental system by which religious man comprehends his universe. Calling this Eliade's "'acrhaic' system," Leach describes it as follows:

> The basic religious distinction is between the here-now and the other. The other is the sacred. The here-now is the center of the universe and man constructs it in imitation of a prototype already existing in the other. Man enters the here-now from the other at birth and returns to the other at death. Time is thus a cycle, an eternal return. 61

Leach admits most anthropologists would consider the pattern portrayed here valid for numerous sets of ethnographic data, but he stresses that it is the pattern alone which...

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61 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
is important, whereas the particular symbols involved are of only passing interest. To show how Eliade has missed this point, he discusses the role played in this system by those symbols that serve to establish a link between the here-now and the other (which are always radically separated by the sea, the sky, or a range of mountains, for example). He attempts to characterize the difference between true structural analysis and Eliade's interpretive work in the following words:

In this kind of analysis we attach importance to structural relations rather than to symbols as such; the ladder, the tree, the boat, the bridge are all "the same" because they do the same thing, they link the two worlds. But in Eliade's Jungian scheme it is the symbol per se that matters, so he tells us about trees and ladders as means of reaching the other world but never gets around to boats or bridges, or tunnels, or rocky cliffs, or heavenly fishing nets, or magic beanstalks, all of which things, and many others besides, can serve the same function in mythical syntax.62

Although this example is exaggerated (for Eliade discusses a far broader range of symbols serving this function than Leach is willing to admit),63 it at least shows where Eliade's interpretive scheme differs from structuralism. It at least indicates that the formal relations between symbols in mythical syntax are not of overwhelming importance to Eliade.

62Ibid., p.31.
63See, for example, Eliade, Shamanism, pp.487-94; and The Two and the One, pp.160-88.
When Leach says, "in Eliade's Jungian scheme it is the symbol per se that matters," he intimates that Eliade does not share the structuralist's exclusive concern with the syntax of a set of symbols, but has other interests. One must moreover feel that there is a very specific reason for associating Eliade with Jung in a discussion of structural analysis, for leading structuralists often point to Jung as the example of a scholar who makes the error of attributing general significance to particular symbols rather than to the relations between symbols (the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss calls this error the "Jungian trap"). Leach perhaps associates Eliade with Jung in order to show that Eliade's concern is with something on the order of Jung's archetypes of the collective unconscious. He means to show that Eliade fails to distinguish between the "historical" problem of explaining why certain symbols frequently crop up in different religious contexts and the structural one of determining the relations between symbols. Jung addresses himself to this "historical" problem in his theory of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, and Leach seems to think that Eliade similarly treats this problem with his deliberations on the universal and archetypal significance of the Cosmic Tree, the Mystical Light, or the symbolism of knots. The similarities and differences

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64 Leach, p. 30.
between Eliade and Jung in this matter are indeed important for understanding Eliade's particular view of structure, but to properly compare the two, one must get beneath the superficial level on which Leach associates them. 65

The outstanding similarity between Eliade and Jung is their use of the term "archetype." There is no simple answer to the question of how often, if ever, Eliade uses the term with its Jungian meaning in mind. Mac Ricketts points out that the only passage where Eliade raises this question clearly specifies that he has never used the term "archetype" in its Jungian sense. 66 In this passage (from the Preface to the 1959 edition of Cosmos and History), he says that his failure to specify this previously was a "regrettable error," for he used "archetype" only as a synonym for paradigm or exemplary model, and only to emphasize a particular fact:

namely, that for the man of archaic and traditional societies, the models for his institutions and the norms for his various categories of behavior are believed to have

65 With Leach, the mere observation that Eliade's works have often been translated under the sponsorship of the Bollingen Foundation or prepared for the Jungian Eranos conferences is sufficient to classify him as "Jungian."

been "revealed" at the beginning of time, that, consequently, they are regarded as having a superhuman and "transcendental" origin.\(^{67}\)

Despite this disclaimer, many statements which Eliade has made concerning archetypes are susceptible to a Jungian interpretation. These are statements in which he speaks of the archetypes found in archaic symbolism not only as being important for the man of archaic societies, but also as living on in the behavior and especially in the unconscious activity of modern man. Yet this in itself does not prove that Eliade and Jung mean the same thing when they use the term "archetype" in discussing symbolic expressions which live on regardless of the caprices of history. As Ricketts puts it; "The question is, how do they live?"\(^{68}\)

Jung's theory in this matter is well known. He calls certain symbolic expressions "archetypal" because he believes they became imprinted on the human mind as a result of profound experiences during the course of man's history and were transmitted down to the present day as part of man's overall psychological make-up. He calls them "archetypes of the collective unconscious," for he believes they belong to an inherited and transpersonal zone of the individual human psyche (i.e., the collective unconscious, which along with the conscious and the


\(^{68}\)Ricketts, "Eliade's 'Jungianism'," p.217.
personal unconscious constitutes his outline of the psyche). How far does Eliade follow this theory in his understanding of the universal significance of religious symbolism? One can at least conclude that he enlists the aid of Jung's "depth-psychology" in trying to persuade the historian of religions to overcome his hesitations about this universal significance. Eliade writes:

By directing attention to the survival of symbols and mythical themes in the psyche of modern man, by showing that the spontaneous rediscovery of the archetypes of archaic symbolism is a common occurrence in all human beings, irrespective of race and historical surroundings, depth-psychology has freed the historian of religions from his last hesitations.69

In this and other passages Eliade appears to seek an explanation for the capacity of religious symbolic expressions to survive. However, he is ultimately unsatisfied with any solution to this problem (such as Jung's) which treats it as a "historical" problem, for, in the final analysis, he considers it a transhistorical matter. This is indicated by a statement he makes earlier in the passage just quoted:

One has only to take the trouble to study the problem, to find out that, whether obtained by diffusion or spontaneously discovered, myths and rites always disclose a boundary situation of man—not only a historical situation. A boundary situation is one which man discovers in becoming conscious of his place in the universe.70

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69 Eliade, Images and Symbols, pp.34-35.

70 Ibid., p.34.
Eliade believes symbolic expressions which are widely disseminated simply owe this to the fact that they answer personal existential situations which confront man at all periods and levels of culture. According to him, religious symbols function to transform these personal situations into something universal. That is to say, religious symbols show them to be "boundary situations" by revealing that these historical situations have a meaning and a solution which is paradigmatic and transhistorical.

Thus, Eliade does not follow the theory that the universal significance of religious symbols is explained by the fact that they have become imprinted on the human psyche during the course of history. He emphasizes that religious symbols always refer to what is universal or paradigmatic, and rejects the need for explaining this as a historical fact, whether by psychological theory, by diffusionism, or by any other means. He notes that,

insofar as the unconscious is the result of countless existential experiences it cannot but resemble the various religious universes. For religion is the paradigmatic solution for every existential crisis. It is the paradigmatic solution not only because it can be indefinitely repeated, but also because it is believed to have a transcendent origin and hence is valorized as a revelation received from an other, transhuman world.71

This means that when Eliade speaks of the universal significance of religious symbols, he refers to their

capacity for revealing paradigmatic solutions for critical human situations, archetypes for meaningful human existence. The problem of understanding their expressive capacity is for him a structural problem; it is clearly distinguished from the historical problem of explaining why these symbols so frequently crop up in completely separate religious contexts. Eliade differs from the structuralist because he conceives the problem by reference to the expressive qualities of religious symbols rather than to their syntactical properties.

Eliade arrives at his concept of structure through a theory of archetypes; this is not, however, a theory in which "it is the symbol per se that matters." Eliade tells us that symbols always point beyond themselves; they always have an archetypal referent. He never says, however, that a particular symbol has archetypal significance, but only that each symbol tends toward an archetype. Thus, to use Leach's example, when Eliade is confronted with a number of symbols which link the here-now with the other: trees, ladders, boats, bridges, etc., he correctly views them as variants of the same thing. They are "the same," for Eliade, because each tends to become the archetypal axis mundi, the Center of the World. This is different from saying they are "the same" because they serve "the same function in mythical syntax." When Eliade approaches the various examples of the symbolism of the center, his concern is not with the syntactical function of each
symbol. Instead, his concern is with the capacity of each symbol to express the meaning of the whole symbolism and reveal its associated experience of being at the Center of the World.

Thus, when confronted with a set of symbols in which each shares the same function and has no special importance in itself, Eliade responds differently from the structuralist. The latter, seeing the relative unimportance of the particular symbols, only attaches importance to the structural relation which defines their common function, understood as a syntactical one. He is concerned only with the syntactical properties of symbols and is indifferent to the question of content and, also, subjectivity. Eliade, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with the expressive qualities of symbols. Particular symbols are unimportant as such, for him, because they point beyond themselves, "revealing a modality of the real or a condition of the world which is not evident on the plane of immediate experience." He stresses this "non-discursive" function of symbols to point beyond the contingencies of the immediate situation to what is archetypal and atemporal in that situation. Each symbol of the center, for example, is able to reveal that this world is "open" to the other world ("the sacred") insofar as it becomes the archetypal axis mundi. Thanks to such a symbol, one's own house or

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72 Eliade, The Two and the One, p. 201.
village may be experienced as being "open" to the sacred, for by means of such a symbol that house or village can be assimilated to the axis mundi, the Center of the World. Eliade describes this function of the religious symbol in the following way:

A religious symbol translates a human situation into cosmological terms, and vice versa; to be more precise, it reveals the unity between human existence and a structure of the Cosmos. Man does not feel himself "isolated" in the Cosmos, he is open to a World which thanks to the symbol, becomes "familiar." 73

This understanding of the role of religious symbols in giving meaning and structure to human experience arises out of Eliade's concern for their expressive qualities rather than their syntactical properties.

To summarize, in light of the current vogue for structural analysis, it has been necessary to see how Eliade's view of structure compares to that of the "structuralists." The difference between the two is that Eliade is concerned with the expressive qualities of religious symbols and the structuralists with their syntactical properties. This means that instead of wishing to show what the symbols stand for on the level of syntax, Eliade wants to show what they express on a non-discursive level; he wants to show how they are able to confer a meaning upon human existence which is not evident on the

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73 Ibid., p.207.
plane of immediate experience. Eliade's structures of religious symbolism do not define formal relations between elements in a syntactical system, but rather relations between the religious subject and the real world of sacred realities. The structures which Eliade identifies are never merely formal or syntactical, for they always signify the way in which the religious subject organizes his experience. The structure of the symbolism of the center, for example, shows how religious man organizes the space which surrounds him into a unified and meaningful whole. In Eliade's view of structure the accent is always upon what religious symbols reveal: the archetypes for meaningful human existence.

Such a general, non-syntactical view of religious structures is not, however, peculiar to Eliade alone. One often hears in current discussion about religion that it serves to structure human existence in some meaningful way. The crucial question, of course, is how does it serve to structure human experience? Commonly, this question is answered in terms of the role of religion in maintaining social cohesion, preserving cultural values, or supporting traditional sources of authority. Eliade describes the role of religion as that of maintaining absolute and axiomatic values, paradigms for all human activity which have a superhuman and "transcendental" origin. He feels these paradigms or archetypes survive apart from the archaic symbolisms in which the historian of religions finds them.
These archetypal patterns, the structures of the sacred, pre-exist their historical appearances; they not only have an important role in the religio-historical contexts where they appear but also survive in non-religious contexts.

Eliade's View of the Transhistoricity of Religious Structures

In what sense do Eliade's structures of the sacred pre-exist their historical appearances? What status do they have which can account for their transhistoricity and their "survival" in non-religious contexts? Robert Baird has made important critical comments on this question. As far as he is concerned, only by assuming that these structures have ontological status can one accept Eliade's claims about their nature and his methodological use of them. He feels it is possible for Eliade to generalize from his particular examples to his universal structures only because an ontology is posited along the way.

Baird's remarks on this issue form part of his overall deliberations on the differing natures of the phenomenological and historical approaches to religion. He finds the

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central problem to be whether or not a phenomenological approach such as Eliade's has more in common with such normative disciplines as theology and the philosophy of religion than with such descriptive ones as history and the social sciences. He defines normative disciplines as follows:

...when certain disciplines are described as normative it is usually meant that they are not merely attempt to describe certain views about reality, but propose to describe reality itself. That is, normative disciplines are so called because of their ontological stance.\(^{75}\)

He maintains that Eliade posits such an ontological stance in his phenomenological approach to religion. Baird argues that, while Eliade investigates historical materials, he also presents an "ontology of the sacred" which becomes indisputably evident as one examines his ideas, first, on the structures of religious symbolism, second, on the ("authentic") existence of those who live by these structures, and finally, on the duty of the historian of religions to reflect philosophically upon the "meaning" of religious symbols and behavior.

According to Baird, the ontology of the sacred has a role in Eliade's thought beyond its place in the religious views of reality which he interprets; it has a crucial role in the method of interpretation itself. In Eliade's inquiry into the structures of religious symbolism, he notes, Eliade interprets the meaning of symbols from diverse

\(^{75}\)Baird, "Normative Elements in Eliade's Phenomenology of Symbolism," p.505.
historical contexts in light of one another and, ultimately, in light of a complete "symbol system". This procedure is possible, Baird argues, only if the interpreter himself accepts an ontology of the sacred which includes its structures. "This ontological stance is most apparent," he states,

"when clear hierophanies are used to clarify the "intention" of obscure "hierophanies." Such a hermeneutic is possible only if one assumes not only that the sacred has ontological status, but also that its structures (and hence the systems of symbolism) also have ontological status. Only on this basis could a symbolism reveal the meaning or intention of a symbol."

Baird further develops this point in his discussion of Eliade's view of archaic religious existence. Eliade does not merely say that the "archaic" mode of existence is one of participation in the structures of the sacred, but concludes that this kind of existence is more "authentic" than modern existence because it is more fully absorbed in the sacred and its structures. Baird comments on the implications of this view as follows:

"Once one sees the sacred or religion as an ontological reality, and one operates as though its structures are also ontologically real, having identified these structures, one has discovered reality. It then follows that those whose lives are lived in the sacred as completely as possible are the most authentic since they exist closest to reality."

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76 Ibid., p.512.

77 Ibid., p.513.
Baird also examines Eliade's ideas on the need for philosophizing in the history of religions. He contends that while Eliade urges historians of religions to "complete" their investigative work with philosophical reflection upon the "meaning" of their materials, Eliade's own philosophizing is needed at the beginning of his studies. This means that unless Eliade is willing to give philosophical argumentation for the ontological stance which he posits from the outset of his studies, they cannot be taken seriously on a philosophical or even on a heuristic level of understanding. He explains this in the following way:

The question now arises as to whether it would be possible to empty Eliade's phenomenological method of its ontological "postulates" and continue to use it as a [heuristic] level of understanding . . . we are forced to answer in the negative. Here, if one eliminates the metaphysical, he eliminates the transhistorical religious structures. And the elimination of the transhistorical religious structures eliminates the possibility of finding a transhistorical religious meaning in a symbol or myth or rite. Without its implied ontology, this method falls to the ground and becomes at best a means of classifying data.  

For Baird, then, the transhistorical and the metaphysical-ontological are one and the same, and the use of transhistorical structures must be justified by arguments of a metaphysical and ontological order. Because these structures supposedly have a validity and a meaning of their own, apart from their conditioned expressions in history, it follows for him that they have ontological reality. It is suggested here

\footnote{\textsuperscript{78}Baird, \textit{Category Formation and the History of Religions}, p. 89.}
that this conclusion can be questioned.

As Baird shows, Eliade's method is unique, and at the same time open to criticism, because of its transhistorical structures. Unless one accepts that these structures are transhistorical, there would be no reason to believe that historically dissimilar hierophanies will shed light upon one another. More importantly, there would be no reason to believe that one could define man's religious mode of existence in terms of participation in these structures.

Eliade's method depends on its transhistorical structures because it has the aim of describing homo religiosus; man in his religious dimension apart from particular religious persons in history. Baird shows he is aware of this in the following:

We began our discussion of Eliade's phenomenological method by stating that it was primarily concerned with religious structures. It might be countered that this does not mean that it is uninterested in religious people. For, the only way Eliade proposes to adequately understand religious man is by the structures in which he participates. However, the emphasis is certainly on the structures. . . . It is true that Eliade's goal is to understand homo religiosus. But homo religiosus is not an historical but an archetypal religious man. 79

In arriving at a description of homo religiosus by reference to the structures of the sacred, Eliade identifies

79 Ibid., p. 86.
certain factors which determine the nature of human religious behavior, yet transcend all its particular historical forms. He identifies those "trans-experiential" factors which shape the life of man as a religious being. They are trans-experiential because they come from outside of one's immediate situation. Yet the questions: where do they come from—a zone of man's unconscious, some metaphysical realm, etc.?; and, what is their ontological status—real, ideal, etc.?, are not important for Eliade. As a phenomenologist, he is concerned with their meaning rather than their origin, their significance rather than their status. It is sufficient for him to underline the importance which they have in defining an essential dimension of man, that is, in arriving at a description of homo religiosus. In other words, Eliade does not consider religious structures transhistorical because they have ontological reality or a metaphysical origin; he considers them transhistorical because he believes they have a permanent significance for human life and correspond to a primary dimension of human existence which transcends history. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to examining this view.

Homo Religiosus: An Essential and Primary Dimension of Man

Eliade considers religious structures the most fundamental kind of trans-experiential factors known to man.
Joseph Dabney Bettis explains this idea in his discussion of Eliade's understanding of religious structures:

What we experience is a product of the data in our environment and the images, models, ideas and expectations which we bring to it. These trans-experiential factors may come from a number of places and function in a variety of ways, but they have a significant influence in shaping our world. When these images and models constitute our fundamental world-view or life-style, they become religious. Religious symbols and images provide the fundamental archetypes of paradigmatic models for organizing and shaping the religious man's environment.80

This correctly represents Eliade's understanding of religious structures as "real," not because they have ontological status, but because they confer ultimate meaning upon human existence. For Eliade, religion is "the paradigmatic solution for every existential crisis"; religious structures are necessary and universal because they appear, and reappear, whenever man's fundamental conceptions, beliefs, or doubts about existence are at stake.

Thus, if there is a single normative presupposition which determines the nature of Eliade's thought about religion, it is his view that religion is a very particular dimension of human existence which is concerned with ultimate or "total" meaning. He aims to establish the specificity of man's religious dimension, as Otto did with

his a priori religious category of the human mind, by
identifying the basis for human religiousness at the level
of structure. This universal, pre-objective basis emerges
in the way he defines the mode of existence of homo
religiosus.

Eliade defines the mode of existence of homo religiosus
by reference to the structures in which he participates; these
"structures of the sacred" are necessarily derived
through studying the religious expressions of particular
historical persons. Because his concern is initially
with the myths, rites, and symbols through which man
expresses the revelations of the sacred, his analysis
produces structures which are, in the first instance,
structures of sacred manifestation. In Charles Long's
brilliant phrase: "His analysis describes the pre-objective
latent structures of religious expression.".81 Yet, as
Long also realizes, the matter does not end here. The
structures described are also, in the final instance,
structures of human thought and behavior. They refer
ultimately to something in the existence of those who
participate in these structures which is prior to
expression, or as Long says, prior to reflection.

While others may describe the universal, pre-objective
basis of human religiousness as an a priori category of
man's mind or a certain zone of his unconscious, according
to Long, Eliade's describes it as a specific dimension of

81 Long, p. 77.
man's prereflective life. Long's observation greatly clarifies Eliade's view of religion as an essential dimension of man, for it discloses that *homo religiosus* is one among several designations which have been introduced into modern scholarship to describe particular aspects of man's prereflective life. Long writes:

> The new definitions of man introduced over the last one hundred years add to the designation *homo sapiens* supplementary or alternative descriptions of the human. Compare, for example, the following as descriptions of man: *homo geographicus*, *homo ludens*, *homo laborans*, *homo faber*, *homo religiosus*.

It was obviously common knowledge prior to the last one hundred years that man lived in a landscape, that he played, made tools, worshipped, and so on. But what was not so obvious was the importance and status of these dimensions of his life as part of a total definition of his being. These definitions of man refer to his ordinary prereflective life.82

This observation clarifies the sense in which *homo religiosus* is, for Eliade, not so much a particular kind of man, existing in or outside of history, as a particular dimension of human existence.

Every effort to understand man in one of his fundamental dimensions invariably has a tendency to become all-encompassing and exclusive. Every discipline tends to incorporate as much as possible under its view of man and believes in the special significance of the values it studies.

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82 Ibid., p. 83.
for the understanding of man in general. In the study of religion, as James S. Helfer points out, the hermeneutical situation of many scholars is determined by a belief in the ultimacy of religious values. The result is that the hermeneutical procedure becomes a religious exercise in itself; how else, scholars say, can one study the ultimate values of others except in relation to one's own sense of the ultimate and in view of the possibility that one may grow religiously in so studying them. Helfer concludes from this situation that "the basic problem in the entire field of the history of religions is methodological solipsism and its cohort, the ultimacy of religious values." He continues:

Strangely, but appropriately, economic historians are not more "economic", military historians more "militant", intellectual historians more "intellectual", or social historians more "social", why must historians of religions persist in being more "religious"?  

This is of course a rhetorical question, for as Helfer knows, the "religious" character accorded by some to the study of religion is presupposed in the view of its materials that they have a quality of ultimacy. 

Elia
de follows this view in his study of religious materials, for he considers homo religiosus man's most fundamental dimension. Homo religiosus, he tells us, represents the "total man"; the experience of the sacred,

he says, is the correlate of "man's specific existential situation of 'being-in-the-world'." 84 This attitude is revealed throughout his quest for homo religiosus. While he begins this quest with historical materials his aim is to describe a dimension of man's prereflective life apart from history. He seeks to transform the historical materials into a description of man as a religious being, that is, as a being who truly lives in transcending history through participation in the structures of the sacred. Of the historian of religions' aim, Eliade writes:

He attempts to decipher, in the temporal sphere of historical actuality the fate of experiences arising from an inflexible human desire to transcend the temporal and the historic. All authentic religious experience implies a desparate effort to penetrate to the root of things, the ultimate reality. But every expression or conceptual formulation of a given religious experience lies in a historical context. . . . The supreme merit of any historian of religions is precisely his endeavor to discover in a "fact" duly conditioned by the historical moment and the cultural style of the age the existential situation which caused it. 85

In moving from the level of the historically concrete to that of existential experience, where he can grasp the specific mode of being-in-the-world of homo religiosus, the historian of religions must perform a religious exercise himself. He must comprehend the ultimate and transhistorical meaning of the historically conditioned facts.

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84 Eliade, The Quest, pp.8-9.
85 Eliade, The Two and the One, pp.191-92.
To summarize, in his quest for transhistorical religious structures Eliade moves from the historically conditioned events to the existential situations which produced them, and finally to the mode of being which underlies these situations. In this manner he forms a morphology of religio-historical facts and explores the relation between man and the world of sacred realities. Examination of this relationship permits him to define the mode of being of *homo religiosus*, man in his essential, prereflective religious dimension.

It also enables the historian of religion, using Eliade's methodology, to discover this mode of being-in-the-world for modern consciousness. As will be pointed out in the next chapter, this necessitates an act of creative self-understanding, an act which partakes of a religious exercise, for the recovery of the archaic *homo religiosus* by modern awareness has important spiritual consequences for man's basic understanding of himself and his world.
IV. Eliade's Religious Hermeneutics and
The "Nostalgia For Paradise"

Eliade's hermeneutics can be called "religious" for
two reasons; first, because it deals with religious
materials, and second, because as a "creative" hermeneutics
it is a religious exercise. According to Eliade, creative
hermeneutics changes man. He believes that every true
hermeneutical encounter gives rise to an experience of a
religious nature. Because it is an encounter with some
"other" world of meaning it alters one's fundamental
conceptions about his own world. Because it awakens the
consciousness of an "other" mode of being-in-the-world, it
causes one to reflect critically upon his particular
situation in the world. Creative hermeneutics changes man,
then, because it involves an act of critical self-
understanding: "the effort to understand the self through
the mediation of the other."

Therefore, the creative "hermeneut" relates to some
"other" world in order to confer a meaning upon his own
everyday world, just as religious man relates to the world
of mythical ancestors or divine beings for the same reason.
He also shares in the characteristic attitude of religious
man toward the "other" world, an attitude which Eliade
calls the "nostalgia for paradise"; he considers the "other"
world more real than the world of present realities and seeks to recover this primordial world. This is not to suggest that the modern hermeneut yearns to recover what is real and primordial in the same concrete way as does archaic religious man. As will be shown here, creative hermeneutics has the aim of self-understanding, not of recovering in actuality some previous mode of existence or view of the world.

Specifically, it will be shown that Eliade's hermeneutical quest to recover the archaic homo religiosus is neither an objective quest for origins nor an attempt to resurrect archaic religious realities in concreto. The manner in which it treats the question of origins will be discussed in the first section of this chapter in relation to the theme of the "nostalgia for paradise." In the second section, Eliade's understanding of the problems involved in grasping archaic religious views will be explained. In the third section, the true intention of Eliade's creative hermeneutics in recovering the archaic homo religiosus will be disclosed. In the final section, Eliade's idea that the historian of religions is in a prime position to reflect critically upon the spiritual situation of modern man through a hermeneutics of archaic religious realities will be discussed.

The "Nostalgia for Paradise"

The theme of the "nostalgia for paradise" has a role
in Eliade's understanding of sacred time and space, the symbolism of the center, millenialism, and every other instance of religious man's yearning to regain contact with some "other" world. It has two essential features: first, religious man considers the "other" world a world of absolute reality, of pure creative being, and thus of the beginnings of all things; second, he believes it is a world from which he is forever separated because of a decisive deed that took place in the time of the beginnings. The first constitutes a vision of paradise and the second the idea of a "fall" from paradise. Religious man must never lose sight of the paradisaical state of the beginnings, nor forget the decisive deed by which he was cut off from that state and arrived at his present condition. All of this is preserved for him in myth.

Eliade calls myth "sacred history" because it records all the events which are real and important for religious man. Like any history, myth tells how man became what he is today: mortal, sexual, etc. In his article "The Yearning for Paradise in Primitive Tradition," Eliade explains this idea as follows:

...in describing the primordial situation the myths reveal its paradisial [sic] quality by the fact that in illo tempore Heaven is said to have been very near Earth or that it was easy to reach by means of a tree, or a vine, or a ladder, or by climbing a mountain. When Heaven was rudely "separated" from Earth, when it became "distant" as it is today, when the tree or the vine leading from Earth to Heaven was cut, or the mountain which touched
Heaven was levelled—the paradisial state was over and humanity arrived at its present state.\textsuperscript{86}

In myth we find expressed both essential features of the theme of the "nostalgia for paradise": the view that events which took place in the beginning have greater significance than all subsequent events; and, the view that man's present condition is explained by a deed which took place in that primordial era. The "nostalgia for paradise" has a place in modern conceptualization and hermeneutics because these two vestiges of mythical thinking are still present.

Eliade describes the first view as a belief in the "prestige of beginnings." In discussing "The Myth of the Noble Savage, or the Prestige of the Beginning," he says it underlies many of the attitudes held in recent centuries toward primitive man, early human history, and man's early childhood, as well as the attitude of primitive man himself toward his primordial ancestors (for he too knew the myth of the "noble savage"). Eliade speaks of "a general attitude to what happened 'in the beginning': and explains the meaning this attitude has in all its forms, as follows: "Whatever the differences between these images and formulae, in the final reckoning they all mean the same thing: that

the essential human condition precedes the actual human condition." 87 This view is affirmed, he says, in most of man's historiographic positions. Certain events are selected from man's past as decisive and determining for all time, as models for present and future activity; they are examples of what it really means to be human. The idea is thus preserved by the historian of a real world of model events, as distinguished from his own everyday world. However, for him, instead of taking place "in the beginning" these events take place "in the past"; that is, for him, the beginning is the past.

Mythical man understood how he arrived at his present condition through remembrance of what happened in the beginning; modern man achieves similar awareness through the study of the past. This does not mean, however, that every historical study aiming to show how man has become what he is today can be considered "mythical" in the proper sense. The specific nature of myths is such that they offer essentialistic, almost simplistic, descriptions of how man arrived at his present condition, and often represent a long and complicated process by a single and sudden event. When one refers to the great mythmakers of contemporary culture: Marx, Darwin, Freud, etc., it is because they have offered such descriptions; they have

87 Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 54.
told how man has emerged as an essentially social being, as a biological being, or as a psychological being. Freud even represents a long and complicated process of human development by a single event: the first parricide. Furthermore, this event can be thought of as a "fall," which is characteristic of mythical explanations of how man has become what he is today.

The question now arises as to how these vestiges of mythical thinking are expressed in Eliade's thought, how a certain "nostalgia for paradise" is evident in his quest for the archaic homo religiosus. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, he seeks something original in man--the essential which precedes the actual--and has an interest in exemplary forms and values, those of authentic or meaningful human existence. While his quest for origins is therefore not an objective quest for the beginnings of religion, its underlying assumption is that man's religious dimension is most fully evident in "archaic" man. From the viewpoint of modern man, who has lost his sense of religiousness, the world of archaic man may then be seen as a lost paradise. This attitude is expressed in Eliade's myth of man's second "fall" into desacralized modern existence. In his view:

... it could be said that nonreligion is equivalent to a new "fall" of man--in other words that nonreligious man has lost the capacity to live religion consciously, and hence to understand and assume it; but that, in his deepest being, he still retains a memory of it, as, after the first "fall," his ancestor, the primordial man retained
intelligence enough to enable him to rediscover the traces of God that are visible in the world. After the first "fall" the religious sense descended to the level of the "divided" consciousness; now after the second "fall" it has fallen even further, into the depths of the unconscious; it has been "forgotten." 88

Eliade's myth of man's second "fall" thus expresses the same idea as the myth of his first "fall": man has been "separated" from the state of his ancestors, and, at the same time, he retains a memory of this state and can perhaps rediscover it. The following section will discuss how Eliade conceives this separation and gives suggestions for the endeavor of rediscovery.

The Gap Separating "Modern" and "Archaic" Man

Eliade believes that the difficulty in modern man's achieving a proper understanding of archaic religious man lies in the fact that he has consciously chosen to reject his predecessor's way of life. However, for Eliade, the gap separating modern nonreligious man from archaic religious man is not absolute. According to him,

nonreligious man descends from homo religiosus and, whether he likes it or not, he is also the work of religious man... In short, he is the result of a process of desacralization,... this means that nonreligious man has been formed by opposing his predecessor, by attempting to empty himself of all religion and all

88Eliade, Sacred and Profane, p.213.
transhuman meaning. He recognizes himself in proportion as he "frees" himself from the "superstitions" of his ancestors... To acquire a world of his own, he has desacralized the world in which his ancestors lived; but to do so he has been obliged to adopt the opposite of an earlier type of behavior, and that behavior is still emotionally present to him, in one form or another, ready to be reactualized in his deepest being.89

Modern man is essentially faced with the same decision as was religious man in his confrontation with "trancendental" sacred realities; however, he makes an opposite choice, for he decides to reject transcendence. As Guy Welbon puts it, Eliade "considers desacralization to be the actualization of a primordial alternative." 90

What, then, really distinguishes modern and archaic man? What is implied in this choice?

As Eliade sees it, in choosing to reject transcendence, modern man has decided to live in linear, historical time and to deny the existence of any reality beyond his immediate, empirical world. Eliade defines the two main characteristics of the world-view of archaic societies in direct opposition to this modern attitude. The first he calls "the revolt against linear time" and the second "archaic ontology." With regard to the first, he states:

89 Ibid., pp.203-4;
In studying these traditional societies, one characteristic has especially struck us; it is their revolt against concrete, historical time, their nostalgia for a periodical return to the mythical time of the beginning of things, to the "Great Time." 

Archaic man defends himself against concrete, historical time through the repetition of archetypes believed to originate outside of history. Modern man, of course, has great difficulty in understanding how it is possible to live this life of endless repetition, for he is pre-eminently "historical man," that is, "man who is insofar as he makes himself, within history." The possibility of comprehending the life-style of archaic man lies, for Eliade, in positing an archaic ontology. He states:

It matters little if the formulas and images through which the primitive expresses "reality" seem childish and even absurd to us. It is the profound meaning of primitive behavior that is revelatory; this behavior is governed by belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of "unrealities"...

Hence we are justified in speaking of an archaic ontology, and it is only by taking this ontology into consideration that we succeed in understanding—and hence in not scornfully dismissing—even the most extravagant behavior on the part of the primitive world; in fact, this behavior corresponds to a desperate effort not to lose contact with being.

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91 *Cosmos and History*, p.ix.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid. p.92
Thus, all of the attempts by archaic man to "kill" Time through archetypal formulas or images represent an effort to saturate his life with being, which is opposed to becoming, or the flux of Time.

While the world of archaic man is far removed from that of the modern interpreter, this does not lessen, but enhances, the value of seeking to understand it. It will be remembered that the value of the hermeneutical effort lies precisely in the fact that it seeks to comprehend something "other." According to Eliade, the value for modern Western man of confronting both archaic and non-Western peoples can be measured in terms of self-understanding. He states:

...this confrontation with "the others" helps Western man better to understand himself. The effort expended in correctly understanding ways of thinking that are foreign to the Western rationalist tradition--an effort which is, primarily, that of deciphering the meanings of myths and symbols--is repaid by a considerable enrichment of consciousness.94

Eliade feels that, despite its potential value, few rewards have yet been reaped from this confrontation. He attributes this to the incapacity of reductionistic ideologies of the Western rationalist tradition to understand correctly the religious worlds of "the others." Moreover, he offers certain suggestions for truly reaping

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94Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 9.
the benefits of the encounter with "the others," for bridging the gap which separates modern nonreligious man from the archaic homo religiosus.

Eliade makes his suggestions in response to one great problem: "the majority of historians of religions defend themselves against the messages with which their documents are filled." This may be overcome, first, he suggests, by avoiding excessive specialization. He therefore invites the various specialists (Indologists, Judaicists, Sinologists, etc.) to become acquainted with developments in areas outside their own. Second, he implores the historian of religions to carry out his own interpretive work; he has served long enough, due to his philosophical timidity, to provide "raw materials" for the philosophers and social scientists. Third, he says the historian of religion progresses little in his own interpretive work if he imitates some fashionable philosopher or borrows his models from the social sciences. Fourth, he points out that, in fact, the historian of religions needs to rectify certain fashionable interpretations of religion (an outstanding example being the idea of Feurbach and Marx that religion is alienation). Finally, he asks the historian of religions to be mindful of "the fallacy of demystification," of the false notion that he ought to seek

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95 Eliade, The Quest, p.62. For a more complete view of the suggestions summarized here, see pp.62ff.
an alternative, rational explanation for religious views, which, at first, make little sense to the modern Western mind. This is the crux of the matter; the aim should be to recover the spiritual messages contained in the materials, not to reduce them to fit provincial philosophies or social scientific models, so that, clad in contemporary garb, they are indistinguishable from the views of modern thinkers. Eliade suggests that the attitude of the various reductionisms toward "the others" may betray a superiority complex on the part of Western scholars. He feels that instead of interpreting them from the point of reference of our particular moment in history, situating them somewhere behind us in our historical-evolutionary development, we ought to raise them to a level of interpretation on which they can serve as a basis for critical reflection upon provincial ways of thinking. He suggests the need for an effort to "revalorize" or to "save" archaic religious realities. This effort is exemplified when he posits an "archaic ontology" to make sense of primitive actions which are otherwise incomprehensible to the Western rationalist tradition. A hermeneutical effort of this kind presupposes a devaluation of contemporary

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\[96\] As, for example, when the religious views of early Christianity, having been "demythologised" from the point of view of existentialism, become indistinguishable from existentialist philosophy itself.

rational thought and will inevitably meet with resistance from scientifically minded scholars. They will be inclined "to suspect obscurantism or nostalgia", Eliade says,

in authors who see in the different forms of religion something other than superstition, ignorance, or, at the most, psychological behavior, social institutions, and rudimentary ideologies fortunately left behind us by the progress of scientific thought and the triumph of technology.

It has already been admitted in the present analysis that there is a certain "nostalgia" inherent in the hermeneutical effort to "revalorize" or recover archaic religious realities. It remains to be shown that this "nostalgia" must not be understood as a desire to return to the actual way of life of premodern religious societies, with their so-called superstitions and non-rational ideologies.

Creative Hermeneutics

Certain scholars suspect obscurantism or nostalgia in Eliade's effort to "revalorize" archaic religious realities because they find it paradoxical. Having heard from an earlier generation of scholars that the study of archaic religions is important to modern man because it shows how far man's religious sense has developed in leaving behind these "lower" forms of religion, they stand aghast at Eliade's view that the study of archaic religions will

98 Ibid., pp. 66-67.
restore to modern man his true sense of religiousness. Because Eliade holds a noble conception of archaic religious existence, and argues that modern existence is by contrast impoverished and bereft of meaning, he is suspected of being a proponent of baseless anti-postivist invective, or a victim of nostalgia for the supposedly beatific existence of premodern man. He is suspected of "using" the study of archaic religious behavior to preach about modern Western man's anxiety or to prophesy the appearance of the means for human salvation on the horizon of non-Western spirituality.

It will be shown that this interpretation stems from a basic misunderstanding of Eliade's creative hermeneutics. This misunderstanding lies in the assumption that Eliade's quest for the archaic homo religiosus seeks the return, in actuality, to a form of premodern religious behavior. Certain interpreters of his thought assume that he advocates the objective recapitulation of archaic religious existence because they confuse his quest for the archaic homo religiosus with the historical-evolutionary quest for the earliest form of religion. The two tasks are even confused in cases, where it is explicitly noted that Eliade rejects the use of a historical-evolutionary framework in his study of religion.

Such a confusion of tasks is evident, for example, in an otherwise insightful review of Eliade's works by the
well-known literary critic Northrop Frye. He notes in his review, that in Eliade's "grammar of comparative symbolism" something primary and universal in religion is uncovered, something "of the type that Tylor called animism." He adds: "Eliade thinks of this animism, however, not as chronologically prior to all other religions, as Tylor did, but as latent in all religious structures and the key to most of their imagery." He thus recognizes that Eliade has dispensed with historical-evolutionism and given us a view of archaic imagery and symbolism which shows its importance to man in general, not to only one stage in his historical development. In addition, Frye does not hesitate to announce the relevance of Eliade's work to the modern literary critic. "It is obvious," he states, "that such studies as Eliade's have an immediate relevance to literary criticism--so immediate that a critic who ignores this kind of work is risking competence in his own field." In view of these remarks, Frye's conclusion about Eliade's effort to restore the value of archaic religious realities surprises us. He writes:

Sacred trees and stones, cities at the

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100 Ibid.; p.427.

101 Ibid., p.431.
navel of the earth, a primordial time of the gods, are all projections, and it would be the silliest kind of self-hypnosis to try to talk ourselves into accepting such projections again. The difference between superstition and religion, which seems to disappear from Eliade's argument, is that in religion such feelings are transferred from the physical to the spiritual world, from outer time and space to inner experience. . . . this process is of immense help in the development of a higher religion and is probably essential to it. ¹⁰²

Frye here uses a form of dialogue which, as he is aware, Eliade has labored to do away with, a dialogue burdened with notions of "superstition," "projections," "higher" and "lower" religions, etc. He fails to recognize that, in rejecting these notions of historical-evolutionism, Eliade has sought to restore the value of archaic religious realities through a non-objective quest, that is, by means of a hermeneutical procedure. It is a hermeneutical procedure which involves critical reflection; it involves, as a necessary result of the encounter with "other" realities, the devaluation and relativization of contemporary existence. Eliade's "revalorization" of archaic existence displays the kind of criticism of contemporary culture which is characteristic of creative hermeneutics. It does not display, as Frye thinks, the kind of "insensitivity to culture" which is "characteristic of preachers of anxiety" in modern existence. ¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid., p.431.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
The criticism of Eliade by the theologian Kenneth Hamilton is similar to that of Frye in that it misrepresents Eliade's hermeneutical quest for homo religiosus as an argument for the return to archaic religious existence. He also sees the relevance to modern man of Eliade's description of archaic religious man. He feels, however, that it is precisely the kind of religiousness which Eliade describes that the modern theologian ought to recognize and oppose in defining a form of faith which is appropriate for modern, historical man. His main point is that it would be both irresponsible and impossible for the modern Christian to assume the mode of existence of homo religiosus, characterized as it is by "a sense of cosmic cosiness." He states:

The fact that the religious consciousness of modern Christians is no longer "open" to the cosmos as was the consciousness of medieval Christians or of archaic man may mean more gain than loss. Perhaps the assumption of homo religiosus that he need only decipher what the cosmos says in order to understand the mystery of life was an ill-founded assumption needing to be corrected by the counterthesis of nonreligious man that the cosmos holds no cipher.

Hamilton's suggestion of a counterthesis is well-stated, but it is not Eliade's awareness of this counterthesis.

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105 Ibid., p.216.
which is at stake. Eliade has pointed out that modern man has in fact chosen to desacralize the cosmos in his theory of man's second "fall." What is at stake is Eliade's contention that modern man can achieve a restored awareness of the views of homo religiosus. Hamilton addresses himself to this issue when he asks: "Can the spiritual outlook of homo religiosus be revived in our modern, historically-minded, anti-metaphysical age?" 106 Yet he still misconstrues Eliade's understanding of the spiritual reawakening which may occur as a result of the hermeneutical encounter with non-Western cultures. According to Hamilton's representation of Eliade's views, the twice-fallen man of the modern Western world ought to look to the horizon of non-Western, non-Christian religions for an actual solution to his spiritual crisis. He represents Eliade's understanding as follows:

... as it is in the Christianized West that secularization has proceeded most rapidly, we should expect the non-Christian religions to take the lead in halting--and perhaps in reversing--the second Fall.... Should we also expect, from the same sources, a second saviour? 107

Again, the specifically hermeneutical nature of Eliade's encounter with the worlds of homo religiosus is ignored. Creative hermeneutics has no intention of "reversing" man's second "fall," for it is this "fall" which makes that

106 Ibid., p.221.
107 Ibid., p.215.
hermeneutics both necessary and possible; it is, in essence, a fall into history.

In conclusion, the important thing is that hermeneutics is an activity peculiar to contemporary man, for it is an exercise in self-understanding through the historical study of other cultures. Charles Long expresses this idea when he says of hermeneutics: "it presupposes modernity." 108 At the same time, however, it presupposes a certain devaluation or relativization of modernity: it confronts the contemporary interpreter with the realization that his existence is only one among many possibilities. As a result, it alters his fundamental view of existence. As Eliade puts it:

In the end, creative hermeneutics changes man; it is more than instruction, it is also a spiritual technique susceptible of modifying the quality of existence itself. This is true above all for the historico-religious hermeneutics.... For in presenting and analyzing the Australian, African or Oceanian myths and rituals, in giving a commentary on the hymns of Zarathustra, Taoist texts, or the shamanistic mythologies and techniques, the historian of religions unveils some existential situations that are unknown or that are imaginable only with great difficulty by the modern reader; the encounter with these "foreign" worlds cannot continue without consequences. 109

These consequences are, for Eliade, individual self-understanding, renewal of thought in Western cultures, and alteration in the spiritual condition of modern man.

108 Long, p.79.
These consequences will be considered in the following discussion of the role of the historian of religions in relation to the problem of religion and modernity.

The Historian of Religions and the Spiritual Situation of Modern Man

Eliade's quest for homo religiosus is a creative hermeneutics because he seeks through objective historical materials to transcend history and discover the universal, pre-objective basis of human religiousness. The three consequences of this approach—self-understanding, cultural renewal, and alteration of man's spiritual condition—are central to Eliade's belief in the power of his hermeneutics to transform the awareness of modern man. In the light of this perspective will be discussed, first, the role of the historian of religions in contributing to man's total understanding of himself through the study of archaic religious realities. Second will be discussed the idea of cultural renewal as it relates to the efforts of the historian of religions to unveil "foreign" existential positions and thus permit critical reflection upon attitudes toward existence in contemporary culture. Finally will be discussed the potential ability of the historian of religions to alter the spiritual condition of modern man, to show modern man that his total situation
has both a historical and a transhistorical, or spiritual dimension.

The effort to understand the self through the mediation of the other can succeed only insofar as "the other" corresponds to something recognizable in the self. In Eliade's study of the archaic homo religiosus, he tells us that it constitutes a form of behavior "still emotionally present" to modern nonreligious man, which is "ready to be reactualized in his deepest being." Thus, the aim of historico-religious hermeneutics is to seek "the other" or "the archaic" as a dimension of the interpreting subject himself; this hermeneutics is an alternative to the historical-evolutionary quest for the original form of religion in objective history. In his comments on the failure of the objective quest for the origins of religion, Charles Long presents this idea of an alternative quest. According to him,

the search for origins--the archaic in objective history--must now be complemented by a search of the archaism of the subject. This archaism is no longer a search for origins in objective history, for, as we have seen, this poses an impossible task. This "new archaism" arises in relation to the universal structure and intentionality revealed in religious symbols. We now wish to understand the meaning of the archaic as a constituent element in man's understanding of himself and his world.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰Long, p.74.
Charles Long would replace the idea of an original, objective stage of human religious life with the idea of its universal, pre-objective structure. This position parallels that of Eliade in this statement: "It suffices to say that the 'sacred' is an element in the structure of consciousness, not a stage in the history of consciousness." Through the comprehension of the archaic homo religiosus on a primordial level of his being, modern man can add to an understanding of himself. He achieves "total" understanding when he comprehends himself in all of his dimensions, even those that have been "forgotten" in the present historical moment, only to be rediscovered in his encounter with "the others."

When, in his encounter with the "others," man discovers the possibility of assuming a "forgotten" or "alien" mode of existence, he is moved to reflect critically upon contemporary attitudes toward existence. "For, after all," Eliade explains, "recognizing the existence of 'others' inevitably brings with it the relativization, or even the destruction, of the official cultural world." However, only through such criticism of fundamental, contemporary views can we truly comprehend the other and "interpolate" that other into our lives.

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111 Eliade, The Quest, from the Preface.
112 Eliade, The Quest, p.4.
expresses this view in the passage where he presents his definition of hermeneutics:

Every adequate hermeneutics is at heart an essay in self-understanding. It is the effort to understand the self through the mediation of the other. By self-understanding I do not mean the reduction of the other to the categories of contemporaneity. Self-understanding through the mediation of the other involves the principle of reciprocal criticism. It is this reciprocal criticism of self and other which permits the interpolation of the phenomenon into our lives.  

When Eliade speaks of cultural renewal or enrichment of consciousness in the modern Western world he has this kind of reciprocal criticism in mind. As mentioned above, he shows the way to a true comprehension of primitive man's life of "archetypes and repetition" through demonstrating that, from the primitive's own point of view, this existence participates in an "archaic ontology." In another instance he experiments with reciprocal criticism of the attitudes toward death of modern historical man and of homo religiosus, and shows the difference between the existential views of death on the one hand as Nothingness, and on the other as Initiation.  

Eliade believes the discovery of other existential positions has a special importance for modern man because he is the victim of his

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113 Long, p.78 Italics mine).  
own historicity, of the belief that the present historical moment solely conditions his situation. Contemporary man is unaware, according to Eliade, that his particular situation can have a transhistorical meaning. Eliade feels that the historian of religions is in a prime position to reveal this fact to modern consciousness because he has a knowledge of the symbolism and imagery through which man has attained the Universal in his moments as homo religiosus.

The role which Eliade asks the historian of religions to take in altering man's present spiritual condition is, then, mainly one of revealing to modern man the value and meaning of archaic symbols and archetypes. Religious symbolism, is for him, the vehicle par excellence by which a consciousness may transcend its own historicity. The idea that the history of religions can become a religious exercise is therefore most apparent in Eliade's statements about the study of religious symbolism. He writes:

By envisaging the study of man not only inasmuch as he is a historic being, but also as a living symbol, the history of religions could become (if we may be pardoned the word) a metapsychoanalysis. For this would lead to an awakening, and a renewal of consciousness, of the archaic symbols and archetypes, whether still living or now fossilised in the religious traditions of all mankind. . . . One could equally well call this a new maleutics. Just as Socrates. . . acted on the mind obstetrically, bringing to birth thoughts it did not know it contained, so the history of religions could bring forth a new man, more authentic and more complete: for, through
the study of the religious traditions, modern man would not only rediscover a kind of archaic behavior, he would also become conscious of the spiritual riches implied in such behavior.¹¹⁵

Eliade thus discloses that the ultimate aim of his hermeneutics is not simply to rediscover archaic behavior, but to give it new and enriched significance. He seeks both to rediscover past historical situations of man and to reveal the transhistorical meaning of these situations.

In conclusion, it can be said that Eliade aims to transcend history through the study of history. This means that in uncovering the primordial condition of the archaic homo religiosus to modern man, he opens the way for the emergence of a more complete being. Eliade's historicoreligious hermeneutics is then involved in the kind of return to the primordial situation which he describes in his discussion of yoga. The yogi becomes liberated when in recovering the primordial state he is initiated into a totally new mode of being; as Eliade puts it: "The man 'delivered in life' regains his original situation enriched by dimensions of freedom and transconsciousness."¹¹⁶ Thus it is with the quest for homo religiosus, which does not return modern man to a mode of existence lived in

¹¹⁵ Eliade, Images and Symbols, p.35.

objective archaic history, but rather seeks to initiate him into a new spiritual awareness through the rediscovery of the archaic modality in himself.

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To summarize, in Eliade's religious hermeneutics "nostalgia for paradise" takes the form of an elevated spiritual technique. It could be compared with the yearning for the primordial state of various mystics or the search for the "first philosophy" by thinkers both ancient and modern, the only difference being that Eliade's quest begins with the historically given and not with introspection. It begins with the historically given "other" as its indispensible guide, and attains to self-understanding through the reciprocal criticism of the self and the other. Thus, "creative hermeneutics changes man"; all the consequences for modern man of the encounter with historico-religious realities are made possible by the act of reciprocal criticism. These results are thwarted by defending oneself against the spiritual messages revealed by historico-religious facts in the provincial manner of Western thought. Self-understanding will follow from the encounter with the other only when the other is taken seriously and raised to a level on which it can truly serve as the basis for radical self-criticism,
Conclusion

The importance of Eliade's study of religious phenomena is that it describes what religious existence is, apart from the social, political, economic, and historical factors which necessarily condition all religious phenomena. The salient features of his description are: first, religious existence is characterized by an attitude toward history which is the opposite of that which underlies most modern ideologies and theories of interpretation; second, it is dominated by archetypes and symbols which reveal their meaning at a non-discursive level rather than the rational level of discourse; and finally, it is not comprehensible to those who insist upon reducing it to the ideological categories of the Western rationalist tradition.

For Eliade, therefore, the problem of religion and modernity is, first of all, the difficulties which are inherent in the hermeneutical situation of the modern interpreter. These difficulties arise out of the fact that the interpreter must seek to understand a mode of existence which transcends the temporal and historic. To overcome these difficulties, Eliade suggests an approach to religio-historical phenomena which transcends their particular conditionings, or at least gets beyond the view
that they are constituted solely by these conditionings. His approach brackets out the various reductionisms which treat religious phenomena as a function of social, political, economic, and other non-religious factors. Treating religion as a function of the sacred is a purely morphological task without any aim toward explaining what has produced a religious phenomenon. Its aim, instead, is to discover the structure and meaning which the phenomenon has when taken together with other phenomena of the same universal, ahistorical type. Morphological interpretation gives us an understanding of the specific nature of religious existence because it shows the meaning which religious phenomena reveal through their common structure. The identification of the structures of religious life leads to a description of *homo religiosus*, in which his existence is characterized by a participation in the "structures of the sacred". By virtue of this interpretive procedure, Eliade's approach claims to provide an understanding of religion as something in and of itself, an understanding of man in his essentially and distinctly religious dimension. This understanding transcends the difficulties presented by the historicity of particular religious facts by transforming them into a picture of the archetypal *homo religiosus*.

While one might expect that the contribution of the historian of religions to discussion on the problem of religion and modernity would end with an understanding of
what religious existence is as revealed by religiohistorical facts, this is not so with Eliade. He feels a true understanding of religious facts from past historical contexts will modify the quality of present existence. In other words, he feels the messages which these facts reveal to modern man can change him. They can help man to complete his understanding of himself because they reveal what is universal and transhistorical in his situation in the world. In Eliade's view of religion and modernity, it is not only a problem of modern man's losing a sense of the religious, but also of losing a sense of the essential human condition which precedes actual human existence.

One outstanding fact about Eliade which has emerged is that he is, above all, a humanist. He is a humanist who is concerned with the essential human condition, and he sees his study of the history of religions as a preparatory work for understanding the essence or unity of humanity, a preparation, that is, for philosophical anthropology. It will be remembered that he says "homo religiosus represents the 'total man'." He also says:

More than any other humanistic discipline (i.e., psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc.) history of religions can open the way to a philosophical anthropology. 117

117 Eliade, The Quest, p.9.
And again:

Certainly, the unity of the human species is accepted de facto in other disciplines, for example, linguistics, anthropology, sociology. But the historian of religions has the privilege of grasping this unity at the highest levels—or the deepest—and such an experience is susceptible of enriching and changing him.\textsuperscript{118}

This desire to grasp the essence of humanity through the encounter with man in his religious state before the "second fall" reveals the "nostalgia for paradise" in Eliade's quest. This is not, however, the abject nostalgia of the malcontent in modern society; it is the nostalgia of the hermeneut, who believes in the relevance to modernity of all past existential positions of man. This nostalgia is born of the idea that man's present situation in the world is only one possibility among others and the realization that all possible human situations share some basic unity.

\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., p.69.
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