

Dynamics and Stability: Potentiality, Bipolarity, Metastability

Some Theoretical Perspectives on the Conceptualization of Dynamics and Stability in the Study of Religion

Scholarly paradigms and theories are [...] as dynamic as their objects [...]

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1 Introduction: Dynamics and the Dynamic Scholar

The Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) ‘Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’ was established to explore an understudied and, in fact, rather underestimated perspective in the study of religions. Its title indicates an ambitious enterprise, as it combines five difficult notions. Jonathan Z. Smith, for instance, “cannot think of two more difficult terms than ‘history’ and ‘religion.’”¹ However, there is more. The emergence, formation, and establishment as well as the stabilization and possible decline of religious tradition are, according to this underestimated perspective, a matter and a result of certain processes of contact between traditions that may already be considered religions or which may only later emerge as such. Thus, religions are studied in terms of a dynamic aspect that, accordingly, appears prominently as the first word in the title of this scholarly endeavor.

There is an ambiguity with the title of ‘Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe’ that is worth mentioning here at the outset. In English, the notion of dynamics is a *plurale tantum*. Accordingly, the ambiguity refers to the question of whether to understand the notion of dynamics in the singular or in the plural sense that is, whether research is to be conducted

1 Jonathan Z. Smith, “In Comparison Magic Dwells,” in *Imagining Religion. From Babylon to Jamestown* (Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 1982), 20.

on the (prime) movement of the history of religion in general or rather, if there are many different kinds of dynamics that can be discerned within the history of religions. The German title of the КНК, *Dynamiken der Religionsgeschichte zwischen Asien und Europa*, thus, clarifies the ambiguity in favor of the second possibility. This is, after all, very much in line with the well-established suspicion in which general ideas are held in the current scholarly discourse in the field of religious studies. The diversity of subjects contained within such a large area of research suggests a diversity of dynamics related to the history in question. The pluralistic stance is, nevertheless, somehow juxtaposed with unity in the title itself, for there is, however, both in the German and in the English title of the КНК, still a tendency towards a greater unification, not least in the sense that is not about the religious *histories* (*Religionsgeschichten*) that take place in its geographical scope, but rather about *the history* (*die Religionsgeschichte*) of religion as a whole. Accordingly, to some scholars, not least in the КНК itself, the question of whether the diverse possible dynamics in play here might follow a common pattern is worth following. Otherwise, might it be possible to build a notion of dynamics that is particular for Eurasian religious history or even the history of religion—if not for the phenomenon of religion as such? It is, perhaps, the particularity of its dynamics that makes religion distinct from other social phenomena.

The notion of dynamics alone, however, cannot claim any outstanding innovativeness. Within the history of the study of religion, the notion was even in danger of being considered utterly discarded in general scholarship, thanks to the influence of Robert Ranulph Marett's theory of 'dynamism'.² In the work of Marett and associated thinkers, dynamics are closely connected to the notion of power. A belief in (pre-)animate power is held to be a precursor of the belief in gods, and, thus, the experience of religion is held to be based on an emotional crisis of humiliation due to the 'power of awfulness' as being awe-inspiring.³ The connection between dynamics and power which originated in studies of the Grecian context remains highly influential in the current usage of the notion. Nonetheless, given the cautiousness of scholarship in religious studies vis-à-vis the earlier concepts, one might have expected that the concept would have been latterly expunged from scholarly discourse. However, on the contrary, the notion remains common, if notorious, in the field. Any approach that claims relevance in the field claims to account for the dynamism of its object of study. Moreover, if the object of study is held to be 'dynamic', this also

2 On Marett see Martin Riesebrodt, "Robert Ranulph Marett (1866–1943)," in *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Axel Michaels (München: Beck, 2004).

3 See Riesebrodt, "Robert Ranulph Marett," 181.

renders the process of research a dynamic enterprise—as opposed to more ‘conservative’ approaches focusing on stable or even unchangeable essential aspects of the objects.⁴ As Thomas Tweed put it: “[S]cholars, like transnational migrants, are constantly moving across.”⁵ The mobility of the scholar examining a dynamic subject should easily morph into mental agility concerning social/political movement. The dynamism of the object, thus, neatly corresponds to the progressiveness of both the scholarly approach and, last but not least, the scholar who practically applies such an approach.⁶ Characterizing the supposedly new and innovative, if not revolutionary, approach in scholarship that his book claims to be part of, David Chidester’s enthusiasm in the introduction to *Religion: Material Dynamics*, published in 2018, verges on the panegyric:

The book participates in the revolution that has liberated materiality—embodiment and the senses, objects and their social lives, exchange, and power relations, media and mediation, and all the forces and fluctuations in the production, circulation, and consumption of things—as the stuff of religion that demands the attention of the study of religion. [...] Indicating a remarkable multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary

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- 4 Take for instance the following article: Heidi A. Campbell, “The Dynamic Future of Digital Religious Studies,” in *Stepping Back and Looking Ahead: Twelve Years of Studying Religious Contact at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg Bochum*, eds. Maren Freudenberg, Frederik Elwert, Tim Karis, Martin Radermacher, and Jens Schlamelcher. DHR 13 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023). Krech and Nagel, however, remind us of the fact that it was the social sciences in particular which, following Marx’s verdict, tended to treat religion as the epitome of the static, associating any dynamics linked to religion only with trends toward the abolition of religion, such as secularization and privatization, see Volkhard Krech and Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, “Religion in Bewegung. Semantische und strukturelle Aspekte religiöser Dynamik,” in *Theoretische Ansätze und Konzepte in der Forschung über soziale Bewegungen in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, eds. Helke Stadtland and Jürgen Mittag (Essen: Klartext, 2014), 423.
- 5 Thomas A. Tweed, “On Moving Across: Translocative Religion and the Interpreter’s Position,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70 (2002), 253. Tweed continues: “Scholars continually move back and forth between inside and outside, fact and value, evidence and narrative, the living and the dead, here and there, us and them.”
- 6 See for example Manuel Vásquez’ emphatic self-description regarding the problem of ‘textualism’ in his ‘materialist theory of religion’: “Standing [sic!] with Marx, I also emphasize the dynamic nature of praxis against the contemplative and ‘poetic’ (in the Aristotelian sense) force of textualism [...] Text should not be treated as ‘fetishes’, acting independently of the practices by which we produce, circulate, consume, and authorize them.” Manuel A. Vásquez, *More than Belief. A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 232. Therefore, the notion of dynamics becomes some kind of universal remedy. Stressing the dynamic nature of things, thus, also might serve as an antidote to the danger of—by studying religious phenomena—acting religiously (in using the object as a ‘fetish’).

enterprise [...] this grounded and dynamic range of inquiry creates openings in religious studies through the study of religious materiality.⁷

However, the omnipresence and persistent acclaim for the notion of dynamics in current scholarship seems to express a self-evidence that relieves its users from defining it or, at least, explaining what is meant by dynamics in their studies. ‘Religion’ and ‘history’, following Smith, are commonly accepted as being difficult notions, leading to endless struggles about their ‘correct’ usage; ‘dynamics’, in contrast, is not even that. To consider something as ‘dynamic’ does not seem to require justification. It is conspicuous how little time and space is spent in scholarly publications on one of the, if not *the*, most basic notion. Thus far, ‘dynamics’ has been used as a key to unlock a supposedly new and better perspective on things, but it is not yet used as a concept. It goes without saying that except for some slightly unsatisfying lists of associated terms,⁸ the reader does not find a definition or even a reflection on the notion of dynamics in Chidester’s supposedly ‘dynamic’ book. The notion is not even considered worthy of an appearance in the otherwise extensive index.⁹

Therefore, the first question to be examined is what is possibly meant by the concept of dynamics when used in the study of religion? If little attention is given to that, as is the case too often, the question inevitably arises of what kind of model of thought this presumably self-evident use of the notion implies. The ever-present possibility, however, of simply abolishing the notion does not seem viable. ‘Dynamics’ does indeed cover an important aspect of the way the object of study should be conceptualized. The lack of reflection turns out to be a neglected problem of a discipline that surely cannot be accused of being too lax and uncaring in its focus on self-reflection and self-control when it comes to applying notions and concepts that evolved in another context. Given this, it seems a far more interesting task to examine what notions the scholar of religious studies actually *maintains* and for what reasons rather than contemplating which notions are to be abolished.

If anything, the notion of dynamics is not only the product of another field of thinking but also a key concept in a different discipline, namely, the natural

7 David Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics* (Oakland: University of California Press 2018), 2.

8 “[O]ur exploration [...] has been [...] about dynamics—power, energy, force and motion [...]” Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 206.

9 To the concerned reader, it somehow comes as a relief, then, that Chidester cheerfully admits that his book titled ‘Religion’ is not about religion at all: “Studying religion, in this sense, focuses attention, not on religion, but on the material conditions of possibility for negotiating the human.” Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 3.

sciences and, above all, physics. Modeling a key notion of research on the example of another field, especially in the case of modeling notions to be used in the Humanities after notions used in natural sciences, provides both bold possibilities to be exploited and serious constraints to be taken into careful consideration. In the following, I aim to scrutinize a useful notion of dynamics that helps to gain a better picture of what is going on in the field of religion, that is, a notion that is more than a sign of goodwill towards the phenomena (or the academic community guarding these phenomena) or the expression of the scholar's self-acclaim as being innovative, dynamic and progressive, such as to be found in Chidester's book: "[T]he future is already present in the material study of religion."¹⁰

2 'Dynamics' in the Study of Religion

I take my starting point from two seminal texts of reference that were repeatedly discussed in the meetings of the КНК, namely Thomas Tweed's monograph *Crossing and Dwelling. A Theory of Religion*¹¹ (2006) and Manuel A. Vásquez' article *Studying Religion in Motion* (2008).¹² In both texts, the notion of dynamics is of considerable conspicuousness. With regard to contemporary scholarship, the inclusion of the notion of dynamics (and, opposing it, stability) into the number of key concepts of the study of religion, thus, seems to be well justified.

Now, if the notion is thus prominent, is it correspondingly concise? Not in terms of content, anyway. Reading Tweed and Vasquez, however, the impression is given that the notion of dynamics is once again some kind of operative signal for the author's good intention to provide something new for the audience, in contrast to the old 'static' teachings on both theorists and theorized.¹³

10 Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 12. See Břetislav Horyna, *Kritik der religionswissenschaftlichen Vernunft. Plädoyer für eine empirisch fundierte Theorie und Methode* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 149: "Wer nicht kreativ, flexibel, dynamisch und innovativ ist, den gibt es eigentlich nicht, und es spielt keine Rolle, ob es sich dabei um eine Hausfrau, einen Wissenschaftler oder den Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten handelt."

11 Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling. A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

12 Manuel A. Vásquez, "Studying Religions in Motion: A Network Approach," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008), 151–184.

13 It is the material turn in particular that forces its matadors to cleanse themselves of any suspicion that they are dealing with static phenomena, such as objects conveying fixed meaning. The turn to objects and the dynamic approach must be reconciled. See David Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the study of religions," in *Religion and*

Tweed, for instance, claims: “But my understanding of theory departs from all five types since I reject a presupposition they all share, even the constructivists’ theory building and the critical theorists’ power analysis—that the theorist and the theorized are static.”¹⁴ “All religions are mobile” states Vásquez apodictically, and furthermore, claims that “it is a modern prejudice to see religion as essentially static.”¹⁵ Religious life, as Tweed points out, “is about movement although most theories offer little help in talking about religion’s dynamics.”¹⁶ This is all the more lamentable for, as Vásquez puts it: “If we accept that religion is as dynamic as any other realm of human activity, then, the task is to evaluate the types, rates, genealogies, causes and vectors of that mobility.”¹⁷ Tweed’s definition of religion entirely relies on the dynamic aspect, prioritizing aquatic metaphors: “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”¹⁸ Not without reason, Chidester claims that “the study of religion has become the study of flows, the study of religion in motion through the circulations of people, objects, technology, money, images of human possibility, and ideals of human solidarity.”¹⁹ So, we have a hydrodynamics of religion.²⁰ The hydro-part of this is neatly illustrated by means of metaphorical reference, but what about the dynamic part of that notion?

Material Culture. The Matter of Belief, ed. David Morgan (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 68: “Time and action, performance and practice make the study of material culture much more dynamic, stressing both the changes in objects over time, their own biographies, and the role that placement, use, and reception each play in understanding what an object does. It is material practice that becomes the actual focus point of the study. Objects and spaces are not static, with abstract meanings encoded within them. Indeed, their ‘meanings’ are often not singular or intellectual meanings at all, but rather the stories of their travels through time.”

14 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 8.

15 Vásquez, “Studying Religions in Motion,” 157. Compare Janico Albrecht, Christopher Degelmann, Valentino Gasparini, Richard Gordon, Maik Patzelt, Georgia Petridou, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke, Benjamin Sippel, Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli, and Lara Weiss, “Religion in the making: the Lived Ancient Religion approach,” *Religion* 48 (2018), 586–587: “In our view, what are usually represented as static (or even crisis-ridden) ensembles of religious symbols, beliefs and practices are better understood as complex dynamic processes, as the interaction between historical agents and their changing material and spatial environments. In a word, religion is to be viewed as ever in the making.”

16 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 5.

17 Vásquez, “Studying Religions in Motion,” 157.

18 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 54.

19 Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 8.

20 Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 291.

That most theories offer little help here in evaluating the types, rates, genealogies, causes, and vectors of that mobility is quite true, mainly for the following reasons. First, there is something Tweed, Vásquez, and Chidester have in common, not only with regard to each other but with most approaches that put the notion of dynamics into a central position in the study of religion. All of them lack an explanation of the notion of dynamics as such. A common understanding of the notion is, therefore, somehow taken for granted: religion is mobile and moving. Accordingly, as a second point: the impression that the notion of dynamics is merely used as a political sign. By emphatically referring to it, an author proves that he is on the politically correct side of theory-building, standing out against static, essentialist, and, therefore, orientalist forms of theorizing ‘over the heads of the phenomena’.

Tweed’s and Vásquez’s attitudes, though their basic conceptual approaches are more sophisticated than others, are by no means unusual for the use of the notion of dynamics, especially in religious studies and the theoretical reflection on it.²¹ The integration of the concept into an overarching conceptual scheme does not prevent us from failing to grasp its foundational importance. Another characteristic of Tweed’s theory is that to him, dynamics is only one of three other basic characteristics, the other ones being ‘relation’ and ‘position.’²² Vásquez proposes the alternative trinity of fluidity, connectivity, and complexity.²³ Although Vásquez considers it a correction of the shortcomings of Tweed’s theory, it is a mere reformulation.²⁴ In both approaches, I find

21 See Sven Bretfeld’s description of the state of affairs in cultural and religious studies: “Das Wort ‘Dynamik’ hat sich in jüngerer Zeit zu einem zentralen Begriff kulturwissenschaftlicher Forschung entwickelt. In einer sich immer schneller globalisierenden Welt, in der das Verschmelzen von Kulturen zur Alltagsrealität gehört, gleichzeitig aber kulturelle, politische und religiöse Grenzziehungen immer stärker die öffentliche Diskussion bestimmen, wird das Aufbrechen ideologischer Konstruktionen voneinander getrennter Kulturböcke zum wissenschaftlichen Paradigma und zur politischen Anforderung. [...] Stichworte wie Dynamik, Fluss und Netzwerk sowie Attribute mit den Präfixen trans- und cross- prägen einen Gutteil der religionsgeschichtlichen Forschung. Ausgangspunkt ist dabei die Prämisse, dass Religionen nicht als übergeschichtliche Entitäten zu fassen sind, sondern sich permanent verändern, neu lokalisieren und dabei stets neue Wechselbeziehungen eingehen.” Sven Bretfeld, “Dynamiken der Religionsgeschichte: Lokale und translokale Verflechtungen,” in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 423.

22 See Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 6–7.

23 Vásquez, “Studying Religions in Motion,” 153.

24 In his monograph *More than Belief* Vásquez offers scholars of the study of religion an approach which, as he puts it, “for the lack of a better term, I will call ‘structured and structuring dynamism.’ This approach provides a different, possibly complementary, angle to Tweed’s theory of religions in motion [...] without falling into the radical anti-structuralism implicit in flow metaphors.” Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 310.

that this theoretical position of dynamics is, in fact, a twofold reduction of the notion: *firstly*, in limiting dynamics to movement, and *secondly*, in reducing dynamics to a mere aspect of a threefold complex. To me, the three concepts both authors propose can only be explained by recourse to a further, to an unlimited notion of dynamics.

Last but not least, it seems to be severely reductionist to examine only the dynamics of *religion* in the singular without taking the dynamics of *religions* in the plural into account—their mutual influences, interrelations, and interplays. ‘Studying *religion* in motion’ or developing ‘a theory of *religion*’, thus, is most likely to neglect a fundamental feature in the history of religions and, by neglecting it, the examination of the emergence, formation, and persistence of the religious field in general. The dynamics of religion are not least characterized by the dynamics of *contact* that occurs between religious traditions.

Their criticism of the earlier scholarship of religious studies notwithstanding, basic features of the dynamics of religions were well-known about fifty years before Tweed and Vásquez, and some of them were even known better.²⁵ Though harshly and justifiably criticized in other parts of his thinking about religion,²⁶ phenomenologist Gerardus van der Leeuw has already put himself in favor of a dynamic interpretation of religion that takes the interplay with other religions explicitly into account:

Auch die Religionen mit ausgesprochen eigenem Charakter stehen nicht für sich abgesondert da. Sie sind keine in sich geschlossenen Systeme, sondern lebendige, wachsende und absterbende Wesen, die nur in einer fortwährenden Wechselwirkung mit anderen Religionen bestehen können. Wir nennen *dies* die Dynamik der Religion [...].²⁷

25 Though, as Harvey Whitehouse so beautifully and gruesomely put it “most humanities disciplines have their traitors’ gates festooned with the heads of currently discredited ancestors” (Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity. A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2004), 171), there may be still some faithful Falada (as in Grimm’s Fairy Tales) among those heads who is able to give—at least at some point in time and in certain matters—some good advice.

26 Vásquez’ own critique on van der Leeuw’s phenomenology of religion characterizes his thinking as “beset with a dismissal of context, embodiment, and material” and, moreover, willfully embracing the essentialist trap and, thus, paving the way for Mircea Eliade. Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 99.

27 “Even those religions that have a pronounced distinct character of their own are no solitaires. They are no closed-up systems, but rather living, growing and declining beings that can only last in constant interaction with other religions. We call *this* the dynamics of religion [...]” (my emphasis). Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), 208.

It is the prolific and distinct religious traditions that emerge *from* the interaction of, that form in the interaction *with*, and that maintain *in contrast to* other religious traditions. The stability of a religion is related to, and even dependent on, the dynamic interplay with other religions. Of course, van der Leeuw's description has constraints of its own. Whether religions really can be fruitfully described as living beings with a particular physiognomy, *Gestalt*, or as characters sharing the circle of life is a matter of doubt.²⁸ More important here are the formal elements used to describe religion. Any religion, van der Leeuw insists, is never self-contained but rather the result of an interchange with other religions that, in turn, are elements from other processes of interchange.²⁹ The comparison of religions to living beings might seem less questionable if the essential relation of a living being to its environment is taken into consideration. Religions, accordingly, cannot be neatly separated from their environment. Movement, above all the movement of growing and declining, is both moving and being moved. Any historical religion is not one but rather many religions.³⁰ Accordingly, any historical religion consists of many religions that may, nevertheless, for the sake of demarcation, well develop an ostensive character of their own. For van der Leeuw it is important to underline that religions that become self-conscious—perhaps via the challenge of another religion—are inherently reformatory (“Auch die Reformation ist jeder bewußten Religion inherent”),³¹ thus reacting to and adapting themselves to the influences of the environment. Though the use of the notion of ‘reformation’ in this context may be criticized as evidence of a Protestant bias,

28 See van der Leeuw's earlier description in his phenomenological *opus magnum*: “Eine historische Religion ist eine Gestalt, ein Organismus. Aber ihre Züge sind keine festen, starren, sie sind in fortwährender Begegnung; sie sind nicht gemacht, sondern gewachsen, und sie wachsen immer weiter.” Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1956), 689.

29 “[...] die universale Erscheinung, daß eine Religion nirgendwo für sich selbst besteht, sondern immer das Ergebnis einer Vermischung mit anderen Religionen ist und ihrerseits wieder zu neuer Vermischung führt.” Van der Leeuw, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 208.

30 “Jede historische Religion ist nicht eine, sondern mehrere; natürlich nicht in der Weise, daß sie die Summe verschiedener Gestalten wäre, sondern in der Weise, daß verschiedene Gestalten in ihre Gestalt hinein-, und zu dieser Gestalt zusammengewachsen sind. Das gilt nun von den großen, sog. Weltreligionen in ganz besonderem Maße.” Van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 692.

31 Van der Leeuw, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 210. Compare van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 698: “Jede Religion ist immerfort *reformanda*, trotzdem sie auch immer schon *reformata* ist. Die Dynamik des Lebens macht, daß die Religion ihre Gestalt immer ändert; solange sie lebt, wird sie reformiert.”

the basic characteristic of the dynamic of *religion* as a dynamic of *religions* is clearly highlighted in van der Leeuw's considerations.³²

The metaphorical and conceptual potential of the notion of dynamics as movement, interrelation, and potential is utterly wasted if it is reduced to its opposition to statics or, even worse, its political opposition to theories dealing with stable entities. Most importantly, a dynamic concept of religion must not prevent research on the phenomenon of *stability*—not least due to the fact that an idea(1) of stability is often encountered in object language reflections on religion. Object language especially turns to reflections on all that is considered or proclaimed to be everlasting, eternal, and unchangeable.

Therefore, the study of religions is not only (material) dynamics. On the contrary, dynamics and stability have to be considered as necessarily interrelated and, in most cases, combined in the phenomena examined. Dynamics, however, taken in the more general sense, including potentiality, are the underlying process for both phenomena of stability and instability. To me, instead of limiting dynamics to movement and considering it to be only one element out of three, it seems more fruitful to examine the entangledness of—to use Tweed's categories—movement, relation, and position *via dynamics*. It is a certain idea of dynamics—which is not reduced to movement—that *interrelates* these three themes to a fruitful *conceptualization* of religion. What is needed, therefore, is a more general conceptualization of dynamics.

3 Towards a General Notion of Dynamics

Scholars should no longer be content to merely treat dynamics as a simple word to the basic insight that change, a sequence of changes then called 'process', evolution, or else something 'dynamic' is happening all the time in the course of history: rather we should strive for a complete notion that realizes the full potential of the idea.³³ Nevertheless, the more sophisticated attempts

32 It should not remain unmentioned that van der Leeuw already made the claim for dynamics as a characteristic not only of its main subject but also as one of, if not *the*, most crucial characteristics of the scholarly discipline itself: "Die Religionsphänomenologie ist vor andern Wissenschaften dynamisch. Sobald sie aufhört, sich zu bewegen, hört sie auf, zu arbeiten." However, as a stark contrast to current dynamic enterprises, van der Leeuw related his claim of dynamics to the permanent need of correction of his enterprise: "Ihre unendliche Korrekitionsbedürftigkeit gehört zu ihrem innersten Wesen." Van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 798.

33 Reading the editor's introduction to the volume titled 'Dynamics of Religion' one forms the impression that the authors mean precisely that: "Religion is a human, historical,

to define this notion basically rely on this. Peter Slater in his book *The Dynamics of Religion* from 1979 “[...] proposes a model for conceptualizing changes in religion which should help us to understand better our own development and that of others of different persuasions.”³⁴ As contemporary scholarship in the person of Hubert Seiwert has clearly acknowledged, connecting dynamics to the idea of change results in significant problems for the anti-essentialist dynamic approach itself. It may lead into the ‘trap of essentialism’ courtesy of the implied separation of form and essence in the concept, above all, as the difference between changeable data and the unchanging theoretical concept used to interpret the data—for example, the concept of religion.³⁵

The idea of equating dynamics with change might also lead to a systematic underestimation of the considerable efforts of the dynamics necessary to keep a religious tradition static or stable.³⁶ “[T]enacious traditionalism,” Aziz Al-Azmeh reminds, was and is “a specific form of representing change, whereby actual or apparent repetition is construed as conservation.”³⁷ This stabilizing

social and cultural phenomenon. As such, religious ideas, practices, discourses, institutions, and social expressions are in constant change.” Christoph Bochinger, Jörg Rüpke, “Introduction,” in *Dynamics of Religion. Past and Present*, eds. Christoph Bochinger and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 1. On the epistemologically dubious notion of ‘constant change’ see Volkhard Krech, “Relational religion: manifesto for a synthesis in the study of religion,” *Religion* 49 (2019, 6): “However, something and thus religion cannot be in a constant change. Religion has been in the making only during the beginning of socio-cultural evolution. If there would not be any established core (in the linguistic sense of an intension), religion could not be identified in its historical variety (in the linguistic sense of extension). Historicity means that the lines of development and dynamics of religion are recorded by reconstructing previous states of morphogenesis. In turn, morphogenesis means the establishment of constant structures, while the content is varying. As a result, diachronic and synchronic perspectives must be connected by understanding processes and structures as complementary modes of observation.”

34 Peter Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion. Continuity and Change in Patterns of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 1.

35 See Hubert Seiwert’s article in the very same volume, “The Dynamics of Religion and Cultural Evolution: Worshipping Fuxi in Contemporary China,” in *Dynamics of Religion. Past and Present*, 12.

36 On the object language level, the necessity to interrelate dynamics and stability is, for instance, expressed in the interrelation between static and dynamic time, such as in Zoroastrian cosmogonic sources, see Kianoosh Rezania, “Zurvan: Limitless time or timeless time. The question of Eternity and time in Zoroastrianism,” *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute* 68 (2008), 60. Also see with regard to the alteration of dynamics and statics in Yašt 13, 53–58 Kianoosh Rezania, *Die zoroastrische Zeitvorstellung. Eine Untersuchung über Zeit- und Ewigkeitskonzepte und die Frage des Zurvanismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 74–77.

37 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 40.

dynamic, in turn, might be the reason for the possibility of qualifying at least some dynamics in the history of religions as being characterized by ‘reduced speed’ as compared to the fast-changing fields of politics, economy, and society. This particularity, for some, makes religion a privileged field of study.³⁸ A notion of dynamics used to describe and analyze the history of religions, however, should be capable of grasping phenomena of stability of traditions, practices, or institutions despite the onslaughts of time, or rather, change. So, the definition that something, perhaps religion as a system “[...] is dynamic if it changes in time. It is dynamic if its outputs depend on its history [...]”³⁹ covers much of its scope, but, ultimately, only part of the notion involved.

However, the idea can—nevertheless—be used as a starting point. In relating dynamics and movement while talking definitively about religion (‘religion is about movement’), Tweed associates the notion of dynamics closely with its use in *physics*.

A new field of science called ‘dynamics’ was first proclaimed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in his 1694 treatise *De primae philosophiae emendatione et de notione substantiae*. In naming it thus, Leibniz sought to give his concept of force an independent ontological status to proclaim that it should be studied by its manifestations in nature. Here, Leibniz explicitly opposes the concept of corresponding ideas in Scholasticism as pure force, claiming for a certain activity or entelechy as being midway between the faculty of acting and acting itself.⁴⁰ The notion, therefore, can well claim a modern Western intellectual origin.

In classical physics, dynamics is part of technical mechanics. Mechanics is the theory of the movements of *bodies* on (defined) courses and can be divided into two broad fields. The study of the forms of movement in time and space is called kinematics, and the relation of these movements with causes is called

38 “Die Bedeutung der Religionsgeschichte lässt sich daher mit wenigen Worten umreißen. Unabhängig davon, ob es der jeweiligen Generation ersichtlich ist oder nicht, findet der Historiker eine natürliche Hierarchie seiner Stoffe vor, angeführt von Literatur, Kunst und Religion. Während Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft zumeist schnellem Wandel unterliegen, weisen die drei erstgenannten Stoffe eine gewisse Konstanz auf. Sie ‘bilden’ und wirken dauerhaft—zumindest ihrem Anspruch nach. Dies gilt insbesondere für Dissidenz. Dennoch unterliegen auch sie Konsum und Verschleiß, dies aber mit vermindertem Tempo.” Christoph Schmidt, *Pilger, Popen und Propheten. Eine Religionsgeschichte Osteuropas* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014), 9.

39 Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, “Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013), 380.

40 See Max Jammer, *Concepts of Force. A Study in the Foundation of Dynamics* (Mineola: Dover, 1999), 160.

dynamics.⁴¹ Accordingly, in the proper scientific sense, ‘dynamics’ is the *theory of the forces of change in movement*. In consequence, the counterpart of dynamics is not stability but rather the field of statics in the branch of mechanics, which deals with the analysis of forces in physical systems in a state of static equilibrium.

The introduction of a notion that emerged from early modern natural science to the Humanities is easy to explain, as it is an all-time dream of the historical sciences to understand the courses of time in order to describe phenomena properly, that is, by means of causality, neatly scrutinizing cause and effect. The notions of *contingency*, or rather, *events* are somewhat disturbing to this idea. Dynamic theories in this sense have considerable difficulty in explaining phenomena of chance, even if they only appear in object language descriptions, for example, instances such as epiphanies, *deus ex machina*-phenomena, or the idea of God’s unfathomable causes. Moreover, the idea of solid bodies being moved or moving should ring alarm bells for any scholar who emphatically denies the solidity of an entity named religion.

Considering the generally acknowledged fact that in history there is no instance of a religious tradition that may claim solidity or isolation as physical bodies can, it is all the more important to find a notion that describes the dynamics of contact, not in terms of the notion of dynamics in physics, that is, the movement of solid bodies.⁴²

In fact, this use of the notion of ‘dynamics’ in physics (which is, of course, also not as uncontested as I presented it) is already a reduction of the complex meaning associated with the Greek notion of *dynamis*. The broadness of this early use proffers significant explanatory and illustrative potential still in the earlier and broader use. First of all, the differentiation between and the relation of kinetics and ontology must be taken into consideration. As always, this problem was discussed in Greek philosophy, for example, by Parmenides and Heraclitus, regarding the opposition and the relation of being and becoming.

41 See Michael Wolff, *Geschichte der Impetustheorie. Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der klassischen Mechanik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 16.

42 In this regard, David Morgan’s salvational definition “I am defining a body not as a static, self-contained reality, but as relational, that is, as defined by the configurations of forces, interests, applications, history, and assumptions that operate within and through it” (David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye. Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2012), 68) may lead to the question if, given that the body in religions is indeed a set of relations, it would be more sensible and adequate to do without the notion of body that, as such, insinuates a solid or static entity.

The pre-philosophical kinetic notion of *dynamis* in the most basic meaning denotes the *facilitation of processes* as such. Therefore, it comprises not only one, but rather two aspects: possibility and process, the second being the result of the first.⁴³ *Dynamis*, accordingly, is prior to process and movement, but inseparably related to them: it is not some pure potentiality.

The notion of *dynamics* came to preeminence a little later. The famous Platonian notion of *dynamis* is an ontological structure that defines our potential in relation to our *possibilities*. In “The Republic” (*Politeia* 477 c–e), Plato defines the potential as the ontological feature that makes something possible. In itself, *dynamis* cannot be observed with regard to observable elements, such as color or form (σχῆμα). As such, its main characteristics are directional in relation to the (realized) possibility. The strongest of all these potentials, according to Plato, is *episteme* (ἐπιστήμη), insight or understanding. We therefore have, according to Plato, to look for dynamics to gain ‘a robust social epistemology’ (as claimed by Manuel Vásquez).⁴⁴ So here, in Plato, *dynamis* is a *relational* feature that gives *direction* to a certain result that in turn *indicates* the *potential*. Thus, it is not a ‘one-sided-directedness’; it might be characterized as *vectoral*, including both the starting and the ending point of the vector.

The Platonic structure of explanation was clarified, differentiated, and expanded by Aristotle, who, in his *Metaphysics* Θ (1046 a 11 f.) laid emphasis on the point that there are, in fact, two basic forms of *dynamis*, that is, the potential to affect, to *be effective*, and the potential of *being affected*.⁴⁵ In Latin translation, these basic forms are denoted as the *potentia activa* and the *potentia passiva*. The forms are distinct, though closely interrelated: consider the process of fire melting iron and iron being melted by fire.⁴⁶ So, as Max Jammer has put it,

[i]n contrast to our modern terms ‘force,’ ‘power,’ ‘activity,’ the Greek word *dynamis* signifies, therefore not only transitive action or transeunt activity, but also passive susceptibility and receptibility. As ‘heat’ can act on an object and make it warm, but can itself be reduced to coldness by another cold body, thus any other *dynamis* implies for the Greek mind both directions of activity. It is this double meaning that made *dynamis* a *terminus technicus*.⁴⁷

43 See W. Wieland, *Die Aristotelische Physik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

44 Vásquez, “Studying Religions in Motion,” 179.

45 The idea is well found in Plato as well, see *Sophistes* 248 c 8.

46 See (with reference to the third chapter of Aristotle’s *Physics*) Walter Bröker, *Aristoteles* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1987), 72–73.

47 Jammer, *Concepts of Force*, 34.

As *dynamis* consists of both the *potentia activa* and the *potentia passiva*, Aristotle employs an ontological concept of *dynamis* rather than a merely kinetic definition. In Aristotle's thinking, as such, *dynamis* expresses 'being' as 'being possible'. In contrast, being as 'being realized' is called *energeia*. Therefore, to obtain an energetic result, one has to be in a dynamic position. This means *dynamis* is not a mere empty or formal possibility that waits to be realized in some transcendent zone, but it also has some positive characteristics in its ontological structure with regard to what Plato called the *episteme*. This ontological possibility gives an entity its *meaning* in the sense of *indication*.⁴⁸ An entity is dynamically structured by pointing at its potential. The potential, in turn, has to be understood with regard to the conditions of its possible (future) realization. These conditions, however, do not have to be present at every moment, though the *dynamis* is *directed* towards them as they are inseparably related to them as the conditions of possible realization.⁴⁹ Dynamics, thus, is also vectorial (as in Plato), a triadic structure consisting of a starting point, a goal, and the *substratum* (*hypokeimenon*) that is undergoing this process.⁵⁰

Additionally, in *Metaphysics* Δ (1019 a 23) one finds among the list of the four meanings of the notion of *dynamis* the more accurate description that *dynamis* is potentiality in the emphatic sense, that is, *effectively* and *methodically* be able to do or cause something, thus stressing the relational bond that is expressed as dynamic (ἔτι ἢ τοῦ καλῶς τοῦτ' ἐπιτελεῖν ἢ κατὰ προαίρεσιν).⁵¹ In this sense, 'being qualified to' adds some substantial characteristics to the phenomenon in question and indicates a meaningful *telos* for the phenomenon. Aristotle also recognizes the interrelatedness of dynamics and stability by stating that the potential to preserve by not (or only slightly) being affected, i.e., stability, is one aspect of the notion of *dynamis*.

48 See Martin Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie. Marburger Vorlesung Sommersemester 1924*, ed. Mark Michalski (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2002), 300.

49 Michael-Thomas Liske, "Inwieweit sind Vermögen intrinsische dispositionelle Eigenschaften? (Θ 1–5)," in *Aristoteles Metaphysik. Die Substanzbücher (Z, H, Θ)*, ed. Christoph Rapp (Berlin: Akademie, 1996), 258, see also 272: "Aristoteles wird also gemeint haben: In die Definition eines Vermögens haben die westlichen Außenbedingungen seiner Realisation einzugehen."

50 See with reference to *Physics* I, 6–7 and *Metaphysics* XII, 1–2 Otfried Höffe, *Aristoteles* (München: Beck, 1996), 106.

51 On the notion of καλῶς in this context see Liske, "Inwieweit sind Vermögen intrinsische dispositionelle Eigenschaften?," 274: "Gut' (καλῶς, 1046 a 17) kann hier nicht bloß meinen, daß das Vermögen zu einem ausgezeichneten Resultat führt, sondern muß auch meinen, daß es sich besonders wirkungsvoll, sicher, leicht und schnell verwirklichen läßt, sonst wäre die Qualifikation beim Vermögen, einer Verschlechterung widerstehen zu können, überflüssig."

This meaningful indication is important for a further conclusion drawn by Aristotle, that there is also a differentiation between reflected *dynamis* (*dynamis meta logou*) as being directed toward both the matter and its counterpart and unreflected *dynamis* (*dynamis aneu logou/alogos*) as some kind of blind natural power (δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τῶν δυνάμεων αἱ μὲν ἔσσονται ἄλογοι αἱ δὲ μετὰ λόγου. *Metaphysics* 1046 b1). This means that *dynamis* indicates a *twofold phenomenon that has a logical* (or rather, mental) *and a physical side* (or pole) *to it*.⁵² It is this point that has not been given due consideration in contemporary reasoning regarding the dynamics of religion. There are interesting questions to be raised about their relationship.

The short and by no means exhaustive excursus to Greek philosophy, of course, is not an end in itself but is done in order to discern the heuristic potential of the notions of dynamics and stability for the description and analysis of religion.⁵³ If religions are to be described as dynamic entities, the Greek notions provide the scholar with an explanatory surplus for analyzing the subject matter that well goes beyond the unsatisfying and simplistic equation of dynamics and change and the questionable adaptation of the notion of dynamics signifying the kinetics of solid bodies from physics.

After all, it is not the *stabilization* processes of religious traditions that should be kept as one focus of the scholarly endeavor.⁵⁴ Dynamics in the sense of spatial expansion of a tradition, for instance, cannot be automatically equated to change as this might well include processes of stabilization.⁵⁵ Adaptation to change might be the reason for a tradition's stability.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the

52 On the characteristics of the *dynamis meta logou* see not at last Martin Heidegger, *Aristoteles, Metaphysik* Θ 1–3. *Vom Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft*, ed. Heinrich Hüni (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1981, 130 f. (§ 14)).

53 For an exhaustive philosophical discussion of Aristotle's concept of *dynamis* see Ludger Jansen, *Tun und Können. Ein systematischer Kommentar zu Aristoteles' Theorie der Vermögen im neunten Buch der Metaphysik* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016).

54 Compare with regard to the contact between Buddhism and Christianity, and in particular its stabilizing effects Stephen C. Berkwitz, "Dynamics and Stability in the Encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians," *Entangled Religions* 5 (2018), 2, 13. Stability, here, is a matter of (and inseparable from) dynamics: "The result of such contacts frequently led to the dynamic re-imagining of what 'Buddhism' represents and includes as both an idea and a social fact. Interreligious encounters frequently led Buddhists to alter their religion on their own terms but in dialogue with the values and views of European Christians" (26).

55 Here, the notion of stability as stabilization seems to be preferable to 'robustness' as it includes the processual and interrelated character of the dynamics/stability dichotomy, see Cho and Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," 381–382.

56 See Jason Neelis' characterization of the formation and spread of Buddhist communities: "Many examples from Buddhist manuscripts, inscriptions, and archaeological artifacts

notion of change has to be specified first with regard to the perhaps interrelated processes of *growth* and *decay*.⁵⁷ The *potentials* also must be discerned, for instance, the potentials with regard to the possibility and actuality of spatial movement. However, this is also true for *vitality* in the sense of being able to find suitable reactions to challenges of the environment and here, of course, to those challenges displayed by other religious traditions. One final important aspect of dynamics is the tradition-building processes of self-reference and retrospection which simultaneously constitute the background for possibilities of future action (*propensity*).

Thus, taking the Greek origins of the notion of dynamics into account to develop a more sustainable concept, several points are to be stressed: first, the *potentia activa* and *potentia passiva* distinction may prove suitable as an instrument for the description of situations of religious contact and the prevailing dynamics consisting of actions of and effects on the contacting traditions.⁵⁸ Thus, the notion might cover the 'push and pull' factors of the historical process. What is more, the Greek concept adds the aspect of *potentiality* as an essential part of the notion of dynamics. It also presents the notion as an interplay of a particular *distinction*. Regarding teleology, it points to the *directedness* involved in the notion and its *vectorial* or indicational structure. Ultimately, it hints at a certain kind of *bipolarity* of the notion including a mental and a natural (material) pole.

[...] illustrate economic, social, and political catalysts for the formation and expansion of the Buddhist *saṅgha* from the time of the Buddha in the fifth century BCE to the end of the first millennium CE. As the *saṅgha* consolidated its position within and outside of ancient India, Buddhist monks and nuns frequently participated in social and economic dynamics, despite ascetic ideals of withdrawal. Considerable literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence demonstrates that Buddhist institutions played key roles in political legitimation, management of hydraulic systems, and development of interregional road networks for long-distance trade. Routes for commercial exchanges of high-value commodities and cross-cultural interactions have served as conduits for transregional Buddhist mobility, which fluctuated with changing economic and political conditions. An ability to change with shifting conditions of material support and to appeal to wide audiences was a very significant factor in successful Buddhist transmission." Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks. Mobility and Exchange Within and Beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*. DHR 2 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 311.

57 On the relation of decline, transformation, and stabilization in contemporary mainstream Christianity and Charismatic Christianity see Maren Freudenberg, "Dynamics and Stability in Globally Expanding Charismatic Religions. The Case of the Vineyard Movement in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland," *Entangled Religions* 8 (2019), par. 2.

58 Berkwitz stresses the reactive potential of Buddhism to the challenge of Christianity in order to not overemphasize the *impetus* of Christianity as a motor of modernization processes, see Berkwitz, "Dynamics and Stability," 14.

To me, it seems a promising enterprise to think about the dynamics of religion along the lines of this concept derived from Greek philosophy, especially with regard to the fact that the notion of dynamics is, in most cases, not explicated at all or/and associated with the use of the notion in mechanics. The last point on the bipolarity of dynamics is of particular importance for the study of religion and the question of the validity of the material turn in the discipline. It may be true that there is no such thing as an immaterial religion. Religion is unable to be done without things, places, or bodies, but it is also unable to operate without theories of materiality *on the object language level*.⁵⁹ In religion, there is no material pole without a mental pole: there is no materiality without meaning.⁶⁰ Any concept that is employed in the hope of grasping the particular 'dynamics' of religion has to include the bipolar aspect of the objects of research, be it words, texts, or material objects.

4 Aspects of Dynamics

As such, dynamics might be provisionally characterized by relation, direction, potential, bipolarity, and, not least, by meaning. Here, the interrelation of *potentiality and meaning* is of particular importance. The interrelation is strongly underestimated in current notions of dynamics if the notion is conceptualized at all. To generalize an observation of Peter Slater's: if we fail to take into account variations of meaning, we shall never understand the dynamics of religion.⁶¹

59 This would be my reformulation of the editors' assumption about material religion as to be presented in the journal 'Material Religion'. Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, S. Brent Plate, "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," *Religion* 40 (2010), 210. Things, places, and bodies are not simply there. Therefore, in order to fulfill the editors' claim for theories that take materiality seriously, it might be helpful to look at the object language theories that make the material religiously meaningful.

60 Karl-Heinz Kohl describes 'sacred objects' (*sakrale Objekte*) correspondingly as follows: "Besser als an jedem anderen Beispiel läßt sich an ihm der Vorgang der Generierung von Bedeutungen nachzeichnen, belegt die Geschichte der Religionen doch, daß nahezu jeder Gegenstand in den Rang eines Symbols des Heiligen erhoben werden kann. Nicht von seinen materiellen Eigenschaften, sondern allein von den individuellen und kollektiven Erfahrungen, mit denen er einmal verknüpft war, hängt ab, ob er als ein das Transzendente verkörpernder Gegenstand: als sakrales Objekt, angesehen wird." Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge. Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (München: Beck, 2003), 10.

61 Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 31.

As the notion includes the elements of potentiality and meaning, the excursus to the use of the notion of *dynamis* in Greek philosophy allows a more refined conceptualization of dynamics with regard to three major aspects concerning the specific direction of the dynamic process. It comprises three dimensions. Lacking better terminology, I will call them horizontal, vertical, and *intensifying* dynamics. It goes without saying that these aspects are closely interrelated in reality but differentiated in the following for analytical clarity.

4.1 *Horizontal Dynamics*

Horizontal dynamics can be considered to be related to the first thing that comes into mind with regard to the notion of dynamics, that is, movement, or rather, change in the flux of time and or change of place in space. The notion of ‘expansion’, such as the idea of the ‘expansion or spread of Christianity or Islam in late antiquity’ (*Ausbreitung*), often held to include geographical areas, individuals, groups, and texts that are reached, is one element and meta-linguistic manifestation of horizontal dynamics, which is already to be found conceptualized on the object language level. Examples include, for instance, the writings of Origen and Tertullian regarding the rapid expansion of what they consider to be Christianity. Horizontal dynamics can, accordingly, also be related to object language considerations on the dynamics a religious tradition considers *itself* to be subject to. In the case of Buddhism, Stephen Berkwitz states:

The very notion of the *sāsana* suggests that the expansion of Buddhism was the result of the Buddha’s efforts to proclaim a universal path for liberation from worldly suffering. Admonishing his monastic followers to go out and preach for the good of the many, for the welfare of the many, and for the happiness of the many, the Buddha is depicted as having instructed them to travel in different directions and to proclaim the life of a renunciant. The expansion of Buddhism is modeled after this early injunction to spread the Buddha’s Dharma to all beings, since all beings are otherwise subject to suffering and repeated existence in the cycle of birth and death.⁶²

It is important to highlight the ideas and notions that are connected to the aspect of horizontal dynamics. The notion of expansion contains the idea of

62 Stephen C. Berkwitz, “The Expansion of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke. DHR 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 224.

something becoming more extant, broader, or bigger in terms of covering geographical space. Sometimes expansion is linked to an idea of inevitability, not only because, as may be argued on the object language level, the spread of truth cannot be stopped, but because the notion and metaphors of dynamics employed here on the metalanguage level involve such a similar kind of expansion as, for example, describing dynamics in language more normally used for water. Richard Foltz, for instance, describes the spread of religious ideas, in particular Buddhist ideas, as follows: “The existence of trade routes and constant commercial activity linking diverse cultures from ancient times meant that religious ideas (like technology, and other aspects of culture) could easily spread along trade networks that spanned Eurasia. Indeed, like running water finding open channels, this spread was probably inevitable.”⁶³ The description of the horizontal dynamics of expansion via aquatic metaphors is likely to turn pejorative on both object language and metalanguage level—see, for example, the metaphor of flood, which evokes associations of imminent danger and thoughts of dikes and draining. Moreover, the idea of an ‘explosive’ expansion that overwhelms space might be an epitome of the dynamics involved in the history of religions. In any case, the spread and migration of religious ideas as well as of people adherent to a religious tradition is an example of temporal *and* spatial horizontal dynamics. As such, it does not come as a surprise that religious dynamics are considered to be everywhere and anytime, rendering the study of religion a necessarily dynamic enterprise.

The common notion of horizontal dynamics, however, is deeply dependent on a model of spatial movement, that is, the movement of something (a body) from a to b. It is dependent on the primary metaphor that change (of state) is motion.⁶⁴ Even the more detailed and sophisticated notion of the spread of religious traditions via ramification⁶⁵ is also closely related to the idea of spatial movement.⁶⁶ This model of movement, given the idea of the arrow of time, is also present in considerations of temporal change, allowing for the emergence of popular philosophical paradoxes such as Zeno’s *paradoxon* of Achill and the tortoise.

The idea of the ubiquity of horizontal dynamics in this sense is not wrong *per se*, but it becomes misleading if it is considered to be the *only* possible use

63 Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road. Premodern Patterns of Globalization* (New York/Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9–10.

64 See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 263.

65 Compare Shils, *Tradition*, 280.

66 To reimagine theories as itineraries used for travelling purposes, as Thomas Tweed does (see Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 8, 13), therefore, well suits to the aspect of horizontal dynamics, but is likely to miss the other aspects of dynamics.

of the notion. Apart from the fact that the use of words like ‘expansion’ and ‘spread’ creates problems of its own,⁶⁷ there is another vital point to be mentioned. As the reference to Plato and Aristotle shows, it is this kind of directedness that *dynamis* is the basis for change, indicating the directedness of the temporal flux. However, as being directed, the metaphor of a flow is badly in need of some additional explication in order to evade the danger of “totally disembedding religious flows,” presenting them as some kind of pure activity without boundaries and directions (*Fluss ohne Ufer*).⁶⁸ Dynamics in the context of religion are intrinsically directional. Vasquez is quite right in pointing that out, though the decisive point is a different one.

In common usage, horizontal dynamics are not only linked to the flux of time or rather the extension to another future. However, the general notion of dynamics indicates timely extension in *both* directions of the time scale. Employing this notion, thus, might provide a more adequate picture of the specific processes related to the dynamics of religion: dynamics that include the aspect of potentiality indicate back to its beginnings. The dynamics of a religious tradition are retrospective and prospective as Tweed puts it,⁶⁹ or, drawing on basic notions of phenomenology, it *extends* protentionally *and* retentionally. In Edmund Husserl’s philosophy of time(-consciousness), temporality is closely related to potentiality and (temporal) dynamics to potential.⁷⁰ Here, potentiality implies time by means of retentional and protentional indication, i.e., by being related to both the past and future. To Husserl, any constitutive process in time works via protention which constitutes the future as such in an empty manner and fills it accordingly.⁷¹ In Popper’s terminology, it is

67 See Berkwitz, “The Expansion of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia,” 222, 234.

68 Vásquez, “Studying Religion in Motion,” 178.

69 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 5.

70 On Husserl’s notion of potentiality see Klaus Wieglerling, *Husserls Begriff der Potentialität. Eine Untersuchung über Sinn und Grenze der transzendentalen Phänomenologie als universaler Methode* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1984).

71 “Jeder ursprüngliche Prozeß ist beseelt von Protentionen, die das Kommende als solches leer konstituieren und auffangen, zur Erfüllung bringen.” Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins (1893–1917)*, ed. Rudolf Boehm. Husserliana x (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1966), 52. Also compare: “Wir müssen die Zusammenhgangsstruktur in jeder Erscheinung und die die alle Erscheinungsreihen einigende Struktur verstehen. Im kontinuierlichen Fortgang der Wahrnehmung haben wir, wie bei jeder Wahrnehmung, Protentionen, die sich stetig erfüllen im neu Eintretenden, eintretend in der Form des urimpressionalen Jetzt. So auch hier. In jedem Fortgang äußeren Wahrnehmens hat die Protention die Gestalt von stetigen Vorerwartungen, die sich erfüllen, und das sagt: Aus den Hinweissystemen der Horizonte aktualisieren sich gewisse Hinweisslinien kontinuierlich als Erwartungen, die sich stetig erfüllen in näherbestimmenden Aspekten.” Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918–1926*, ed. Margot Fleischer. Husserliana xi (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1966), 8.

dependent on the relevant propensity.⁷² Likewise, any presence is an extension to the past as a relation to something past *as* past or, rather, as a fulfillment of a protention. Any retention as an extensive continuum is a retention to another one, thus rendering the continuum steady.⁷³ There is, accordingly, no ‘point’ in time, but rather, temporal directedness (extension) depends on the potential in question. To transfer this to the subject of religion: as a consequence, religion’s temporal dynamics do not consist only of movement forwards but also movement backward, leading to a re-stabilization of the present.⁷⁴

Likewise, the spatial spread of religions is by no means unidirectional. This is not only the case for the possibility of potentially spreading in all directions at the same time, restricted only by geographical obstacles. There are also analogous ‘retentional’ phenomena in matters of spatial spread. The distances to the original place of a religious tradition, which are achieved in the process of spreading, have *repercussions* on it that also contribute to the dynamics of the tradition in question.⁷⁵

In the religious field, horizontal dynamics are, therefore, no one-way street, neither movement to the stars nor to the future alone. To put that in a seemingly paradoxical way: temporally, the dynamics (of religion) change the religious meaning of things not only in prospective but also in retrospective. Dynamics does not only mean change in the future; it also changes the past.⁷⁶ Spatially, religious traditions dynamize both forward and backward. From my point of view, the retentional perspective is largely underestimated in current approaches to the explanation of the concept of dynamics.

4.2 *Vertical Dynamics*

However, despite this suggested reintroduction of the neglected retentional perspective in temporal horizontal dynamics, the notion of dynamics would be underestimated if it is merely reduced to change in the sense of temporal or, say, horizontal sense that includes ideas of spatial spreading and expansion. Regarding dynamics, *it is not all about religion and space*. After all, there is also

72 See chapter on Attraction.

73 Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, 29.

74 See Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, 32–33. See chapter on Tradition.

75 See for example the intensifying effects of Swedish Pietism (being exported via the Swedish Prisoners of war to Swedish Siberia) on the Swedish homeland itself. Compare my article Knut Martin Stünkel, “Halle—Stockholm—Tobolsk and back stronger than ever. Curt Friedrich von Wreech and his Wahrhaftige und umständliche Historie von denen schwedischen Gefangenen (1725/1728),” *Entangled Religions* 14, no. 1 (2023).

76 See chapter on Retrospection.

a form of dynamics that concerns the different levels, or, to put it geologically, the strata of the phenomenon in the situation in question that cannot suitably be described by spatial movement. Aristotle's insistence in his *Physics* on the fact that there are processes of growth and decay that must be considered as well as kinetics hint towards this important aspect of a full-fledged notion of dynamics. However, it would be premature to consider vertical dynamics to be describable as akin to a tree with its roots and branches which mostly grow vertically rather than horizontally. Such dynamics, related to the idea of growth, would be nothing but horizontal dynamics shifted to a vertical axis, change as being measured in the change of extension.

Accordingly, vertical dynamics have to be carefully scrutinized. Within the work of the КHK, Volkhard Krech has analyzed these dynamics by introducing an 'evolutionary scheme' that conveys five major levels: the physical, the organic, the psychic, the social, and the cultural level. It is important to notice, however, that these levels do not describe a certain 'evolutionary progress', or rather, a course of time, but are all present at any given point of time. In the first place, this does not mean anything more exciting than the rather un-idealist fact that the physical and the organic level are also present in times of ambitious cultural achievements. However, the presence of interaction between these levels inaugurates some particular dynamics as well. Krech describes the special 'vertical' dynamics of this scheme as follows: "The transfer between the different levels consists of processes of attraction and repercussion. First, each level is attracted by the following one. Second, by being attracted, the respective level gets shaped by the repercussions of the subsequent level, e.g., psychic by social processes, and social by cultural developments."⁷⁷ The attraction displayed here may be described as challenges and responses as a certain claim for reaction. Modifications of levels, for example, on the material or physical level, cause reactions on the subsequent level, for instance, as a lack of food influences the (proper) work of the organic and so on. In turn, an increase in effort to find food has repercussions on the material level. In the same manner, a sociality that is based on plenitude gives rise to corresponding ideologies and institutions that have certain effects on the social layer in return. This is, however, no one-way directed process from a more fundamental as in materialism or idealism. Strange ideas that emerge on the cultural level shape the 'lower' levels as well as famines or natural catastrophes at those levels above.

The mutual effects of the various strata on each other are of salient importance for an adequate picture of what is going on in the field of religion, as

77 Volkhard Krech, "Attraction in the Context of Religious Evolution," (unpublished КHK-Paper, 2011), 18. See chapter on Attraction.

religion cannot be reduced to a process happening on just a single level. For example, the cultural complex of asceticism obviously has its repercussions on the organic level. “We also have cogent accounts of how culture—in the form of language, the built cultural environment, modes of production—shapes basic human cognition, as well as the manner in which human cognition powerfully constrains the forms that culture can take.”⁷⁸ Moreover, the senses, as the perceiving interface that transcends the individual, are modeled according to religiously meaningful assumptions.⁷⁹ The inner dynamics of religion might be analyzed with regard to this scheme, that is, the emergence of religious ideas and their repercussion on the various levels of the evolutionary scheme.

To denote this dynamic process as the interrelation of strata, Krech introduces the notion of “axial rotation” (*Achsendrehung*) as developed from the work of Georg Simmel. Simmel introduces the notion in his last book *Lebensanschauung* while analyzing the interrelation of life and ‘ideal worlds’, their emergence, and the mutual influence between the two. Though ideal worlds emerge from the ‘lived life of humans’, ideal worlds still can have profound effects on lived life. Simmel describes this process as a significant ‘turn’ (*Wendung*) as a result of life’s own dynamics which leads to the domination of a level beyond that of lived life.⁸⁰ As such, dynamics of life perform a threefold

78 Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China. Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 263. Slingerland adds: “The alternative to the Blank Slate of strong social constructivism is not the naked ape of 1990s evolutionary psychology but rather a tool-equipped, built-environment-inhabiting organism shaped by both genes and culture, and navigating a physical world co-structured by physics, chemistry, biology, and culture.”

79 See chapter on Senses. These dynamics are also at the core of David Morgan’s scholarly endeavor concerning the phenomenon of visual culture: “What concerns me is the ways in which biological acts of seeing are deeply inflected by culture, how seeing is disciplined or trained over time to perform in certain ways. This happens in the way parents teach children, but this training is a medium for conveying and instilling practices and techniques shared with contemporaries as well as foregoing generations going back many centuries.” Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 60.

80 It seems that in Simmel’s description, life and ideal forms are interconnected by means of their respective model forms that, if completed, ultimately make sense: “Es sind zunächst Erzeugnisse des Lebens, wie all seine anderen Erscheinungen, seinem kontinuierlichen Lauf eingeordnet und dienend. Und nun geschieht die große Wendung, mit der uns die Reiche der Idee entstehen: die Formen oder Funktionen, die das Leben um seiner selbst willen, aus seiner eigenen Dynamik hervorgetrieben hat, werden derart selbständig und definitiv, daß umgekehrt das Leben ihnen dient, seine Inhalte in sie einordnet, und daß das Gelingen dieser Einordnung als eine ebenso letzte Wert- und Sinnerfüllung gilt, wie zuvor die Einfügung dieser Formen in die Ökonomie des Lebens.” Georg Simmel, “Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel,” in *Gesamtausgabe Vol. 16*, eds. Gregor Fitz and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), 244–245.

process of transcending: they have the tendency to overcome their own conventions and routines, they constitute ideal worlds, and, ultimately, they introduce the domination of dogma and institutions as the manifestations of ideal validity.⁸¹ By transcending through axial rotation, life introduces the possibility of self-evaluation via self-reference.⁸²

To Simmel, accordingly, axial rotation is the most obvious and, accordingly, best to examine in religion. Regarding religions, axial rotation comes into play with the generation of ‘ideal forms’ from vital processes, which, in turn, influence the vital processes after they are established. Thus, the physical influences the cultural, and the cultural shapes the physical, particularly owing to the tendency of the latter toward absolutism.⁸³ The ‘systemic universalism’ (Parsons) of religion can therefore be described as rotating around its own axis. It is important to note, however, that the rotation process does not merely consist of the change in hierarchical importance but is a permanent, continuous process of mutual influence and resonance.⁸⁴

Vertical dynamics thus consist of the interplay between (analytical) strata. Summarizing his considerations on the five-layer evolutionary scheme, Krech describes the effects of vertical dynamics as follows:

This model might explain the emergence of religious ideas and, at the same time, may help to understand their impacts on the social and psychic level. In addition, this evolutionary model provides us with the possibility of multiperspective analysis. We are able to explain religion as a cultural realm generated by psychic and social processes and in turn are able to understand its impact on them. For, we might explain methods of achieving religious salvation as an expression of physical needs, and at the same time are able to understand salvation techniques as a ‘magical’ inscription of religious ideas into material objects and the body

81 See Volkhard Krech, “Die ‘Soziologie der Religion’—neu gelesen,” in *Georg Simmel und das Leben in der Gegenwart*, eds. Rüdiger Lautmann and Hanns Wienold (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 343.

82 Compare the three-level model of transcending in the chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

83 See Krech, “Attraction in the Context of Religious Evolution,” 15.

84 “Was man in der ethnologischen und vielfach in der antiken Welt mit Verwunderung und oft mit Ehrfurcht wahrnimmt: wieviel dichter, fast bis zur Kontinuität, das Leben von religiösen Vornahmen besetzt ist, dies quantitativ ungeheuerliche Durchwachsenheit des Lebens durch das Religiöse—hängt doch eben damit zusammen, daß die Religion noch nicht ihr, dem Leben mit seinen täglichen Begehren und Interessen gegenüber, ganz reines Fürsich-Sein gewonnen hat; nachdem freilich das letztere geschehen ist, flicht sie sich wieder in das Leben zurück.” Simmel, “Lebensanschauung,” 287.

or explain certain religious ideas as the articulation of a specific psychic perception and at the same time understand the latter as ‘mystical’ experience, and so on.⁸⁵

This rotation, however, does not have to have only one stable axis but may also take place between any of the other levels. It does not have to be symmetrical with regard to a just distribution of the five layers—this would, for example, mean that religious dynamics can only take place in the human psyche. The scheme also explains why there may be *acteurs* in the dynamics of religion that are not human beings: for example, religious concepts which in turn may be expressed in material objects which cause or shape psychic, social, or cultural dispositions that, by human action, influence the environment.

4.3 *Dynamics of Intensification*

Of course, vertical and horizontal dynamics are closely interrelated. Events in one regard, such as migration, clearly have effects on the other and vice versa. Whereas horizontal and vertical dynamics basically describe two distinguished forms of dynamics of *interrelation*, the third and final form is basically *self-relational*. This final form might be termed the *dynamics of intensification*. This aspect of dynamics deals with phenomena of intensification and reduction of tension. The dynamics of intensification are predominantly characterized by its mandatory and *expressive* character—first of all, as being embodied—whereas horizontal and vertical dynamics are characterized by their *generative* quality.

Within the research program of the KHK, the term ‘dynamics’ “[...]” was understood first of all as a description of the *occasionally self-escalating* interplay of production, reproduction, and change of semantics and social structures. The term dynamics indicates an (inwardly and outwardly occurring) *intensified* development and change of semantics and social structures in the history of religions.”⁸⁶ The intensification of a dynamic process becomes most observable in structural condensation, such as the emergence and maintenance of institutions on the one hand, or, on the other hand, processes the dissolution of institutional structures. Most importantly, intensification of this kind is characterized by the bipolar interplay of two aspects, namely semantics

85 Krech, “Attraction in the Context of Religious Evolution,” 18–19.

86 Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 32.

and structure. The structure is condensed in institutionalized structures, the former constantly reshaped and reinterpreted by circulating semantics.

The notion of dynamics, thus, describes the *intensification* or the possible *decline of self-reference*. These dynamics are most clearly manifested in the emphatic relationship of a religious tradition to itself as a religious tradition.⁸⁷ It is, therefore, closely related to the notion of *stability*. It is also related to the notion of *contact* as the trigger of self-reference. Intensifying expressions of self-reference are to be expected and are mostly triggered by situations of contact between different traditions. Contrasts increase intensity.⁸⁸ To put that into a short thesis: *Contact triggers intensifying self-referential dynamics that cause stability. Or: in the history of religions, contact triggers intensifying self-referential dynamics that cause the stability of religions.*

This process is of supreme importance for the study of the history of religions, for it, in turn, provides the identifiable material for the scholar that makes the study of religion as an *episteme* in the Platonic sense possible. So, it is not only the case that religions are essentially mobile and moving. *When we talk about religion, we talk about an intensifying process of self-reference.*⁸⁹ According to Alfred N. Whitehead's theory of religion, there are four main elements that define a religion based on its historical or social development. These elements are externally expressed in human history as ritual, emotion, belief,

87 See chapter on Tradition. Compare also the level of formal transcendence in the chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

88 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

89 The *BuddhistRoad* Project at the Center for Religious Studies in Bochum (Germany) examines a corresponding phenomenon originating from religious contact on the macro-level, concerning nodes or locals of relative import and significance in a certain geographical network. It is described by the theoretical model of a 'feedback loop' which "[...] means a movement or wave of influence(s) emanating from one node to another in a circular or recurring fashion (a loop), so that the influence from the original wave comes back to its origin but with something added. This added information, which normally comes back in a slightly distorted form to the original output, has its immediate origin in the second or receiving node, which, for its part, is the product of the interplay between the feedback loops of a whole string of interconnected nodes. As such, the feedback loop can be understood as a primary, engendering force behind a given oscillating process, i.e. a back-and-forth-movement of data, material goods, ideas, practices, rituals, etc." *BuddhistRoad* Team, "Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer in Eastern Central Asia 6th–14th Centuries: A Project Report," *Medieval Worlds* 8 (2016), 129–130. Cho and Squier generalize the self-recurring/self-referential process even to the very level of 'religions': "Buddhism as a doctrinal system is a process of interaction and adjustments in a feedback loop—for example, the original nonsubstantialist orientation of Buddhist doctrine leads to the dispersive pressure to reconcile it with other tenets such as karma and the continuity of the self, which in turn leads to adjustments that reassert the system's nonsubstantialist orientation." Cho and Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," 382.

and rationalization. Whitehead writes: “The dawn of these stages is gradual. It consists in an increase of emphasis.”⁹⁰ The common thread between these elements which signify an increase of emphasis is that they are expressions of *self-reference*.

As the dynamics of intensification is a necessary element in the dynamics of religions, its stabilizing effects become characteristics of the processes in question as well. In the following, I aim to provide some hints to possible conceptual frameworks that might grasp some aspects of what is going on in the dynamics and stability of religions.

5 Six Forms (*modi*) of the Dynamics-Stability Relation

Stability is not a counterpart of dynamics but is rather a necessary aspect of dynamics itself. A whirlpool or a tornado is nothing but movement, but, nevertheless, can be described as a stable entity. It can be indexically denominated and, accordingly, be given a stable name or described as a notion. The main problem, given the proposition that everything is in flux, is how best to describe the point where one may reasonably speak about stability while examining a certain field or period of time. That there must be some kind of stability, be it on the phenomenal level or on the level of description, is a necessary claim for all scholarly approaches, thus fulfilling the requirement for possible reproduction of results. Contemplation of stability, therefore, leads to the epistemological question of what constitutes an object that can be recognized in the scientific process. This is an object that is an obstacle⁹¹ to the all-embracing flux of time.⁹²

90 Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 18. The dynamics of intensification is also somewhat hinted at by Tweed (see Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 54, 70–71). However, as I am not convinced that religions may be described in every case and every circumstance as a confluence of organic-cultural flows that “intensify joy,” I shall prefer the Whiteheadian notion of intensifying emphasis. The possibility of intense joy is of course, not excluded.

91 In German: *Gegen-stand* in the sense of *Wider-stand*, that is: resistance. On the concept of *Gegenstand* in this sense see Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*, 119.

92 Jörg Rüpke stresses the precarious state of the objects of the study of religion: “In short, it is religion in the making that comes under scrutiny [...]. Only rarely do such actions, or rather transactions [...], attain permanency as objects and written texts or solidify into what is conceptualized as networks and organizations. It is only in such exceptional cases that they begin to resemble what we consider ‘religions’ [...] and are inclined to reify.” Jörg Rüpke, “Religious agency, identity, and communication: reflections on history and theory of religion,” *Religion* 45 (2015): 5. In the following I would argue that it is precisely this meta-stable state as dynamically stabilizing self-recursivity that allows for the possibility of an academic discipline ‘religious studies’.

The notions of dynamics and stability are, therefore, closely interrelated. In fact, they do not make sense without the other. Religion, religions and the history of religions are characterized by the interplay of dynamics and stability. On object language level, for instance, one finds a telling example in Daoism. In the imaginary of the Dao, the Dao itself is often represented as a wheel.⁹³

In the Daoist classic *Laozi* [...], the imagery of the Way (*dao* [...]) is linked to the root metaphor of water and was rendered by means of the ‘wheel’ simile [...] that conflated the ideas of motion and stillness [...]. The conflation of motion and stillness was, on the one hand, the primary characterization of the cosmic ‘matrix’ called *dao* (the Way) and, on the other, exemplified the soteriological path of early (and late) Daoists: to be clear and quiet amidst the turmoil of changes and transformations.⁹⁴

In consequence, equilibrioception is represented by both ‘doctrine’ and practice, becoming a marker of dynamic stability of a religious tradition.

There are several major ways to understand *stability* as well as the opposing instability within a dynamic phenomenon. As it—at least to my understanding—makes no sense in the study of religion to separate the material object from the hermeneutical process, theory has to provide a ‘unified’ *model* to combine the physical and the mental pole of the processes which have generative and intensifying aspects—and, of course, also their opposites as manifested in decay and decline. Here are six suggestions on the relationship of dynamism and stability based upon the theoretical considerations presented above, each illuminated by the writings of a different theorist.

5.1 *Retrospect Stability of Possibilities/Propensities*

The first mode I propose for the interrelation of dynamics and stability refers back to the more general notion of dynamics as *potential*. If the Aristotelian

93 On the image of the wheel as both object and process in Daoism see Hans-Georg Möller, *In der Mitte des Kreises. Daoistisches Denken* (Frankfurt/Leipzig: Insel, 2001), 33: “Wenn das Dao als ein Rad, das Rad eines Wagens, dargestellt ist, so zeigt diese Darstellung zunächst einmal, dass das Dao nichts bloß Statisches ist, nicht etwas, das sozusagen ewig nur stillsteht, sondern etwas, das, wenn es auch seine Form nicht ändert, sich trotzdem bewegt. Das Rad ist nicht nur ein Ding, es ist auch ein Vorgang: es ist Drehung und Bewegung. Das Rad läuft, es ist ein Ablauf, ein Prozess.”

94 Alexandra Cuffel, Licia Di Giacinto, and Volkhard Krech, “Senses, Religion, and Religious Encounter. Literature Review and Research Perspectives,” *Entangled Religions* 10 (2019): 10. The authors relate the interplay of dynamics and stability here to a sense of balance achieved by meditative practices that may be described in bodily language and expressed in bodily gestures.

notion of *dynamis* is employed, it is not only religious traditions actually *realizing* their potential in history (*energeia*) that is important for a general theory, but also the *potential background* that allows the possible realization (*dynamis*) in the Aristotelian sense. As concerns the definition of dynamics this means: the potential to be in a state of change—to be within the *basin of attraction* in the case of phenomena of attraction.⁹⁵ This basis provides the *stability* that is needed, not least, for scientific identification of its own phenomena. The background, as related to the *situation* at hand, provides conditions that *in retrospect* must be considered as stable.

This mode of the dynamics-stability interrelationship has attracted some philosophical elaboration, particularly on the part of thinkers seeking to explore religious attraction. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the notion of propensity is of some help in dealing with religious attraction. As Popper said, propensities do not inhere to objects but are properties of certain situations that give rise to certain tendencies to be realized.⁹⁶ Thus, propensities, provided that the background in question is stable, display a tendency towards *stability*, at least regarding statistics of possible cases.⁹⁷ This may allow us to explain processes and even make predictions.⁹⁸ In the case of religions, one might assume that, if certain conditions are present as a background, there seems to be an attraction acting on humans, ideas, or objects that is a discernable and describable stable phenomenon that may be denoted in an explanative manner as the formation of, for instance, on the macro-level, Christianity, Manichaeism or Islam. This is, in fact, rather the condition of the very possibility to describe the process as triggered by the motivation of

95 See, for example, the stability of Zoroastrian oral tradition of Avastan poetry as expressed in a 're-composition in performance', using certain possibilities stemming from a particular pool with regard to audience and situation of performance: "Bei der avestischen Dichtung als einem mündlichen Dichtungssystem scheint vor allem die 'Rekomposition in Performance' maßgebend gewesen zu sein. Jeder Dichter hat versucht, die vorhandenen Liedermodule nach den Bedingungen seiner Performance und den Anforderungen seiner Zuhörer neu zu gestalten. Zu beachten ist, dass in diesem Dichtungssystem nicht nach dem Original zu suchen ist. [...] In der Zeit, in der die Tradition lebendig war, müssen die Lieder ständig rekomponiert worden sein. Die verschiedenen Variationen galten somit nicht als richtig oder falsch. Eine Version wurde vom Zuhörer akzeptiert, nicht wenn sie mit dem Original völlig übereinstimmte, sondern wenn sie den Anforderungen einer guten Dichtung gerecht wurde." Kianoosh Rezania, "Von der altiranischen Dichtung zur Yasna-Liturgie. Über die Kanonisierung der liturgisch avestischen Texte im Zoroastrismus," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (2010): 202.

96 See Karl Popper, *Realism and the Aim of Science*, ed. W.W. Bartley III (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 359.

97 Karl R. Popper, *A World of Propensities* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), 12.

98 See Popper, *Realism and the Aim of Science*, 350, 358.

individuals.⁹⁹ It is the attraction-displaying situation that introduces and changes the propensities/possibilities that are continuously actualized.

This idea corresponds well with the ideas of classical phenomenology. In Husserlian phenomenology, potentiality is related to actuality by means of a frame of possibilities that consists of possible actualizations fitting within it but is otherwise indefinite. It is, however, then defined by the actualization that occurs. That is to say, it cannot be otherwise than as realized by the particular actualization, introducing a necessary but contingent relation between potential and actualization, or rather, a stable (temporal) relation.¹⁰⁰ This relation, above all in object language considerations, then may be interpreted as causality or, on a more practical level, as the idea that things cannot be otherwise.

If any, retrospective stability is something often to be claimed by religions on the object language level, whereon religions regard themselves as *traditions*. Though the past itself is changed in the course of time, either via slow development or in reaction to sudden events, the tradition itself stabilizes via the incorporation of the prevailing answers to the challenges met.¹⁰¹ They are, in this sense, actualized possibilities, which are objective tendencies to be realized in the sense of a propensity. Thus, dynamic (re-)actions stabilize traditions, or rather, change does not destabilize traditions. On the contrary, it is *because of change* that a tradition may stabilize by realizing its propensities; tradition and innovation thus are closely interrelated.¹⁰²

5.2 *Stability of the Chain of Interpretation*

As regards the *horizontal aspect* of dynamics, the relationship between dynamics and stability must cover sequential phenomena. To provide the conceptual bridge between both counterparts with regard to the flux of time, the concept of an *attractor* proves most suitable. Attractors denote the analytically discernible processes of attraction in the course of events. Within the inexhaustible possibilities of reality, the attractor forms and orders processes with respect to the complex conditions of the processes' particular environments or their

99 See chapter on Attraction.

100 Compare Wiegerling, *Husserls Begriff der Potentialität*, 18.

101 Slater as well stresses the temporal aspect of the specific dynamic of religions, claiming that "The dynamics of religion must be understood by reference to the present interplay of past and future considerations. [...] The weight of tradition has always been recognized, but not the counterweight of hope." Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 3. Slater, however, in the course of his argument tends to overemphasize the future aspect of religious temporality (based on the category of hope) at the expense of the dynamically stabilizing interplay of the three extases of time (see, for example, *ibid.*, 8–9).

102 See chapter on Tradition.

basin of attraction. Attractors are centers of clustering movements that follow certain propensities which may be described as gravitations to their prevailing position. As such, attractors indicate recursivity.¹⁰³

To elaborate further, a notion developed by Charles Sanders Peirce proves useful: the so-called *dynamic* (or *dynamical*) *object*.¹⁰⁴ To Peirce, the dynamic object is the ‘real’ object that stubbornly resists immediate insight and, therefore, is the motivating trigger for future interpretation processes.¹⁰⁵ In the world, the dynamic object “exerts a continual veto power over the signs that cluster around the immediate object.”¹⁰⁶ Being suitable for grasping literary fiction like Hamlet, this dynamic object might be fictional, but it nevertheless conveys meaning¹⁰⁷ and, what is more, ‘acts’ by *generating interpretation*.¹⁰⁸

A religious attractor is a *dynamic object* generating a *chain of signs* (of *immediate objects*)¹⁰⁹ that—while reaching for a full understanding of the object

103 See chapter on Attraction.

104 See for a discussion of the concept of ‘dynamic(al) object’ in Peirce Carl R. Hausman, “Peirce’s Dynamical Object: Realism as Process Philosophy,” in *Conversations on Peirce: Reals and Ideals*, eds. Douglas R. Anderson and Carl R. Hausman (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

105 See Peirce’s explanation in his letter to William James from 14 March 1909: “We must distinguish between the Immediate Object,—i.e., the object represented in the Sign,—and the Real (no, because perhaps the Object is altogether fictive, I must choose a different term; therefore:), say rather the Dynamical Object, which, from the nature of things, the Sign cannot express, which it can only indicate and leave the interpreter to find out by *collateral experience*. For instance, I point my finger to what I mean, but I can’t make my companion know what I mean, if he can’t see it, or if seeing it, it does not, to his mind, separate itself from the surrounding objects in the field of vision.” Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings. Volume 2 (1893–1913)*, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 498.

106 Robert S. Corrington, *An Introduction to C.S. Peirce. Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 1993), 144.

107 See Francesco Bellucci, “Exploring Peirce’s speculative grammar: The immediate object of a sign,” *Sign System Studies* 43 (2015): 403.

108 “[W]hat counts as a dynamical object is the way the object fits into or functions in relation to interpretation. It can be a prior immediate object for a developing interpretation, and as such, it functions dynamically. But underlying all these strands of interpretations, and all these related immediate objects, is externality, the inevitable function of the inexhaustible condition of thought in general.” Hausman, “Peirce’s Dynamical Object,” 98.

109 As an example of this see the chain of succession in early Christian churches, perpetuating true faith in direct relation to the founding figure of Christianity and thus, as a process, leading to stabilization. Jan-Markus Kötter, “Stability and threat to the order of the church. Some thoughts on the personalization of the church in Late Antiquity,” *InterDisciplines* 2 (2011): 48.

though never reaching 'it'—describes the very process of *attraction*.¹¹⁰ On the religious object language level, the significance of interpretation as inseparably related to a dynamic object¹¹¹ is exemplified by the idea of the possibility of connecting to the divine through 'inspired interpretation'. In her analysis of the Book of Jubilees Hindy Najman writes:

Rather than thinking of interpretation of texts and the development of prophecy, we should consider it one of many forms of revelation in preexilic and postexilic texts. Throughout the Second Temple period and beyond we have texts that continue to claim that they are able to connect with the divine via heavenly journey, conversation with angels, and inspired interpretation of older authoritative prophetic texts and/or traditions.

By doing so, these texts themselves connect inseparably to the divine. In her conclusion, Najman characterizes *Jubilees* as follows:

Jubilees participates in prophetic discourse by attaching its origin to Mosaic recording and angelic dictation. Thus, the text is presented as a revelation insofar as it is the earthly copy of an already established divine and heavenly original. This is done by emphasizing the role of the exemplar in generating and sustaining new discourses in Judean traditions from Second Temple times. Thus, the exemplar is himself the prophet who receives and transmits inspired tradition.¹¹²

110 Helmut Pape characterizes the relation of the dynamic object and an attractor correspondingly as follows: "[M]y thesis is that the dynamical object of a sign acts analogously to a final cause. Or, to use a piece of terminology from physics and chaos theory, the dynamical object resembles to some extent to what is called an 'attractor'. This implies that the dynamical object is embodied into the logical structure of semiotical forms: its job is to structure sign-processes in such a way that some relational form properties analogous to those of purposes, goals, aims that govern human conduct become effective. The semiotical concept of the object is consistent with there being real, independent objects because this can be done in such a general way that their form allows objects to be dynamically parts of sign-processes, regardless of what changes in their properties might occur." Helmut Pape, "C. S. Peirce on the Dynamical Object of a Sign: From Ontology to Semiotics and back," (unpublished manuscript, Paper presented at the KHK Workshop 'Dynamics of Signs', 24 October 2013), 4.

111 See Helmut Pape, *Erfahrung und Wirklichkeit als Zeichenprozeß. Charles S. Peirces Entwurf einer Spekultativen Grammatik des Seins* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 315.

112 Hindy Najman, *Past Renewals. Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 197, 203.

In religious studies, one might refer to a canonic text that generates commentaries, or which is intended to generate commentaries as part of its own development.¹¹³ The immediate object, here, consists of the previously made interpretations of the dynamic object. As a consequence, the attractor is the *generating process*, not to be fixed into an object-like state, but which provides an impulse and motivation for further inquiry. The ‘stability of the chain of interpretation’, thus, does not insinuate that the object or the prevailing interpretations are stable, but rather that their interrelation, the chain is as such.¹¹⁴ The generative and intensifying aspect of attractors seen as dynamic objects, or rather, attraction¹¹⁵ as, in this sense, dynamics might well be related to the old philosophical notion of *dynamis* which is, according to Plato and Aristotle, the potential of realizable possibilities (with certain propensities) of some entity or in our terms actual *interpretations* of a certain object. Thus, the notion of dynamics *via attraction* becomes more precise and definable than simply ‘becoming’ as an opposite feature of ‘being’. The Peircean idea is also likely to throw some doubt on the supposedly stable material things the study of religion has often turned to.¹¹⁶

Dynamics becomes a metaphor for a description of religious history that moves beyond causal determination (a becomes b because of c), which is itself a common misunderstanding of the notion of *evolution*. The correct dynamical formalization would be the following: b evolved from a because it later

113 See in the case of Ancient Chinese canonization processes Licia Di Giacinto, “The Early History of the Confucian Canon, Successes and Failures of the First Closure,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (2010): 141: “A[n] important [...] factor for text authority was the continuous acceptance of a given text within the community. [...] A criterion for certifying the ‘canonicity’ of a text was the existence of commentaries.”

114 Compare Helmut Zander’s notion of stability: “Stabilität [...] läßt sich nur konstruieren, indem vermeintlich unveränderliche Bestände immer wieder an neue Kontexte angepaßt, also reinterpretiert und insoweit verändert werden.” Helmut Zander, *‘Europäische’ Religionsgeschichte. Religiöse Zugehörigkeit durch Entscheidung—Konsequenzen im interkulturellen Vergleich* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 48.

115 See chapter on Attraction.

116 Gesche Linde notes an important point as regards materiality: “[T]he material things of our surroundings we naturally take for existent, and for stable, are rather the products of successive steps of interpretation: They are much more fluid, so to speak, than we use to think. They are results of negotiations between my former self and my present one, or between myself as a interpreter and some supposed other, the speaker. This also means that our possibilities to reconstruct the meanings physical artefacts might have had in the past, or to ‘converse with the subjects of our research’, as Clifford Geertz put it, are limited.” Gesche Linde, “Semiotic Objects and Physical Artefacts. A Peircean Approach to Cultural Semiotics,” (unpublished manuscript, Paper presented at the КHK Workshop ‘Dynamics of Signs’, 24 October 2013), par. 11.

has become, or was interpreted as *c*. This formula integrates the *retentional* perspective. Furthermore, material objects can be examined as *energetic* ones (*energeia*) in the sense of being a realized possibility (propensity) of interpretation. Attraction, therefore, holds a privileged position in reflections on religious dynamics—my suggestion would be that it is the form that illuminates most of the dynamic processes that might be called religious.

5.3 *Stability of Dynamic Bipolarity*

To Aristotle, the external conditions of its realization must be included in the definition of a *dynamis*.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, as indicated in *modus 1* of the dynamics/stability interrelation, the notion of *realization* as introduced here is two-fold: in the sense that ‘realization’ means both a) to actualize, to make true (real as a physical process) and b) ‘to realize’ in the sense of becoming aware of. This second meaning introduces an agenda of self-reflection (‘consciousness’) that leads to (intellectual) densification and stabilization—to an *intensification* of expression.¹¹⁸ The most important insight is the following: all dynamics as the realizations of possibilities are always *bipolar*.¹¹⁹ Put into a geometrical model: *dynamics are always elliptical*, consisting of two focal points.

It is at this point, that Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophy of organism can suitably be combined with Aristotelian insight toward a unified conceptualization of dynamics.¹²⁰ In his *Enquiry into the Principles of Natural Knowledge* Whitehead characterized the basic bipolarity of nature as follows.

There are two sides to nature, as it were, antagonistic the one to the other, and yet each essential. The one side is development in creative advance, the essential becomingness of nature. The other side is the permanence of things, the fact that nature can be recognized. Thus nature is always a newness relating objects which are neither new nor old. Perception

¹¹⁷ See Liske, “Inwieweit sind Vermögen intrinsische dispositionelle Eigenschaften?,” 272.

¹¹⁸ On the ‘densification’ or crystallization of Buddhist identities as a result of the dynamics of interreligious contact see Berkwitz, “Dynamics and Stability,” 27. Citing Fukun Habian and Angarika Dharmapāla as examples Berkwitz claims: “Their respective writings about Buddhism and Christianity are significant examples of how interreligious contacts could lead to the intensification of notions about Buddhist identity, morality, and truth.”

¹¹⁹ Gesche Linde hints at the bipolarity connected to the Peircean notion of the dynamic object, see Gesche Linde, “Experience as Interpretation. A Peircean Approach to practical Theology,” in *Religion: Immediate Experience and the Mediacy of Research. Interdisciplinary Studies, Concepts and Methodology of Empirical Research in Religion*, eds. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Christopher P. Scholz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 162.

¹²⁰ Tweed recognizes Whitehead as a fellow collaborator in the “description of dynamic processes.” Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 57.

fades unless it is equally stimulated from both sides of nature. [...] Thus essentially perception is an awareness of events in the act of passing into what has yet never been. But equally perception requires recognition. [...] [T]he recognition in perception requires the recurrence of the ways in which events pass.¹²¹

Natural events can only be perceived and recognized in a combination of becoming and permanence. This, too, sheds some light on the operations of religions, as religion is not all about movement; rather, it is about movement and standing still. The very foundation of religion, as Whitehead himself claims, relies “on our apprehension of those permanent elements by reason of which there is a stable order in the world, permanent elements apart from which there could be no changing world.”¹²² Religion, thus, is a way of describing the possibility of order and stability in a changing world that can only be identified as such by means of a stable order. In general, Whitehead’s thinking claims for a mediated and, in fact, mediating interplay of change and conservation as the basic characteristics of reality:

There are two principles inherent in the very nature of things, recurring in some particular embodiments whatever field we explore—the spirit of change, and the spirit of conservation. There can be nothing real without both. Mere change without conservation is a passage from nothing to nothing. Its final integration yields mere transient non-entity. Mere conservation without change cannot conserve. For, after all, there is a flux of circumstance, and the freshness of being evaporates under mere repetition. The character of existent reality is composed of organisms enduring through the flux of things.¹²³

Whitehead characterizes his own intellectual endeavor as a philosophy of organism, building on the shift from materialism to organic realism (organism).¹²⁴ The dynamics of materialism, thus, are replaced by the dynamics of organism. Organisms, as the actual elements of reality, consist of both aspects of dynamics and stability. Organisms operate in the direction of (vectorially

121 Alfred North Whitehead, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (New York: Dover, 1982), 98.

122 Whitehead, Preface to: *Religion in the Making*.

123 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures 1925* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 201.

124 See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 309.

to) themselves as a 'superject' of this directional progress (self-realization, self-transcendence); the operations are not directed from the organism as a *subject*.¹²⁵ Accordingly, the notion of 'organism' is basically an indicator for *self-transcending* actual entities.¹²⁶

Moreover, organisms guided by both 'the spirit of change' and 'the spirit of conversation' are characterized by yet another expression of *bipolarity* (or *dipolarity*). 'Change and stability' are parallels to 'physicality and mentality'. Concerning bipolarity, Whitehead writes:

Each actuality is essentially bipolar, physical and mental, and the physical inheritance is essentially accompanied by a conceptual reaction partly conformed to it, and partly introductory of a relevant novel contrast, but always introducing emphasis, valuation, and purpose. The integration of the physical and the mental side into a unity of experience is a self-formation which is a process of concrescence, and which by the principle of objective immortality characterizes the creativity which transcends it.¹²⁷

The notion of concrescence denotes something very basic to Whitehead's thinking and is explained in *Process and Reality* as the 'production of novel togetherness'. 'Concrescence' thus describes the process of many growing into one. Whitehead adds: "These ultimate notions of 'production of novelty' and of 'concrete togetherness' are inexplicable either in terms of higher universals or in terms of the components participating in the concrescence."¹²⁸

125 Whitehead coins the notion of 'superject' in order to describe the situation when a subject is carried beyond its internal becoming and, by means of this self-transcending process, therefore is no longer a subject but rather a *superject*. As such, it becomes the object of still later subjects' prehensions. Thus, superjects are expressions of process. Once an occasion has become fully actualized, it becomes an objective datum for those occasions which follow it. "An actual entity is to be conceived both as a subject presiding over its own immediacy of becoming, and a superject which is the atomic creature exercising its function of objective immortality. It has become a 'being'; and it belongs to the nature of every 'being' that it is the potential for every 'becoming.'" Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 45.

126 "And also it is to be noted that every actual entity [...] is a creature transcended by the creativity which it qualifies." Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88. Whitehead here relates this note to Spinoza's idea of substance being *causa sui*, thus reaching transcendence because of reasons of immanence.

127 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 108.

128 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21–22.

Concrescence realizes creativity (dynamics) as self-formation, and is, thus, superjectively self-transcending.

Reality, thus, as an effect of realization, consists of a *physical and a mental pole*, or to put this another way, of physical inheritance and conceptual reaction—a pair that together generates a new *contrast*. Of course, the two separate poles are stressed here for analytical reasons. There is obviously no dualism of mind and matter, although it may be described that way in object language text. Moreover, the presence of a mental pole does not necessarily involve consciousness in this conception of bipolar dynamics.¹²⁹ The five-layer scheme proposed for understanding vertical dynamics, for instance, clearly indicates that there are in fact levels in between the ‘mental’ and the ‘physical’ pole of an intensifying dynamic process. However, there is more to it than simply saying that any contrast cannot prevail without the contrasted.¹³⁰ The parts of a bipolar relation only make sense by mutual reference, which does not merely say that they are not explainable without the other but rather that the process between them, the (rotating) mutual reference, *generates meaning* as interpretation or expression.¹³¹ The introduction of ‘emphasis, valuation and purpose’ (meaning) due to the fact that ‘physical inheritance is essentially accompanied by a conceptual reaction’ means the introduction of *intensification*. The integration of the mental and the physical pole provides a concrescence that may be characterized as an axial rotation: it is not only the mind informing the body but also concerns the repercussions of the information received. Something like this might be indicated in Tweed’s definition: ‘Religious life is about movement’ means both that something is moving and that (in re-flection) someone is moved, the dynamics thus being *intensified*.

Intensification is, thus, a particular self-formation—among which the formation of an emphasized self is an extreme case—, allowing for something which Whitehead, somehow surprisingly, calls ‘feeling’.¹³² Usually, feelings

129 See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 248.

130 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

131 Here, the dynamic of display and concealment regarding the phenomenon of secrecy as examined by Robert Ford Campany in Chinese esoteric practice might serve as an example: in the esoteric arts, there is a basic tension between reclusion and recognition. These opposing tendencies imply and reinforce each other, leading to an increase in emphasis. Concerning secrecy, it is not enough simply to hide something, the fact of something being hidden must be recognized, or rather, realized as well, thus involving both the physical and mental pole in order to make sense. Compare Robert Ford Campany, “Secrecy and Display in the Quest for Transcendence in China, ca. 220 BCE–350 CE,” *History of Religions* 45 (2006): 294, 336. Compare chapter on Secret.

132 Compare Morgan’s notion of feeling with regard to material culture as an important device of religion: “[M]aterial culture, and the arts generally, are ways of generating, transmitting, refining and sharing feeling. Material culture, and visual culture as subdivision

are subsumed under the 'subjective' side of human experience, as opposed to 'objective' facts. 'Feeling' here is a technical term denoting the way actual entities appropriate data in order to make them their own in the process of concrescence.¹³³

Thus an actual entity is essentially dipolar, with its physical and mental poles; and even the physical world cannot be properly understood without reference to its other side, which is the complex of mental operations. The primary mental operations are conceptual feelings.¹³⁴

Dynamics, thus, is the conceptual appropriation of data to a creative new unity which can be considered to be the agenda of the actual entity as a superject. Mental operations, therefore, are not secondary to physical occasions, rather they are co-original (*gleichursprünglich*).

The process of bipolar contrasting intensification may lead to certain 'ideal forms' which are the main elements of mental operations involved in any actual occasion (*actual entity*). In *Process and Reality*, these forms as pure *potentials* for the determination or appropriation of facts¹³⁵ are called 'eternal objects'. As potentials, these eternal objects are the dynamizing elements in processes. "An eternal object is always a potentiality for actual entities, but in itself [...] it is neutral as to the fact of its physical ingression in any particular entity of the temporal world."¹³⁶ Due to its neutrality in content, ideal forms or eternal objects may be used as schemes or model forms in self-reflection but also in situations of contact. Whitehead describes the bipolar dynamics involved in any process as follows:

Thus the process of becoming is dipolar, (i) by reason of its qualification by the determinateness of the actual world, and (ii) by its conceptual prehensions of the indeterminateness of eternal objects. The process is constituted by the influx of eternal objects into a novel determinateness of feeling, which absorbs the actual world into a new actuality.¹³⁷

of it, is not principally the expression of ideas or doctrines, but rather the cultural production, circulation, and reception of felt-knowledge. This means that images and their uses should be examined for the ways in which they help to create forms of sympathy, empathy, antipathy, and apathy—feeling with, feeling into or as, feeling against or other than, and feeling not at all." Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 147.

133 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 164.

134 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 239.

135 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 22.

136 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 44.

137 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 45.

As a technical term denoting the unification of a manifold into one new actuality, a 'conceptual prehension' *feeling* is highly suitable for the description of the dynamics in the history of religions. In the abovementioned sense, dynamics generate new *contrasts*¹³⁸ by introducing stable elements, providing them with both continuity and novelty. In his own considerations on religion, Whitehead states: "The novelty which enters into the derivate instance is the information of the actual world with a new set of ideal forms. In the most literal sense, the lapse of time is the renovation of the world with ideas."¹³⁹ Novelty, thus, is not achieved by making things more fluid but rather by the introduction of new stabilizing conceptual elements (feeling) that serve as the focal points for re-interpretation. Movement is generated by the introduction of stable elements and not by their dissolution.¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, with regard to the history of religions, it may be assumed that dogma or canon generates dynamics in its three forms: horizontal, vertical, and intensifying.

Translated into Aristotle's words, Whitehead's insight indicates that, in particular in religion, *dynamis* is always *meta* and *aneu logou*. Not least, this holds true for the scientific description of religion. There is no material without meaning and no meaning without the material strata. *The realization of religion is both putting it into existence and realizing it as such*. In other words, there is no material level of religion without the interpreting mind, be it on the object level (ascribing meaning) as well as on the (scientific) meta-level of the describing scholar. In his theory of religion *Religion in the Making* Whitehead expresses this bipolar interrelation as follows: "It is the genius of religion to point at the facts and ask for their systematic interpretation."¹⁴¹

5.4 *Stability of Dynamic Trails*

To explain the decisive feature that may furthermore combine and interrelate dynamics and stability and to partly answer the question of what might guarantee the stability of a dynamically described entity named religion, I shall refer to psychology, in particular to a theory of psychodynamics, developed by the German *Entwicklungspsychologe* Hans Thomae (1915–2001).¹⁴² In some sound agreement with the current state of the art in religious studies, dynamic

138 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanende Distinction.

139 Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 113–114.

140 "The things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal." Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 40.

141 Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 51.

142 For a biographical sketch see Manfred Gogol, Andreas Kruse, and Georg Rudinger, "Hans Thomae zum 100. Geburtstag," *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 6 (2015): 574–576.

psychology holds the inner life of human beings to be a dynamic context defined by the interplay of certain forces, opposing 'static' psychology that considers inner life a certain state. However, the reference to this theory does not mean that I try to explicate religion as a psychological phenomenon, but rather that I wish to use the formal features of Thomae's psychological theory as a model for the description of the interplay of dynamics and stability found in religion.

Thomae takes his point of theoretical departure from the insight that the key to the description and explication of human behavior is not *structure* in the first place but rather process (*Geschehen*).¹⁴³ In his *magnum opus* 'Das Individuum und seine Welt. Eine Persönlichkeitstheorie' (*The Individual and His World. A Theory of Personality*), Thomae critiques the persistence of antique teachings that view characters as solid and permanent structures in modern theories on personality. In contrast to that, and in accordance with recent currents in the study of religion, Thomae emphasizes his own dynamic approach.¹⁴⁴ This basic insight must sound very appealing to scholars of religion who are very aware of the fact that religion is about movement and is, accordingly, not to be characterized by static structures only, let alone by unchanging 'essential' features.

However, the basic dynamics that Thomae sees underpinning character are not without order to provide some constancy, as this character of human existence is furthermore qualified by its basic directedness (*Gerichtetheit*). To Thomae, direction serves a fundamental explanatory feature: without it, he argues, basic notions of psychology cannot be explained satisfactorily.¹⁴⁵ It is directedness that makes the human being 'propulsive' and, thus, self-transcending.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, these (psycho-)dynamics are not blind and undefined activities, they rather do fixate and are unlikely to depart that *trail* of

143 See the chapter "Personality as Process" (*Persönlichkeit als Prozess*) in *Persönlichkeit. Eine dynamische Interpretation*, ed. Hans Thomae (Bonn: Bouvier, 1981), 11–13.

144 "Was sich dem Beobachter an einem anderen Menschen zeigt [...] das ist Geschehen, Ereignis, Ablauf, Handlung, Veränderung. Dieses einer Person zugehörige [...] Geschehen gilt es auch, bei der diagnostischen bzw. theoretischen Bemühung um die Erschließung individueller Welten zu bewahren." Hans Thomae, *Das Individuum und seine Welt. Eine Persönlichkeitstheorie* (Göttingen: Hogrefe, 1968), 403.

145 Thomae, *Persönlichkeit*, 16: "Danach [...] muß die Gerichtetheit als Grundqualität menschlichen und darüber hinaus lebendigen Daseins, der Vorgang der Richtung als ein Grundvorgang gelten, ohne den Tatbestände, wie z.B. Integration, Gestalt, Ganzheit gar nicht sinnvoll verstanden werden können."

146 Thomae, *Persönlichkeit*, 26–27: "Es ist ein propulsives, das Dasein ständig über sich hinaussteigerndes Moment, das hier lebendig wird."

direction (*Bahnung*) which provides for their full development.¹⁴⁷ This trail is the manifestation or realization of the directed process. With regard to religious practice, one may think of ritualized behavior and canon-building processes here.¹⁴⁸

Additionally, and most suitably fitting for a contact-based perspective on the dynamics in the history of religions, Thomae states that the creation of these trails of direction is dependent on two basic aspects, namely internal processes of maturing and external *situations of contact*.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, it is the ‘polarity’ of process and directedness that makes human behavior.¹⁵⁰ The trail of directedness is psychologically elevated (transcended) into an ‘ideal situational scheme (*ideales Lageschema*)’, which then is applied independently of the situation the individual is currently in.¹⁵¹ Thus, trail-making (pathfinding) stabilizes. It is, as such, a stable intentional structure that has evolved from the directed process and thus provides the main instrument for a meta-level perspective. Or, in Thomae’s words, it makes the individual ‘see’ in order to design, describe, and control their environment.¹⁵² It is the schema that makes sense of experiences and even allows them as such.¹⁵³

In the above, we can recognize another example of the basic bipolarity of the dynamic process, in which the mental (designing, controlling) pole is in

147 See Hans Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Psychologie 1944–1984* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1985), 112: “So wenig schwebt jene Dynamik überhaupt im luftleeren Raum, daß sie jede Bahn fixiert und nicht mehr verläßt, die ihr einmal volle Entfaltung verlieh.”

148 Correspondingly, Dirk Werle considers tradition (see chapter on Tradition) a phenomenon that can be described as paved trails in a particular library, rendering a multitude of texts to a non-contingent association of texts (“Traditionen sind so etwas wie gebahnte Wege durch die Bibliothek, innerhalb derer die Bücher aufeinander verweisen, sind spezifische, nicht-kontingente Gruppierungen von Texten.”) Dirk Werle, “Was ist Tradition?,” in *Tradition und Traditionsverhalten. Literaturwissenschaftliche Zugänge und kulturhistorische Perspektiven*, eds. Philip Reich, Karolin Toledo Flores, and Dirk Werle (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2021), 44.

149 See Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 117: “Immer aber erscheint dann das Antriebsgeschehen als eine konkrete Bahn, in der sich die Lebensdynamik für eine Weile zu manifestieren vermag. Und immer ist die ‘Bahnung’ abhängig von der Artung des psychophysischen Gesamts durch innere Reifungsvorgänge wie durch Begegnungen.”

150 “Die Polarität von ‘Lebendigkeit überhaupt’ und geformter, in bestimmte verpflichtende Richtung weisender Lebendigkeit [...] macht also erst das aus, was wir spezifisch menschliches Verhalten nennen.” Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 124.

151 Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 121.

152 Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 120.

153 Compare Thomae, *Das Individuum und seine Welt*, 586.

itself an expression of the dynamic process as such.¹⁵⁴ Thomae's idea of pathfinding dynamics as a fundamental for self-reflection adds an important element to a conceptualization of dynamics, and, complementarily, stability. To wit, *stability* denotes a *fixation of a certain directedness of a dynamic process in certain trails* (Bahnen), which makes it possible to describe the fixated process as a whole, both on the object-level (self-)description and on the scientific meta-level description.¹⁵⁵ Trails manifest propensities and display attraction.¹⁵⁶

Of course, trailmaking remains a process on the micro-level. Stability as a product of fixing a trail might be described as a conservative form of dynamics. Trails are fixed by contact, as in Thomae's theory. Conservative dynamics, therefore, might, for instance, be identified in stereotypical behavior towards others or 'the other' in general.

On the physical macro level, the stability of dynamic trails can be related to mutually reinforcing processes found in the contact of the religious field with other societal fields. In the case of the contact of religion and economy, Foltz has described this process for the horizontal dynamics of Buddhism which like 'running water found open channels' formed trade routes. Foltz continues as follows: "But the religion-trade relationship was mutually reinforcing. For example, the expansion of Buddhism brought an increasing demand for silk, which was used in Buddhist ceremonies, thereby further stimulating the long-distance trading activity that had facilitated the spread of Buddhism in the first place."¹⁵⁷ Via a process of mutual reinforcement, an element of

154 "[...] das gemeinte konkrete Antriebsgeschehen ist Anzeichen für die Richtung, in der sich die 'Lebendigkeit überhaupt' auf Grund einer bestimmten inneren und äußeren Lage manifestieren kann. Es ist somit sehend gewordener 'Ausdruck' einer auf eine spezifische 'Stufe' gehobenen Lebendigkeit." Thomae, *Dynamik des menschlichen Handelns*, 115.

155 Compare the concept of pathdependency (*Pfadabhängigkeit*) which argues that there are cultural fixings that shape subsequent developments. I would argue that not only the starting points, but also the trails of the development might become fixated (not as determination, but as a discernable path that is followed in a majority of occasions). Nevertheless, with both the stability of trails and trail-dependence, Zander's reminder remains valid: "Das bedeutet nicht, ontologische Festlegungen für eine Kultur zu treffen, sondern historisch kontingente und im Prinzip reversible, jedoch stabile Festlegungen anzunehmen." Zander, *Europäische Religionsgeschichte*, 50.

156 Thomae discusses the behavior potentials of a person as a selection from a range of possible responses, asking for the order of probabilities for the different response classes. Due to a 'principle of economy' certain responses that turned out to be useful in meeting a problem situation are retained, possibly resulting in fixation and rigidity (see 183), thus providing a propensity of reaction. Hans Thomae, "Conceptualizations of responses to stress," *European Journal of Personality* 1 (1987): 177.

157 Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 10. On the dynamic mutual interrelation of a network of well-built infrastructure and the spread of religions in the Roman Empire see Christoph

intensification is added to the horizontal dynamics of expansion. Moreover, at least for some people, this also had effects on the vertical level which can be seen in transformations on the cultural and physical levels through evolutions in costume in order to fulfill the obligations of Buddhist ceremonial practices. Another example of the interrelation of dynamics and stability in the form of dynamic trails at work in the history of religions may be found in Aziz Al-Azmeh's description of the emergence of Islam in late antiquity. Here, Al-Azmeh suitably employs the element of potentiality in his analysis of the realized process:

In contrast to the diffusionist model often provided for the genesis of the Muslim religion, and its search for constitutive origins in previous monotheistic religions or in more generally Semitic terms, the model here adapted is polygenetic, with an emphasis on local and autochthonous forces and processes which, once their geographical and social remit had widened under imperial auspices, joined a historical flow that had already been firmly in place, and realized, under central control, a number of possibilities available in the structure of polytheism, as it had been the case before.¹⁵⁸

Thus, the dynamics of Islam's emergence can be described as realizing the propensities provided by the background of monotheism, a process that is stabilized by trails that are themselves further supported and intensified by political circumstances, dynamizing the vertical dynamics of the actors involved.¹⁵⁹

Auffarth, "Menschen reisen zu den Göttern, Götter reisen zu den Menschen. *Religio migrans* in Abonuteichos und am Schwarzen Meer," *Phasis* 18 (2015): 32: "Vielmehr bieten die gut ausgebauten Infrastrukturen für Militär, Verkehr, Handel, Migration die Wege für die Ausbreitung von Kulturen. Andererseits bestimmen Kriterien des 'Marktes', welche Kulte und wie sie dargeboten werden müssen, um Anklang beim Publikum zu finden. Eine Angleichung und Verdichtung führt zu einer neuen Qualität von Religion." Accordingly, Auffarth fittingly re-interprets the notion of *Reichsreligion* (Religion of the Empire) as a certain space preserving a dynamic potential by guaranteeing religious mobility by providing the infrastructure for travel and exchange: "[D]as Reich [bietet] die Infrastruktur in Form von Handels- und Reisewegen, die pax Romana des militärischen Schutzes und gefahrlosen Reisens, verhältnismäßige Toleranz." (ibid., 39).

158 Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 40.

159 "Militarily powered, this religion of an external proletariat came to be immediately transposed, by empire in Damascus and Baghdad, to the most advanced terminus reached by Hellenistic political theology in which the one universal empire mirrored the one God. It was thus that the microcosmic and elementary re-enactment of the oecumenical late antique move from henotheism and monolatry to monotheism took place among the Arabs." Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 41.

5.5 *Stability of Reproduction, Stabilization as Permanent Re-stabilization*

The notion of stability, having fallen victim to ideological misuse (indicating 'bad' and, indirectly, via contrast 'good' attitudes towards the phenomena), had to be reintegrated into the Humanities via the reception of physics in social sciences. In Niklas Luhmann's thinking, the notion of *dynamic stability* may be of some utility to the field of religious studies.¹⁶⁰ Luhmann's dynamic stability is embedded in a theory that deals with the perpetual renewal of elements of a certain system. From Luhmann's *Soziale Systeme*:

This theory is not concerned, like the classical theories of equilibrium, with returning to a stable state of rest after the absorption of disturbances, but with securing the constant renewal of system elements—or, more briefly, not with static but with dynamic stability. All elements pass away. They cannot endure as elements in time, and thus they must constantly be produced on the basis of whatever constellation of elements is actual at any given moment. Reproduction thus does not mean simply repeatedly producing the same, but rather reflexive production, production out of products.¹⁶¹

Stability, seen from the perspective of this theory, is not the achievement of a resting position but rather consists of guaranteeing the reproduction of certain temporal elements with regard to the prevailing constellation at a given point in time. This approach makes the production 'reflexive'. Stability is not a mere repetition but consists of a *chain of production*; one former production being the basis of the later one (reproduction). With regard to the dimension

160 As Christoph Kleine put it, to a certain degree the question for the possibility of a stable society and the examination of the techniques of social differentiation that stabilize societies is the very basis of Luhmann's thinking. Christoph Kleine, "Niklas Luhmann und die Religionswissenschaft: Geht das zusammen?," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 24 (2016): 52.

161 Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr. with Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 49. "Dieser Theorie geht es also nicht, wie klassischen Gleichgewichtstheorien, um Rückkehr in eine stabile Ruhelage nach Absorption von Störungen, sondern um die Sicherung der unaufhörlichen Erneuerung der Systemelemente, oder in kurzer Formulierung: nicht um statische, sondern um dynamische Stabilität. Alle Elemente verschwinden, sie können sich als Elemente in der Zeit nicht halten, sie müssen also laufend neu hervorgebracht werden und dies aufgrund der Konstellation von Elementen, die im Moment aktuell ist. Reproduktion heißt also nicht einfach: Wiederholung der Produktion des Gleichen, sondern reflexive Produktion, Produktion aus Produkten." Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 79.

of time, reproduction thus also indicates the presence of a retentive process. Accordingly, a religion or religious tradition as a self-referential system reproduces religious elements at a given point in time on the basis of its former elements, thus stabilizing itself.¹⁶² Religious traditions adapt themselves to their own instability.¹⁶³ It is a seemingly paradoxical idea that the cause of stability here is the fundamental instability, which, nevertheless, allows religious traditions to react to the situation it is in by kick-starting the process for the appropriate reproduction of elements. One might call this a stability of *evolution*, which at once reacts to or interprets and also changes its environment.¹⁶⁴ In Luhmann's words: "Anything that can be built on such restless foundations must be able to change fluctuation into stability."¹⁶⁵ In other words, it must generate dynamic stability. A stable system that is unable to communicate with the situation would disintegrate into the flux of time.

With reference to Jan Assmann's characterization of Egyptian religion having moved from being an implicit to an explicit one, Luhmann characterizes the decisive development in the evolution of religion as a 'care for consistency' (*Konsistenzpflege*):

In this new way, religion became a system that reproduced itself, its own boundaries, and its own history. It continually reactualized its own recursions. In short, it became an autopoietic system. Religions' semantics were completely reformulated, becoming a doctrine that could be fixed in writing.¹⁶⁶

Another example of continual reactualization is the Pentateuch texts in Jewish tradition. These texts stabilize a certain community by means of their authority, but not because they are considered to be immutable:

162 See chapter on Tradition.

163 Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 50 correspondingly describes the "system's internal orientation towards its own instability." See Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 80.

164 Compare the processes of constant redefinition and constant reinterpretation in Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 70–71.

165 Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 52. "Was auf so unruhigem Untergrund gebaut werden kann, muß Fluktuation in Stabilität überführen können." Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 82.

166 Niklas Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, trans. David A. Brenner with Adrian Hermann Stanford (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 192. "Religion in diesem neuen Sinn wird nun zu einem sich selbst und die eigenen Grenzen und die eigene Geschichte reproduzierenden System, das seine eigenen Rekursionen ständig reaktualisiert, kurz: zu einem autopoietischen System. Die religiöse Semantik wird komplett reformuliert. Sie wird eine schriftlich fixierbare Lehre, eine Dogmatik." Luhmann, *Die Religion in der Gesellschaft*, 267.

The [...] Reworked Pentateuch-texts are a case in point. The evidence we have challenges the ideal of the immutability of sacred and authoritative texts and reveals a reality of texts being changed, revised, and corrected in the course of their compilation and transmission. [...] In other words, a text may remain authoritative primarily because of the changes because then it keeps up with the developments taking place in the society and thereby remains relevant for the community.¹⁶⁷

It is entirely appropriate that the adaptability of the text grants its overall stability.¹⁶⁸

In a dynamic situation, stability is not achieved by opposing dynamics but via the very ongoing dynamic *process* of stabilization that is, as such, dependent on the changing environment of the entity that is to be stabilized with reference to the environment: "Religion then found stability in itself and precisely in the difference that separated religious meaning from other kinds."¹⁶⁹ Here, one might additionally claim that it is not only the reference to the *other religion* that stabilizes religion but also, and rather in the first place, the reference to the *other religion* in a situation of religious contact that generates the processes of self-stabilization that results in a solid dogmatics. The increase of self-reference, the shift from other-reference to self-reference, thus, becomes an indicator of the evolution of religion.¹⁷⁰

In Luhmann's sense, continual reactualization of self-recursions, otherwise known as *autopoietic* systems, are systems defined by communication and the interaction of meaning, whose basic processes are self-generated and self-regenerating from within. The interactions and self-definitions of the content of the communication define the system. As a consequence, dynamic structures emerge which define the horizon of possible adaptations from the outside, that is, from environmental changes: "It structures [...] that must make possible the connectivity of autopoietic reproduction if they do not

167 Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila, "Introducing Changes in Scripture," in *Changes in Scripture. Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*, eds. Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 6–7.

168 See Hans Debel, "Rewritten Bible, Variant Literary Editions and Original Text(s): Exploring the Implications of a Pluriform Outlook on the Scriptural Tradition," in *Changes in Scripture*, eds. Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011).

169 Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, 191. "Die Religion findet jetzt Halt an sich selbst und ebendeshalb auch an der Differenz, die religiösen Sinn von anderem Sinn trennt." (Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 266).

170 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

want to give up the basis for their own existence, and this limits the domain of possible changes, of possible learning.¹⁷¹ Thus, self-reference allows for contact with the environment by means of ‘structure’. But structure, here, means the limited or selected possibilities available.

Accordingly, *the propensities of possible answers to challenges emerge and display a certain attraction that, in turn may lead to dynamic trails that stabilize through reproduction. The interfaces of the systemic processes of reproduction with the challenging environment can be considered to be model forms.*

The directed reproductions of self-realization stabilize dynamic systems and open them for future, possibly challenging events. For the prospect and the sake of its future, religions by definition built on insecure foundations retentionally rewrite their own pasts. At this point, the preeminence of contact in this process becomes obvious. Without unexpected challenge—transcending the limits of the current re-actualization—no directed re-actualization is necessary, or even possible.¹⁷² A challenge is answered through a re-actualization directed by self-reference. Accordingly, in a situation of contact between one tradition and another, the traditions themselves become possible objects of self-observation. On the basis of this self-observation, the other tradition is conceptualized with a degree of rigidity.

5.6 *Stability of Contingent Contact*

These considerations on the dynamic stability of reproduction, thus, link up with the issue of contact in the dynamics of the history of religions. Dynamics is the *realization or materialization of inherent possibilities*. The possibilities available are determined by the background of the situation in question or, in our terminology, the ‘basin of attraction’ or the potential *dynamis*. This is to say that dynamics are dependent upon their propensities (directedness).¹⁷³

171 Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 36. “Strukturen müssen [...] die Anschlußfähigkeit der autopoietischen Reproduktion ermöglichen, wenn sie nicht ihre eigene Existenzgrundlage aufgeben wollen, und das limitiert den Bereich möglicher Änderungen, möglichen Lernens.” Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 62.

172 “Therefore without an aspect of surprise there would be no structural formation because nothing would happen for other things to link onto.” Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 288. “Ohne Überraschungen gäbe es deshalb keine Strukturbildung, weil nichts vorkäme, was zu verknüpfen wäre.” Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme* 391.

173 This directedness creates sense as a chosen—or realized possibility. Compare Luhmann: “Meaning allows no other choice than to choose. Communication grasps *something* out of the actual referential horizon that it itself constitutes and leaves *other things* aside. Communication is the processing of selection.” Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 140. “Sinn läßt keine andere Wahl als zu wählen. Kommunikation greift aus dem je aktuellen Verweisungshorizont, den sie selbst erst konstituiert, etwas heraus und läßt Andres beiseite. Kommunikation ist Prozessieren von Selektion.” Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 194.

It also means that dynamics, as the realization of possibilities, indicate a creative process, not only in the emphatic sense of the creation of something new but also the emergence of something different than before. Novelty, hence is a special case of the above—or better, novelty can be considered a regulative idea of description. Dynamics, in this sense, describe the kind of change that is necessary to identify a certain tradition. Thus, the dynamics of a religious tradition cannot be described as merely an undifferentiated explosion in time and space but rather as *directed realizations*, which primarily gain direction or its directedness from ‘the other’ (tradition)—through the *contacts* that make its environmental conditions. Dynamics, thus, is also constituted by the prevailing situation.¹⁷⁴ This leads to the seemingly paradoxical idea that a dynamic process gains stability *because of* rather than despite its contingency.

This is, above all, the case in situations of *contact of religious traditions*, which are, at first, a contact with something previously unknown. Participants in the situation have to deal with contact cognitively and linguistically, adapting their existing mental and linguistic frame as necessary. Here, the main example is the introduction of names or salient notions as *ostensive*, or rather, to use Saul Kripke’s term, *rigid designators*, is of some assistance.¹⁷⁵ The referent of a name as well as the meaning of a concept is determined by the situation of its introduction. Content-wise, the concepts in question are usually left largely blank, though they are framed by the circumstances of their situation-related acquisition. The result of the stabilizing dynamics of a contingent contact is a model form.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the introduction of notions in concrete contingent situations, that is, in situations of contact provides them with relationships of *situation-related necessity* and, accordingly, *stability* of a strong kind.

174 Compare Volkhard Krech, “From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion,” in *The Dynamics of Transculturality, Transcultural Research—Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context*, eds. A. Flüchter and J. Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015), 64: “Within the religious field, religious diversity as well as religious contacts and transfer processes enabled as a result thereof are key conditions for triggering dynamics in the history of religions. A plural situation can arise or actively be promoted either through the import and export of religious traditions, for instance as part of trade relations, during imperial expansion, or through religious innovation and reformation from the inside outwards. Religious contacts challenge religious traditions to differentiate themselves, position themselves, and establish an identity and thus promote the controversy of the religious field inwardly and outwardly as well as the demarcation of boundaries. But equally, religious contacts can also lead to an explicit or creeping amalgamation of elements from various traditions.”

175 See Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 3–4.

176 See chapter on Model Forms.

This might be shown with regard to the stabilizing effect of tradition. Tradition is generally considered to be an essential feature of religions. To Pascal Boyer, for instance, the stability of tradition depends on the contingent situation of the introduction of the traditional category in question: “[T]he main hypothesis here is that in the process of acquisition of a traditional category, the definitional features are replaced with memories of specific situations, contrary to what happens in the acquisition of most ordinary terms. [...] Traditional interaction implies that some people supplement a vague and unconstraining common stereotype with memories of singular ostensive designations.”¹⁷⁷ Most representations of tradition (that is *as traditional*) are episodic and thus occasion-bound; as a consequence, traditional knowledge is generated with regard to the episodic character rather than on theoretical interferences or general principles.¹⁷⁸ The process of tradition, as a consequence, requires reiteration in the sense that specific communicative situations are repeated. This can be termed the situation of ostensive designation.¹⁷⁹ The categories of traditional interaction “are anchored to memories of singular situations rather than associated with mental definitions.”¹⁸⁰ Therefore, to use Boyer’s terminology, even ‘systems of beliefs’ are to a great extent triggered and determined by concrete situations and the corresponding processes of concept acquisition. This results in a stable relationship to time, more commonly known as tradition, which has been acquired through the dynamics of contingent contact.

The definiteness of a religious tradition, therefore, relies on the impact of the other (mostly of the other tradition but also of other ‘fields’ such as politics, etc.).¹⁸¹ It is, thus, a synergetic process of a cooperation toward realization. One may formulate the general idea that it is contact (of horizons of

177 Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication. A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 42.

178 Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 43.

179 Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 126.

180 Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, 79.

181 On the stabilizing effects of an emergent Islam on other religious traditions compare Stroumsa: “In a world endowed with a great social and religious complexity, the constant interaction and transformation of ideas and persons is the default option, as it were, and permanent fluidity is the essential rule. This is how one should conceive the interface between religious traditions in the Near East, an interface in which Islam was born. One should insist on the flow of religious ideas between communities. The formation of Islam and its early conquests restructured religious communities in the Near East and permitted the stabilization of both religious ideas and boundaries between communities.” Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 149.

possibilities) within the ongoing process that *constitutes the actual entities that might be examined as stable phenomena*.

The stability of contingent contact as an interplay of dynamics and stability is not restricted to the field of religion but is also, in effect, at the intersection of other societal fields. In the case of Sri Lankan medieval kingship, Steve Berkwitz has shown how the dynamic input provided by Buddhist notions of divine kingship, borrowed from the language and notions of Hindu tradition, helped to stabilize both the rule of Sri Lankan kings and Buddhism itself as the reservoir of ideas and notions to interpret and propagate this rule. As Berkwitz put it:

What is abundantly clear, however, is that kingship in medieval Sri Lanka was greatly expanded by the dynamics of cultural interactions and exchanges, creating new images of power and sovereignty to enhance the image of the Sri Lankan king within the larger pan-Indic context in which it operated. Notions of divine kingship and bodhisattva kingship were incorporated and adapted to fit local religious and cultural circumstances. These adaptations contributed to the stability of local expressions of Buddhist kingship by making Sri Lankan rulers comparable, if not superior to, other royal rivals and allies in terms of their fame, power, and virtue.¹⁸²

Thus, the dynamic contact between Buddhist and Hindu traditions, on the one hand, and Buddhist and local traditions adapting Buddhist ideas, on the other hand, had a stabilizing effect, not least by generating new models (model forms) for Buddhist kings' self-reflection.¹⁸³

182 Steve Berkwitz, "Divine Kingship in Medieval Sri Lanka. Dynamics of Traditions of Power and Virtue in South Asia," *Entangled Religions* 8 (2019): 46.

183 "These cultural flows back and forth across the Palk Strait ensured that a variety of Indic strands of kingship were introduced into Sri Lanka. These dynamics of cultural encounters and cultural exchange generated new models for enacting sovereignty through processes that involved both local inflection and trans-local imitation [...]. Ideas and rites associated with Cōla kings, including divine kingship, eulogistic writing, and the *abhiṣeka* consecration, took on new significance in Sri Lanka, transforming what it meant to be a Buddhist king. Interactions with the Pallavas and other kingdoms in South India were also sites for enlarging local notions of kingship and sovereignty in Sri Lanka. Particularly central to these new formulations was the conflation of king and god in the representation of political and moral authority. Sri Lankan Buddhists eagerly adapted notions of divine kingship in an apparent effort to enhance the fame and power of their kings, in manners similar to predominantly Hindu communities in the Indian subcontinent." Berkwitz, "Divine Kingship in Medieval Sri Lanka," 5.

6 Metastability: A General Notion of the Dynamics/ Stability-Relationship

The crystallization of a certain religious worldview, namely a manifest expression of religious insight (*episteme*) in word, artifact, or deed, must also be described as a *dynamic process*. This process is triggered by expressions of interpretation, that are intensifying dynamics, for these are structured and guided by key concepts and their context of indication (*Verweisungszusammenhang*). The coexistence, or rather, the contact of these concepts, thus, may lead to a contest between attractors, namely between the notion and the specific indicational context. This thus provides some insight into the interrelationships of attraction processes, their influence upon each other, and their special dynamics.

To sum up, with regard to the perspective of religious knowledge, the main agents of this process are not human beings but *notions*. What is important about these notions is their indicational or self-transcending capacity, which is their potency in serving as a center of connectability (*Anschließbarkeit*). Thus, the notion provides not only a spatial perspective in its role as a center of attraction at a given point of time but also some *temporal* perspective. It might be conjectured that the more possibilities of indicational connections a notion provides—a lack of defined content but a multiplicity of indicating trials—the more it is likely to become a center of attraction and a promoter of a textual attractor. Given material form, this would be a religious text and its contexts, its commentaries, continuations, and refutations.

Given the basic bipolar structure of any dynamic process, I would additionally like to defend the following claim: the really interesting dynamic process is *not* the genealogical evolution of a phenomenon, be it a material object, a ritual, a word, or a concept. Rather, it is the retentional or retrospective *intensification*, or rather, “densification” of the phenomenon in the course of *self-referential interpretation*, which is caused/triggered and catalyzed—or prefigured—by contact.¹⁸⁴

184 Compare Jan Assmann's thoughts on the relation of connectability and canon-building by means of a *realizing retrospection* on a *dynamic potential*: “Wir stoßen hier auf eine typische Struktur: die besondere Anschließbarkeit oder Nachahmbarkeit dessen, was nach neuen und zugleich nachvollziehbaren Regeln konstruiert ist, die Beziehung zwischen Formstrenge und Anschließbarkeit. [...] Erst durch den klassizistischen, imitierenden Rückgriff, durch *mimesis*, *aemulatio*, *imitatio* [...] verwirklicht das kanonische Prinzip seine Funktion einer Form kultureller Erinnerung: als Fluchtpunkt der retrospektiven Orientierungssuche. [...] Kanonisierung ist kein zufälliges Rezeptionsschicksal, sondern die Erfüllung oder Einlösung einer im Werk selbst durch Formstrenge und Regelbildung angelegten Potenz.” Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 108.

The problem with metaphors borrowed from natural sciences is that they only prevail up until a certain point. They can provide perspectives but not self-sufficient models of explanation for the Humanities. This is all the truer for the notions of 'dynamics and stability' when used as guiding metaphors for understanding. Among the notions to avoid are ideas that might be related to the concept of stability in thermodynamics. In thermodynamics, stability signifies some kind of an ending point of a given process, relating the notion of stability to the notion of solidification, or, to use the biological notion, to congealment—which all too easily becomes a euphemism for death. A closed system is directed towards thermodynamic equilibrium, thus making the system stable. This gives rise to the idea that formerly 'living' religion in developing certain stable structures, such as ritual, liturgy, dogma, or canon, has come to the endpoint in a development process. Arguments such as this might well serve as a rhetorical device for interested groups to justify reform within religions, but they are not adequate for the scholarly observer. The thermodynamic description does not describe a realistic evolution but rather suggests that we should consider the subjects of our research as closed systems. As we know, the process of canonization might be described as a contact phenomenon, thus expressing some ongoing inter-relational process of attraction with the stable form of the canon. This is an expression of the process and absolutely cannot be considered as the end of such.

In order to denote stability in the study of religious phenomena, I therefore propose the introduction of yet another notion borrowed from natural sciences that may shed some more light on the processes examined: that of *metastability*. It has the potential to serve as a significant link to illustrate the ever-popular challenge concerning the relationship between object language and metalanguage, flux on the level of the object, and stability on the interpretative level. The notion of 'metastability' denotes a rather precarious state of affairs, likely to transform itself with 'catastrophic'—in the sense of 'revolutionary'—results. This is particularly true with regard to the reflective mind of the observer, who realizes that the process is essentially unstable and, in fact, likely to collapse.

The notion of metastability itself was coined by the founding father of physical chemistry, Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932). Its first introduction, here, bears some decisive reference for its adaption for the description of religious phenomena. In his *Studies on the Formation and Transformation of Solid Objects* (1897), Ostwald used the notion to describe chemical systems that have a limited field of stability and might change under the influence of energy.¹⁸⁵

185 Wilhelm Ostwald, "Studien über die Bildung und Umwandlung fester Körper," *Zeitschrift für physikalische Chemie* XXII (1897).

The notion appears in the context of what later was called Ostwald's Rule (*Ostwaldsche Stufenregel*), namely that a system does not immediately transform itself into the most stable condition, but rather it moves to the least stable possibility first. *When leaving a given state and transforming to another state, the state that is sought out is not the thermodynamically stable one but the state nearest in stability to the original state.* What is interesting about this rule is, that it is not a universal law but rather a *propensity* of natural processes.¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, metastability provides observable stability within fundamentally unstable processes.¹⁸⁷

Religious traditions under the conditions of contact can be described as metastable entities, denoting a precarious state of stability within dynamic processes. The state is reached via reflection. Indeed, somehow, everything is in flux, but certain states of stability are reached in contact situations. Above all the kind of stability reached via meta-language evolving out of object-language in this contact situation, i.e., one tradition realizing itself and the competing other. Metastability is reached elliptically by activation of the mental pole of a physical process via contact.¹⁸⁸ This is the reflective, i.e. *meta-* (one might say *transcending*) stability which produces (religious) meaning and which might at last provide the origin of such 'stable' things as dogma. The ultimate meta-stable sign is not solidity but rather fluidity that respects challenge just as dogma reproduces itself for each new environment. Metastability characterizes the products of contacts that are used for reproduction, thus producing a stability of the chain of interpretation. It is also meta-stable in the sense

186 See Terry Threlfall, "Structural and Thermodynamic Explanations of Ostwald's Rule," *Organic Process Research & Development* 7 (2003).

187 See chapter on Attraction.

188 On the interrelation of the physical and the mental pole in a situation of contact, generating a meta-stable state in the case of architectural artefacts i.e. Japanese Christian church building see Beate Löffler, "Acculturated Otherness. Christian Churches and Wedding Chapels in Modern Japanese Society," *Entangled Religions* 5 (2018): 319–320: "What was introduced to Japan from Western culture in general to church buildings in particular were sets of cultural codes of homogeneous foreignness from the outside and high heterogeneity from the inside. It was a moment in time that allows observing, in retrospect, the interrelation of change and perpetuation in religious contexts. In the Christian sense, tradition was kept by the mission projects themselves and the work of the individual missionaries. Yet the creation of new communities had a strong dynamic element that shifted not only the biographies of individuals as well as the built and social space of neighbourhoods, but the balance of a whole society. Furthermore, it shifted the meaning of the building form 'church.'" Löffler concludes by stating: "In the end, the acculturation of Christian church architecture in Japan showcases the inconstancy of complex religious systems in transfer between regions and cultures. This allows for integration and adoptions and shows religious systems as highly adaptable entities" (*ibid.*, 340).

that it now allows scientific description, that is, for a scientific metalanguage that converges with the emerging metalanguage of the contacting traditions. This self-description gives rise to the development of certain paths of behavior, which may be examined as such. As such, stability in the form of the metastability described here fulfills a vital role in the research process.

7 Conclusion: Bipolar Metastability in Contact

A suitable notion of dynamics in the study of religion has to fulfill a double task: it first must do justice to the interplay between dynamism and stability that allows for both religious insight and scholarly research. Dynamics is, therefore, always dynamics *and* stability. However, it also has to include both the physical and the mental pole of religions as it is specific for the religious field that materiality is never without meaning—that is coded by the distinction of transcendence and immanence.¹⁸⁹ Simply relating ‘dynamics’ to change or movement, thus, is insufficient, to be altogether silent about using the notion of dynamics as a mere brand to characterize one’s own (dynamic) enterprise.

The current state of the discussion on the dynamics in history as well as in the study of religion might be replenished with a new conceptualization of the notion of dynamics that takes the Greek origin of the concept into closer consideration. This notion explicitly takes the interplay of dynamics and stability as well as the bipolarity of these processes into account. Based on this notion, I have further suggested the introduction of the concept of metastability to the scholarly description and analysis of dynamics in the history of religions. So far, the reflection on an adequate notion of dynamics in the study of religion has led to the following (provisional) definition: *metastability denotes the intricate stability achieved by the self-reference of a dynamic process that, retrospectively, is guided by its prevailing potential.*

Metastability, thus, serves as the indispensable ground for possible action. The most obvious cases of meta-stability, thus, can be described as the products of an observer i.e., both of the scholarly observer of the history of religious traditions *and* of the object-language observer who is trying to cope conceptually with a given situation of religious contact that triggers self-reflection. It is this meta-stable state as dynamically stabilizing self-recursivity that allows for the possibility of an academic discipline of ‘religious studies’. As such, situations of contact are manifestations of the bipolar dynamics of the history of

189 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.

religions. The *bipolar* dynamics of religion and the history of religions are stabilized by the mental pole via self-reference.¹⁹⁰

However, it is still an intricate stability, as it is triggered by contingent challenges. As ever, situations of contact are important instances of such challenges, as situations of contact with other religious traditions play a major, if not decisive, role in giving rise to self-reference and, accordingly, to the emergence of meta-language that allows second-order observation and critique within a religious tradition itself. The process, thus, arrives at a metastable state that provides the observing scholar with concrete phenomena to be examined.

Metastability denotes *reflected stability* as a reaction to the open potentiality (dynamics). Metastability is adapting stability in relation to the dynamics. The interplay of dynamics and stability takes place in relating (oneself) to potentiality.

Inherent possibilities of a prevailing religious tradition, realized as ideal forms, might be characterized as model forms (*Formulare*)¹⁹¹ or schemes, which might communicate with the other in situations of contact, for they convey certain blank spaces as interfaces which may blend schemes and therefore lead to an ‘explosion’ of (new) meaning in both of the contacting horizons of possibilities—or, to put it in Whiteheadian terminology: they prevailingly allow for new contrasts.¹⁹² This process might suitably be expressed as a concrescence of directedness in a contact situation, opening a new, or rather, a different trail of interpretation.

Originally, the idea of meta-stability was introduced by observing a sequence of events in natural sciences. Correspondingly, ideas of paths or reproduction indicate dynamic stability in the course of time. In the religious field, the temporal and recursive expression of dynamic metastability is the idea of *tradition*. Tradition is considered to be a vital element of any religion. The corresponding concept of tradition as used on the level of scholarly metalanguage should be able to refer to these basic functions as a vital element of religions and the way religions relate themselves to history. This shall be addressed in the following chapter.

190 By introducing Mani as the ‘inventor’ of a concept of religion, Jason BeDuhn describes the specific element that Mani used to make the religiod a religion: a *theory of religious plurality*, see Jason BeDuhn, “Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of ‘Religion’ in Third Century Iran,” in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, eds. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley. Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 266, 274.

191 See chapter on Model Forms.

192 See chapter on the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction.