I have emphasized anthropology thus far. A good instance of how Freudian psychology can treat ritual structures in an illuminating way is Géza Róheim's *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* (New York, 1945). The work deals with central Australian Aboriginal rituals. Erik Erikson's psychoanalytic *Childhood and Society* (New York, 1950) shows the connection between ritual and games. Jean Piaget has reflected on the role and meaning of games in the psychological development of children in numerous books, such as his *Plays, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood* (New York, 1961); many of his observations have a bearing on ritual. However, the classic study of this fascinating topic is Johann Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (London, 1949), written not from a psychological but a humanistic perspective.

A synthetic, multidisciplinary approach to ritual, making use of the contributions of specialists in a variety of natural and social sciences within the context of a single theory of human development, is *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Bio-Genetic Structural Analysis,* edited by Eugene G. d'Aquili (New York, 1979).

The study of ritual in terms of its explicitly religious significance remains the province of scholars in the history and phenomenology of religions, for example, Mircea Eliade, Theodor H. Gaster, W. Brede Kristensen, and Gerardus van der Leeuw (see "References").

Major contributions to the general understanding of ritual are to be found in studies from within specific religious traditions, or in works devoted to their classic sources on ritual. As examples, I should mention from the Jewish tradition Gersion Appel's *A Philosophy of Mizvot* (New York, 1975) and Max Kadushin's *The Rabbinic Mind,* 2d ed. (New York, 1965); from the Catholic tradition Louis Bouyer's *Rite and Man* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1963) and Roger Grainger's *The Language of the Rite* (London, 1974); and from the Confucian tradition the classic *Li Ji* (The Book of Rites), translated by James Legge and edited by Chu Zhai and Winberg Zhai (New York, 1967)—the James Legge translation first appeared in "Sacred Books of the East," vols. 27 and 28 (London, 1885)—and the philosophic commentary by Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York, 1972). Reference has been made in the essay to some classic works on Hindu ritual; these are available in English translation. Arthur Berriedale Keith's *Karma-Mimamsa* (Calcutta, 1921) gives a general introduction to this school of philosophy, while Raj Bali Pandey's *Hindu Samskaras,* 2d ed. (Delhi, 1969), gives a good insight into the traditional understanding of personal rituals.

Ritual provides a way of dealing not only with the positive sides of the human condition but also its negative sides. One study has approached even the cultural phenomenon of the "feud" in terms of ritual theory: Jacob Black-Michaud's *Cohesive Force: Feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (New York, 1975). One of the major ways of controlling violence is through the ritualization of it; a penetrating examination of the implications of this is René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred,* listed in the "References" above. Also see Ernest Becker's *Escape from Evil* (New York, 1975) and Eli Sagan's *Cannibalism: Human Aggression and Cultural Form* (New York, 1974), although both of these works tend to generalize overhastily—for example, some research casts doubt on almost every European report of "savage cannibalism."

An overall bibliographic survey of study on ritual is available by Ronald L. Grimes, entitled "Sources for the Study of Ritual," *Religious Studies Review* 10 (April 1984): 134–145.

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RITUAL [FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS].

The term *ritual* remains difficult to define, which is hardly surprising, since central activities and concepts are always the ones probed most restlessly. The difficulties attending the definition of *ritual* testify to the fundamental role it is given in religion and social life, as well as to its attractiveness as a focus for current theorizing about religion in general. The definitional difficulties may also suggest the variety of input into the discussion. For these reasons, ritual has been identified in many unexpected places; rarely does an analysis decide something is not ritual. Nevertheless, the study of ritual in numerous settings is driving theory in several disciplines to work through, and past, the symbol-culture model of the 1970s and 1980s—in some cases to engage the contributions and ramifications of postmodernism, in other cases to forge a new science to depict the importance of ritual. The results, a matter of highly visible differences with more subtle areas of consensus, are the context for much of the contemporary study of religion.

Many current theories of ritual use the term *ritualization,* which goes back at least as far as the work of Max Gluckman (1962) and Julian Huxley (1966), in order to foreground the dynamics by which people actually do rites, perform rituals, or act ritually. The term challenges a number of positions, starting with the assumptions that rites are the unchanging elements of a religious tradition, and that they all have some underlying, universal structure. Even when rituals proclaim their faithful adherence to ancient models, they always involve choices and changes; the degree to which change is denied, minimized, or embraced is important for any interpretation. The more deeply rooted longing to articulate a universal structure for ritual—a scheme that does not change when other features do (i.e., that which makes a rite a rite)—has taken on a special significance due either to a semi-theological concern for absolutes or, more likely, a pragmatic instinct to ground "religion" itself. In a prosaic but remedial manner, ritualization also announces that it is the activity itself, not texts or doctrines or pantheons, that will be taken as important and as the place to start analysis. Ritualization also signals an understanding that any activity can be ritualized; that is, made into a ritual or a ritual-like performance, usually by invoking features such as formality, repetition, and the use of more traditional models. Naturally, then, the term appreciates that there are degrees of ritualization and the example of one rite might not be the best example for all rites. While not all of these points are embraced by every theorist, there is a consensus that the activities themselves should be the main focus, and theorists seek the best theoretical model for doing that.

Using the terms *ritual*, *ritualization*, or *performance*, attention to ritual is frequent in the major disciplines—anthropology, sociology, history, communication, and even philosophy. Collections such as *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* by Michael Lambek (2002) and *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* by Michele Dillon (2003) feature sections on ritual that attempt, in their different disciplinary ways, to organize this fast-paced area of research so as to suggest a coherent direction. Within the collection of methods that make up the field of religious studies, these terms are also used with a new self-consciousness in biblical studies, church history, psychology of religion, and, naturally, liturgical studies. The most comprehensive bibliography of ritual covering all these areas since Ronald Grimes's *Research in Ritual Studies* (1985) is the extensively annotated and thematic catalog appended to *Theorizing Rituals: Classical Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts, Annotated Bibliography*, edited by Jens Kreinath, Jans Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (2005).

Just as *ritual* remains hard to define, the ability of ritual to pull together scholars of different subjects, approaches, and disciplines—witnessed in the many conference panels and subsequently published collections—remains remarkable. Interdisciplinary projects will often involve the widest mix of cultures and historical periods, and some even go out of their way to use particularly unconventional notions of ritual, such as the scratching of medieval graffiti on the walls of a small church in Italy (Rollo-Koster, 2002, p. 127). These projects testify to a lingering desire to identify something common in all the examples identified as ritual, even when careful historical contextualizing makes each set of activities stand out in their uniqueness. Still, these collections vividly illustrate something else as well: that attention to so-called ritual activities in multiple contexts can bring into focus forms of behavior relevant to the study of religion and society that would have fallen under the radar of other analytical terms.

CURRENT THEORIES: A ROUGH GUIDE. There are two theoretical points of departure dominating the study of ritual at the beginning of the twenty-first century, each with distinct but not mutually exclusive positions on ritualization, religion, and the role of theories about them. While these "camps" read each other, they do not often refer to each other clearly. Hence, a guide of sorts may help clarify the main lines of argument. Of course, any general rubric for organizing approaches, such as distinguishing those theories that emphasize ritual as a form of communication from those that emphasize it as a form of action, can be precise only at a certain level of generality. In regard to ritual and the whole ragtag set of issues that have defined the study of religion in modern times, it sometimes seems that the most telling distinctions among theories are not found in the introductory assumptions—where one starts, so to speak—but in where one ends up. As a "rough guide" to the current scene, a first-order distinction can be made between theories that remain heavily rooted in cultural explanation and those that are re-

creating naturalistic (or scientific) models of explanation. Yet even within these two general positions, no two theories are alike. In addition, several popular theories resist categorization even within a sorting this broad; they might be said to take a more or less psychoanalytic view of the role of ritual in human history—a view that often seems distinctly literary, romantic, and even mythic, even as it alludes to the science of the psychoanalytic enterprise.

Ritual theory through the 1980s often took it for granted that ritual is primarily a form of communication, although such communication involves much more than the simple conveyance of information. Earlier theories of this sort emphasized the symbolic nature of ritual action, with later ones showing a preference for focusing on the expressive or performative aspects of ritual communication. Pushing at the margins of the influence wielded by Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Mary Douglas and Barbara Myerhoff were prominent in portraying the complexity of ritual's symbolic communication in generating meaningful interpretations of the social and cultural order. For these theorists, the encoded symbols and performance sequences understood as ritual are flexible forms of symbolic activity that reaffirm cultural values and a sense of order—both social and cosmic. In other words, rituals are frameworks for mobilizing meaning. But resistance to this approach has been building widely in anthropology, with Talal Asad's challenge to Geertz's notion of a symbol often cited as something of a turning point (Asad, 1993).

COMMUNICATION AND A NEW NATURALISM. During the 1990s, several projects were launched that explore ritual's essentially communicative functions in ways that differ from the Geertzian symbol-culture-meaning approach. This new approach foregrounds communication in the doing or performing of ritual, but stresses the relative unimportance of any "meaning" for participants, as well as for theorists (contrast Rothbuhler, 1998). This note was first sounded by Frits Staal in 1975, and its later rearticulation can be understood perhaps as reluctance to objectify religion and culture as required by most theories of ritual as communication. In one project, the anthropologist Roy Rappaport consolidated thirty years of theories from a number of disciplines into a massive study entitled *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (1999), which expands the insights of his earlier work, notably *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (1979). In another echo of Staal, Rappaport declares ritual to be "the social act basic to humanity" (1979, p. 198; 1999, p. 31) because ritual involves adaptive features as important to the evolution of human beings as language itself. As an essentially performative mode of communication, with more emphasis on the communication aspect, ritual does more than merely *convey* religious ideas. Rather, Rappaport attempts to show how ritual *creates* religious ideas and experiences. In his early work he argued that ritual communicates both indexical (self-referential) messages and canonical (pertaining to cultural tradition) information. The later analysis expands this to include how ritual activities generate, ratify, and nor-

malize "the Holy" in a set of "Ultimate Sacred Postulates" (1979, pp. 210–211; 1999, pp. 263–290). Ritual communicates, Rappaport argues, but it communicates an informationless and unquestionable order of things in which the performer and the performed are indistinguishable from the certainties expressed and, inevitably, accepted.

For Rappaport, ritual performs two explicit and socially indispensable communicative functions: in its creation and communication of the Ultimate Sacred Postulates, ritual does not lie and it does not sanction alternatives to itself. Drawing these terms from Martin Buber's analysis of the stages of evil (1952), the lie and the possibility of choice (and indecision), Rapport uses them to describe the forces that constantly threaten to unravel the social fabric. Ritual denies the possibility of both by asserting a true and unchallengeable order of things. It creates (and communicates) a discourse of sacrality, defined as "the quality of unquestionableness" that participants intellectually attribute to things that cannot be proven (Rappaport, 1999, p. 281). Simultaneously, ritual affords participants an affective experience of the numinous, which Rappaport defines as an emotional consciousness of transcendence comparable to the discussions of *das heilige* (the holy) by Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and others at the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, within Rappaport's rubric, the conjunction of the sacred and the numinous creates the holy. The "meaninglessness" of a rite is an essential quality of the holy, which is generated by the rite. Meaninglessness is the product of both a ritual's "canonical invariance," as Rappaport puts it, and the basic emptiness of the sacred postulates endorsed by ritual. Not only is meaning not needed, it would impede what a ritual is doing. Instead of meaning, the critical factor is the social ratification invoked in and demanded by ritual, not the diffusion of meaning in the fashion suggested by Geertz among others (Rappaport, 1979, p. 263). Ritual is the language-like communication of what is socially indispensable; it is what sets the human species apart—but it is not a provider of meaning. Eventually locating his argument more fully in the biological language of human evolution, Rappaport contends that ritual is the indispensable evolutionary adaptation that established social conventions and mandated their acceptance (Rappaport, 1999, p. 124). He concludes with the same amused finale that closed his earlier work: ritual is the means by which "the unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary, and the conventional into the correct, the necessary, and the natural" (1979, p. 217; 1999, p. 405).

Rappaport's study is subtle, repetitive, and synthetically indebted to many. Still, in both its 1979 and 1999 articulations, he contributes one of the most complete descriptions of how "the religious" may be constituted. The role of ritual is central in this process, perhaps well beyond what anyone but a ritual studies scholar could possibly appreciate. In his major step beyond Émile Durkheim (1859–1917) and Geertz, Rappaport describes ritual as doing more than simply supplying the "effervescence" that enables individuals and society to create social identities (Durkheim) or mechanistically restoring the fit between the mental orientation of a worldview and the emotional tendencies of a cultural ethos (Geertz). Yet he follows the same structural style of argument basic to the analyses and conclusions of Durkheim and Geertz; that is, he also casts ritual as the means for reuniting the terms of a previously drawn analytical distinction— an essentially circular argument. In his case, ritual creates the holy by conjoining the sacred and the numinous, defined in intellectual and emotional language, respectively. This seductive pattern of theorizing about ritual—to distinguish two properties (thought and action, individual and society, spiritual and material, etc.) and then work one's way toward a definition and analysis in which ritual is the means for reuniting them—is thoroughly critiqued in Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992). Still, while evoking Geertz's categories in particular, Rappaport does what Geertz never; he ventures to describe *how* the sacred and the numinous each come into being and then come together in an experience of the holy. This is a provocative phenomenological exercise, although Rapport does not see this as phenomenology. It took him many years to determine how best to cast his arguments, and he chose evolutionary biology; the meta-argument of his later book maintains that the mental requirements for ritual activity, defined as the construction of the holy, functioned as the adaptive evolutionary prerequisites for a fully human consciousness.

Rappaport is not the first scholar to return to the role of ritual and religion in evolution. This was a major topic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthropology, when Giovanni Battista Vico, David Hume, Auguste Comte, and Edward Burnett Tylor all presented new "sciences" of religion that cast religiosity as a stage somewhere between early emotional attempts to placate unknown powers and the dispassionate pursuit of science seen in the Enlightenment. After Tylor, Julian Huxley and Konrad Lorenz in the 1930s also proposed their ethological examinations of ritual practices among animals and humans. With E. O. Wilson's widely discussed theories of sociobiology in the 1970s and 1980s, there began to be analyses of the adaptive benefits of altruism and other aspects of religion. In the 1980s Eugene d'Aquili and his colleagues were writing about how the cognitive dimensions of ritual activity might have been important to, or made possible by, the evolution of specific neurological systems in the brain (d'Aquili, 1979; 1985). The renowned classicist Walter Burkert took up the evolution of the broad and questionable patterns he saw in ritual among both human beings and animals in *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (1996). In the most general biological-evolutionary explanations of morality and religion, such as Frans de Waal's *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (1996) and David Wilson's *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (2002), ritual is an important component for explaining the evolutionary or biological significance of reli-

gion, although in many of these studies ritual is characterized primarily by emotionalism, strict repetition, and illiterate cultural settings. For all of these works, religion is still an "other" to be explained with the proven analytical frameworks of science, or at least something that looks like science.

Rappaport's concluding, nearly apocalyptic, appeal to the role of ritual in the past and future of humankind is, therefore, part of a fairly constant interplay between cultural explanations and natural/scientific ones. During the 1990s the tendency for a popular shift every few years in the winning focus found greater substance in the emergence of "cognitive" theories of religion—and ritual. Cognitive studies are not actually new. A standard textbook on psychology and religion (Wulff, 1997) has three extensive chapters on biological, behavioral, and laboratory-based natural theories of belief and ritual going back a full century. Still, a study of ritual by E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (1990), claimed to be launching a "science of religion" due to the sense of fresh developments in evolutionary psychology and neurobiology. Lawson and McCauley's argument for the existence of certain rules in the performance of ritual generated fresh enthusiasm for explanations as empirical hypotheses that could be tested by others, a scientific process new to religious studies. In *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (2002), they were even bolder, using the tools of an action-representation system to address another specific aspect of ritual, the link between the frequency of a ritual and the degree to which it is marked by elaborate and varied modes of expression. Their science of religion has been accompanied by a provocative line-up of studies espousing a wide array of theses (Andresen, 2001; Atran, 2002; Boyer, 2001; Pyysiäinen, 2001; and Whitehouse, 2000, 2004, among others). While some of these works propose very reductive theories of religion ("apparently pointless behaviors," and "snares for thought" [Boyer, 2001, pp. 262–263]), others are more moderate and nuanced. Cognitive approaches are also attempting to address issues in theology and the psychology of religion by explaining the constraints and the formative impulses in how and why people believe what they believe, or remember what they remember—still ritual is a common and often central concern.

McCauley and Lawson are careful with the language of reductionism. They are apt to speak of an "intuitive knowledge" of a system of ritual that is not dependent on socialization or instruction, suggesting that a type of ritual grammar exists in human beings, much like the innate generative grammar for language proposed by Noam Chomsky in *Syntactic Structures* (1957). As a grammar, a language, or some analogous scheme, a ritual system is seen as a rule-governed expression of an evolutionary adaptive basic competence. For McCauley and Lawson, theirs contributes another model of ritual as communication, but one that builds on the work of cognitive psychology, in contrast to the evolutionary anthropology of Rappaport, where the rules are less amendable

to empirical testing. In their first book, Lawson and McCauley specifically looked at the way in which ritual structures are linked to types of beliefs about the supernatural. They proposed two universal principles: the principle of *superhuman agency* and the principle of *superhuman immediacy.* The first finds that the most central rites are those in which a superhuman being is the active agent, compared to those more peripheral rites in which the god is inactive or passive. The principle of superhuman immediacy argues that the more central rites are less complex, that is, they include fewer "enabling" activities and superhuman agents. These two principles, say Lawson and McCauley, will explain the basic competence of people to produce fitting rituals in their cultural setting and suggest the adaptive function of religion.

Their second book is concerned with the relation between ritual form (the structures generated by their first analysis) and ritual frequency (how seldom or often a ritual is performed). Since rituals motivate participants to recall and re-enact performances, Lawson and McCauley generate a "ritual form hypothesis" to explain the low levels of emotionalism attending frequent rites compared to the high levels of stimulation found in rites that are less often performed. In their analyses, the psychological processes that Lawson and McCauley attempt to uncover do not derive from social or cultural contexts but from cognitive structures, forms, or abilities within the human brain, with the assumption that scholars can imagine precultural forms of cognition. While it is assumed that ritual knowledge confers adaptive social benefits, ritual—as ritual—is not seen as a fundamentally social phenomenon. Among those who turn away from cultural-symbolic explanations of meaning, the Lawson-McCauley theory of cognition attempts to go the furthest in delineating "very general features of religious ritual form [that] are independent of both semantic and cultural contents" (2002, p. 10). Their acultural analysis addresses "religious ritual" tightly defined as the same universal form everywhere (secular rites are never discussed as "ritual"). Whatever cultural content and context might contribute, what makes a set of actions a ritual lies beyond culture: thus, the rules uncovered among the Baktaman of New Guinea, for example, should be valid for religious rituals of the eighteenth-century Chinese court. In effect, and unlike Rappaport, McCauley and Lawson are not drawing on the history of the study of ritual; they are operating among the literature and issues defining the branch of competence theory in the field of neuropsychology. Their ability to contribute to a broader study of ritual cannot be discounted, nor can that of the other cognitive approaches being developed. Yet the primary assumptions, as well as the terminology and style, are difficult for people in religious studies and cultural anthropology. While addressed at some length here, these two works are not the best introduction to the cognitive approach. Jensine Andresen's "Introduction: Towards a Cognitive Science of Religion" (2001) and Ilkka Pyysiäinen's *How Religion Works* (2001) are clearer in tracing the origins of the cognitive model and its relationship to older models of religion.

PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE. The other general approach to ritual works within the assumptions of a fully cultural perspective—namely, that the social and cultural life of a community is responsible for the emergence and style of ritualization, and the category of "ritual" is a historical one as much as it is an analytical one. From a sociocultural perspective, the origin of ritual has not been much addressed since Durkheim led a general abandonment of "origins" arguments. But a naturalistic explanation of the evolutionary origins of ritual could be welcomed by those who avow to be nonscientists—as long as the formidable role of culture is not left out of any aspect of ritualization, even its evolutionary roles or neurological rules. Recent cultural theories have tended to regard ritualization as a fundamentally performative action or practice, rejecting the stress on communication, although Rappaport and others considered ritual as performative communication. Among the many discussions of performance, the notion of practice exerts great influence. Rooted in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Bloch, and Sherry Ortner, practice approaches to ritual are used in the work of Jean Comaroff and Talal Asad, with the most developed theoretical presentation in Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. The starting point for Bell is the notion that ritual might be more accurately approached if it is not classified as some structurally distinct and primal cultural activity; that is, unlike all other ways of acting. Rather, ritual activity should be returned to the context of cultural action in general, as action among actions. Only in the context of many ways of acting—a functional semiological system—can one approach the construction, meaning, and efficacy of ritualized practices. The term *practice*, historically indebted to Karl Marx's notion of *praxis*, simply refers to culturally shaped and shaping activities.

For many of the great theoreticians of religion, there was no question that ritual possessed a distinctive identifying structure. The dominant models of ritual in the twentieth century, such as those of Arnold van Gennep, Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, Turner, and Geertz, understood ritual as a fundamentally different sort of social event. Just as Durkheim described the distinction between the sacred and profane as starkly clear, these models assume that ritual—as a symbolic (non-instrumental) mode of acting, directed toward what is sacred—by definition must differ completely from profane modes of acting. In making this argument theorists needed to name the something extra or different that is found in rituals, such as traffic with supernatural beings, awe of the *mysterium tremendum*, or a specific structuring of social symbols and symbolic stages of experience. For example, Turner saw ritual in terms of a distinctive pattern of "structure" and "*communitas*," while Geertz saw a characteristic harmonization of the symbolic references that make up a social arrangement (ethos) and a sacred cosmology (worldview). The many adoptions and adaptations of the Turner and Geertz models to interpret an ever elastic set of activities have shown how impossible it may be to define ritual as a clear category. Some theorists have been logically drawn into the enterprise of constructing typologies in order to deal with those rites that had a "fuzzier" nature; they wrestle with taxonomies to distinguish liturgy from rite from ceremony from ceremonial, and, naturally, religious ritual from secular and civic ritual. The impulse to see ritual as a very distinct form of action is, according to Bell (1992), a position that replicates a fundamental dichotomy between thought and action, and eventuates in an overly structured discourse that strongly defines scholars as those who are not ritual actors, the observed and the analyzed.

Bell's approach builds on (1) the notion of practice, (2) the dynamics of the so-called ritual body, and (3) ultimately, the arrangements of power that make ritualization the culturally effective thing to do. Drawing in part on Bourdieu (1977), Bell suggests four basic features of cultural practice or activity in general. First, practice is situational, with a contingency that eludes any attempt to grasp its objective meaning, thus evoking Edward Said's description of the "endless deferral of meaning." Second, practices are strategic (i.e., exploitative or expedient), with an instrumental logic that remains as implicit and improvisational as possible. Third, practices misrecognize their own dynamics; generally focusing only on their goal, they do not see how their activity towards it shifts the nature of the goal and the whole landscape of action to attain it. Finally, practices are guided by the need to act as much as possible within an interpretation of domination and subordination that provides all involved with a measure of empowerment, however modest or even illusionary—a concept dubbed "redemptive hegemony" (Bell, 1992, pp. 81–85). As cultural practice, ritual activity will be all these things; it will share these features with other activities, such as cooking a meal, though some features will be more stressed than others. Ritual is not an intrinsically special way of acting, but it is a distinct orchestration of activities: the commonality of ritualization with other actions allows a better focus on what is distinctive about the choices involved in it. In terms of this commonality, ritualization should be analyzed in context of its situational strategies and misrecognitions, which create a form of redemptive hegemony able to exercise some dominance over other activities in the world.

According to Bell, the distinctive significance of ritualization starts in the type of contrast it generates with other actions. Acting ritually appears to establish, in the very manner in which the activity is performed, a "privileged distinction" between it and other implicated actions: "acting ritually is first and foremost a matter of nuanced contrasts and the evocation of strategic, value-laden distinctions" (1992, p. 90). Bell's suggestion that ritualization seeks to establish a privileged differentiation means that a Sunday service is not a ritual by virtue of an intrinsic structure it alone possesses, but by virtue of the way its activities stress contrasts with other activities that make the ritualized acts special (people dress up for Sunday service, gather in a large room according to a what is understood as a tradition, sing an order of songs,

address God in prayer through a minister's leadership—in contrast to their daily dress-down routines, infrequent gatherings, individual prayer, and self-determination, etc.). Through an action's creation of this type of privileged distinction, "ritual is always contingent, provisional, and defined by difference" (1992, p. 91). Therefore, formalism or repetition or traditionalism are not intrinsic qualities of ritual practices, but common strategies for producing acts that can dominate their context in important and useful ways. On this basis, a universal characterization of ritualization may be impossible; it may be describable only in general terms since even the most widespread strategies could mean different things in different cultural contexts. Bell's "theory" of ritual, therefore, is an experiment in backing away from all the universal qualities usually assigned to ritual to make it an a priori event structured similarly in Madras and Manhattan.

Yet the privileged opposition at the base of ritualized practices is only part of what goes on in ritualizing. Another distinct feature for Bell is the way in which ritual strategies of action are rooted in the individual, socialized body: "the interaction of the social body with a symbolically constituted spatial and temporal environment" is a circular process by which the body shapes the space that shapes the body. The socialized body misrecognizes this shaping: it does not see itself shaping its environment so much as reacting to an order or pre-existing arrangement of forces. Nonetheless, as bodies (with minds and voices, not just limbs and gestures, etc.) absorb the logic of spaces and temporal events, they then project these structural schemes, reproducing liturgical arrangements out of their own "sense" of the fitness of things. This process of embodiment and projection produces, and is indicative of a "ritualized body," a body that can naturally produce ritualized schemes. Even outside the ritual arena, the ritualized body will exercise quiet ways of reinterpreting (thereby dominating) social circumstances based on the dense, flexible logic of schemes learned in the rite. This theory of the "ritual mastery" of the socialized body draws upon Marcel Mauss's analysis of the "*technique de la corps*" (1935), as well as to Bourdieu's innovative re-description of Mauss's notion of "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977). For Bell, the goal of ritualizing activity is always the production of a ritualized and ritualizing agent who acts beyond the rite, while the situation in which this particular set of circular misrecognitions is played out is one in which the participants are seeking a particular organization of domination and power, that is as emanating more or less directly from sources deemed beyond the human community but still subject to some channeling or control or intercession.

The contextualization of ritual as cultural practice opens up new dimensions of analysis. For example, the theorist can ask why ritual is chosen as the most efficacious way of acting in a situation? What types of power are defined for all involved? What is the difference for a community between ad hoc ritualizing and a "tradition" of ritual forms controlled by whom? The choice to use ritualized practices to act on the world can lend a peculiar efficacy to action, an efficacy that has everything to do with ritual's own qualities of misrecognition and its redemptive sense of empowerment. It might also lend a particular retreat to a situation by defining the problem and solution in terms that leave the dispensation of power outside of the community. This practice theory of ritual has proven to be usefully elastic for a number of fields and disciplines, especially the interpretation of so-called secular rituals and the emergence of new ritualizing, neither addressed by preceding theories.

The anthropologists Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw propose a different theory of ritual as action. They see ritualization as the distinctive way in which any action may be performed, but they suggest that ritualized activities will always differ clearly from routine actions for a cultural community. First, ritualization is "a qualitative departure from the normal intentional character" mobilized for any action (1994, p. 89). Second, ritual actions are always stipulated in advance, already formed, ready to do, or prescribed. Hence, the intentions of the actor make no difference to what the actions are or how they are done. This is, in part, a way of dealing with the ritual tradition as something that is given yet also freshly exercised. These ritual precedents, which Humphrey and Laidlaw call "archetypal," have no intrinsic meaning for the ritual actors or the participants. People are free to assign meanings and argue about the rites in broad or detailed terms, which they certainly do. A third and crucial point for Humphrey and Laidlaw is that these rites are perceived as external, elemental, or object-like entities. As such they appear to exact a type of fundamental acquiescence to the facticity of one's social world. In their extended analysis, liturgies or "liturgy-centered rites" can be seen as characteristically ritualized, while more performance-centered rites are only weakly ritualized, leaving more to the actors to determine.

Humphrey and Laidlaw's theory of ritualizing action is particularly concerned with challenging the assumption in anthropology that ritual is a paradigmatic form of cultural communication with discursive meaning for all involved. Bell rejects any suggestion that ritual is universal, and she is hesitant even to grant universality to any particular strategy of ritualization, such as formalism. Similarly, Humphrey and Laidlaw argue that since cultural attitudes toward ritualization are inseparable from it, ritual can never be the same across cultures, but ritualization as they define it remains a universally available form of action. This contrasts strongly with Bell's move away from universalism and power of tradition.

Performance theory invokes the emphases on communication and performance that have characterized so much theorizing about ritual, while identifying a spectrum of ritualized gestures and acts (Bell, 1998). At one end of a spectrum, some theorists emphasize the performative aspects of ritualization, in contrast to theorists in theater studies, for example, who explore the ritualized dimensions of performance.

Some analyze performance as communication, while others approach performance theory as liberation from communication models. Pushing out from all of these positions, the focus on performance has opened up many avenues of inquiry. For example, it highlights ritual as a multisensory experience of sights, sounds, flavors, and smells, as well as a physical language of gestures and embodiment (Sullivan, 1986; Schechner, 1985). Performance approaches also generate analysis of the ways in which ritual is a matter of "frames" and what framing accomplishes interactively between actor and audience (Bateson, 1955; Goffman, 1974; Handelman, 1990). While some scholars point to an underlying notion of "illusion" in the language of performance, this is challenged by those who articulate both ritual and performance as central to the social construction of reality (Schieffelin, 1985). As evidence of its synthetic tendencies, a view of ritual as performance will foreground the limits on, and yet necessity for, inventive spontaneity suited to the moment, in addition to time-honored classical models that provide a larger sense of context and identity (Hughes-Freeland, 1998). A number of anthropological studies of performance attempt to chart the social and cultural ramifications of transitions from a local traditional rite to a more tourist-oriented performance, certainly a very common development in the last century. Finally, performance theorists have been particularly alert to the importance of a culture's own approach to performing, letting cultural specificity dominate theoretical categories (Laderman and Roseman, 1996). Still, the implied question of universal aspects to ritual and performance, even when answered in the negative, often underlies the issues brought to the study of "ritual performance."

The popular theories of Georges Bataille (1973) and René Girard (1986) forge distinctive routes through the issues of culture, nature, communication, and practice to express themes that have been consistent threads throughout the twentieth-century's study of religion. Bataille and Girard are regularly cited for their distinctive analyses of sacrifice, with both using approaches that are vaguely psychoanalytic in a Freudian way and loosely ahistorical in a Eliadian way, focusing on primal emotional conflicts that endure, they argue, in ritual today. For both theorists, sacrifice is the origin of religion (and much else) and the preeminent form of ritual in general. For Bataille, ritual is born of desire and destruction; for Girard, ritual is mimetic desire (envious imitation) and violence. Within an encompassing theory of religion, Bataille argues that the sacrificial destruction of an animal transforms it from an external object in the world of things into something more intimate and immanent to human beings: a part of the divine world. The sacrificer negates the profane order of reality for the priority of the mythical or sacred order, yet, paradoxically, each order exists in order to neutralize the other (as Bataille acknowledges). Sacrificial killing is an act of destructive consumption (in contrast to the productivity of profane reality) in which the transformation of the separate, objective life of the animal is, mysteriously, the transformation of the separate identity and reality of the individuals involved in the act. In the death and consumption of the animal, human beings experience a transgression of the bounds of life and death. While Girard laments the heavy moral demands of sacrifice, Bataille argues that the cruelty and anguish of sacrificial killing are essential in opening the only route to transcendence.

Bemoaning the failure of religious anthropology to solve "the mystery of ritual," Girard lays out a theory that roots all ritual forms in primitive, or primal, sacrifice. Convinced that primitive societies are "obsessed" with mimetic rivalry, in which one person desires that which another has, Girard casts ritual as a "theatrical reenactment" of the social crisis that results from such rivalry, a destructive paroxysm in which the group can purify itself by killing a victim, a scapegoat. The purpose of ritual, therefore, is collective reconciliation and reordering—a Frazerian process of regeneration (Girard, 1996, pp. 10–14)—via the shared act of violence. It is not so hard to understand why Bataille is regularly cited, although not usually in formal studies of ritual, since his explanation is so close to Christian theology despite his insistence on outsider status. It is more curious that Girard's bleak reductionism has been found so provocative to many, although its attractions are undoubtedly a version of the theological as well— if only the atheology of Sigmund Freud himself, who tried to account for religion by collapsing history into the psyche, with religion as the necessary illusion that keeps us more or less content in a civilization constructed on the sacrificial killing of the father.

NEW DIRECTIONS. In the words of one theorist, the interaction of the concepts of ritual, practice, and performance has generated a "rapidly changing intellectual geography" (Hughes-Freeland, 1998, p. 2); certainly none of the preceding approaches will keep their current shape for long. The study of ritual practices will undoubtedly continue to pursue several directions of inquiry, perhaps with lopsided influences on each other. Cultural-practice theories are proving amenable to further refinement and wide application. The various arguments of cognitive science may not be unraveling that many ritual milieus, but so far they have generated suggestive ideas and drawn much attention in a post-postmodern milieu. The assumption that cognitive universals underlie the panoply of culture reintroduces an old position, of course, but with fresh enthusiasm for scientific forms of evidence and the mysteries of adaptive evolution (Pyysiäinen, 2001). For decades the study of religion was mapped in terms of the poles of *eklaren* (explanation) and *verstehen* (interpretation); and again we hear the cry for a truly scientific explanation and a rejection of vague cultural interpretation. Yet for students and readers of Eliade, it is hard to read the introductory chapters to this new scientific literature without thinking of the grand comparative-religion project of the twentieth century. With a sentence that could have come from Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958), one proponent of the new cognitive science writes that "there are quite obviously recurrent patterns of religious phenomena across cultures, and it is these patterns that form the ob-

ject of the study of religion" (Pyysiäinen,, 2001). Eliade's morphology of the forms of religious symbolism, with its semi-scientific intentions of collection and analysis, capped a century of what was understood to be the scientific study of religion. Eliade eventually reached out to be more than scientific, in part because science was having such a hard time actually comprehending religion. As in the anthropological and psychological sciences, interpretation became a rich and complex method, as well as an object of study itself.

In a summary of recent studies of ritual, the sociologist Robert Bellah asserts that ritual is the basic social event and "the most fundamental category for the understanding of social action" (Bellah, 2003, p. 32). He then traces the evidence for its emergence in this role and its evolutionary contributions in the transition from primates to humans, raising interesting questions about ritual's relationship with language and music. Bellah is strongly committed to maintaining "general terms in the social sciences"—although they warrant a "healthy skepticism" since they are "of recent and Western origin." Still he argues, there is no need to doubt that they "refer to real features of the real world" (p. 44). Bellah is specifically responding to Bell's suggested doubt that the category of ritual refers to a real, universally distinct phenomenon. Thus, even as culturally oriented a sociologist as Bellah finds it impossible to adopt a perspective that he undoubtedly sees as the continued nihilism of postmodernism. He also turns to various discussions of the evolutionary roots of ritual with their promises of real evidence.

Cognitive approaches to ritual might be most valuable if they were to find a clear, realistic place for cultural analysis. Practice theories of ritual, for their part, need to continue to demonstrate greater ethnographic utility, not merely in the broad outlines. Surely the nature versus nurture debate is foolishly conceived, and we will inevitably find that these two extreme categories refer to realities that are harder to differentiate. In the end it is not surprising that ritual studies is the site of such different approaches; it has always been a area for cross-disciplinary exchange, and it undoubtedly will continue to be that.

Future theories of ritual may address some of the evidence for how people are actually ritualizing today. Around the globe, several major changes in ritual practices are occurring. First of all, the loss of undisturbed tribal cultures is certainly complete, so the rites of tribal peoples today must be understood to represent incredibly complex cultural interactions, dominations, and inversions. Second, the twentieth century saw the conversion of many peoples of the world to Islam and Christianity, both of which invite forms of nationalism and transnationalism not possible among earlier cultural differences. Third, the evangelical movement in the United States, perhaps another great awakening, may be again emptying the mainstream churches and filling up the so-called mega-churches with their distinctive style of worship and their openness to immigrant populations. Fourth, the sense of a personal spirituality that does not require affiliation or clear doctrines, or more than minimal ad hoc rituals, cannot continue to be dismissed as New Age-ism; while people of this persuasion have been active consumers of books and paraphernalia on how to ritualize the main events of their lives, the language of an unaffiliated spirituality is now quite pervasive (Grimes, 2000). Together, all of these developments do not predict any greater coherence and unity in ritual studies than we have seen up to this point. Following the words of the cognitive theorist Ilkka Pyysiäinen, perhaps a theory of ritual is unreasonable, but we can have theories about ritual (2001, p. viii). For religious studies in general, the mid-century move from Biblical sources about ritual, with their particular focus on sacrifice, to more anthropological ones, makes religious studies a player alongside the other social disciplines. So, within the field of religion, ritual studies inevitably struggles to identify its peculiar contribution, which is less likely to be a special position or method as a stubborn refusal to reduce—in analysis or in significance—so-called religious phenomenon into fully other (that is, non-religious, un-holy) components or conclusions.

SEE ALSO Ritual Studies.

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For an overview of theoretical interpretations, the many types of rituals identified, and the roles ritual plays in social life, see Bell's *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions.* It is usefully supplemented by Humphrey and Laidlaw, *The Archetypical Actions of Ritual*, which develops an extensive example in Jain ritual. McCauley and Lawson's *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, from two major scholars, is not the easiest introduction to cognitive analysis of ritual per se, but it is the most complete. One could also start with the articles by McCauley and Lawson in Andresen's *Religion in Mind*. Rappaport's *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, the other major work since the mid-1980s, is also not a simple study, but Lambek's *Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* excerpts a credible selection. Bial's *The Performance Studies Reader* assembles a thorough collection of the major theoretical sources for a performance perspective on ritual.

CATHERINE M. BELL (2005)

RITUAL STUDIES

RITUAL STUDIES as a field of inquiry began with a research group established in 1977 by the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the international society of religious studies scholars. A decade later Ronald L. Grimes and Fred W. Clothey cofounded the *Journal of Ritual Studies.* Ritual