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The Power of Pretext: Religious Justification in Science Fiction, Scientology, and Society

By

Lilith Claire Acadia

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Rhetoric

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Daniel Boyarin, Chair
Professor Marianne Constable
Professor Niklaus Largier

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Abstract

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The justification a speaker offers for a given action, stance, or identity may serve the discursive purpose of veiling motivating reasons or rhetorically appealing to the audience. This dissertation defines such speech as ‘pretext,’ presenting ten tests for identifying pretext rhetorically rather than psychologically, then demonstrates through the example of religion the stakes of treating such justifications as reflecting motivating reasons rather than constituting a rhetorical trick. I argue that the naturalized concept we call ‘religion’ is a modern European construct with ten identifiable characteristics; this ‘religion’ enjoys epistemic privilege that makes it a potentially dangerous basis for pretext. Examples from social, legal, and literary texts show that audiences tend to evaluate ‘religiously’ justified actions and ethical stances as valid or incontrovertible, even when those justifications fall into the discursive category of pretext.

Chapter One, “Fallacy of Justification: ‘Pretext,’” bridges rhetoric, epistemology, and linguistics to define pretext. Diverging from past scholarship, I define pretext rhetorically, by how that category of justification functions in spoken and written texts, rather than analyzing a speaker’s psychology. I design ten tests for identifying pretexts in discourse, conduct a discourse analysis of how scholars use the term in relevant literature, and read pretext against core rhetorical theory.

Chapter Two, “The Privileged Space of ‘Religion,’” responds to discourses of religion scholarship in arguing that the epistemically privileged world that ‘religion’ creates for itself is a historical and conceptual mistake with dangerous ethical implications. Beginning with evidence that what we call ‘religion’ is an Enlightenment European construct, I identify ten common characteristics of the construct, then proceed to argue that ‘religious’ justifications for imperialism are fallacious, the concept’s epistemic privilege is undeserved, ‘religious’ pretexts can have dangerous implications, and there are strong reasons to be suspicious of ‘religious’ pretexts.

Chapter Three, “Religious Pretext for Imperialist Violence in Science Fiction,” systematically applies the previous two chapters’ theoretical interventions to two objects of science fiction literature: Mary Doria Russell’s *The Sparrow* (1996) and Octavia Estelle Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy (1987-1989). For each text, I analyze the discursive construction of a ‘religion’ with

reference to my ten characteristics of 'religion,' then examine how these constructed 'religions' serve as sources of pretext for imperialism.

Chapter Four, "Clearing up Pretext and 'Religion' through Scientology," echoes this methodology with a border case between 'religion' and science fiction: the Church of Scientology. In conversation with scholarship on New Religious Movements, science fiction studies, and American studies, I systematically trace the discursive construction of Scientology as a 'religion.' Presenting evidence of how Scientologists use the institution's status as a 'religion' pretextually, and their 'religion' as a basis for pretexts for imperialism and other violence reinforces the dissertation's overarching argument.

The conclusion suggests how readers can generalize the four chapters' analyses and apply this dissertation's central theoretical contributions that critique how audiences think about 'religion' and pretext.

Dedicated to Pamela Sue Anderson

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	iii
A. Defining Terms	iii
B. Objects	vi
C. Objectives	viii
II. Acknowledgements	xii
III. Chapter One: Fallacy of Justification: ‘Pretext’	1
D. An Argument for ‘Pretext’	2
E. Testing ‘Pretext’	7
F. Reading ‘Pretext’ Interdisciplinarily	13
G. Reading ‘Pretext’ through Rhetoric	25
H. Post-text	37
IV. Ten Tests of Pretext	46
V. Chapter Two: The Privileged Space of ‘Religion’	47
I. ‘Religion’ Isn’t What You Think	47
J. Fallacious Imperialism	59
K. Religion’s Fallacious Privilege	67
L. Religion’s Undeserved Justificatory Weight	72
M. Potent ‘Pretexts’	74
N. Should You Accept that ‘Religious’ ‘Pretext?’	75
VI. Ten Characteristics of ‘Religion’	82
VII. Chapter Three: Religious Pretext for Imperialist Violence in Science Fiction	83
O. Science Fiction as a Social Text	86
P. Why a Literary Object	86
Q. Human-initiated Contact	89
R. Alien-initiated Contact	100
S. Conclusion: Construction of ‘Religion’ as ‘Pretext’	114
VIII. Chapter Four: <i>Clearing</i> up Pretext and ‘Religion’ through Scientology	126
T. From Dianetics To Scientology	128
U. Scientology as Science Fiction and ‘Religion’	131
V. Scientology’s Imperialism and Violence	139
W. Scientology’s ‘Pretexts’ and Applying the Plausible Motive Test	142
X. Discursive Solutions	151
IX. Conclusion	162
Y. Summary	163
Z. Enactment	168
X. Bibliography	171

Introduction

“The philosopher was seated on the lawn. He said: ‘signs form a language, but not the one you think you know.’ I realized I had to free myself from the images which in the past had announced to me the things I sought...”
—Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*.¹

The philosopher in Calvino’s passage reveals language’s illusory signification, awakening in his listener the realization that finding meaning requires abandoning presumptions. So too, my dissertation aims to denaturalize the significations of two signs we take for granted, justification and religion, revealing their discursive construction and power. Presumptions impede knowledge, because the thinker jumps directly from recognition to knowledge production, skipping any interpretive stages to simply reproduce rather than develop knowledge. Presuming that a justification reflects a motive ignores the ways in which certain kinds of justifications function discursively; presuming that an institution is a religion overlooks the problems with privileging and defining religion as a category. Recognizing the discursive constructions of pretext (as a form of justification) and religion are important because religious pretexts are powerful justifications for violence. Or, to summarize the theoretical thrust of my dissertation in 50 words: what we call ‘religion’ is a construct that enjoys epistemic, legal, and social privileges making it a dangerous source of pretext, a discursive category of justifications (for actions, stances, and identities) that do not reflect the speaker’s motives but seek to veil the motives or rhetorically appeal to the audience.

Defining Terms

Particularly since this dissertation is interdisciplinary, I do not assume that my readers are familiar with any of the academic discourses with which I am in conversation. For the sake of orientation, here are definitions of the significant terms appearing in the following chapters.

Chapter 1 presents ‘pretext’ in a new, and I believe more precise and productive way than past scholarship. Here, pretext is a discursive category encompassing justifications (for an action, stance, or identity) that do not reflect the speaker’s motivations and serve instead to veil those motives or rhetorically appeal to the audience. As a discursive category, pretext refers to the space in communication that the speaker, audience, and construction of meaning around the exchange all help delineate. It does not necessarily indicate bad faith on the part of the speaker, since it refers to the discursive role of the phrase rather than the speaker’s psychology. Pretext is not a temporally nor culturally universal linguistic form, but rather a kind of speech dependent on the way humans communicate in that milieu. I view discourse as an abstract text akin to a conversation yet extending beyond the spoken to encompass writing, visual material, actions, and the assumptions and epistemologies shaping how agents understand and interact with those texts. Justifications are explanations a speaker offers to validate a proposition. I emphasize justifications for actions, stances, and identities owing to their relevance to my central thesis.

Distinguishing pretexts as justifications that do not reflect the speaker's motives indicates the role of the justification rather than purporting to make psychological judgments. As such, pretexts have the purpose not of reporting motivations, but rather of veiling the motivating reasons (even without intent) or rhetorically appealing to the audience. I propose 10 tests to identify pretexts precisely to designate pretext as a discursive rather than psychological category, a rhetorical device beyond a mere lie. Rather than simply being a false statement, pretexts are a version of rhetorical appeal that a speaker makes. The tests point to how the justification functions in the discourse, rather than analyzing the speaker's psychology, intent, or conscious choices of expression. This framing of pretext means that it is irrelevant whether the motives are for example, selfishly, irrationally, or religiously motivated. The source of motivation is irrelevant, and the function and force of the justification is central.

Though I know of no research seeking to define pretext nor related concepts, my corpus analysis of the term across hundreds of articles from religious studies, classics, philology, literature, law, and linguistics yielded several broad understandings of pretext. In linguistics, scholars such as H. G. Widdowson define pretext as the conditioning of text design and comprehension,ⁱⁱ while in literature, pretext can refer to what comes before and is in dialogue with the text, as with Gérard Genette's intertextuality model.ⁱⁱⁱ Both of these definitions are closer to my view of discourse than pretext. The predominant sense of pretext in the corpus, however, resembles my definition, conveying an insincere excuse or justification offered in place of the true motivation. This popular usage, in common parlance as well as in the literature, implies a psychological denotation of pretext. Yet, without offering rubrics for distinguishing which statements are pretext, as I do with 10 tests identifying pretexts, readers are left wondering what qualifies as 'true' or 'sincere,' and how an audience might guess the speaker's psychology. The tests further function to identify the rhetorical device regardless of whether the presumed speaker is the source of the justification, a particularly important consideration in literature or complex organizations, when a speaker may not also be the author of that statement.

This point is where I diverge most significantly from past scholarship addressing pretext. Chapter 1 contains an analysis of pretext in relevant interdisciplinary literature, which tends to use sincerity as means of differentiating pretext, viewing pretexts as insincere justifications. I did not find any uses of pretext that situated pretext as a discursive category or rhetorical device, viewing the form of justification functionally rather than psychologically. My approach to pretext is not concerned with psychology, sincerity, intention, nor consciousness of the justification, but rather with the role that it plays in speech or writing. Pretext here is not a state of mind, but rather a formal (in the sense of form) function of expression, a rhetorical concept. I am therefore asking my reader not only to denaturalize the conception of justifications as valid regardless of whether they are reasons or pretexts but to also denaturalize the association of pretext with the psychology of sincerity.

My understanding of pretext as a discursive category situates this project as a primarily rhetorical—rather than literary or philosophical—dissertation, since I view rhetoric as describing discursive force (when referring to a discursive tool) or the analysis thereof (when referring to an academic field). Note that 'rhetorical' does not mean 'pretextual' as the common phrases 'rhetorical question' or 'political rhetoric' might imply. Rhetoric concerns power, whereas

pretext is a device for concealment or manipulation. Pretext is rhetorical, however, in the sense that pretext is an instrument of persuasion, and rhetoric studies how speakers and audiences use language, including significantly for persuasion.

Chapter 2 offers possible characteristics for identifying what contemporary Western discourse considers ‘religion’ and builds to the conclusion that this construct of ‘religion’ enjoys undeserved epistemic privileges with practical implications, making it a potent basis for justification, including pretext. ‘Undeserved’ here is not a value judgment, but rather a logical evaluation I explain in the chapter of an absence of bases for epistemic privilege. When I use the term ‘religion,’ it is with the understanding that ‘religion’ is a European Enlightenment construct based on a Christian prototype, with discursively particular characteristics, ten of which I identify in Chapter 2 and then apply to objects we may consider ‘religions’ in Chapters 3 and 4. The ‘Christian prototype’ refers to an image of Christianity as the first and ideal instantiation of the category, while ‘discursively particular’ refers to the way in which texts about religion develop those characteristics as qualities of a category ‘religion.’

‘Epistemic privilege’ is the high valuation of certain knowledge or sources of knowledge; the term encompasses ethical, legal, societal, and other privileges, because the value that an audience assigns to an ethical stance, legal principle, or societal more, is rooted in the production of knowledge within that field. Privilege does not necessarily convey a value judgment, though philosophers such as Miranda Fricker argue that epistemic privilege generates injustice.^{iv} A statement receives epistemological benefit deriving from the audience assigning it more value due to some quality implying privileged knowledge production. In the case of Fricker’s testimonial injustice, a white, male, older, educated, British speaker’s testimony receives (unjust) epistemic benefits from the speaker’s identity. I argue that invoking pretexts grounded in ‘religious’ argument can carry epistemological privilege. To claim that religion enjoys epistemic privilege means that the discourse values knowledge or ethics arising from religion above knowledge or ethics from other sources. The claim also situates religion as an object of epistemology: discursive conventions for evaluating knowledge determine the value of religion or knowledge based in religion. I also consider religion as a subject of epistemology: when religion provides the conditions for knowledge evaluation or production.

Chapter 3 applies the theoretical interventions of the previous two chapters to two texts: Mary Doria Russell’s *The Sparrow*^v and Octavia Estelle Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy.^{vi} Both are works of ‘science fiction,’ a genre of speculative fiction presenting possible worlds that are other than the reader’s world. This alterity, what Darko Suvin calls “cognitive estrangement,”^{vii} is a form of denaturalization, forcing the reader to abandon presumptions. The speculative possibilities and process of denaturalization suits science fiction to projects such as this dissertation, which follow critical theory methodologies and objectives. As Carl Freedman proposes, science fiction is the critical theory of literary genres.^{viii} Science fiction’s Foucauldian heterotopias—^{ix}worlds familiar enough to resonate, yet strange enough to make the reader’s world uncanny—contribute to the genre’s critical possibility. Reading certain institutions in these texts as religions illustrates how society constructs and utilizes religion as a pretext, while the. Russell constructs as slightly unfamiliar Jesuit Christianity to fund, lead, and justify a mission to meet the music-producing species of another planet. Butler constructs a powerful ethical^x

ideology of Biology, with which an alien species justifies colonizing Earth and genetically mixing with humans. I intentionally chose one text depicting a ‘religion’ that is similar to our conception of prototypical ‘religion’ (Russell’s altered Jesuit Christianity), and one text constructing an institution displaying core characteristics of ‘religion’ yet probably falling outside most readers’ intuitive understanding of ‘religion’ (Butler’s Biology as the alien’s religion). I apply my ten characteristics of Enlightenment European religion to Russell’s Jesuit Christianity and Butler’s Biology to evaluate whether they fit the category popularly called ‘religion,’ and to highlight how that category is discursively constructed, whether in society or the contained discourse of a literary work. I also apply my ten tests for identify pretext to the justifications for imperialism and violence in each text to show how the constructions of religion serve as powerful bases for pretext.

Then Chapter 4 merges the genres of religion and science fiction by employing Scientology as an object against which to test my argument that religion enjoys privileges that make it as more powerful pretext and source of pretext. That distinction between ‘religion as pretext’ and ‘religion as a source of pretext’ delineates two types of what I inclusively call ‘religious pretext.’ The former phrase refers to when an institution’s identity as a religion is the pretext, as is notoriously the case with Scientology claiming tax exempt status. The latter phrase refers to when a pretext (generally a pretext for an action) is based in religious texts or practices, such as when the Church of Scientology justifies torturing child members as prescribed by their religious practice of ‘overboarding’ (throwing people into the ocean)^{xi} and consistent with their religious belief that children are merely small adults who should not receive special treatment nor protections. I echo the previous chapter’s methodology, evaluating Scientology against my ten Enlightenment European ‘religion’ characteristics, and identifying Scientology as a pretext and as a basis for pretexts with my ten pretext tests. Between and astride science fiction and religion, Scientology offers a boundary case that helps critique those categories and understand how each informs the production of knowledge and ethics.

Objects

This dissertation has two theoretical objects—pretext and religion—and three discursive objects—two speculative science fiction texts and a speculative religion, Scientology.

My master’s advisor Pamela Sue Anderson urged me to apply to Berkeley Rhetoric to write a dissertation on justifications because my master’s work on feminist epistemology and ethics kept bumping up against a kind of justification, pretexts, that other scholars seemed to ignore and even naturalize as valid justifications. Some cases used what we might consider ‘religion’ as pretext—e.g. several European governments use the rhetoric of secularism to justify banning women from wearing the *niqab* (lower face veil),^{xii} which mirrors the Islamic leaders invoking their power as representatives of a religion to force women to wear the *niqab*.^{xiii} Some cases contained pretexts based on religion—e.g. the God’s eye view of universality is premised on a Christian worldview, while more explicitly, South African men justify raping lesbians in ‘corrective’ rapes as a fulfillment of Christian teachings against homosexuality.^{xiv}

Religion is hardly the only institution that serves as a pretext or as grounds for pretext. I could just as relevantly have written about scientific, legal, medical, or capitalist pretexts. All of these institutions are Enlightenment European constructs that enjoy epistemic privilege, serve as foundations for ethics, have perceived universality and often transcendence, and enjoy a degree of incontrovertibility. Religious pretexts are powerful though, in part because of the naturalization of religion as a temporal and spatial universal. The construction of science, law, medicine, and capitalism is easier to conceptualize, because they do not carry a mythology of being intrinsic to humanity, nor of supernatural origins. One might argue that science is rooted in laws of physics preexisting humanity, that our legal systems are based on natural law, medicine on ancient healing practices, or capitalism on innate human greed. However, the institutions of how we practice these fields are recognizably modern: we can trace the scientific method to Franciscan Friar Roger Bacon's thirteenth century writings on experimentation, even distinguishing it from the natural philosophy forebears. We might credit William Blackstone as the eighteenth century founder of contemporary law, building upon Hugo Grotius' natural law of the prior century. nineteenth century innovations such as Joseph Lister's hand-washing and anesthesia introduced modern Western allopathic 'medicine,' and Adam Smith's 1776 *The Wealth of Nations* birthed capitalism. Whether a justification is in the name of religion, reason, science, law, medicine, or capitalism, it can follow similar formulations of pretext as I trace in the following chapters. However, religion is a particularly formidable discursive construct to challenge, due to the supposed incontrovertibility of religion as a private matter, and the naturalized view of religion in the universalizing language of the Enlightenment. Despite decades of research from religious studies placing the origin of the modern institution we call 'religion' in Enlightenment Europe, general discourse continues to view religion as a prehistoric, global human universal, a matter of private faith rather than public theorization. Moreover, belief that religion arises from God precludes some from recognizing religion as a human construct from any era.

The discursive situatedness of pretext is why I have chosen objects from my lifetime and culture: *The Sparrow*, published 1996 and written by US academic Mary Doria Russell; *Lilith's Brood*, a trilogy published 1987-1989 and written by California author Octavia Butler; and the California-based Church of Scientology, first incorporated as a religion in 1953, but which continues to operate, attract controversy, and perhaps grow. The arguments in this dissertation are temporally and culturally situated in contexts around this writing. As the examples in Chapters 1 and 2 suggest, some of these arguments are generalizable beyond this time and context, yet my analysis and the primary objects are situated in the contemporary United States. Given that the US inherits its ideology and ideals primarily from modern Western Europe, I view the European Enlightenment construction of 'religion' as part of the US ideological legacy, although the US has developed these ideals differently than modern European states. For example, separation of Church and State in the US arise from a Calvinist impulse to protect religion from political defilement, whereas in France, the same separation has the objective of protecting the people from theocracy. As I discuss in Chapter 2, US constructions of religion also serve a pretextual role of justifying land theft from indigenous Americans.^{xv} Further, one pragmatic reason for situating this study in a US context is that religions do not enjoy the same privileges and protections in the EU as in the US, as the case of Scientology in Chapter 4 exemplifies. Thus, the US context allows me to focus on religion in a context that continues the intellectual legacy of its early discursive construction, and where it occupies space of epistemic privilege.

Objectives

In Bill Waterson's comic series *Calvin & Hobbes*, the human child Calvin occasionally blames bad behavior on his stuffed tiger, Hobbes. From jumping on the bed to running wet and naked through the neighbor's yard, Calvin justifies his actions with lines like "Hobbes told me to do it." The reader knows that Hobbes is a stuffed toy, whom Calvin constructs as a speaking, moving, thinking animal through a discourse of their conversations and adventures. Sometimes, adult characters humor Calvin by reinforcing this discourse, speaking about Hobbes as though he is an epistemically and ethically valid agent rather than Calvin's construct. Calvin's justifications that Hobbes 'told' him to do something may be part of the literary construction of Hobbes as speaking, yet they also fit the role of the pretext, veiling Calvin's impish motives and attempting to manipulate the audience into shifting the blame away from Calvin. The stakes in a comic book are low; but consider the historical—rather than cartoon—Calvin, whose theology served as a basis of justifications for violence and imperialism in the 30 Years War, contemporary US Protestantism, and capitalism.^{xvi} Calvinist ideology is now so engrained in US culture that its deployment as a source of justification is taken for granted or 'naturalized.' Calvin's doctrines of election (that God chooses who will go to heaven, and predetermines each individual's fate)^{xvii} and grace have even become idiomatic: 'there but by the grace of God go I.' This view that advantages are the result of God's grace and that disadvantage indicates the individual is not chosen by God justifies intolerance and greed, since society's needy must have angered God, whereas rich, white, male, able-bodied citizens must deserve God's grace. Such ideological underpinnings of our ethical and epistemic judgments are precisely what I seek to dislodge in this dissertation through two denaturalizations.

The first denaturalization, of justifications, reveals pretexts as distinct from reasons, and wrests pretexts away from the role of reasons in ethical arguments. To offer an analogy, the traditional epistemological tripartite analysis of knowledge holds that an idea must be a *justified true belief* to qualify as knowledge.^{xviii} These three criteria measure the permissibility of an idea in a way that, alongside my 10 pretext tests, can apply to ethics to measure whether a stated reason obtains as an argument for why an actor does an action, holds a belief, or has an identity: *justified true reason*. If the stated reason is epistemically permissible, then one can evaluate whether it is ethically permissible. Before that evaluation, however, it is irrelevant whether an argument is ethically permissible. If the justification is a mere pretext, then it is not justified true reason, and should be inadmissible grounds for an action, ethical stance, or identity. Otherwise, granting pretexts the same value as reasons, we might determine that an act is valid because the stated justification is valid: that a televangelist is warranted in collecting exorbitant tithes from congregants to better spread the good word (a pragmatic justification), to force them to commit to their spiritual healing (a psychological justification), or because their gospel commands it (a religious justification). One might even seek to justify polygamous underage marriage through the same three justifications, despite material gain and pedophilic desire being the televangelist's more plausible motivating reasons. Distinguishing pretexts from reasons preempts an ethical evaluation of the false claims by discounting the pragmatic, psychological, and religious pretexts to search for motivating reasons to evaluate. The pretext tests I propose offer

means to identify justifications acting as pretexts, even if true motivations are not evident or the speaker's psychology is unknowable.

The second denaturalization unravels the taken-for-granted status of religion in contemporary discourse. De-naturalizing religion as what Danielle Dubuisson calls a 'sociological being,'^{xxix} a frame colonizers used as a failed translation to make sense of other cultures,^{xx} reveals the epistemic hegemony of justifying imperialism by privileging Abrahamic religions over local belief systems,^{xxi} and the noblesse oblige of conversion colonialism (e.g. Cecil Rhodes' nineteenth century expansion of the British Empire; France's *Mission Civilisatrice* from 1890-1945; and arguably the US's ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, and Syria). By describing religion as a 'sociological being,' Dubuisson seeks to portray its emergence as an academic mechanism constructing a paradigm, a history to naturalize religion as a means of justifying imperialism and understanding the imperialized cultures in Western terms. The view of 'religion' that arose in the European Enlightenment first revealed against older structures, then functionalized the institution, then reassigned privilege to that institution, allowing 'religion' to summon the power that earlier critiques had sought to disburse. Religion served as a frame colonizers used as a failed translation to make sense of other cultures;^{xxii} imperialists created religion and religions, as with Mogul and European constructions of Hinduism in India.^{xxiii} Likewise, countries threatened by imperialism created their own institutions that would resemble 'religion' as defined on a Christian prototype, as for example with the nineteenth century invention of Shintoism in Japan in response to pressures to adopt Western economic practices and conceptions of modernism.^{xxiv} Not only was the concept powerful enough to serve as an analytical category by which to define other institutions, but it was strong enough to get other cultures to shape institutions to fit those characteristics, thereby also reinforcing the concept of 'religion.'

There is a tension in this Enlightenment origin of a contemporary conception of 'religion,' because delineating religion opened it to critique—for example from Immanuel Kant—so this conceptualization of 'religion' made it both powerful and vulnerable. Once there is a concept of 'religion,' scholars can criticize it, activists can fight against it, yet these rejections compound the tension by reinscribing the term, reinforcing it as a naturalized concept. As a naturalized social and political construct, 'religion' gains incontrovertibility as a source of justifications for violence. Bringing these insights to evaluating validity of ethical rationale helps distinguish pretexts for ethical positions from valid reasons or grounds for belief.

I approach this dissertation similarly to building a syllabus: identifying the learning goals, foundational theory, illustrative examples, and a few discursive objects on which students can practice applying the theory. My learning goals with this dissertation are to train readers to identify pretexts and recognize the epistemic privileges some institutions enjoy as pretexts or sources of pretext. I hope to empower readers to contesting pretexts by showing the rhetorical device's deceptive function in discourse, and challenging the institutions validating the pretexts by explaining the epistemic injustice of privileging certain bases of justification. Finally, I hope that my denaturalizations of pretext and religion encourage readers to be similarly skeptical of other discursive devices and social institutions, challenging how various rhetorical approaches and sources of knowledge function, and questioning what they previously took for granted. The

foundational theory is my theorization of ‘pretext’ in Chapter 1 and the critical study of religion in Chapter 2. These foundational two chapters include numerous illustrative examples that I have designed or gleaned from society. For easy reference, I list ten tests for identifying pretext following Chapter 1, and ten characteristics of an Enlightenment European construct of religion following Chapter 2. The discursive objects on which readers could observe how I applied the theory are Russell’s *The Sparrow* and Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* in Chapter 3, and Scientology in Chapter 4.

This project is meant not as an ethical evaluation, but as a discursive examination of a neglected consideration in ethical discourse from the perspectives of rhetoric, religious studies, cultural studies, and literature. My goal is to develop a tool to identify and contest the use of religious pretext in ethical arguments. Distinguishing pretexts from reasons is a vital hermeneutical distinction when parsing an ethical agent’s account of her own stance, and religion’s role in validating ethical positions is a crucial concern for contemporary ethics. By denaturalizing our contemporary treatment of justifications and understanding of ‘religion,’ my dissertation draws attention to the discursive weight of epistemically privileged pretexts and challenges the epistemological permissibility of religious justifications in ethical arguments.

I hope my readers harness this power, applying my 10 tests for identifying pretext and recognizing my 10 characteristics of the construct ‘religion,’ then using these tools to develop their own critiques. At a disciplinary level, I hope that rhetors, literary scholars, and philosophers will use my presentation of pretext to better understand how justification functions in discourse, and as a model for a discursive approach to defining such a category without recourse to psychology. Most critically, I hope to bridge epistemology, ethics, and discourses of religion through my argument that religion’s undeserved epistemic privilege has epistemic implications, making it a powerful basis for pretext.

ⁱ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Inc. 1972), 48.

ⁱⁱ H. G. Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext: Critical Issues in Discourse Analysis*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

ⁱⁱⁱ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

^{iv} Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

^v Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*, (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996).

^{vi} Octavia Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, (New York: Aspect, 2000).

^{vii} Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2016).

^{viii} Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

^{ix} Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

^x Rather than engage in the philosophical debate over the distinction between ethics and morality, I have chosen to use ‘ethics,’ except where morality is relevant to a quotation, or to signal the debatable distinction between ethics as a ‘secular’ field and morality as a ‘religious’ field.

^{xi} Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2013), 110.

^{xii} The Belgian police introduced the interdict *le règlement vise l’interdiction de se présenter dans l’espace public masqué ou déguisé* in 2004, followed by the French bill, *Loi 2010-1192, interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l’espace public*, and the Catalan Government’s anti-niqab legislation in 2010 (Sénat 2010). The Netherlands passed a similar bill passed in 2012 (Radio Netherlands Worldwide 2012).

^{xiii} Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the veil: male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society*, (London: Saqi Books, 2003). Fatima Mernissi, “The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries,” *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003). Fatima Mernissi, *The veil and the male elite: a feminist interpretation of women’s rights in Islam*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Books: 1991).

^{xiv} N. Mkhize, J. Bennett, V. Reddy, R. Moletsane, *The country we want to live in: Hate crimes and homophobia in the lives of black lesbian South Africans*, (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2010). Human Rights Watch, “‘We’ll Show You You’re a Woman’ Violence and Discrimination against Black Lesbians and Transgender Men in South Africa,” (Human Rights Watch Report, 2011).

^{xv} e.g. *Johnson & Graham v. M’Intosh*. 8 Wheat. 543, 1823. Chief Justice Marshall.

^{xvi} Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, (London: Routledge Classics, 2001).

^{xvii} John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2013).

^{xviii} Arguably rooted in Plato’s *Theaetetus*.

^{xix} Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

^{xx} Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

^{xxi} David Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). David Chidester, *Savage Systems*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996).

^{xxii} Nongbri, *Before Religion*.

^{xxiii} Balangadhara, S.N. “Orientalism, Postcolonialism and the ‘Construction’ of Religion.” *Rethinking religion in India: the colonial construction of Hinduism*. Eds. Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens, and Rajaram Hegde. (London: Routledge, 2010).

^{xxiv} Jason A. Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Trent Maxey, *The ‘Greatest Problem:’ Religion and State formation in Meiji Japan*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).

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Chapter One

I'm interested in a special kind of lie: a pretext. You may call it an excuse, guise, or ruse. A pretext is a justification for an action, stance, or identity that does not reflect a motivating reason, like a fallacy of justification. 'Pretext' describes a category of speech that serves to conceal motivating reasons or manipulate the audience. Pretexts may be white lies to veil an embarrassing motive (for example if you say you are going to powder your nose), and pretexts start wars (the classic example being Bush's imaginary weapons of mass destruction in Iraq). Catching pretexts not only gives one the satisfaction of calling out a fallacy, it also offers an opportunity to look for motives, understand the situation more clearly, make better informed decisions, and offer stronger counter-arguments.

Fallacy of Justification: 'Pretext'

"Language always occurs within a range of deceptive appearances which it created itself; for that reason, it always endangers its own innermost being, that is, the authentic act of saying."

— Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry"¹

My primary theoretical goal in this dissertation is to distinguish pretexts as a category of stated justifications for actions, stances, or identities that fill the discursive role not of expressing motivations, but rather concealing those motivations or manipulating the audience. I define pretext discursively rather than psychologically, looking to the justification's text rather than the speaker's psyche or self-report, since a speaker may be unconscious of a pretext's misrepresentation (e.g. crediting a ticking biological clock with the desire to have a baby, when biological clocks are the product of a late 1970s backlash against feminism), and a speaker is always unconscious of at least some of the infinite motivations (e.g. habits, traditions, privileges, ideology, social conditioning). Examining pretexts can help identify which justifications for ethical stances or actions we might consider *just*, by first dismissing stated justifications that do not serve to express the speaker's motivating reasons (motives).

I model my approach examining the stated pretexts on philosopher Miranda Fricker's negative model of pursuing justice by looking first to epistemic injustice: what justifications may be valid, if one can eliminate the invalid pretexts? Fricker is concerned with 'testimonial injustice,' whereby "a speaker receives an unfair deficit of credibility from a hearer owing to prejudice on the hearer's part."² Testimonial injustice describes an unjustly low evaluation of an agent's speech due to audience bias. A classic example is juries' epistemic bias: race, class, age, and gender all influence juries' evaluation of witness credibility.³ In future chapters, I address how testimonial injustice—and the broader category of epistemic injustice, including how audiences evaluate knowledge based on factors beyond the testimony—produces social power, whereby audiences grant an unfair excess of credibility owing to positive prejudice. In such a situation, a jury may unfairly assign a white, upper-class, adult male witness more credibility than he deserves. Rather than the speaker's identity generating the unjust epistemic disadvantage, as in Fricker's model, my critique of religiously-based pretext highlights the unjust epistemic privilege

that arguments deriving from ‘religious’ grounds receive. As I distinguish more clearly through the example of Scientology in Chapter 4, I am interested both in religion *as* pretext and religion *as grounds for* pretext. The former phrase describes when religion is the justification for some action or stance (e.g. Scientology’s status as a religion is a justification for tax exemption), claiming that something is justifiable because the institution a speaker represents falls into the category of ‘religion.’ The latter sense refers to justifications based in religion (e.g. Scientology’s belief system is foundational to justifications for violence; because religious doctrine prescribes locking up even children in solitary confinement in a small dangerous space without food at water, it is penitence rather than torture), claiming that something is justifiable because religious doctrine permits or promotes it.

One might view my intervention as a critique of metaphysics, understood as the study of cause and causality,⁴ given that my dissertation sets out to complicate the simple categorization of a cause for an ethical stance. By what standards would a factor be a defensible cause (ground) for an ethical stance? Though other variations within the category of justifications are relevant (for example to distinguish justifications offered to oneself, one’s society, juridical powers, or God), I focus on pretexts in contradistinction to motivating reasons. My ethical goal in this dissertation is to distinguish pretexts as a discursive category to help identify which justifications for ethical stances or actions should obtain as valid justifications.

This chapter defines ‘pretext’ as a discursive category, offers 10 tests to identify pretexts, measures my definition against uses of ‘pretext’ in relevant interdisciplinary literature, then reads pretext against rhetorical texts to defend my premise that pretexts function differently than reasons, and consequently, that epistemic and ethical discourse should problematize pretext. In order to show the stakes and characteristics of religious pretexts for violence, this chapter presents ‘pretext.’

An Argument for ‘Pretext’

I begin with the premise that some justifications reflect motivating reasons while others are stated purely for discursive benefits, two categories that are neither exclusive nor exhaustive, but provide the contrast relevant to this study. Justifications may be thoughtless, impulsive, meaningless, irrelevant (a non sequitur), indecipherable, or otherwise lacking importance for our considerations. My differentiation between motivating and non-motivating justifications is not an arbitrary binary, but rather two possible answers to the pivotal question I think it is important to pose when faced with a justification: is this justification a pretext?

‘Discourse’ may refer to the concept of language’s connectedness to societal functions and the broader text of a given topic. Such a conception of discourse is helpful for understanding why pretext cannot stand neutrally without relation to the discourse in which it arises, and why religious pretext is particularly powerful, buttressed by the discourse of religion. As I specify in the introduction, when I use the term ‘discourse,’ I imagine an abstract text akin to a conversation, yet extending beyond the spoken to encompass writing, visual materials, actions, and the assumptions and epistemologies shaping how agents understand and interact with those

texts. In contrast, I view rhetoric as describing discursive force (when referring to a discursive tool), or the analysis thereof (when referring to an academic field).

With an intellectual historical view, Michel Foucault places ‘discourse’ in context of the turn from a classical view of “language as the spontaneous tabula, the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things” to a post-Enlightenment view of language as “a historical form coherent with the density of its own past.”⁵ To describe the general shift, language became situated and powerful: not merely a tool arising to represent things, but a form with force and a discursive backdrop. To use Philosopher J. L. Austin’s distinction between meaning and force, the classical view of discourse recognized the meaning, then the Enlightenment brought a conception of force. Meaning relates to the truth or falsity of a statement, whereas force relates to the impact. Force describes the “certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker or of other persons” that a statement produces, regardless of whether the speaker anticipated or intended that force.⁶ The modern era understands language’s force as how speech acts upon the speaker and audience. Identifying pretext requires a consideration of both Foucault’s and Austin’s observations on the changing power of language in the modern era: an evaluation of the meaning through the truth value of a justification (is it a motivating reason?) as well as the discursive force (does the justification carry discursive benefits?). Between meaning and poetry, Hayden White situates discourse as a “form of verbal composition... distinguish[ed] from logical demonstration on the one side and from pure fiction on the other.”⁷ Discourse spans empirical and artistic forms.

Linguist H. G. Widdowson moves farther from the poetic force to define discourse in reference to elements of meaning: “[d]iscourse in this view is the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation. Text is its product.”⁸ His imagery of process and product suggests a tricky temporal relationship between the two: can a text issue from *and* precede the discourse? If not, then what comprises the discourse? This understanding also suggests a rationality with the word ‘pragmatic’ that is at odds with Widdowson’s later characterization of discourse as inexact and illogical.⁹ In this dissertation, I conceive of discourse as the abstract concept and text as a particular instantiation, of which justifications are one component.

For a given ethical stance or action (the former of which may inspire the latter), there are uncountable motivating reasons (what impels the actor, consciously or not, to hold a belief or act in a certain way) and finite justifications (what the agent asserts are the motivating reasons). Within that category of stated justifications, some fill the discursive role of reflecting motivating reasons, while others fill the role of pretext—stated as reasons, yet not reflecting motivating reasons, serving to conceal reasons or manipulate the audience. An agent is certainly unconscious of some reasons motivating her actions, stances, and identity formation, and may be unconscious of misrepresenting her motivating reasons when offering a pretext as a justification.

Just as logic distinguishes correlation from causation, I wish to distinguish the potentially overlapping categories of stated causes (justifications) from actual causes (motivating reasons). Within the category of stated causes, I wish to distinguish justifications deriving from reasons, and justifications without basis in reasons that fill the role of pretext. On this view, ‘false pretext’ would be redundant, for the true justifications are ‘reasons.’ Stated untrue causes can arise when

the speaker is deceiving herself and truly believes the pretext to be a reason, or likewise when she instrumentally posits a factor as a reason for some social, hermeneutical, or epistemological benefit: discursive benefits.

Audiences implicitly and unconsciously assign these benefits, reinforcing an agent's use of pretext. A social benefit of using a pretext could be the privilege of one rationale over another. For example, the following justifications for declining a party invitation may be more or less socially acceptable depending on the social circle: because the party is scheduled for your religion's sabbath, you are trying to save money, you need to shampoo your hair, or because you are in the habit of refusing social invitations. This last justification serves to show that there are usually multiple reasons behind an action or stance, and that an un-self-aware speaker could unconsciously offer a pretext. A hermeneutical benefit of calling a non-causal factor a cause could be simplicity. For example, intelligent design is easier to interpret than evolution: homo sapiens taking their current form because God made us in His image is easier to comprehend than an arbitrary and complex process of gene selection, mutation, and chance. A less politically-charged example would be to say it is light outside because 'the sun rose,' rather than explaining the Earth's orbit and spin. An epistemological benefit derives from the hearer assigning more value to a statement due to some quality implying privileged knowledge production. For example, I am less likely to believe the veracity of intelligent design based on a pamphlet from a neighbor than I am to put credence in the evolutionary theory I learned in a university biology course.

Discursive pressures encourage speakers to offer pretexts, for example in place of silence, to fulfill discursive expectation. Many examples I offer later in this chapter are responses to explicit demands for justification in order to clearly portray the discursive situations in which speakers employ justifications. Actual conversations are rarely so forthright. The audience, by explicitly requesting or communicating no expectation of a justification, can influence the speaker's production of justification. Likewise, a speaker's production will affect the reception of the justification and the audience's credulity. Speakers are generally motivated by peer response, or anticipated audience reactions. The speaker longs for the audience's approval and validation, and fears censure. Sigmund Freud recognizes others' reactions as the most potent of the three sources of suffering: oneself, the world, and interpersonal relations. "The suffering which comes from this last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other."¹⁰ Fearing the suffering that others' negative reactions would cause us, we frame our speech to elicit approval, and defend ourselves to avoid censure.

The audience to pretext resembles the sovereigns towards whom all attention turns in Foucault's description of *Las Meninas*:¹¹ the speaker orients the stated justifications towards the audience. Foucault seeks to reveal and mirror, showing that the audience's reflection is what matters to the speaker. The audience's role is to create an image to the justification's preimage, to reflect what the speaker has said in a way that gives it validity. Just as for Foucault "the function of that reflection is to draw into the interior of the picture what is intimately foreign to it,"¹² the audience gives pretext meaning that is intimate with the justification, but not existing in the utterance of the justification, generating an ethical validity only an audience can produce in evaluating another's justification. The audience brings value to the justification that the utterance

itself cannot produce; the justification needs the reflection from the audience's reception to produce the full impact of the justification. The justification's meaning is close to the utterance, yet the audience rather than the justification itself generates that meaning. The speaker also produces a meaning through the justification's utterance—an 'attitude' I address later—but the audience generates the justificatory value.

On the inconsistency of human thoughts and actions, Freud recognizes the complex disjuncture between societal values and personal admiration, the "diversity of their wishful impulses."¹³ His observation applies to an audience's reception of justifications, admitting justifications that may be at odds with their own values yet that society privileges, or that the speaker justifies with a satisfying type of reason. We can likewise apply the inconsistency to understand the speaker, who will not necessarily reflect her motivations, nor beliefs and actions, through her justifications. Freud describes an unintentional discrepancy, yet a speaker may intentionally offer such a justification: thoughts, actions, and expressions thereof do not necessarily align. Whether we read the 'wishful impulses' as motivating reasons or ethical values an agent seeks to follow, the discrepancy of both with justifications is important to revealing the contradictions.

My second premise holds that distinguishing non-motivating justifications can help avoid fallacies and measure epistemic value. Non-motivating justifications a speaker states may be useful indicators of personal and cultural values, contemporary discourses, and rhetorical strategy. Yet they are, to use Freud's phrase, "false standards of measurement"¹⁴ when considering a statement's epistemic or ethical value. One approach to analyzing the ethical value of an act or stance disregards the agent and her intentions, knowledge, identity, position, and justifications. On this approach, the agent's speech and the question of whether a statement is a pretext are both irrelevant. I, however, hold that ethical discourse includes the agent's discourse, so the agent's knowledge, beliefs, interpretation, and of course justifications are relevant. I believe the latter approach is a realistic representation of human responses to questionable acts. When evaluating the accusations that women have leveled as part of the #MeToo movement, you are unlikely to ask, "the offender and victim's feelings aside, what was the ethical equation?" If you hear that someone has sexually harassed or assaulted another person, you are more likely to ask yourself, "what were they thinking?!" or "how could they do such a thing?" rather than "is what they did so bad?" or "are they so wrong?" Post-enlightenment humanism inclines us to presume—and privilege—shared social norms, encouraging conformity over ethical analysis of deviant behaviors and opinions. I hope that an awareness of pretext helps audiences consider stances outside of the presumed shared norms and evaluate their interlocutors' ethical positions.

I propose the category of 'pretext' to describe the rhetorical device of non-motivating justifications. In her 2003 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance lecture, Iranian lawyer and human rights activist Shirin Ebadi twice uses the term 'pretext' to describe governments and human rights opponents citing certain threats or ideals to validate violating human rights. First, Ebadi criticizes governments, presumably the United States, for exploiting 9/11 and the war on terror as a pretext, an instrument to justify their human rights violations: "some states have violated the universal principles and laws of human rights by using the events of 11 September and the war on international terrorism as a pretext." Two sentences later, she restates the problem describing the pretext as a "cloak" of justification, stating that illegitimate human rights restrictions and

special courts “have been justified and given legitimacy under the cloak of the war on terrorism.”¹⁵ Both statements imply that while governments offer the stated justification of fighting terrorism, it is a guise for ulterior motives. Second, Ebadi identifies an ideological pretext at play in justifications for violating human rights laws both by Western signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as by known human rights adversaries “under the pretext of cultural relativity,”¹⁶ claiming that their non-Western cultures do not adhere to the same human rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration, and that their ethics are equally valid. Ebadi indicates that the pretext is a guise for other motivations, since the latter are “recognized opponents” of human rights, suggesting a prior opposition to human rights based on other motivating reasons.

Ebadi’s application of ‘pretext’ is consistent with common parlance. Widdowson writes in a chapter on pretext that, “[t]he term ‘pretext’ generally refers to an ulterior motive: a pretending to do one thing but intending to do something else.”¹⁷ Particularly in the context in which the author situates this definition through a quotidian scene of spouses watching television, this definition suggests that ‘pretext’ is not only a common linguistic performance, but also a common term in general use. Widdowson’s diction of “ulterior motive” to describe pretext’s common usage captures the point I hoped to make with my second premise, that some justifications express motivating reasons while other justifications fall beyond the scope of those reasons.

I disagree with Widdowson’s definition on two points. First, I understand ‘pretext’ as describing purported rather than “ulterior” motives and concealing unspoken ulterior motivating reasons. Second, Widdowson only accounts for intentional pretext and not unconscious pretext, unless we read “pretending” and “intending” as potentially subconscious impulses influencing speech, which seems like an interpretive stretch. In the preface, he suggests another definition of pretext in characterizing recent “cynical abuse of language” in reference to Orwellian “doublethink,” as “designed to deceive, used as a front, a cover-up of ulterior motives.”¹⁸ Rather than the ulterior motives themselves, ‘pretext’ here is concealing the ulterior motives, which is more in line with the altered definition I propose: ‘pretext’ refers to the category of stated justifications concealing motivating reasons and manipulating the audience.

Linguists use ‘pretext’ quite differently to describe “how texts are designed and understood,” what directs the audience’s attention and interpretation through cues such as context, “assumptions and expectations,” the text’s auditory “resonance” of the text, or the meaning the audience perceives, however ignorant of an exact or literal meaning of the text, all of which the audience brings to the interpretation.¹⁹ Widdowson even notes that literal readings of a text, using the example of the Bible, will “only yield a partial meaning,” given the role of pretext in forming meaning.²⁰ Audiences are like Christmas-Easter Catholics who understand the trinity and the meaning of John 1:1 well enough without ever considering how three could be one or the Word could be God. When we hear a justification, we are like a dog who hears a speaker cooing ‘bad dog’ in an affectionate and affirming tone while scratching us behind the ears: we wag our tails in satisfied bliss. The text itself is not what we understand, but rather the impression that pretextuality conveys. For Widdowson, pretext is like a “perlocutionary purpose,” which is what the text intends to do, whether or not the author intended the text to do so.²¹ Pretext is a

subversion of meaning inherent to language: Widdowson cites Austin, describing “[w]hat we do with words” as “we make them do our bidding to achieve propositional reference and illocutionary force by making appeal to mutually recognized contextual conditions,” with the reference and force being “conditioned by what I have called pretextual assumptions.”²² The speaker relies on shared understanding with the audience, alluding to a discursive construction of what the word implies.

In an attempt to avoid confusion and differentiate between pretext in my rhetorical sense of justificatory fallacy, and Widdowson’s linguistic sense of hermeneutic background, I will retain the usual spelling for my meaning and hereafter use ‘pre-text’ for the linguistic sense. While acknowledging this linguistic understanding of pretext, which I use later, I would like to return to the clarified definition of a common meaning of the term I proposed above. Rather than fearing that “to scrutinize the text...might well reveal the pre[-]text and undermine the effect,” I hope to encourage my readers to engage in a “resistant or critical reading,” to examine a text, reveal the pretext, and “refuse to ratify it,”²³ undermining the duplicity of pretext. Rather than presuming the shared pre-text, I hope my readers will question discursive assumptions. Though Widdowson views such reading as merely assigning new pre-texts,²⁴ I demonstrate in Chapter 3 and discuss in Chapter 4 how such readings can be constructive.

Testing ‘Pretext’

To encourage scrutiny of the text in the diataxis stage of discourse analysis (when the rhetor analyzes the argument),²⁵ I offer a series of ten tests for identifying and parsing pretext.

Pretexts are easy to identify in situations of false dilemma, when a speaker cites an ulterior factor as the reason for a choice but retains the initial choice when faced with a third option that would satisfy the ulterior factor. The parent who justifies moving their child to a Christian school on the grounds that the public school teaches sex education is obviously employing a pretext if the public school offers parents an opt-out choice to excuse their children from sex education classes. Another side of sex education offers another example. Abstinence-only education proponents offer the false dilemma of having either pro-sex (comprehensive reproductive health) or anti-sex (abstinence-only) education, without entertaining the possibility of teaching teenagers how to put a condom on a banana while still encouraging them to wait until marriage to have sex. Particularly in the face of overwhelming evidence that abstinence-only education does not lower rates of teen-pregnancy, their false choice of teaching either one or the other suggests that their insistent on abstinence-only education as opposed to comprehensive sex education is a pretext not to teach a combination.

A more political religious argument example of a justification that this test reveals to be a pretext comes from the debate over reproductive freedom. Opponents of legal access to contraception argue that the Ten Commandments forbid killing, and that life begins at conception, so abortion is murder, and therefore contraception violates the Ten Commandments. Pre-conception contraceptives such as the synthetic estrogen and progesterone in birth control pills, IUDs, diaphragms, vasectomies, and condoms all function pre-conception, so would not be murder

even on the strict definition of life as beginning at conception. Those voices are offering a false dilemma of contraception as impermissible or no contraception as permissible, even though there are contraceptives that would not meet their definition of murder, suggesting that the invocation of the Ten Commandments is a pretext, not a motivating reason for limiting women's reproductive freedom.

The tension from the reproductive freedom example introduces a fourth test to identify pretexts: selective enforcement. Science fiction author Patrick S. Tomlinson offers a thought experiment to reveal the anti-abortion argument of life beginning at conception as a pretext, posing proponents of this position the following dilemma: running to escape a fire, you can save either a five-year-old child or "1000 Viable Human Embryos;" which do you choose?²⁶ Tomlinson asserts that no one could honestly answer that they would value 1000 embryos over 1 living child, showing that they do not practice belief that life begins at conception. Alternatively, if the same people who decry contraception as violating the commandment not to kill also support the death penalty or 'preventative' war, they are exercising selective enforcement. The classic example of selective enforcement revealing pretext is to condemn homosexuality by invoking Leviticus 18:22, yet to flaunt Leviticus 18:19 (and 20:18) to sleep with a woman having her period or wear mixed fabrics in violation of Leviticus 19:19. Another biblical example would be working on the Sabbath yet using the next commandment of honoring one's father and mother as justification for spanking one's disobedient child. One might call this test the hypocrisy test.

A speaker citing Leviticus or the Ten Commandments without a personal reason to view those texts as authority may be using a borrowed justification. The non-Muslim who refuses to pay her student loan interest by citing the Qur'an 2:279 that interest is oppressive, exploitative, and unjust is borrowing a justification. Similarly, the atheist who invokes Noah's curse of Ham in Genesis 9:20-27 to justify enslaving humans who, like Ham, descended from Canaan, is borrowing biblical justifications for slavery from a belief system to which he does not adhere. Both of these cases are also examples of speakers citing authorities that are irrelevant to appraising the act, stance, or identity: an appeal to irrelevant authority. Student loan agencies are unconcerned with the Qur'anic position on interest, and laws are not based on the Bible, so Genesis is an irrelevant basis for legal justification. To take an example from current events, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions was appealing to irrelevant authority when he invoked Romans 13 as a justification for US Border Patrol kidnapping children from their parents in June, 2018, since Romans is not a valid authority for justifying federal policy.

If the loan officer calls out the defaulting student as a non-Muslim who should have no ideological objection to interest, and the student changes her justification to an inability to pay or confusing loan conditions or continuing schooling that should delay her loan repayment, she is employing a shifting justification.²⁷ If the slavery defender, once a neighbor notes he is an atheist, switches his rationale to an economic argument about the necessity of unpaid labor, then the shifting justification signals that the initial justification was a pretext—and the latter justification probably was as well. If the anti-contraception campaigner, upon reading my above arguments about the false dilemma and selective enforcement of opposing contraception then offers an argument that all contraceptives interfere with God's will, then they are shifting justifications. Within this test, I include the category of multiple justifications, which has a

similar effect. In some cases, it is unclear whether the speaker is shifting or adding justifications. Daniel Boyarin offers one such example from the debate over how to interpret a passage in Mark 2 in which Jesus defends his disciples from the Pharisees' censure for harvesting grain on the Sabbath. First Jesus justifies their actions by comparing them to David eating before the priests, and then he justifies their actions with the argument that a human life is more important than the Sabbath. One might interpret Jesus' second justification as a shifting justification in response to negative reaction from the Pharisees, or he may be offering multiple justifications, which diminishes his credibility, or at least complicates interpretation. As Boyarin writes, "Jesus seems to be giving too many justifications of the disciples' behavior."²⁸ My reading of this example may be a glib attempt to fit Jesus' defense to my purposes, since Boyarin does attempt to resolve the shifting justifications hermeneutically.

A speaker may shift or add justifications if she realizes that the first justification does not fit the action or stance because the outcome does not satisfy the justification (or 'obtain' in a philosophical sense), as in the case of fifth test, which I call 'unobtaining outcome.' R. Drew Griffith offers a classics example of an unobtaining outcome indicating a pretext: since Iphigenia remains a virgin until death, marriageability must be a mere pretext, for were the motivating reason her marriageability, she would not have remained a virgin.²⁹ Griffith's is an odd reason, overlooking the many reasons Iphigenia may not have married, including her devotion to Artemis and estrangement from the parents who would presumably broker her marriage. There is a clearer unobtaining outcome indicating pretext in Iphigenia's story: her father Agamemnon tells Iphigenia and her mother Clytemnestra³⁰ to come to Aulis where his Greek fleet is stranded, so that Iphigenia may marry Achilles. However, Achilles is unaware of this (fraudulently) proposed marriage, so marriage could not have been an outcome. Achilles' real motivating reason for sending Iphigenia to Aulis is to sacrifice her to the Goddess Artemis as a conciliation for his hubris. Thus, Agamemnon's justification relies on an outcome that cannot be obtained through the action, indicating that the justification fulfills the role of a pretext. For a religious example, if a school administrator advocates Bible study classes throughout elementary school as a means of teaching the students ethics despite knowledge of studies such as "Morality in Everyday Life,"³¹ showing that religious education does not lead to more ethical behavior, the unobtaining outcome test indicates that the administrator's justification is likely a pretext. In some cases, the speaker determines whether the outcome obtains, revealing the pretext all the more clearly, as in the case of a televangelist who raises money for missionaries, only to spend the funds on a new private jet or another family mansion. Agamemnon and the administrator may simply appear to be lying; since the lie takes the form of a justification, the lie is playing the role of a pretext.

The school administrator who introduces the research as having the obverse outcomes or the televangelist who reinterprets the charitable fundraising campaign as soliciting funds for a missionary jet may also be subject to the intentional misreading or misapplication test. Justifying killing one's spouse because one had no alternative since the Bible forbids divorce (Matthew 5: 32-33 & 19: 3-12, Mark 10: 2-12, Luke 16: 17-18) is a misapplication of the logic, since the obvious alternative to divorce that does not violate any commandments would be to remain married, not to murder one's spouse. Jehovah's Witness Ralph Candelario murdered his wife and staged a home invasion because his religion forbids divorce (his first wife had 'disappeared'); the

story of Jehovah's Witness Kelle Jarka murdering his wife and claiming it was a burglary is strikingly similar. Not only Jehovah's Witnesses commit uxoricide then try to shift blame to a robber, I merely chose these examples for that coincident religious background. The Qur'anic scholar who encourages only women to wear the hijab citing Qur'an 24:30-1, would know that the passage explicitly addresses men as well as women in encouraging them not reveal what is translated variously as 'charms' or 'adornments.' Given the injunction in hadiths against wearing jewelry outside the house, and Ibn Abbas' interpretation of the adornments that should be hidden as bracelets and belts, symbols of wealth,³² the scholar would know that 'adornment' refers to jewelry, not anatomy. In that case, the Qur'anic scholar would be knowingly misinterpreting the genders to which the passage is relevant, the content of what those genders should not reveal, as well as the spirit of the passage, which is about class rather than sexuality.

For an illustration of the next two tests, recall the story of Iphigenia, whose mother Clytemnestra kills her husband Agamemnon in revenge for sacrificing their daughter. Clytemnestra has been plotting the murder with her lover, Aegisthus, before Agamemnon returns with his lover, Cassandra. When Clytemnestra's daughter Electra comes to exact revenge on her mother for her father's murder, imagine if Aegisthus pled with Electra to show her mother mercy, justifying Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon as a crime of passion because Agamemnon had brought home a lover. This justification, offered belatedly and by a third party, satisfies what I call post hoc and ventriloquist tests: tests revealing that the pretext comes after the fact (sometimes with information attained after the action) or from the wrong agent, respectively. Post hoc pretexts are the esprit de l'escalier of justifications, offered a little too late. Since this justification comes long after Clytemnestra decided to kill her husband, and is dependent on knowledge (that he would bring home a lover) she only had after resolving to commit the murder, it satisfies the post hoc test. Since the justification comes from someone other than Clytemnestra, the actor in this justification, it satisfies the ventriloquist test.

Satisfying any of these tests signals that the justification may be a pretext. To check any of these tests' results, the audience might consider other relevant information, such as the speaker's knowledge. In the case of borrowed justifications, knowledge of the speaker's identity and beliefs is relevant to recognizing whether the justifications reflect the speaker's beliefs or are borrowed. In most cases, the audience's knowledge of auxiliary information is relevant to identifying potential pretexts, so I am including a final test allowing for any auxiliary information that allows the audience to determine what reasons actually motivate the agent. Summarizing Hermocrates, C. M. Fauber offers a classical example of auxiliary information revealing a pretext: "Athenians, being opportune aggressors, will use the pretext of aiding kinsmen to subjugate all of Sicily," a justification Fauber later characterizes as "a specious pretext."³³ Knowledge of the Athenians' bellicose nature reveals that their justification for military aggression is probably a pretext.

These tests consider the rhetoric of the speech and information about the speaker to determine whether a justification derives from a pretext or reason, which is one angle from which to approach the speech. Foucault begins *The Order of Things* with an analysis of the virtual triangulation of gaze in Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, from the reciprocal gazes between painter and audience, complicated by the spectators and subjects the painting depicts, and the decomposition

a mirror performs.³⁴ Just as the audience is forced into that role upon meeting the painter's eyes, the audience to a justification is forced into that role upon hearing the speaker's justification. Just as the painter-viewer reciprocity is complicated by figures in the painting and the humans they represent, the subjectivity of the children, wives, slaves, and neighbors in the examples above should be relevant. The audience and speaker are rarely alone in the ethical calculations of a justification. Similarly to how Velázquez's mirror reflects what is otherwise unseen in the painting, I hope that these tests can serve as mirrors to reflect unseen factors and reveal how justifications relate to the scene.

Another approach is to look entirely outside the scene for a motivating reason that might lead the speaker to invoke a pretext. Freud proposes what resembles a test for this purpose. To understand guilt about doing or even intending to do something bad,³⁵ Freud looks for the actor's "helplessness and his dependence on other people," which may generate a motivating reason for issuing a pretext: "fear of loss of love."³⁶ The actor who loses love, Freud explains, will be subject to "punishment" from stronger people,³⁷ presumably redoubling the fear of losing love. Freud describes this fear mindset as "bad conscience" which is not guilt itself but rather fear of losing love.³⁸ The importance of that distinction is that bad conscience is evidence of primal anxiety rather than of internalized desire to do what is ethically good; the agent with a bad conscience is not upset over letting down the community or doing the wrong thing but simply fears social ostracism. This distinction corroborates the importance of pretext, since the agent would be primarily concerned to justify the action to an audience to prevent punishment and loss of love and only secondarily concerned to assuage a bad conscience deriving from their own ethical alignment. Further, issuing a pretext offers an agent time and psychological bandwidth for reflexive justification to herself while in that cycle of fearing that an action might carry negative social consequences.

If we set aside the belief that conscience encourages people to act ethically, then we might agree with Freud's suggestion that people do whatever they desire and believe they can get away with: "people habitually allow themselves to do any bad thing which promises them enjoyment, so long as they are sure that the authority will not know anything about it or cannot blame them for it."³⁹ Whether the reader believes that Freud has valuable insight into human behavior or not, we can read this passage as offering a relatable scenario of a situation leading to exercising pretext: engaging in reproachable behavior motivated by fun or pleasure, with the plan to justify that behavior afterwards to escape blame. If presenting an authority with a pretext allows an agent to escape blame, then the agent gets away with doing, intending, or believing something ethically bad. So the rhetorical act of pretext not only permits, but even encourages bad behavior, and each successful pretext encourages further employment of pretext rather than reason (which Freud would identify as desire for pleasure) as justification.

Internal authority may also perpetuate use of pretext. Freud further suggests reflexive justification not to one's internal ethical sense, but rather to an internalized external authority by means of a "super-ego" from which "nothing can be hidden...not even thoughts," leading to the generation of guilt from within as well as without.⁴⁰ If an individual can convince their super-ego that a pretext is a reason, then the super-ego's positive response to such justifications would encourage an agent to employ pretext. Alternatively, if the internalized authority—with the

advantage of access to the individual's conscious motivations—rejects a pretext as a rhetorical performance rather than expression of motivation, the actor might be all the more insistent on the pretext when addressing an external audience (or 'authority,' to use Freud's terminology). Freud suggests that the virtuous suffer from the most distrustful egos, especially when faced with ill luck;⁴¹ not only the guilty employ pretext. The high ethical demands and criticism of the super-ego might amplify the need to justify actions or stances with pretext, even when the actor feels on some internal level vindicated by motivating reasons.

In line with Freud's concern for motive, we might add a specification version of the tenth test: plausible motive as auxiliary information, asking whether another justification would be more believable. For example, in the cases of 'corrective' rape or polygamy, is it more likely that the rapist or polygamist is motivated by conviction that God commands the act or by misogyny and/or sexual desire?

While Freud's concerns obviously utilize psychological analysis, I have purposefully designed the test to be consistent with discursive analysis, without having to psychoanalyze the speaker. I imagine that the reader employing my tests might look for other stated or implied justifications in the text of speech or look for potential motivating reasons in the broader text of what one knows about the speaker or situation. While I refrain from psychological analysis, I do engage two writers who do. In the next section, I explain the insufficiency of Matthew Fore's suggestion that insincerity is what differentiates pretext from other justifications;⁴² in the following section, I analyze Austin on 'insincere' performatives.⁴³ As Miranda Fricker observes when utilizing the concept, sincerity is an ethical value, a socially constructed value for personal emotional response.⁴⁴ Though I hope the image of a pretext as an insincere justification in contrast to reason's sincerity will help the reader conceptualize the difference within our socially constructed contemporary discourse, it raises problems for identifying and responding to pretexts. Rather, I propose a discursive approach to defining pretext that considers the justification's function in the speech. To facilitate such discursive analysis, I propose ten tests for identifying pretext, with an accompanying question to ask for the following situation:

Speaker S justifies stance or act A with potential pretext P from source Q.

1. False dilemma test: If a more attractive or less controversial act other than A satisfies P, would S still choose A?
2. Selective enforcement (or hypocrisy) test: Does S insist upon honoring P, but not another justification following from Q?
3. Borrowed justification test: Is Q an invalid authority for S?
4. Appeal to irrelevant authority test: Is Q a relevant authority when evaluating A?
5. Shifting justification test: Does S abandon P for another justification?
6. Unobtaining outcome test: Would P fail to produce the promised outcome to A?

7. Misreading or misapplication test: Does Q not mean or imply P; would S know that?
8. Post hoc test: Does S offer P too long after or before A for it to be credible?
9. Ventriloquist test: Is someone other than S responsible for A?
10. Auxiliary information and plausible motive test: Is there anything about S that would indicate that P is not a reason? Is there another motive more likely than P is to explain S's A?

If the answer to any of these tests might be 'yes' for a given justification, then that justification is likely a pretext. I will repeat this list between this chapter and the next for easy reference.

Reading 'Pretext' Interdisciplinarily

Is pretext the correct term? In *The Order of Things*, Foucault uses 'pretext' similarly to how I intend it, discouraging his audience from appealing to a history of thought "as a pretext for disparaging a thought powerless to stand on its own feet."⁴⁵ In his formulation, the audience would use the historical and discursive construction of meaning as an excuse to wrongly undervalue a thought, implying that such pretext would help perpetuate common thought systems. Foucault emphasizes the function rather than the psychology of pretext by describing a hypothetical general use of a certain intellectual argument as a pretext. Were he viewing pretext from a psychological perspective, then the pretext would be to appeal to a history of thought rather than to a 'sincerely' held reason for disparaging the thought. This application of pretext as a discursive tool—rather than a reflection of psychology—matches the definition of pretext I seek to convey in this chapter. One fitting example of a use of 'pretext' cannot suffice to either confirm the diction or establish a meaning in the literature.

My goal in this section is to present how relevant literature uses 'pretext' and what other terms the literature uses to convey the discursive phenomenon I seek to describe. Even the seemingly clear-cut superficial literal meaning of 'before text,' is ambiguous, suggesting 'before' temporally (e.g. a prior work inspiring the text), physically (e.g. a screen standing in front of a text), or preferentially (e.g. an element more important than the text). Etymologically, 'pretext' derives from the Latin *praetextus*, referring not to text in a discursive sense, but rather to textiles, implying a sense of pretext as what comes before the weave. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the second syllable rather than the first was stressed in the English pronunciation into the nineteenth Century, an emphasis that shifts the focus from the various understandings of 'before' to the importance of the textile. Neither the literal nor etymological roots supports either my definition of pretext or the common use Ebadi and many of the theorists below reflect, which attests to the mutability of meaning over time. Given the interdisciplinary nature of my project, I cannot limit my literature study to rhetoric alone, but look to other areas impacting my project which I group broadly as: religious studies, classics and philology, politics, and law.

To answer the question of whether pretext is the correct term, I apply the corpus analysis

methodology Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin employ in *Imagine No Religion*⁴⁶ (see further discussion in Chapter 2), and which Widdowson recommends “as a corrective to pre[-]textually determined interpretation.”⁴⁷ So I reviewed the 199 results for “pretext” in the British National Corpus, from sources including broadcast and print news; fiction prose and poetry; academic work from the humanities, politics, technical engineering, and social sciences; nonacademic work from the humanities, law, politics, and social sciences; and biographies. Almost all cases clearly employ the term in my sense of a stated justification offered in place of motivating reasons to gain audience approval for an act, stance, or identity. However, none explicitly view pretext as a discursive category the way that Foucault does in the line I discuss above.

Out of 199 instances, only 4 appear to deviate from my general understanding of ‘pretext.’⁴⁸ The first result, “a classic pretext for war,” attests to the prevalence of this sense of the term, and other phrases such as “[t]he Use of Religion as a Pretext for Waging War” are representative of the prevalence of using ‘pretext’ to present government justifications for military action. Indeed, 51 (25.6%) of the instances obviously concerned war (which I read here broadly as state or militia violence), 8 (32%) of which concerned religion (understood broadly and colloquially to include Zionism and Hezbollah, which attests to the weakness of the term ‘religion,’ which I address in Chapter 2). Certain grammatical formulations stand out as indicative of such uses of ‘pretext:’ “under/on the pretext of/that” occurred 48 times (24% of all instances), “as a pretext for/to” occurred 30 times, “some pretext” 15 times, “use(d) as a/the pretext” 14 times, “any pretext” 8 times, “provide/providing the/a pretext” 7 times, “on one/some pretext or (an)other” 4 times, and “on the slightest pretext” occurred thrice. Phrases such as “on one pretext or another” suggest an understanding of pretext as shallow justifications offered in exchange for another justification rather than carrying their own content. The phrase “on the slightest pretext” further expresses the insignificance of a pretext’s content.

For more contextualized—if less exhaustive results—I analyze the use of the term ‘pretext’ in over two hundred articles I selected from fields including area studies, classics, history, law, literature, philosophy, philology, politics, and religion. Given that Chapter 3 uses literature to analyze my readings of ‘pretext’ and ‘religion,’ I address how the literature discourse applies ‘pretext’ in that chapter. Since the field of religion is of most immediate relevance to this dissertation, I begin there.

Religious Studies

Chapter 2 covers what I mean by ‘religion.’ In the meantime and for the purpose of this section, I take ‘religion’ in common parlance to refer to a broad contemporary understanding of spiritual belief systems or worldviews, and ‘religion’ as an academic field to be the study of that broadly-understood category. This section includes articles from journals such as the *Journal for the Study of Religion*, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Studia Islamica*, and *Harvard Theological Review*. Several articles⁴⁹ apply ‘pretext’ in ways that match the meaning I seek to elucidate in this chapter. Where ‘pretext’ is a translation of a Greek term in the Bible, the Greek term given is πρόφασις, which also appears in a number of the articles from Classics that I discuss below.

John Ralph Willis uses ‘pretext’ eight times to describe how Islam justified slavery, first in “Slavery is an Infidelity,”⁵⁰ offering non-belief in Islam as a justification to enslave peoples of recently imperialized colonies. The chronology Willis describes obtains under my post hoc and ventriloquism tests: “*amirs* of the Sudan, as they sought to consolidate the newly-won territories of Islam, turned to the learned custodians of the *Shari’a* in an effort to contract the area of doubt which enveloped the question of slave ownership,” and the scholars offered them “a pretext for enslavement in the notion of non-belief.”⁵¹ First, they captured the slaves, then they consulted scholars to find a pretext for owning slaves, who offered them the pretext that the now-enslaved people were not Muslim, and therefore enslavable. We might read this sequence as one model for how speakers use pretext discursively. That they had “sought a pretext for possession” shows that the justification comes after the act, followed by generalizing the pretext: “the pretext of non-belief began to cover a multitude of transgressions.”⁵² Once they could justify slavery with the pretext of non-believers having fewer rights, they extended the pretext to other cases, and extended their search for other pretexts.

Second, Willis cites Edith Sanders⁵³ tracing the progression of justification from non-belief to race as bases for enslavement, looking to the Babylonian Talmud for a new pretext. Sanders argues that twelfth-century merchant Benjamin of Tudela read race into the “curse of Ham” (Genesis 9:20-27) as a justification for enslaving people he describes as intellectually and morally inferior who were sold as slaves in Northern Africa. She characterizes this pretext as a “rationalization,” commenting on Tudela’s description of these enslaved peoples, that “[i]deas have a way of being accepted when they become useful as a rationalization of an economic fact of life.” If economic considerations make the creation of an identity expedient, then people will support the construction of such an identity as a rationalization. The economic consideration is the more plausible motivating reason. Within a few centuries, Sanders writes, this idea “of the Negro-Hamite,” wedding the justification from Genesis to a construction of identity fitting the economic realities of the slave trade, “was generally accepted.”⁵⁴ Willis glosses this progression as showing that the passage from Genesis “provided...a pretext for the subjugation of the Canaanites” before “its elaboration found a ready channel into the Muslim historiography of a later era,” and remained relevant in the Muslim justification of slavery. According to Willis: “darkness of color remained a pretext for enslavement well into the nineteenth century.”⁵⁵ Should scripture serve as a valid authority? If not, this usage may satisfy my borrowed justification test. The trajectory from the pretext of non-belief to the pretext of enslavable race echoes a similar shift in justifications for violence in US history.⁵⁶ ‘Seeking’ a pretext in the first case, and ‘remaining’ a pretext in the second case both suggest that speakers seek content to fill the discursive role of pretext, echoing my understanding of pretext.

Examples from Christianity predominate in this literature. Analyzing Mark 12:38-40, religious scholar Harry Fledderman reads a translation that uses ‘pretext’ to describe how “[t]he poor are exploited on a religious pretext” by vain and selfish scribes “who devour the houses of the widows and for a pretext say long prayers.”⁵⁷ Pretext is the translation here for the Greek word *πρόφασις*, which the author glosses as designating “an ‘alleged reason’ or a ‘pretext’,”⁵⁸ suggesting that pretext is synonymous with a justification given in place of the motivating reason. Here again, “for a pretext” suggests that pretexts fill a set discursive role. The scribes enact an action and then insert a pretext for the justificatory role. While the phrasing of how

writers use ‘pretext’ suggests the discursive role, adjectives that modify ‘pretext’ can point to the low justificatory value of the pretext. For example, religion scholar Cynthia Edenburg writes that Solomon “is equally determined to do away with Shimei, the kinsman of Saul (1 Kgs 2:8-9), and this new Gath incident is but a flimsy pretext to eliminate the kinsman of Saul.”⁵⁹ Modifying ‘pretext’ with ‘flimsy’ suggests that the justification is etiolated, dubious, does not stand up to scrutiny. Then presenting a strong alternate motive, Solomon’s resolve to kill Shimei—especially since it is ethically reprehensible—suggests that the pretext is a guise for the actual motive.

Modifying ‘pretext’ with ‘mere’ indicates that historian Benjamin Z. Kedar views the term as indicating something insignificant,⁶⁰ and his other applications of the term suggest that the insignificance extends to ethics, that pretexts do not signify meaningful ethical justifications. Reporting a French Jesuit’s account of events in 1096, when “false crusaders” massacred Jews in Cologne and Mainz, “as barbarous, inhuman, deriving from a false zeal, perpetrated under the pretext of piety yet inspired, in truth, by sheer avarice,”⁶¹ Kedar contrasts pretext against a true inspiration and roots the act in a ‘false’ zeal, thereby doubly emphasizing pretext as falsity. Again suggesting a motivating reason to emphasize the falsity of pretext, Kedar presents “the wish to avenge the crucifixion as a pretext,” then notes that the more likely motivating reason “to rob and kill the Jews” was that “the largely penniless Christians [were] roused by Jewish wealth.”⁶² The clearest presentation of my understanding of ‘pretext’ in these texts may be a quotation from Hans Eberhard Mayer, “the argument that the Jews were punishable as the enemies of Christ was... a poor pretext that inadequately concealed the motivating reasons of greed.”⁶³ The purpose of the argument that Mayer identifies as a ‘pretext’ is to conceal ‘motivating reasons,’ and the inadequate concealment reveals the motive, while showing the argument to be a pretext. While we might read these examples of pretext as demonstrating the insincerity (psychological falsity) of pretext as opposed to (psychologically true) reason, we can also read a discursive function in these situations: the pretext is the justification offered in place of the motivating reason, to veil or otherwise mislead the audience.

Anti-Semitism is the clear motive in the two instances Rudnicki offers of the Polish government economically persecuting Jews in the 1930s under more palatable pretexts and the cover of targeting select groups rather than an entire population. First, “[u]nder the pretext of humanitarian treatment of animals, an action was undertaken aimed at preventing Jews from participating in the meat market,” and second, a “law annulling Polish citizenship of persons who lost their connection with the Polish Statehood... served as a pretext for Nazi Germany for the expulsion of the Polish Jews.”⁶⁴ Both examples suggest that the Polish government employed potentially reasonable justifications of protecting animals and requiring certain standards for citizenship to conceal anti-Semitic motives for preventing some Polish Jews from working, and allowing others to be forced out of Poland.

Scholars writing on religion have deployed pretext in various ways. Willis, Fledderman, Kedar, Edenburg, and Rudnicki use pretext in an ethical or theological-moral sense of justifying violence or exploitation. Religion scholar Kyle Fedler and Historians Michael Burger and Timothy Gloege are concerned with legal pretext, while Philosopher John McSweeney and Laura Savu have more quotidian applications comparable to excuses, still within my range of meaning, even if they are not explicitly presenting pretext as a discursive tool. Considering

whether certain acts are justifiable under canon law, Burger twice uses the phrase “canonical pretext,” while implying that the motives are not premised in canon law.⁶⁵ Fedler offers several examples of how “warfare is often the pretext for the suspension of human rights,” including by Hitler and Lincoln.⁶⁶ Gloege applies ‘pretext’ to churches justifying elitist choices: “religious pretext allowed ‘respectable’ denominations to repress minority voices.”⁶⁷ Yet the legal applications are more prominent in his description of a late-nineteenth century legal struggle between the City of Chicago and “faith healer” John Alexander Dowie. This City attempted to stop Dowie’s operations “on the pretext he was running a hospital without a license,” but found the law lacked sufficient provisions to cover the case, so wrote an “ordinance [that] was simply a pretext to persecute his religious convictions.”⁶⁸ The first instance demonstrates ‘pretext’ in the sense of a legal excuse for doing what the agent desired, while the second usage presents pretext as the justifications given that would satisfy legal standards that the motives would not cover.

McSweeney expresses misgivings about a ‘Statement of Conclusions’ from antipodean Catholics that “is seen by many as a pretext being used by the reactionary elements in the Church to slow down real reform.”⁶⁹ His mention in the preceding sentence of circumstances that lend “an element of incredibility to the document”⁷⁰ suggests that the rationale for using the document similarly lacks credibility, imbuing ‘pretext’ with a sense of incredibility. The implied grounds for that incredibility are the alternative plausible motive of a reactionary political agenda, which reflects my final pretext test. Then the contrast to “real reform” gives ‘pretext’ a sense of un-reality, perhaps of being false or untrue, and certainly representing something other than what is real—the real being what I categorize as reasons.

Contrasting medieval European and contemporary justifications for going on pilgrimage, Savu writes that in the Middle Ages, “a religious pilgrimage gave the average person the only pretext to leave home and encounter the wider world,” whereas today, quoting a contemporary pilgrim’s memoir, “walking across Spain is ‘an excuse to have a series of structured days’.”⁷¹ In both sentences, the subject is the form of pilgrimage, and the direct object is a justification: ‘pretext’ in the former sentence, and ‘excuse’ in the latter sentence. The pairings of these two sentences suggests that ‘pretext’ serves as a synonym for ‘excuse.’ Etymologically and colloquially, an excuse is an attempt to free the speaker from blame, which is a key determinant of ethical status. An excuse then effects a moral distancing from blame by claiming that the speaker’s actions or epistemic state do not create conditions for blameworthiness. The excuse has the discursive role of distancing the speaker from blame, just as the pretext has the role of distancing the justification from blame by concealing blameworthy reasons and manipulating the audience’s ethical evaluation. Finally, several of the religious studies articles used ‘pretext’ in ways other than what I mean here.⁷²

Classics and Philology

In a revealing discussion of ‘pretext’ in Latin translations, Judith Ann Weller reads *specie* as ‘pretext’ in Tacitus’ writing on Tiberius’ exile. Weller questions whether the justification Tacitus gives for the exile, that Tiberius was “sent to Rhodes on the pretext that he needed further instruction” was a reason-based justification, given that “[e]ven if this is true, it does not explain why Tiberius remained seven years in Rhodes.”⁷³ As the unobtaining outcome test shows, the

outcome of the action is not consistent with the justification given, which should raise suspicion. Weller describes Tacitus' purpose as being "to elucidate [the subjects of his history's] actions by supplying a motive," and Tacitus' reading of the exile as being "on the pretext of retirement."⁷⁴ In conjunction with her previous challenge of the pretext's truth, setting 'pretext' in contradistinction to 'motive' suggests an understanding of 'pretext' as an untrue expression of motive. Weller is clear in her reading of *specie* as 'pretext' when glossing Tacitus' line, "*specie dedicandi templa apud Capuam Iovi* (Annals 4.57.1)," leaving her room for "no doubt here that *specie* means 'on the pretext of,' since it is impossible to feign a dedication and not actually perform it," so the dedication was a pretext.⁷⁵

In the literature on Greek texts, Πρόφασις appears as indicating a variation of 'cause' whose meaning is commonly "alleged and presumably true" in classical texts, then later "increasingly [carries] the meaning of alleged but untrue reason"⁷⁶ or "formulated reason."⁷⁷ Classicist Donald Walter Baronowski reads Πρόφασις in Polybius as "an outwardly presentable excuse, a professed reason as opposed to a genuine motive... a feeble justification (3.6.13), a clumsy invention (3.15.4-1 1), or an unreasonable and false claim (3.7.3)." He argues that, given that pretext "is by nature a diversionary artifice, it must be judged by the criterion of expediency, not of morality."⁷⁸ Evaluating pretext by its practical rather than ethical value is consistent with my 10 tests of identifying pretext, which evaluate the way in which the justification is used, how it functions as a rhetorical tool. Paradoxically, Gordon M. Kirkwood also reads Πρόφασις as "true cause" in Attic writing and "unexpressed but true 'motive'" in Thucydides.⁷⁹ One line expressing such potential ambiguity arises in a speech from the titular character in *Thucydides* that Paul Woodruff quotes, "in time of peace they could have had no pretext and would not have been so eager" to invite new governments to form.⁸⁰ Pretext makes sense here either as an excuse or a motivating reason.

Perhaps the most significant translation for 'pretext,' and certainly one closer to my understanding in this dissertation, is Πρόσχημα.⁸¹ As Hunter R. Rawlings III explains, "[i]n Herodotus and Thucydides, the word Πρόσχημα is, with one exception, used uniformly. As its etymology (Προέχειν) suggests, it means (LSJ) 'that which is held before,' hence 'that which is held cover, screen, cloak.' It is thus a common way of designating 'pretense, pretext.'" Rawlings interprets the ambiguous 'before' of the literal deconstruction of 'pretext' and 'pretense' as spatial, a veil like a guise in front of the reason. Looking at the application of the term, Rawlings looks for pretext's meaning in the terms in contradistinction to which texts pose it. He continues, "[s]ince Πρόσχημα refers to a 'professed purpose' or 'publicly made claim' it is always contrasted with words or phrases which designate 'real intentions,' 'true aims,' 'private reasons.'"⁸² Then in contrast, pretext would describe fictitious intentions, false aims, or reasons re-presented for a public audience.

Tracing the appearance of Πρόσχημα in Herodotus and Thucydides, also through the methodology of a corpus analysis, Rawlings contrasts the former's clear and consistent use of the term to indicate pretext to conceal imperialist motives with the latter's more convoluted usage. While "Herodotus uses Πρόσχημα to designate the publicly professed purpose of an aggressor whose real intention is conquest,"⁸³ Thucydides' usage is more contentious. Yet the closest Rawlings comes to encapsulating 'pretext' is to observe that "openly expressed motives are at

variance with their real intentions.”⁸⁴ Given that Thucydides uses the term in military contexts, both historians’ applications are consistent with this dissertation’s application of ‘pretext’ as a non-motivating justification concealing motivating reasons for violence.

Politics

A surprising number of the articles I examined applied ‘pretext’ to war in the Middle East, including the same case Shirin Ebadi highlighted in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech: as the form of a *casus belli* for the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan following September 11, 2001, and the George W. Bush administration’s justifications for such militarized response,⁸⁵ and also notably the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁸⁶

Under the heading, “Justification for Waging War,” economist Michel Chossudovsky quotes the September 14, 2001 Congressional resolution authorizing Bush “to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks” three days prior. In this resolution, the attacks serve as a justification for vaguely broad actions (‘force’) against vaguely broad objects (‘those nations...’), without designating appropriate places, for an unspecified time into the future. The resolution’s justification for this authorization is that the force is necessary “in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.”⁸⁷ A pragmatic justification, the resolution cites prevention, rather than economic interests, ideological disagreement, or retaliation (or ‘justice,’ as Congress would presumably have presented it). Yet Chossudovsky suggests that retaliation is involved, linking the resolution to the FBI’s near immediate naming of Osama bin Laden as the prime suspect, and observing bin Laden’s “operations in some 50 to 60 countries providing ample pretext to intervene in several so-called ‘rogue states.’”⁸⁸ The pretext here is a justification prior to potential action, and Chossudovsky’s claim that the FBI lacked any evidence of bin Laden’s involvement implies that the justification is a pretext in my sense. The Congressional resolution contains an implication that a patriotic show of strength might deter future attacks, but the justification is not patriotism for its own sake. However, Chossudovsky glosses the resolution as premised on the justification of patriotism, writing, “[p]atriotism cannot be based on a falsehood, particularly when it constitutes a pretext for waging war and killing innocent civilians.”⁸⁹ Aside from the heading, ‘justification’ does not appear in the text, nor do ‘justify,’ ‘rationale,’ nor ‘rationalize.’ Yet Chossudovsky uses ‘pretext’ for these two cases, without clarifying the distinction, so I read his word choice as indicating that he views ‘pretext’ as interchangeable with ‘justification.’

Andrew Stefan Weiner titles his 2011 review of several video and performance exhibitions “Pretexts: The Evidence of the Event,” highlighting one exhibit’s performance of historical quotations from G. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Saddam Hussein, and others to reveal a rhetorical convention of employing pretext in political speeches: “the ubiquity of human rights rhetoric calls its credibility into question, as such appeals often serve merely as pretexts for politics as usual.”⁹⁰ Themes of defending violations of human rights are instrumental in pretexts from various sides, and have a long history as pretexts for Western military incursions in other countries such as the French-British declaration of war against Germany at the start of WWII to

protect the Polish people's human rights, various UN Security Council Resolutions authorizing war in response to human rights abuses, US intervention in Kosovo,⁹¹ and of course imperialism according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous description of the British abolition of *sati* is representative of imperialist pretext: "white men saving brown women from brown men."⁹² Weiner cites the historical precedent of human rights pretexts for war compounding their effect, "almost as if the legitimacy of military action were already taken for granted."⁹³ "Legitimacy" is an important term for describing pretext, one that Ebadi also employs. The dual implications of legal and logical validity, with the potentially theoretical or practical context, strengthens and broadens pretext's application.

Weiner's definition of 'pretext' emphasizes its temporal place in producing evidence for an event prior to the event, as well as highlighting the publicizing element of sharing with an audience: "rhetorical pre-texts serving as pretext, [are] a form of evidence that comes before the event of its presentation to the public."⁹⁴ This definition suggests inattention to actual motivations, since the pretext acts as a place-holder, a type of "evidence [that] is less a contestable rationale than a mere formality, a claim that will likely be rendered irrelevant after new facts on the ground have been established."⁹⁵ Such a pretext serves to appease the audience until it is too late for the audience to respond to actual reasons and reject dissatisfactory justifications. The political pretext thus buys leaders time until it is past the point at which the public, aware of motivating reasons, can prevent a declaration of war or deployment of troops.

British activist Lindsey German echoes this understanding of pretext in the same context, clarifying, "events showed the weapons of mass destruction that were the pretext for war did not exist."⁹⁶ The pretext here is the false statement (that Saddam Hussein had stockpiled weapons of mass destruction) issued (by George W. Bush) that subsequent evidence (UN and US searches that found nothing at the purported stockpile locations) proves to be untrue after the action that the pretext justified (the post-9/11 US invasion of Iraq). Remove the parentheticals interpreting German's example, and you see the basic temporality of political pretext. At that point, after the action, true motivating reasons can surface or politicians can admit their pretexts were false without hindering the action for which the speaker offered the pretext. Such a temporal place of pretext is particularly relevant in political situations, when the timing of public audience response is crucial. Higher courts may overturn legal decisions, academic research may revise past analyses, and individuals remain answerable to their social circles for quotidian applications of pretexts. In politics though, the audience has limited time to evaluate a justification and respond. Perhaps the urgent timeline and high stakes explain why war is such a prevalent context for claims that a justification is a pretext.

On journalistic support for the pretext for the 2003 US invasion of Iraq on the basis of weapons of mass destruction, philosopher David Coady writes, "false reports...have been used as a pretext for war before."⁹⁷ This statement does not imply that a pretext *is* a false report. Nevertheless, the word choice is intriguing given that the author is a philosopher and the piece calls itself "An Epistemic Defense," because using epistemological jargon, one might define pretext as a false report: the agent reports a justification that is not a motivating reason.

Political, philosophical, and area studies articles compare pretext to terms such as justification, motive, false report, and perhaps most poetically, “hidden ingredients.” This literature describes pretexts as excuses for double standards and grounds for retaliation and contrast pretext with “the final goal,” “the real strategic goal,” and adequate justification. These comparisons suggest falsehood, concealment, secondary importance, the unreal, and inadequate. For example, tracing anti-Semitism in academia, Yves Pallade contrasts “its earlier religious context of justification” to “new pretext more suited to the epistemological criteria of modernity.”⁹⁸ I read the distinction in terms as a search for synonyms to diversify the text, rather than reflective of a meaningful distinction, since on the previous page, the author refers to both old and new as pretexts. “Traditional forms of Jew-hatred that use a religious or racist pretext still exist” refers to the earlier form, while “a new political pretext for the articulation of anti-Jewish attitudes” refers to the contemporary form.⁹⁹ This example is particularly politically charged, given the conflict over whether critiques of Zionism are a pretext for anti-Semitism¹⁰⁰ or a genuine critique for the sake of those arguments without ulterior motives.¹⁰¹

K. T. Thomas equates pretext with ‘hidden ingredients’ when he concludes a review of US justifications for military action in Iran and Iraq in the 1980s and 2000s by claiming, “the pretext[s] of ‘war against terrorism’, ‘war against nuclear and chemical weapons’ and ‘arbiter of peace’ are all hidden ingredients of America’s oil politics in the Middle East.”¹⁰² Since these justifications were all highly publicized, I read Thomas as calling the pretextual nature of these claims ‘hidden,’ rather than the claims themselves. The pretexts hide the actual motivations and their own misrepresentation of their motivating reasons.

Two of Shamir Hasan’s three applications of ‘pretext’ describe situations in which Israel produced excuses for maintaining a double standard, first for refusing to reciprocate when Syria agreed to demilitarize its border, then in recognizing “the elasticity of the boundaries under the pretext of security” for their own but not other countries.¹⁰³ ‘Pretext’ specifically demarcating an excuse for a double standard suggests that it is a non-motivating justification, since the prevalence of countries holding their neighbors to higher standards than themselves is an obvious candidate for the true reasons that a pretext masks. Martha Vanessa Saldivar uses pretext in similar ways and in the context of Israel’s border wall: despite its role in “furthering an apartheid system...the wall remains and Israel continues to perpetuate propaganda claiming its necessity under the pretext of national security.”¹⁰⁴ The wall produces a situation facilitating the Israeli government’s pretexts for the wall itself: the wall exacerbates the apartheid conditions that Palestinians are protesting, and Israel uses those protests as justifications for continuing the apartheid system. The contradiction compounds the pretext.

Political scientist Norman Finkelstein uses ‘pretext’ three times to denote sufficient grounds for retaliation, describing how Israel required a pretext and the US’s permission to invade Lebanon in 1982 and the West Bank following September 11, 2001. To secure the pretext in both instances, Finkelstein claims Israel provoked Palestinians in southern Lebanon, until Palestine’s reaction escalated to the point at which Israel could justify military action.¹⁰⁵ In this presentation, the temporal place of pretext before the retaliatory action is important. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Charles A. Duelfer and political scientist Stephen Benedict Dyson use pretext in a similar sense, describing an Iraqi theory “that Washington wanted Saddam to go into

Kuwait, thus creating a pretext for crushing Iraq's forces."¹⁰⁶ Rather than the incursion being sufficient grounds for retaliation, it functions here as sufficient grounds for military action from a third party.

Mathan Ravid's use of 'pretext' in describing a steppingstone to "the final goal of [securing] Iranian oil"¹⁰⁷ does not suggest that the pretext and goal are opposed, but it does highlight the temporal function of pretext as a placeholder before the action. Marxist Economist Samir Amin contrasts the Cold War as "the pretext" (in the past) for weakening Europe with "the real strategic goal" that US actions "reveal."¹⁰⁸ In contradistinction to "the real strategic goal," pretext sounds like a fake justification that is not actually a goal, and the action of revealing implies that pretexts serve as a tool to conceal: both implications are consistent with my understanding of pretext.

Considering what constitutes sufficient conditions for "adequately justifying a war on terrorism," Tom Rockmore contrasts that sufficient or "adequate" justification with the "convenient pretext for American imperialist ambitions" he sees justifying the post-9/11 Iraqi and Afghan wars.¹⁰⁹ Here the pretext is a statement that is insufficient to qualify as an adequate justification, below the "not particularly high" standards of being defensive. Rockmore's conclusion is that the stated justification for this war "appears increasingly as a mere pretext" that, because it does not meet his minimum standards, "cannot be morally justified."¹¹⁰ Rockmore's binary distinction of justifications as meeting certain standards, and pretexts as failing to meet that standard does not account for temporality, intentionality, validity of evidence, discursive force, or whether the justification derives from a reason or pretext. However, it does offer the possibility of pretext having to meet other sufficient conditions. Where I disagree with Rockmore is in allowing for the possibility that a pretext that meets minimum standards could be ethically justified. If a justification is a mere pretext, I argue it should not count as a valid justification for evaluating an ethical question.

Law

The sense of 'pretext' in the legal literature consistently aligns with my definition of the stated justification concealing ulterior motivating reasons. For a brief representative overview, I offer examples from several articles addressing censorship by pretext, pretextual evidence, pretextual discrimination, and religious pretext. Law Professor Derek E. Bambauer characterizes "censorship by pretext" as when "state officials use unrelated laws as means of blocking access to disfavored speech," so we might induce that legal pretext at least includes the use of unrelated laws as a means of achieving another aim.¹¹¹ Gloege's case of Chicago trying to stop a faith healer by invoking hospital laws could fall under such an understanding of legal pretext, and we might consider this definition as falling under my borrowed justification test, which takes its pretext from an irrelevant authority, since an unrelated law should be irrelevant.

The literature on pretextual evidence after 2005 looks to the decision in *Kelo v. City of New London* as the authoritative decision, not for its impact on eminent domain law, but rather for its contribution to defining pretext. In the decision, the court sets "mere pretext" in contradistinction to "actual purpose," writing: "[n]or would the City be allowed to take property under the mere

pretext of a public purpose, when its actual purpose was to bestow a private benefit.”¹¹² This understanding matches mine, with pretext functioning as a rhetorical performance that does not reflect actual reasons. Justice Kennedy, who voted with the majority, wrote separately that it was important in eminent domain cases to apply the Equal Protection Clause to distinguish and reject what “is clearly intended to injure a particular class of private parties, with only incidental or pretextual public justifications.”¹¹³ By pairing the term with “incidental,” Kennedy diminishes the importance of pretextual justifications, and by contrasting pretext with what is “clearly intended,” he posits pretext in contrast to actual reason.

In an earlier article on the role of ‘pretext evidence,’ David A. Sutphen clarifies that he uses “the terms *pretext*, *pretext evidence* and *proof of pretext* interchangeably,” for any legal challenge that “for whatever reason, is unworthy of credence.”¹¹⁴ Though Sutphen’s definition is more specific to the cases discussed in the article, it does indicate an understanding of ‘pretext’ as a challenge that is not credible. Tracey Maclin defines ‘pretext stops’ as searches for which “police use a traffic violation as an excuse to stop a vehicle when the real purpose is to investigate criminal activity for which the officers lack objective evidence.”¹¹⁵ The quintessential example is the disproportionate policing of black drivers, a phenomenon popularly called ‘driving while black,’ as though he driver’s race were the crime, rather than merely the pretext. Pretext here describes an ‘excuse’ concealing a ‘real purpose,’ for which the actors lack sufficient justification.

The literature on pretextual discrimination¹¹⁶ utilizes the McDonnell Douglas/Burdine Framework. Law Professor Tristin K. Green glosses ‘pretext’ in this framework as representing “falsity-of-proffered-reason.”¹¹⁷ when the justification a party offers is false, or not actually a reason. Whether “falsity” refers to a lack of basis in actual motivating reasons, or epistemic invalidity of not being a true consideration in the evaluation of that knowledge, the falsity of a stated justification (“proffered reason”) supports my understanding of pretext. Proving pretextual discrimination, according to Law Professor Mark S. Brodin, establishes that an “employer’s justification is pretextual” if “the employer is presumed to have offered [an explanation] as a pretext to conceal its discriminatory tracks.”¹¹⁸ In this sense, in which the agent offers pretext to veil discrimination, pretext is a guise.

Matthew Fore’s previously mentioned application of ‘pretext’ in an article considering potential ramifications of the International Religious Freedom Act is highly relevant to this dissertation, since it repeatedly “addresses the possibility that religion is being used as a pretext for misdeeds” including violence. Note that Fore does not distinguish, as I do, between religion as a pretext and religion as a grounds of pretext; the above sentence more accurately refers to the possibility that religion is the basis for pretexts for misdeeds. This sense is also evident when religion is used as an adjective to modify pretext, as when Fore describes that pretextual action as a justification: “the use of religious pretext to justify oppression.”¹¹⁹ The Confederacy’s (among others’) invocation of Biblical justifications as a pretext for slavery is one of Fore’s examples,¹²⁰ though Muslim abuses of religious pretext is his primary concern.

The examples in this article could very well fit my presentation of ‘pretext,’ indicating justifications that serve to veil motivating reasons or manipulate audiences to get away with violence, however Fore relies on a weak definition of ‘pretext’ that undermines his argument. On

Uzbeki invocation of the Qur'an to use "religion as a pretext for political persecution and control," he comments in a footnote that calling religious justification 'pretext' is potentially problematic or 'delicate' for "adjudging the 'sincerity' of religious beliefs."¹²¹ The emphasis on 'sincerity' indicates that he views sincerity as what distinguishes pretext from justification, leaving the ethical question of whether sincerely held religious belief would be a valid justification for persecution. Fore recognizes that sincerity is a problematic measure of pretext that leads to problems in identifying pretext. A definition of pretext dependent on sincerity detracts from the potential power of identifying a justification as a pretext by requiring a psychological evaluation of the speaker and raising questions about conscious versus unconscious pretext. My approach to pretext as a discursive tool resolves these issues and would strengthen Fore's argument.

Even were sincerity an unproblematic test for pretext—without the difficulty of recognizing sincerity—it could not suffice to prove that a justification reflected a reason rather than a pretext, since speakers can be unconscious of the pretextual basis of their justifications and sincerely state a pretext. Consider the prevalence of affianced individuals stating that they plan to marry their fiancé(e) out of love. While the speaker is doubtless sincere that they love the fiancé(e), the unobtaining outcome and plausible motive tests suggest that loving someone is a pretext for marriage. First, love and marriage are not causally related; neither necessitates nor generates the other. Second, there are more plausible motives to marry, including social and religious conditioning, expectation, and pressure; the social habit of tradition; financial and immigration security for oneself and one's offspring; as an excuse to have a party or receive gifts; desire to secure unpaid domestic and sexual labor; sexual access in societies demanding premarital abstinence; career or political prestige; and even the more plausible sentimental motive of wanting to tie the partner to oneself legally, economically, and socially to prevent a separation after loss of love.¹²² Here we see the force of the unobtaining outcome test for revealing pretext: to protect love, the affianced couple should not marry, so that no legal bonds of marriage taint or impede the true expression of their love.

Although political entities such as "the U.S. State Department telling Muslims what the Qur'an 'really requires'" would be inappropriate, Fore believes "scholars of human rights, law, and theology can play an important role in addressing the 'pretext' issue," suggesting that whereas government officials have no right to tell others how to interpret their own religion, academics would be justified in doing so. Despite the challenges of judging whether a speaker believes the religious underpinnings of a justifications, and the political implications of such judgments, Fore stresses the importance of scholars continuing to pursue what he calls the 'pretext argument,' "because religion undeniably has been and will continue to be used as a pretext for evil acts."¹²³ This phrasing of religion being "used as a pretext" emphasizes my case that pretexts are a discursive tool: to use as a pretext suggests that there is a category of use or function that the speaker is describing as 'pretext.' Fore's point also echoes my broader goal in this dissertation, encouraging further scholarly research into religious 'pretexts' for violence, which is precisely the objective of this dissertation. Of course, the issue is not religion as such, but rather the testimonial privilege that religion enjoys, which unjustly privileges religion as a pretext and pretexts based in religion, the distinction between which I address further in Chapter 4.

Reading ‘Pretext’ through Rhetoric

At the start of this chapter, I called ‘pretext’ a discursive category not only to relate it to discourse and speech, but also to insinuate my critique of ‘pretext’ into conversation with the field of rhetoric. This section makes that exchange explicit, beginning with my analysis of how J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* elucidates ‘pretext.’ Austin’s first footnote specifies that he believes sentences themselves are not statements, but rather tools for presenting statements through which the speaker submits a logical argument: the sentence “is used in making a statement, and the statement itself is a ‘logical construction’ out of the makings of statements.”¹²⁴ I would like to extend Austin’s logic to justifications, to claim that the utterance itself is not the justification; rather, the speaker uses the utterance to make the listener sympathize with an action, stance, or identity: pretexts are a version of rhetorical appeal. Here I diverge from Austin on the role of the audience. Whereas Austin looks at statements as isolated texts, I side with theorists such as Widdowson who emphasize the relevance of audience and context. For Austin, a statement is more than the words; it is the logic and force of that text. Applying Austin to justifications and extending the view of a statement’s power to include the audience and context, I hold that justifications reflect the logic that the utterance, presumptions, and shared world views produce. If a parent says, “I am going to have my child baptized because we are Christian,” the justification for the baptism encompasses more than the words spoken to include the presumptions and reasoning that parents have the authority to make such a decision for the child, that someone other than a parent performs the baptism, that Christians are baptized, that a child will practice to the parents’ religion, and so on.

Not all statements carry equal epistemic value, fully true, or even sensible, Austin recognizes the prevalence of apparent statements that only “impart straightforward information about the facts” partially, if at all. Indeed, his illustrative example fits my argument well, that “‘ethical propositions’ are perhaps intended, solely or partly, to evince emotion or to prescribe conduct or to influence it in special ways.”¹²⁵ The suggestion is that speakers employ ethical propositions towards emotive, normative, and manipulative ends. That Austin used ethical statements is particularly telling of the rhetorical possibilities of such a statement beyond a simple constative (expression declaring something is the case).

“The masqueraders” or “performatives” for Austin are utterances that are not true or false constatives, and are not simply statements, but do more, such as his famous examples of marriage and betting.¹²⁶ I propose that justifications are similarly performative, for they are not reporting something that is or is not the case, and they do more than simply present a statement. The ethical action of a justification is akin to naming a ship or placing a bet, in that it performs an ethically significant action: it seeks to legitimate the ethical stance or act in an audience’s estimation. Community recognition is important for the justifications I address in this dissertation, as it is for Austin’s examples. In each case an audience’s comprehending and accepting reception of the performative is essential to the successful performance. His examples of performatives are primarily explicit, such as “I promise,”¹²⁷ and a justification may be explicit if it takes the form “I justify....” Yet justifications are usually implicit performatives, using signal words such as ‘because,’ ‘since,’ or ‘for.’ Verbs like ‘justify,’ ‘sanction,’ ‘validate,’ ‘legitimate,’ and ‘warrant’ are clear markers of a justification that may not be the “first person

singular present indicative active” that exemplify Austin’s performative masqueraders, yet function in a similar way. For example, an 1820 *Richmond Enquirer* contributor uses the third person singular present indicative passive to justify slavery, writing “that buying African servants and holding them for a possession—is warranted by the written word of God.”¹²⁸ They are neither necessarily rational nor ceremonial, yet they *do* something. Further, the contributor aims to gain community recognition by appealing to supposedly shared faith in the Bible.

To test my argument that justifications are performatives, I measure them against Austin’s six necessary conditions for felicitous (literally ‘happy,’ but meaning satisfactory or successful) performatives:

(A. 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B. 1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B. 2) completely.

(Γ. 1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, [footnote in original] and further

*(Γ. 2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.*¹²⁹

The two conditions with Greek letters are for technically successful performatives for which the performer’s intentions do not reflect truth, or in Austin’s phrasing, are insincere. Austin calls such cases “ABUSES,” that are “‘professed’ or ‘hollow,’” whereas cases that violate (A. 1)-(B. 2) are “MISFIRES.”¹³⁰ Within the “abuses,” Austin names those acts that violate (Γ. 1) “insincerities.”¹³¹ This diction echoes the common understanding of pretexts as insincere, in contrast to sincere (motivating) justifications. Within the “misfires,” those that violate (A. 2) are “misapplications,” a category that is relevant to this dissertation’s argument that justifications deriving from religion are misapplications, because religion lacks the authority to be the basis for a justification. So rather than the misapplication deriving in Austin’s sense from the agent lacking the authority to speak, or being in the wrong circumstance to speak,¹³² I propose that religion ought not deserve the justificatory status.

The Greek-lettered final two conditions require knowledge of the speaker’s “thoughts or feelings”—for the former, to confirm that they accord with the performance; and for the latter, to confirm that they follow through with the appropriate action for a felicitous performance. For the purpose of this analysis, let us imagine that it were possible to access a speaker’s thoughts and emotions, while remembering that even the speaker does not have reliable access to feelings or subconscious thoughts. (Γ. 1) is where pretext becomes crucial, since pretext distinguishes the infelicitous justifications, which do not align with the speaker’s true thoughts, feelings, intentions, or motivations. Austin lists the first three terms to describe how the performance must

resonate with the speaker's sincere approach,¹³³ and I have added "motivations" to reflect the criteria most relevant to the case of justifications. Given that a third party evaluating the performance lacks access to the speaker's thoughts, feelings, intentions, or motivations, except what the speaker reports, and that the speaker herself may only be fully aware of her thoughts but not the other criteria, it is difficult to determine whether a performance meets the final two conditions. This difficulty of accessing the psychological conditions in order to evaluate justifications is why I frame pretext as a discursive tool, because the audience can analyze the role that a justification plays from textual evidence. I hope that my ten tests for pretext can assist with this assessment by offering discursive criteria for recognizing whether a justification is felicitous or a manipulation.

To see how Austin's necessary conditions might map on to a successful justification, consider the following exchange:

- (I.) Sascha asks Amal, "you work so hard, yet earn so little, why do you choose to tithe so much of your income to the church?"
- (II.) Amal replies, "because I believe the priest that if everyone in the community tithes, then the church can do more good with our donations than we can do individually."
- (III.) Sascha: "I understand. It is honorable of you to sacrifice your earnings for the greater good."
- (IV.) Amal: "Thank you for hearing me out and respecting my decision."

(I.) presents the ethical choice or act to justify, since a component of a justification is its configuration with an act or stance. In this case, a second party (Sascha) explicitly questions the choice and requests a justification from the actor (Amal). Often though, the actor presents this step, as would be the case, had Amal said, "I tithe because..." When reading such a sentence, remember that the performative is the justification, not the tithing, although "I tithe" follows Austin's preferred grammatical form for illustrating performatives. This line also introduces a component of the justificatory performance: "mood," which for Austin includes imperatives and modal mood.¹³⁴ In the case of justifications, mood includes response to a challenge, without which the justification would be unnecessary.

(II.) constitutes the statement form of the justification. It functions in conjunction with the logical chain, presumptions, worldview, etc. that the speaker invokes and the audience accepts. In this case, the logical chain begins with an assumption: "if everyone in the community tithes, the church can do more good with our donations than we can do individually" (C0), which implies *modus tollens* that if not everyone in the community tithes, then the church may not be able to do good. Sascha then infers two syllogisms:

- P1(C0) if everyone in the community tithes, then the church can do good
- P2 it is desirable that the church do good
- C1 therefore, it is desirable that everyone in the community tithe

- P3/C1 it is desirable that everyone in the community tithe
- P4 Amal is a member of the community
- C2 therefore, it is desirable that Amal tithe

From the conclusion of the second syllogism, it is desirable that Amal tithe, Sascha then makes a calculation that the desirability of Amal tithing outweighs the hardship Amal experiences by making the tithe. So despite working so hard and earning so little, Amal is justified in choosing to tithe.

(III.) is an explicit statement of Sascha's role as listener in accepting the justification. By saying "I understand," Sascha acknowledges the logical chain of the justification. By calling the choice "honorable," Sascha affirms the validity of Amal's ethical justification.

(IV.) completes the justification by explicitly showing Amal's recognition of Sascha's role in validating the justification: "hearing me out" reflects the reception and understanding components of the listener's role, and "respecting my decision" reflects an agreement in the justifiability of the stance or action. Few justifications in quotidian conversation take such an explicit form, yet the components are often there.

Amal and Sascha's exchange meets Austin's necessary conditions for a felicitous performance: (A. 1) Justifications follow loose conventions, as I suggest by delineating steps (I.)-(IV.) which we may view as a "procedure." There is generally a presentation of the ethical choice or act to justify (I.), a statement functioning in conjunction with presumptions and logic to form the justification (II.), the listener's reception of the justification (III.), and potentially an acknowledgement of the listener's positive reception from the justifier (IV.). The "conventional effect" of a justification is that the listener views the justifier as justified. Words such as "because" and "validate" signal the statement component of the justifications, and the "certain circumstances" are the discussion of an ethical act, stance, or identity.

(A. 2) Sascha, Amal, and the situation in this case are "appropriate for the invocation of" justification, because Sascha solicits a justification for an ethical choice by asking, "why do you choose to tithe?"

(B. 1) As I detail in the explanations of steps I-III above, the two speakers "correctly" fulfill the expectations of an exchange expressing a justification.

(B. 2) Step (IV.) above serves to show the completeness of the exchange, with the justifier reflecting the listener's reception of the justification.

(Γ. 1) Here we can see the relevance of pretext. If Amal were sincere, and reflecting true thoughts, feelings, intentions, and motivations by citing a desire to contribute to greater good in the community by pooling resources through tithing, then the performance would be felicitous. If, however, the justification Amal gives in (II.) were a pretext, then the performance would be infelicitous, the case would be "insincere," and the performance of justification would be an "abuse" or in my terminology, a manipulation.

(Γ. 2) If Amal's justification reflected a motivating reason satisfying (Γ. 1) rather than a pretext, and Amal were to continue to tithe due to that justification, then the performance would be

felicitous. Should Amal either cease to tithe or change the justification or sincerity of justification for tithing, then the performance would be infelicitous. Justifications do not always require a subsequent action, and maintaining a consistent approach to the question should suffice to satisfy this condition. Note that Austin's requirement for a felicitous performance resonates with my shifting justifications test. A changing rationale indicates a problem, abuse, or manipulation.

Either the speaker or the audience—in this case either Amal or Sascha, respectively—can disrupt the felicity of the justification performance. It may be irrelevant whether Sascha appropriately receives the justification, or the circumstances could be inappropriate, for example if either or both were intoxicated and could not accurately and sincerely conduct the procedures. Further, either party could be inappropriate for the justification, such that the performance would not meet condition (A. 2). Sascha could ask why Amal tithes, and someone other than Amal might answer. These two situations are emblematic of my ventriloquist test: the wrong actor offering a justification indicates a problem for Austin and for me.

Likewise, either the speaker or audience could fall short of the procedure for justification, failing to meet conditions (B. 1)-(B. 2). Had Amal replied in step (II.) with a shrug rather than a justification; or answered, “for a number of reasons” without naming any; or contradicted the first justification with a second such as by replying, “I do it for myself, my spouse would be upset if I did not,” then Amal as speaker would have exhibited rare honesty yet disrupted the felicity of the justification by offering partial and conflicting justifications. Had Sascha in step (III.) rejected Amal's justification, then Sascha as the audience would have disrupted the felicity of the justification. For example, Sascha could challenge any part of the explicit or implied syllogisms, rejecting C0 with, “I do not trust the church to do good with our donations” or “I think you can make a bigger impact individually.” Or Sascha could reject the normative implication of C2 with “just because it is desirable for you to tithe, is that reason enough to do so? Working less and spending more time with your family seems equally desirable.” Or Sascha could introduce an external consideration such as, “your tithing is harmfully supererogatory. Yes, it is desirable for you to tithe, but doing so means that your children go hungry.” By rejecting the justification, the audience would fail to perform the reception element of the justification process. Through this dissertation, I aim to encourage audience disruption of religious justifications by highlighting the audience's agency in performance of justifications, and to offer the audience tools to question the validity of certain justifications. The examples below of potential pretexts from Amal offer illustrations of how audiences can perform such disruptions.

Though theoretically, only the speaker can disrupt the fulfillment of (Γ. 1), by having thoughts, feelings, intentions, and motivations at odds with the performed justification, the audience can also encourage recognition of infelicity by pressing the speaker, by offering challenges as simple as Sascha asking Amal whether that is really the reason to tithe, or proposing potential motivations such as “are you sure it is not because your spouse wants you to tithe?” This last challenge is an application of my plausible motive test, asking whether there is another more likely explanation. If oblivious to pretexts as a subset of justifications, Sascha might take Amal's word for the justification. However, if attuned to potential pretexts, Sascha might remember that

Amal has a young child who is eligible to attend the church daycare if Amal is a tithing member of the church. A few months ago, Sascha learned on NPR that childcare costs an average of 30.8% of the US median household income,¹³⁵ which is well above Amal's 10% tithe to the church. Sascha could disrupt the justification performance by challenging Amal's justification, "if your child were not attending church daycare, you would be paying much more—so are you sure that tithing is not a financial calculation for you?" Keep in mind that the audience's disruption is not necessary for a performance to be infelicitous. Even if the audience accepts the pretext and believes the justification to reflect a reason, the utterance remains a pretext and the performance is infelicitous. As Austin puts it, "[b]eing accepted is not a circumstance in the right sense."¹³⁶ Though audiences can grant justificatory value through their affirming reception, they cannot turn a pretext into a reason.

For the purpose of the exercise, let us imagine that the exchange between Amal and Sascha above was an infelicitous performance of a justification, not meeting condition (Γ. 1), because aggregating resources with the church community to do more good than they could achieve individually does not motivate Amal; rather a financial calculation to pay less for daycare is the overwhelming primary concern. Imagine Amal had made the calculation to tithe rather than pay for private daycare but offers as a justification in (II.), "because Malachi 3:10 directs it: 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse.'" Amal's response would be a pretext, and the performance would be infelicitous because condition (Γ. 1) would not be met. Sascha may not realize that the justification is a pretext and may accept and validate the biblical justification. Had Sascha been trained in the sort of hermeneutics of suspicion being offered here, though, I would hope that the response in (III.) might disrupt the infelicitous performance by offering a challenge, even if Sascha has no idea of Amal's motivating reason. The audience could challenge the sincerity of the motivation, e.g. "an Old Testament verse is a more powerful motivation for you than fear of excommunication?" The audience could challenge the relevance of the justification, e.g. "is Malachi 3:10 even relevant to your situation? You're not a farmer with excess grain to contribute; you're an underpaid and overworked teacher barely scraping by." Further, the audience could challenge the ethical assumptions of the justification, e.g. "why should an interpretation of a biblical passage determine your action?" These challenges have the potential not only to help the speaker see the infelicity of their performance by recognizing the pretext of their justification, but also to change the speaker's perspective on sincere justifications, which would disrupt (Γ. 2) by changing the motivations for future action or alternatively of convincing him of the sincerity of his motivations.

Significantly for this project, were an utterance to not meet condition (Γ. 1) due to the speaker's (Amal's) justification being a pretext, the audience (Sascha) might be able to recognize that a justification is a pretext by applying the ten tests in the Testing 'Pretext' section above:

1. False dilemma test: If a more attractive or less controversial act than tithing satisfies the justification for tithing, would Amal still choose tithing? This case is a good candidate for such a question, because behaviors such as donations may themselves be justifications not to do more onerous actions with similar outcomes, such as volunteering. Tithing relinquishes decision-making to the church, which may spend the money in a way that does not benefit the community, whereas Amal volunteering to cook for a food bank or teach adult literacy, for example, would

have direct and evident community benefit. There are also likely other organizations in Amal's community that devote a larger proportion of their donations to community benefit. To avoid an ethical judgment of whether the church's use of the money is more or less valid than another organization's use of the money, I would like to focus merely on the amount of donation going to community benefit as opposed to say organizational functions. Moreover, perhaps Amal has motivations for not volunteering or donating to another organization instead, or perhaps tithing is a pretext.

2. Selective enforcement test: Does Amal insist upon honoring the justification for tithing but not another justification following from the priest? If Sascha knows that the priest also advocates abstaining from alcohol over Lent, yet Amal has a glass of wine every night anyway, or that the priest discourages any kind of birth control yet Amal has decided not to have any more children, then Sascha may question the selective honoring of the priest's recommendations.

3. Borrowed justification test: Is the priest a valid authority for Amal? Assuming Amal is Catholic, the priest is probably a valid authority, though if the priest were recently caught in a scandal that compromises the congregation's respect, Sascha may question the priest's ethical authority.

4. Appeal to irrelevant authority test: Is the priest a valid authority in deciding whether to tithe? Amal may believe so, though Amal's spouse or tax consultant may prioritize other authorities in such calculations.

5. Shifting justification test: Does Amal abandon the justification for tithing for other justifications? If the next time Sascha asks, Amal claims to tithe because it sets a good example of generosity for the children, then Sascha would have grounds to doubt the sincerity of one if not both justifications.

6. Unobtaining outcome test: Would the justification produce the promised outcome to tithing? If the church does not have any projects benefiting the community, then Amal's justification is clearly flawed.

7. Misreading or misapplication test: Does the priest mean or imply the justification for tithing; would Amal know that? In this case, the priest probably does mean to encourage everyone in the community to tithe. The two most contextually sensible interpretations of Matthew 19:21, "[i]f you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven," are as a test of faith for the wealthy (the wealthy young man Jesus is addressing chooses not to relinquish his wealth to follow Jesus) or a message on the incompatibility of wealth (Matthew 19:24 is the famous line about a camel passing through the eye of a needle). Had the priest told the congregation that the passage promises eternal life in heaven to those who tithe, Sascha would have reason to believe that the priest had misread the passage to mislead the congregation.

8. Post hoc test: Does Amal offer the justification for tithing too long after deciding to tithe for it to be credible? Does Amal rely on information attained after beginning to tithe? Given that

humans rarely reevaluate habits, perhaps Sascha should consider how long Amal has been tithing; would Amal have given the same justification after the first instance of tithing, or is the justification relatively recent? If Sascha knows that Amal has been tithing for several years but the Priest only recently spoke about the communal benefits of tithing, then Sascha knows that Amal crafted the justification after deciding to tithe.

9. Ventriloquist test: Is someone other than Amal responsible for tithing? Perhaps it is actually Amal's spouse who tithes, yet Amal offered the justification on behalf of the family. If that is the case, might Amal's spouse offer another justification?

10. Auxiliary information test: Is there anything about Amal that would indicate that the justification for tithing is insincere? If Sascha knows that Amal's altar boy son skims money from the collection plate to help them pay their rent, then Sascha might guess that Amal tithes to dodge suspicion or encourage others' generosity. Plausible motive test: Is there another motive more likely to explain Amal's tithing than the justification for tithing? Were Amal a registered church member in Germany, then Sascha would likely know that tithing is not a choice for church members, but rather a legal requirement of *Kirchensteuer*.

Importantly for this dissertation, audiences can disrupt a performance of justification by refusing to admit religious justifications (or pretexts). Sascha could refuse to accept the priest as a valid authority, especially in a case in which the priest benefits from filling the church's coffers with the credulous congregants' cash.

Pretext is a justification in bad faith, whether consciously or unconsciously, because both either levels of awareness violate condition (Γ. 1). Whereas constantives are true or false¹³⁷ and verdictives are right/wrong or correct/incorrect,¹³⁸ as performatives, justifications are sincere or insincere, taking a purpose-focused approach to whether they fulfill or abuse the practice. To illustrate an insincere promise, Austin translates Hippolytus (l. 612) as "my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind...) did not."¹³⁹ The gap between statement and intention is relevant to pretext, in which the utterance performs one justification, yet the underlying motive of the heart compromises the sincerity of the justification. Hippolytus' performance may still be a promise, yet an abuse of the form of a promise. Likewise, pretexts are abuses of the form of a justification. Hermocrates supports my reading of pretext as infelicitous by calling the Athenian pretext for subjugating the Sicilians (mentioned above) a "*sophismata*,"¹⁴⁰ indicating ambiguity or deficiency, an infelicitous rhetoric.

When a speaker justifies '[action, stance, or identity] because [justification],' and the audience believes what follows 'because' it is true, then she may consider the justification's validity. The next step is to ask whether the justification following 'because' is a valid grounds for an action or belief. In the case of pretext, what follows 'because' is not true, either as a constantive statement, or as a justification for the belief or action. The speaker may or may not believe that it is true. In the former case, it is an unconscious pretext, and in the latter case a conscious pretext. Imagine that I claim, "I finished your slice of cake, because I saw you walk out the front door, indicating that you were leaving the party." For the justification to be valid, the audience must believe that (1) I ate the cake, rather than covering up for a naughty child or having thrown it in

an interlocutor's face during an argument; (2) my epistemic condition would lead me to sincerely believe that the act of walking out the front door indicated my friend was leaving the party; and (3) it is acceptable to finish the cake of someone who left the party. Those presuppositions are three of many, including the meanings of words, linear chronology, etc. If I knew that she was just going out to greet a friend, and would be back in a few minutes, then my justification would be a conscious pretext. If a mutual friend had alerted me to her exit and suggested that I eat the cake since she was leaving, then it would be more accurate to state that the influence of the mutual friend's suggestion was my reason for eating the cake. Borrowing the mutual friend's justification, which was not my own reason but appears to me in the thoughtless moment of being challenged as a palatable and possible justification, would be an unconscious pretext.

Given that justifications are intended to elicit sympathy for or acceptance of a stance or action from the audience, we might consider justifications in the category of performatives that Austin calls behabitives—"the adopting of an attitude"—which¹⁴¹ are "concerned roughly with reactions to behaviour and with behaviour towards others and designed to exhibit attitudes and feelings."¹⁴² Behabitives respond to an audience, or often a prior speaker by performing an attitude, expressing a feeling. The primary force of the behabitive is the emotive force: the attitude or feeling that the speaker performs. Since Austin offers no category of speech that seeks to elicit an attitude from the audience, I think the closest category is the behabitive. We might interpret justifications as performing an attitude so that the audience mirrors that attitude in evaluating the larger claim. Certainly, his examples of behabitives seem designed to express as well as elicit emotive responses. For a speaker to apologize, repent, censure, blame, or welcome implies a desired audience reception: accepting their apology or contrition, sharing the censure or blame, or feeling welcomed. Likewise, a speaker offers a justification in order to elicit audience acceptance. Governments justify their human rights abuses to avoid international condemnation, parents justify their school choice to solicit peer support, Austin may justify his word choice to improve the editor's estimation of his diction.

I propose that use of reflexive justification (when one justifies to oneself, or a speaker displaces a justification inwards, to use a Freudian wording) shows that even to oneself, there is some performance. The performance may be thought if not spoken, as with the conflicted fundamentalist parent who questions herself as she beats her child, but thinks "I am right to beat my child because Proverbs 13:24 tells me to." So, the speaker herself should be included in the "audience" if we view justifications as behabitives. Justification even resembles some examples of behabitives Austin offers, such as "'applaud', ... 'commend', 'approve', and 'favour,'" while being a near-reverse of behabitive examples from the 'challenges' category, after which he considers the potential 'insincerity' of behabitives. Given the discursive similarities between justifications and Austin's behabitives, justifications could form an eighth category of behabitives.¹⁴³

It might be tempting to view justification as merely illocutionary speech ("performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something"), because we can view it as "answering a question," whether or not someone explicitly poses the question. It would fit Austin's criteria of "giving some information or an assurance" about the justifiability of an act or stance, "announcing a verdict or an intention" if we read intention as motivation

rather than anticipation of a future act, and “making an . . . appeal” in the sense of an appeal to favorable ethical judgment.¹⁴⁴ Justification has the illocutionary characteristics of requiring an “uptake,” achieving “a certain effect” from the audience, i.e. that the audience accepts the justification.¹⁴⁵ Yet justifications fill a more complex discursive role than illocutionary speech.

Foucault describes one sixteenth Century view that originally, “given to men by God himself, language was an absolutely certain and transparent sign for things, because it resembled them.” Yet that language became opaque after Babel, to punish humanity,¹⁴⁶ suggesting a longing to return to the transparency of language, and a view of sinful relationship with opaque, adulterated language. The Classical view of speaking is not so far from that of language, with speaking comprising “thought itself” as a function: both “knowing and speaking are interwoven in the same fabric.”¹⁴⁷ Enlightenment linguists such as “Rask, Grimm, and Bopp” heralded a turn in understandings of speech, allowing discourse to be “an object of language,” and criticism allowing for the view of language and signs as more than pure representation, disconnecting knowledge from speech so that it would “close in upon itself.”¹⁴⁸ Foucault illustrates the turn as a move from language speaking to language analyzing,¹⁴⁹ describing this change as a move from representation to signification, which decouples the sign and what it may signify. Language in the modern age loses its classical power “to ascribe a name to things” and holds “value only as discourse.”¹⁵⁰ So pretext could form between thought and speech or in speech itself, in the gap between words and things that opens the potential for ‘artifice.’¹⁵¹ For Foucault, a word is a word rather than a ‘vocal sign’ by virtue of “the proposition concealed within it” composed of “the subject, the predicate, and the link between them,” or what he quotes Hobbes as calling “their copulation.”¹⁵² The artifice of a word that is a pretext is contained in that copulation. Like the lines Foucault describes in *Las Meninas*, pretexts “point towards the very thing that is represented, but absent,”¹⁵³ focusing the audience on a justification that uses artifice to suggest what is not there and to hint at unspoken motivations.

Another canonical rhetoric text theorizing a modern conception of language’ potential artifice, Hayden White’s *Tropics of Discourse* offers a new history enmeshed in figures of language, in which language offers both access to consciousness, and the malleability to serve what it expresses. White’s view of language—that every linguistic expression is incomplete, situated, and active—offers several insights into pretext. Expressing something in a certain way in a set moment precludes saying it in another way in that moment, so choosing a certain justification precludes offering another justification. Since every expression or “mimetic text” omits potential description, and must include irrelevant information and distortion,¹⁵⁴ the audience should always be alert to the omissions in which motives may lay, and the distortions in which we may find pretext. Since our consciousness is active and creative,¹⁵⁵ we do not passively receive language, so we do not passively receive pretexts. I would extend to any field of study White’s premise that history inevitably involves interpretation. As in other fields, interpretation in history involves inference, speculation, selection then presentation of evidence, and rhetoric of the written study. Therefore, White is skeptical about the possibility of objectivity in such studies.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, in evaluating pretext, the audience must account for these elements of interpretation that allow for artifice, malleability of expression, and manipulation. Amongst those elements of interpretation are rhetorical devices.

I have been reading pretext literally, as a presentation of a justification for a stance or action. Perhaps it would be generous to read pretext as a trope, following White on the four dominant tropes, what Vico considers the four modes of figurative speech¹⁵⁷ and Kenneth Burke calls the ‘master tropes:’¹⁵⁸ metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.¹⁵⁹ Analyzing these tropes exposes their discursive force, and reading an audience’s reception of the trope shows how that force functions. White describes the regressive or “unconscious or unintended lapse into a pre-logical mode of comprehending reality” when an audience reads metaphor as literal,¹⁶⁰ resembling the suspension of logic or discursive blindness of reading a pretext as a motive.

Reading a pretext as a metaphor for other justifications or motivating reasons functions to give pretext the benefit the doubt that it could be suggesting similarities between the stated justification and actual motivating reasons, presenting what Vico calls a “fable;” identifying a familiar idea with an unfamiliar one to elucidate through similarity and divergence.¹⁶¹ Two of my childhood friends quoted 1 Thessalonians 4:3 at their wedding, “[f]or this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication,” proud to have maintained celibacy through eight years of dating. The husband was not even Christian, yet reading this rationale as a metaphor for their reasons, we might interpret the biblical pretext as a trope representing the societal expectations and rewards for pre-marital abstinence. There are also pretexts that take the form of a metaphor by returning the demand for a pretext onto the audience for a (purportedly) parallel equivalent. For example, if an atheist asks a deist, “why do you believe in God,” and the deist retorts, “why do you *not* believe in God?” we might read the retort as a justification for belief premised on the metaphor or a parallel justification that the audience would have to accept. Then in some cases, justifications take the form of explicit metaphors, such as justifying belief in God through the analogy, “God is like air: we cannot see it, but know it’s there,” even though we can obviously use instruments to measure air but not God.

Measuring and ordering are two modes of comparing that Foucault identifies: measuring “analyses into units in order to establish relations of equality and inequality,” while ordering “arranges differences according to the smallest possible degrees.”¹⁶² Neither of these modes satisfactorily describes the comparisons of these metaphors, for it is neither a quantifiable nor sequential comparison that matters in metaphor. Rather, a jump between ideas, between the metaphor and the implication or in this case justification, creates the metaphor. As speech, the metaphor is a weak comparison, for reception of the metaphor is important to creating meaning. Perhaps Foucault’s acknowledgment of imagination is necessary for interpreting resemblance: “[w]ithout imagination, there would be no resemblance between things.” Imagination thereby makes sense of the role of audience interpretation and the jump in the comparisons of metaphors.¹⁶³

Particularly in the case of an appeal to authority, a pretext could metonymically invoke the many reasons that authority would condone the position. Given the infinite motivations for a stance or action, using a metonym to suggest more than the actor can state in a single justification is pragmatic. If your grandchild asks why you always put on both shoes before tying either, the pretext “I do so in accordance with Jewish law” is a pragmatic metonym for the range of potential truly motivating reasons. This single notion conveys a range of potential reasons, from an unconscious habit through your conscious decision to follow a sixteenth Century

interpretation that, for example, balances precedence of the right side against shoes' resemblance to the tefillin. Perhaps in that instance, you were focused on teaching your grandchild how to tie shoes; though that morning, you had put on then tied your shoes as an intentional enactment of the Shulchan Arukh; and the time before, you had paused over your laceless bedroom slippers and considered whether they counted as shoes. A single pretext metonymically reflecting these motivations is a simpler answer to your grandchild's question. In line with Vico's view of metonym as presenting the abstract in a tangible way,¹⁶⁴ we might think of the sacramental host as a potential metonymic justification for a range of Christian beliefs. The concrete host is a concrete embodiment of abstract knowledge and experiences, for example, to answer the demands for justification, "why do you believe Jesus died for your sins?" or "why do you believe you are one with God?"

Similarly to metonym, synecdoche suggests a larger range of motivations than a justification can cover. White follows Burke in recognizing a difference between the reductive quality of metonym and the representative quality of synecdoche.¹⁶⁵ If I justify my vegetarianism as inspired by the commandment "thou shalt not kill," that pretext represents my sense that eating meat is wrong. The cruelty and questionable ethics of killing non-human animals is part of my motivation that represents the broader cruelties and wrongness. I am further motivated by the sense that meat consumption is wrong because meat production's higher water waste and methane release are environmentally harmful, monoculture and caloric waste are detrimental to world food safety, and current levels of meat quality and consumption are medically detrimental to humans. The commandment is a synecdoche for the myriad wrongs of meat consumption. Vico applies the Latin use of 'head' to represent 'human' to illustrate how synecdoche carries the particular to the general.¹⁶⁶ An example from religion would be the use of a single text or character to represent religious doctrine. The late 1990s fad of rubber and woven bracelets with the initials "WWJD?" standing for "What Would Jesus Do?" could be read as synecdochic generalization of Jesus to represent Christianity. That people invoke "WWJD?" as a justification for behaviors they view as Christian, such as contributing to charity or disowning their queer child, rather than for behaviors more specific to Jesus such as eating Kosher¹⁶⁷ or being homeless ("the Son of Man has no place to lay his head," Luke 9:58), indicates that WWJD functioned not as a call to imitation, but rather as a synecdoche.

Because irony requires the conscious intention of the speaker, irony is the most limiting trope for our considerations. The audience's awareness of the possibility of non-literal/untrue/or misrepresentation,¹⁶⁸ and perhaps a degree of background knowledge about the speaker restricts potential applications. Certainly, there are instances of speakers ironically presenting pretexts as a way of accentuating their motivating reasons. I might ironically state, "I drank the entire bottle of non-kosher wine to save you from the temptation," to play off my selfish act by obviously acknowledging that I was motivated by desire to drink the wine. Since you are aware that I know you make an exception for non-kosher wine (even if it makes you susceptible to the temptations of gentile wine-makers' daughters), you would recognize the irony of my pretext.

We can treat pretext as one example of what Claude Lévi-Strauss calls a "linguistic mode" expressing the relationship between what the speaker says and what the speech should signify. White portrays Lévi-Strauss' view of this relationship that the linguistic mode expresses as

deriving from a view (shared with Jacques Lacan) that people “always mean something other than what they say and do, and they always say and do something other than what they mean.” Then White locates the “something other” of the unstated meaning or unmeant statement “in the relationship presumed to exist between the things signified in speech or gesture and the signs used to signify them.”¹⁶⁹ Pretext falls into the latter category of the “something other:” the unmeant statement pervasive in human communication, while actual motivating reasons would fit the former category, the unstated meaning. In order to accurately interpret the communication, we must identify “the linguistic mode in which the system of signs has been cast.”¹⁷⁰ In our case, the linguistic mode is the practice of pretext, and the purpose of this chapter is to identify it in order to interpret the signs. Foucault is concerned that the illusion that words objectively represent meaning has allowed the human sciences to be caught in “figurative modes of discourse” that *constitute* rather than *describe* the objects of their study.¹⁷¹ As I discuss in Chapter 2, Foucault offers an apt critique of religious studies: the field creates what it intends as the object of its study.

Post-text

‘Pretext,’ as a separate discursive category from reason, does not warrant the same epistemological and ethical benefits. Particularly in epistemologically and ethically delicate situations, the audience should exercise discretion. My objective in subsequent chapters is to show how utilizing religious justifications leads to fallacies in ethical arguments, and how epistemic asymmetry of religion justifies privileges and encourages religious arguments as pretexts. Religious justifications, whether pretexts or reasons, are problematic for ethics, owing to permutations of subjectivity, clear verdicts or questions of interpretation, historically-situated attitudes, prohibitions in certain situations, etc. The next chapter applies critical religious studies to challenge an understanding of ‘religion’ contemporary discourse takes for granted as: temporally and geographically universal (intrinsic to humanity or society), *a priori* (deducible from reason if not empirically observable), plural (there are multiple iterations of a category of religion), *sui generis* (unique; not comparable to other institutions), an analytical category (a meaningful grouping for analysis), ontologically extant (iterations of religion exist in the world), systematic (organized structures of belief, practice, etc.), offering a connection to the transcendent (sometimes God), suggesting cosmology (explanations of the world, life, etc.), and providing normative ethics. I seek to unseat this naturalized understanding of ‘religion’ because as a constructed concept posed as an intrinsic human institution, ‘religion’ sanctions violence and creates epistemological injustice that makes religious pretexts all the more potent.

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” in *The Paul de Man Notebooks*, trans. Paul de Man, ed. Martin McQuillan, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1959), 174.

² Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9.

³ Maria L. Ontiveros, "Rosa Lopez, David Letterman, Christopher Darden and Me: Issues of Gender, Ethnicity and Class in Evaluating Witness Credibility," *Hastings Women's Law Review* 6, no. 2, (1996).
Christine L. Ruva and Judith Becker Bryant, "The Impact of Age, Speech Style, and Question Form on Perceptions of Witness Credibility and Trial Outcome," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 34, no. 9, (2004).

⁴ Peter van Inwagen and Meghan Sullivan, "Metaphysics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaphysics/> (accessed April 16, 2018).

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xxiii.

⁶ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), 101.

⁷ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 2.

⁸ H. G. Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext: Critical Issues in Discourse Analysis*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 8.

⁹ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 80.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961), 24.

¹¹ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 14.

¹² Foucault, *Order of Things*, 15.

¹³ Freud, *Civilization*, 11.

¹⁴ Freud, *Civilization*, 11.

¹⁵ Shirin Ebadi, "The Nobel Peace Lecture for 2003," *Peace Research* 36, no. 1 (May 2004): 20.

¹⁶ Ebadi, "Nobel Peace Lecture," 20.

¹⁷ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 79.

¹⁸ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, viii.

¹⁹ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 79-82.

²⁰ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 83.

²¹ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 83-6.

²² Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 85.

²³ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 85, 87.

²⁴ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 87.

²⁵ White proposes three stages for analyzing discourse: mimesis or data representation, the diegesis of argument, and diataxis combining the two (White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 4).

²⁶ Sarah Young, “Man’s Viral Pro-Choice Question ‘Shuts Down’ the Anti-Abortion Argument,” *The Independent*, published October, 24 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/man-pro-choice-question-anti-abortion-argument-human-embryos-five-year-old-a8016671.html> (accessed April 16, 2018).

²⁷ Trump is particularly prone to this evidence of pretext, for example claiming he fired Comey for treatment of Clinton, then attributing the decision to the Russia investigation.

²⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, (New York: The New Press, 2012), 60-61.

²⁹ R. Drew Griffith, “Disrobing in the Oresteia,” *Classical Quarterly* 38 02 (1988): 552-4.

³⁰ Iphigenia’s story may include another dramatic pretext. In Aeschylus’ telling, Clytemnestra justifies killing Agamemnon because she believes he sacrificed their daughter, not realizing that Artemis spared Iphigenia by sending a deer to Aulis in her place. Aeschylus hints that Clytemnestra’s motivating reason for killing Agamemnon may be anger that her husband married Cassandra, or her own desire to marry her lover, Aegishus. Also, there is a reference to Clytemnestra in one of the texts I analyze in Chapter 3: the protagonist reflects that he must model himself off Clytemnestra to survive an ordeal. Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*, (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996), 389.

³¹ Hofman et al., “Morality in Everyday Life,” *Science* 345 (2014).

³² Anne Sofie Roald, *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*, (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2001), 270.

³³ C. M. Fauber, “Hermocrates and Thucydides: Rhetoric, Policy, and the Speeches in Thucydides’ ‘History,’” *Illinois Classical Studies* 26 (2001): 43-4.

³⁴ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 4-7.

³⁵ While Freud distinguishes between action and intention, I am concerned with pretexts for either, including for beliefs or stances as well as actions or potential actions.

³⁶ Freud, *Civilization*, 71.

³⁷ My audience takes the place of what Freud describes as the ‘stronger person’ or the ‘authority.’

³⁸ Freud, *Civilization*, 72.

³⁹ Freud, *Civilization*, 72.

⁴⁰ Freud, *Civilization*, 72, 75.

⁴¹ Freud, *Civilization*, 73.

⁴² Matthew L. Fore, “Shall Weigh Your God and You: Assessing the Imperialistic Implications of the International Religious Freedom Act in Muslim Countries,” *Duke Law Journal* 52, no. 2, (Nov., 2002).

⁴³ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*.

⁴⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 45, 72, 76, 119.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 220.

⁴⁶ Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

⁴⁷ Widdowson, *Text, Context, Pretext*, 127, n. 2.

⁴⁸ Two academic humanities sources and one biography used the term in ways I read as suggesting the literary meaning of pretext I address below: “Plot may become a pretext. It may be eroded by comedy or decomposed, but it can never disappear,” “in Barthes’s reading the theme of castration is seen as

a pretext for a kind of reflexive anxiety on the part of the text itself,” and “‘pre-communist’ text in terms of Nizan’s own ideological evolution, became the pretext for Sartre’s own ‘post-communist’ radicalisation.” One line in a fragmented poem whose full text I could not locate online read, “The white pretext,” which lacks the context or grammatical form I would need to determine whether the term was being used in a way consistent with my meaning.

⁴⁹ In chronological order: John Ralph Willis, “Islamic Africa: Reflections on the Servile Estate,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 52 (1980). Harry Fledderman, “A Warning about the Scribes (Mark 12:37b-40),” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (January, 1982). Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Crusade Historians and the Massacres of 1096,” *Jewish History* 12, no. 2 (Fall, 1998). John McSweeney, “‘Faith Crisis’ Down Under,” *The Furrow* 50, no. 7/8 (Jul. - Aug., 1999). Kyle Fedler, “On the Rhetoric of a ‘War on Terrorism’: A Lecture Presented at Ashland University on September 17, 2001,” *CrossCurrents* 51, no. 4, *Reconsidering Scripture* (Winter 2002). Michael Burger, “Peter of Leicester, Bishop Godfrey Giffard of Worcester, and the Problem of Benefices in Thirteenth-Century England,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 95, no. 3 (Jul., 2009). Cynthia Edenburg, “Notes on the Origin of the Biblical Tradition Regarding Achish King of Gath,” *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 1 (2011). Szymon Rudnicki, “Jews in Poland Between the Two World Wars,” *Shofar* 29, no. 3, *Polish Jewry* (Spring 2011). Timothy E. W. Gloege, “Faith Healing, Medical Regulation, and Public Religion in Progressive Era Chicago,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2013). Laura Savu, “Rites of Togetherness: ‘The Fuzzy Faithful’ Pilgrims and Their Oceanic Feelings,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2014).

⁵⁰ Willis, “Islamic Africa,” 188.

⁵¹ Willis, “Islamic Africa,” 189.

⁵² Willis, “Islamic Africa,” 191.

⁵³ Edith R. Sanders, “The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1969), 521.

⁵⁴ Sanders, “The Hamitic Hypothesis,” 522.

⁵⁵ Willis, “Islamic Africa,” 195-6.

⁵⁶ As I discuss in Chapter 2, justifications for stealing land from indigenous North Americans shifted from their lack of rights as non-Christians under Johnson v. M’Intosh to Andrew Jackson’s justification for stealing from non-whites, following many indigenous individuals’ conversions to Christianity.

⁵⁷ Fledderman, “A Warning about the Scribes,” 63, 52.

⁵⁸ Fledderman, “A Warning about the Scribes,” 62.

⁵⁹ Edenburg, “Notes on the Origin of the Biblical Tradition,” 36.

⁶⁰ Kedar, “Crusade Historians,” 18.

⁶¹ Kedar, “Crusade Historians,” 14.

⁶² Kedar, “Crusade Historians,” 18.

⁶³ Kedar, “Crusade Historians,” 18.

⁶⁴ Rudnicki, “Jews in Poland,” 10-1.

⁶⁵ Burger, “Peter of Leicester,” 463-4.

⁶⁶ Fedler, “On the Rhetoric,” 498-9.

⁶⁷ Gloege, "Faith Healing," 188.

⁶⁸ Gloege, "Faith Healing," 197, 199.

⁶⁹ McSweeney, "Faith Crisis," 427-8.

⁷⁰ McSweeney, "Faith Crisis," 428.

⁷¹ Savu, "Rites of Togetherness," 94.

⁷² Following Hans-Georg Gadamer's view of an encounter between the text and the reader's perspective, Aaron B. Franzen claims "readers bring a 'pretext' with them to the text," and each text they encounter changes the pretext.

Aaron B. Franzen, "Reading the Bible in America: The Moral and Political Attitude Effect," *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 3 (September 2013), 396.

This application is closer to Widdowson's pretext as cues and context directing the audience's interpretation. Approaching the term from more of a literary criticism perspective, theologian Ulrich Luz defines pretext, amongst other related terms in reference to structuralist literary theorist Gérard Genette's intertextuality model describing how texts are related. 'Intertextuality' describes 'co-presence,' 'paratext' refers to elements of a text such as title and endnotes, 'metatext' denotes "commentary, which explains its pretext," yet is distant from it. 'Hypertext' is a secondary text "written entirely [and informally] on the basis of a preceding pretext." The pretext is the hypertext, and intertextuality is a model similar to genre. Pretext in this schema has manifold potential characteristics: coming temporally before other texts, receiving commentary, providing a structure, dialoguing with other texts, becoming "superfluous" on account of other texts, and serving as the basis of allusion or quotation. To illustrate, Luz offers three potential pretexts for Matthew 2:13-23, "the flight of the holy family to Egypt and their return to Israel:" the Passover Haggadah and Exodus 4:19-20, which the hypertext of Matthew directly quotes; and Genesis 46:2-4, because it depicts Joseph traveling to Egypt.

Ulrich Luz, "Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew," *The Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (Apr., 2004), 123-4, 128, 130-1.

G. J. Steyn, Mark Kiley, and Richard Werbner apply similar uses without referencing Genette.

G. J. Steyn, "Intertextual Similarities Between Septuagint Pretexts and Luke's Gospel," *Neotestamentica* 24, no. 2, (1990), 229-43.

Mark Kiley, "Three More Fish Stories (John 21:11)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 3 (Fall, 2008), 531.

Werbner defines pretext as a prefiguring "prior story," with the example of the Holy Gospels being the pretext or "master narrative" for Christianity.

Richard Werbner, "The Suffering Body: Passion and Ritual Allegory in Christian Encounters," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 2, (Jun., 1997), 317.

While the stories may serve as pretexts in my sense of the term as a stated justification for a stance or action, these uses highlight the literary meaning of previous texts that inform the interpretation of a later text.

⁷³ Judith Ann Weller, "Tacitus and Tiberius' Rhodian Exile," *Phoenix* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1958): 31-2.

⁷⁴ Weller, "Tacitus and Tiberius' Rhodian Exile," 32.

⁷⁵ Weller, "Tacitus and Tiberius' Rhodian Exile," 33.

⁷⁶ Gordon M. Kirkwood, "Thucydides' Words for 'Cause,'" *The American Journal of Philology* 73, no. 1 (1952): 37.

⁷⁷ Kirkwood, "Thucydides' Words for 'Cause,'" 40.

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- ⁷⁸ Donald Walter Baronowski, "Polybius on the Causes of the Third Punic War," *Classical Philology* 90, no. 1 (Jan., 1995): 17.
- ⁷⁹ Kirkwood, "Thucydides' Words for 'Cause,'" 46, 55.
- ⁸⁰ Paul Woodruff, "In Place of Loyalty: Friendship and Adversary Politics in Classical Greece," *Nomos* 54, (2013): 47.
- ⁸¹ Kirkwood notes, "Sometimes Πρόφασις is simply Προέχειν," yet does not extrapolate on the distinction between the two terms (Kirkwood, 1952, 50).
- ⁸² Hunter R. Rawlings III, "Thucydides on the Purpose of the Delian League," *Phoenix* 31, no. 1 (Spring, 1977): 1.
- ⁸³ Rawlings, "Thucydides on the Purpose of the Delian League," 2.
- ⁸⁴ Rawlings, "Thucydides on the Purpose of the Delian League," 7.
- ⁸⁵ In chronological order: Michel Chossudovsky, "Osamagate," *Peace Research* 33, no. 2 (November 2001). Tom Rockmore, "On the So-Called War on Terrorism," *Metaphilosophy* 35, no. 3, (April 2004). K. T. Thomas, "The US, Iraq and Oil Politics," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 67, (2006-2007). Lindsey German, "Women and the War on Terror," *Feminist Review* 88, (2008). Mathan Ravid, "Prejudice and Demonization in the Swedish Middle East Debate During the 2006 Lebanon War," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 21, no. 1/2 (Spring 2009). Martha Vanessa Saldivar, "From Mexico to Palestine: An Occupation of Knowledge, a 'Mestizaje' of Methods," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (December 2010). David Coady, "An Epistemic Defence of the Blogosphere," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28, no. 3 (August 2011). Andrew Stefan Weiner, "Pretexts: The Evidence of the Event," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 26 (Spring 2011). Ahmad Doostmohammadi, Seyyed Abdolazim Mousavi, and Javad Amani Sari Beigloo, "A Study of the Causes of Wars between the Government and the Shiites of Yemen Based on 'Fuzzy Cognitive Maps,'" *Journal of International and Area Studies* 19, no. 1 (June 2012). Stephen F. Knott and Lawrence J. Korb, "Scholarly Exchange: America's Iraq War—On Stephen Knott's 'Rush to Judgment,'" *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 4, (Fall 2013).
- ⁸⁶ In chronological order: Samir Amin, "US Hegemony: Need to Reshape European Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 21 (May 22-28, 1999). Norman G. Finkelstein, "First the Carrot, then the Stick: Behind the Carnage in Palestine," *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova serie, Anno 21 (82), no. 2 (2002). Yves Pallade, "'New' Anti-Semitism in Contemporary German Academia," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 21, no. 1/2 (Spring 2009). Ravid, "Prejudice and Demonization." Saldivar, "From Mexico to Palestine." Shamir Hasan, "Israel's Borders and Other States' Security," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72, no. 2 (2011). Nimer Sultany, "The Making of an Underclass: The Palestinian Citizens of Israel," *Israel Studies Review* 27, no. 2, (Winter 2012). Saffo Papantonopoulou, "'Even a Freak Like You Would Be Safe in Tel Aviv': Transgender Subjects, Wounded Attachments, and the Zionist Economy of Gratitude," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1/2, (Spring/Summer 2014). Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Infiltrated Intimacies: The Case of Palestinian Returnees," *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 1, (2016).
- ⁸⁷ Chossudovsky, "Osamagate," 42.
- ⁸⁸ Chossudovsky, "Osamagate," 41-2.
- ⁸⁹ Chossudovsky, "Osamagate," 42.
- ⁹⁰ Weiner, "Pretexts," 85.
- ⁹¹ Amin, "US Hegemony," 1247-8.

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- ⁹² Cited, e.g. in Rosalind C. Morris, ed., *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, (New York: Columbia University Press: 2010), 3, 5, 48, 49, 50, 51, 270.
- ⁹³ Weiner, “Pretexts,” 85.
- ⁹⁴ Weiner, “Pretexts,” 85.
- ⁹⁵ Weiner, “Pretexts,” 85.
- ⁹⁶ German, “Women and the War on Terror,” 144.
- ⁹⁷ Coady, “An Epistemic Defence of the Blogosphere,” 285.
- ⁹⁸ Pallade, “‘New’ Anti-Semitism,” 34.
- ⁹⁹ Pallade, “‘New’ Anti-Semitism,” 33.
- ¹⁰⁰ See, e.g. Ruth R. Wisse and Gabriel Schoenfeld.
- ¹⁰¹ See, e.g. Judith Butler, Noam Chomsky, and Marc Ellis, as well as the previously-cited Daniel Boyarin and Norman Finkelstein.
- ¹⁰² Thomas, “The US, Iraq and Oil Politics,” 904.
- ¹⁰³ Hasan, “Israel’s Borders,” 1092-3.
- ¹⁰⁴ Saldivar, “From Mexico to Palestine,” 823-4.
- ¹⁰⁵ Finkelstein, “First the Carrot,” 273.
- ¹⁰⁶ Charles A. Duelfer and Stephen Benedict Dyson, “Chronic Misperception and International Conflict: The U.S.-Iraq Experience,” *International Security* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 82.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ravid, “Prejudice and Demonization,” 83.
- ¹⁰⁸ Amin, “US Hegemony,” 1247. Thomas also uses “strategic goal” in potential comparison to pretext, though the relationship is not as clear (Thomas, “The US, Iraq and Oil Politics,” 906).
- ¹⁰⁹ Rockmore, “On the So-Called War on Terrorism,” 386.
- ¹¹⁰ Rockmore, “On the So-Called War on Terrorism,” 400.
- ¹¹¹ Derek E. Bambauer, “Orwell’s Armchair,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 79, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 885.
- ¹¹² *Kelo v. City of New London*, 545 U.S. 469 (2005) at 478.
- ¹¹³ *Kelo*, 545 U.S. at 491.
- ¹¹⁴ David A. Sutphen, “True Lies: The Role of Pretext Evidence under *Batson v. Kentucky* in the Wake of *St. Mary’s Honor Center v. Hicks*,” *Michigan Law Review* 94, no. 2 (Nov., 1995): 489-90 n. 12.
- ¹¹⁵ Tracey Maclin, “Open Door Policy: Court rulings on traffic stops undercut Fourth Amendment protections,” *American Bar Association Journal* 83, no. 7 (July 1997): 46.
- ¹¹⁶ *Blacks Law Dictionary*, as quoted in Seyferth “defines pretext as the ‘[o]stensible reason or motive assigned or assumed as a color or cover for the real reason or motive; false appearance, pretense.’” Paul D. Seyferth, “A Roadmap of the Law of Summary Judgment In Disparate Treatment Cases,” *The Labor Lawyer* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 253 n. 18.
- ¹¹⁷ Tristin K. Green, “Making Sense of the McDonnell Douglas Framework: Circumstantial Evidence and Proof of Disparate Treatment under Title VII,” *California Law Review* 87, no. 4 (July 1999): 988-9 n. 33.

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- ¹¹⁸ Mark S. Brodin, “The Demise of Circumstantial Proof in Employment Discrimination Litigation: *St. Mary’s Honor Center v. Hicks*, Pretext, and the ‘Personality’ Excuse,” *Berkeley Journal of Employment and Labor Law* 18, no. 2 (1997): 185.
- ¹¹⁹ Matthew L. Fore, “Shall Weigh Your God and You,” 426, 439.
- ¹²⁰ Fore, “Shall Weigh Your God and You,” 446.
- ¹²¹ Fore, “Shall Weigh Your God and You,” 446, n. 142.
- ¹²² See Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005).
- ¹²³ Fore, “Shall Weigh Your God and You,” 446, n. 142.
- ¹²⁴ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 3.
- ¹²⁵ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 2-3.
- ¹²⁶ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 4-6.
- ¹²⁷ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 32.
- ¹²⁸ Larry R. Morrison, “The Religious Defense of American Slavery Before 1830,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 37, no. 2 (Fall 1980 - Winter 1981): 21.
- ¹²⁹ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 14-6.
- ¹³⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 16, capitalization in the original.
- ¹³¹ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 16.
- ¹³² Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 28.
- ¹³³ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 40.
- ¹³⁴ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 73-4.
- ¹³⁵ Maureen Pao, “U.S. Parents Are Sweating And Hustling To Pay For Child Care,” *National Public Radio*, published October 22, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/10/22/498590650/u-s-parents-are-sweating-and-hustling-to-pay-for-child-care>.
- ¹³⁶ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 29, italics in the original.
- ¹³⁷ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 3.
- ¹³⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 141.
- ¹³⁹ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 9-10.
- ¹⁴⁰ Fauber, “Hermocrates and Thucydides,” 46.
- ¹⁴¹ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 163.
- ¹⁴² Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 83.
- ¹⁴³ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 160-1.
- ¹⁴⁴ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 99-100.
- ¹⁴⁵ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 116-7.
- ¹⁴⁶ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 36.

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- ¹⁴⁷ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 78, 88.
- ¹⁴⁸ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 79-80, 89.
- ¹⁴⁹ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 115.
- ¹⁵⁰ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 120, 42-3.
- ¹⁵¹ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 107.
- ¹⁵² Foucault, *Order of Things*, 92-3, italics in the original.
- ¹⁵³ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 308.
- ¹⁵⁴ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 3.
- ¹⁵⁵ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 20.
- ¹⁵⁶ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 51.
- ¹⁵⁷ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 204.
- ¹⁵⁸ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 72.
- ¹⁵⁹ For Foucault, “the three great figures of rhetoric” omit irony, though include synecdoche, metonymy, and catachresis, which he equates with metaphor as a more immediately perceptible trope in the same vein (Foucault, *Order of Things*, 111, 114). Perhaps there is a degree of irony in catachresis, in the intentional misuse of the substituted word, for example in the catachresis bumper sticker “Dog is my co-pilot,” which ironically plays on the older “God is my co-pilot.” The (intentional) incorrect diction substituting ‘dog’ for ‘God’ is a catachresis in that ‘dog’ would be an inappropriate word in the religious context of the phrase.
- ¹⁶⁰ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 10.
- ¹⁶¹ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 205.
- ¹⁶² Foucault, *Order of Things*, 53.
- ¹⁶³ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 69.
- ¹⁶⁴ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 207.
- ¹⁶⁵ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 73.
- ¹⁶⁶ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 207.
- ¹⁶⁷ See Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, Chapter 3.
- ¹⁶⁸ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 208.
- ¹⁶⁹ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 231.
- ¹⁷⁰ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 231.
- ¹⁷¹ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 231-2.

Ten Tests of Pretext

These tests, introduced in Chapter 1, are intended to help audiences identify justifications functioning as pretexts.

The tests refer to a general scenario:

Speaker S justifies stance or act A with potential pretext P from source Q.

1. **False dilemma test:** If a more attractive or less controversial act other than A satisfies P, would S still choose A?
2. **Selective enforcement (or hypocrisy) test:** Does S insist upon honoring P, but not another justification following from Q?
3. **Borrowed justification test:** Is Q an invalid authority for S?
4. **Appeal to irrelevant authority test:** Is Q a relevant authority when evaluating A?
5. **Shifting justification test:** Does S abandon P for another justification?
6. **Unobtaining outcome test:** Would P fail to produce the promised outcome to A?
7. **Misreading or misapplication test:** Does Q not mean or imply P; would S know that?
8. **Post hoc test:** Does S offer P too long after A for it to be credible?
9. **Ventriloquist test:** Is someone other than S responsible for A?
10. **Auxiliary information and plausible motive test:** Is there anything about S that would indicate that P is not a reason? Is there another motive more likely than P is to explain S's A?

Example:

Imagine you are debating women's reproductive freedom with a man who argues that the Ten Commandments forbid killing, and that life begins at conception, therefore first-trimester abortions and Plan B should be illegal. Since US laws are not based on the Bible, this is an **appeal to irrelevant authority**. Then, you pose a thought experiment. Running to escape a burning building, you can save either one five-year-old child or 1000 Viable Human Embryos: what do you do? If he chooses the child, he is exercising **selective enforcement**. Finally, after you challenge the anti-choice campaigner with the first two pretext tests, he retorts that contraceptives interfere with God's will. Keep an eye out for the speaker who jumps between justifications, or 'doth protest too much:' **shifting justifications** indicate that the speaker is throwing out arguments they hope will appeal to the audience, signaling the powerful lie of pretext.

Chapter Two

In the beginning there may have been God, but there was no religion. After aeons, humans whispered words for God, words for us against them, but no word religion. After centuries, enlightenment Europeans inscribed a word to justify their curiosity, then power. They looked at their Church, saints, rituals, explanations, then looked abroad and named it 'religion.' The word wrought the metal that has shackled blacks to whites and women to men, gouged the land, and pierced our skin so foreigners' blood flows together. Now there is the word, and the word is not God, but it is powerful: religion.

Growing up in 1990s Atlanta, the second or third question other children would usually ask me was, “do you believe in God?” It was an ethical litmus test, for ‘yes’ implied religious adherence, and thus sound ethics. Their elision of God, religion, and ethics inscribed a perimeter around good people, beyond which one was an unpredictable danger and object of potential conversion. This chapter challenges similar presumptions in contemporary discourse, offering the reader ways to rethink the genealogy and meaning of ‘Religion’ we take for granted, question religion’s relationship with ethics, and ask how discourse epistemically privileges religion.

The Privileged Space of ‘Religion’

Enlightenment Europeans constructed a conception of ‘Religion’ that they applied as a justification for imperialist violence. Characteristics of the concept, namely perceived timeless universality and ontological existence of an institution called 'religion,' along with the epistemic incontrovertibility of beliefs deriving therefrom, secure an unduly privileged place for justifications in our political systems.¹ Several centuries later, we have the perspective to recognize many actions justified on religious bases as ethically abhorrent,² and applying tests for identifying pretext from Chapter 1 suggests that some of these justifications may be pretexts. Those characteristics of the Enlightenment conception that initially made religion an effective grounds for justifying imperialist violence continue to contribute to religion's justificatory potency and epistemic privilege today. Without the benefit of temporal distance, we may not be able to intuitively identify certain contemporary actions as ethically abhorrent, yet I argue that the pretext tests from Chapter 1, the parallels to historical applications, and the misrepresentation of religion form a case against privileging religious justifications.

‘Religion’ Isn’t What You think

Premise A: Perceived characteristics such as universality and incontrovertibility dominate contemporary discourse of ‘Religion’

*“I believe in God. I am Christian. I think The Bible is certainly, it is THE book.
It is the thing...I’m a protestant, I’m a Presbyterian...I think religion is a wonderful thing.
I think my religion is a wonderful religion.”*

– Donald Trump in a 2011 interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network’s David Brody³

What is this thing we call ‘religion?’ Like my elementary school classmates, Donald Trump seems to elide belief in God with being Christian. Though the syntax is confusing, he also appears to state that the Bible is the book that is the thing, and religion is a thing, so perhaps he elides the Bible and religion as well. His use of the article ‘a’ suggests that he believes there are multiple religions of which Christianity (or Protestantism, Presbyterianism, or whatever he considers “my religion”) is one example. Aside from evaluating religion as wonderful, and contextualizing it with the terms Presbyterian, protestant, the Bible, Christian, and God, Trump does not offer a clear conception of what religion is. Listening to the interview, one hears that Trump is struggling even more than usual to speak about what religion is for him, pausing between his jumps from one term to the next. The characteristics of religion I read in what Trump is able to express are connections to theism (God) and religious texts (the Bible), ontological existence of something called ‘religion’ (‘a wonderful thing’), plurality of religions (‘a wonderful religion’), and a positive impression.

Before you think I’m constructing a straw man depiction of religion in current discourse, consider how a more eloquent and educated twenty-first century US President speaks about religion, also in an interview in the years leading up to his first presidential campaign. Speaking in early 2004 with *Chicago Sun-Times* religion reporter Cathleen Falsani,⁴ Barack Obama recalls his mother’s view of “the world’s religions,” with which he grew up: “underlying these religions were a common set of beliefs about how you treat other people and how you aspire to act, not just for yourself but also for the greater good.” This view presupposes that there exist institutions or entities that we may call ‘religions’ (plural), sufficiently similar to fall within one category. Further, this description suggests that (perhaps all) religions share an ideological foundation. Note that Obama does not say that *sets* of beliefs underlie *each* religion, which would suggest a definition of religion as founded on ideological foundations that may be unique to individual religions. He formulates a stronger universality, that a single set of beliefs is ‘common’ to the world’s religions. Beyond a strong universality of religions’ foundation, Obama’s characterization suggests a shared normativity (that religions instruct people on how to act) and single telos (that these actions should lead to common benefit). The strong universality suggests an atemporality. Especially in how Obama portrays religion as synonymous with spiritual, religion comes across as a way of being in the world unrelated to political or historical situation.

Though later in the interview, Obama claims to have gained “more of an intellectual view of religion” from working in church communities in Chicago, he does not offer another view of what religion is, either in a US or global context. Like Trump, Obama expresses ontological existence of a category of ‘religion,’ plurality of religions, and a positive impression of religion. Further, Obama’s description of world religions expresses features of strong universality, normative function, ethical telos, and atemporality.

Significant contemporary scholarly treatment of ‘religion’ largely perpetuates these assumptions. As a sampling, consider the characterization of religion in three books written by university professors and published in the last year by university presses that explicitly state or implicitly suggest that they are intended for a general rather than academic audience: philosopher Tim Crane’s *The Meaning of Belief: Religion from an Atheist’s Point of View*, theologian John

Haught's *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, and sociologist Christian Smith's *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters*.⁵ All three books treat religion as an analytic category describing a real phenomenon with plural iterations.

While explicitly atheist and attempting to show religion's indefinable diversity, Crane's book accepts a common view of religion, addressing plural global religions, to which he attributes transcendent cosmological and normative ethical features. After nodding to the "somewhat obscure" "matter of controversy" over whether religion is a modern concept constructed in contradistinction to secularity, Crane defines religion as "a systematic and practical attempt by human beings to find meaning in the world and their place in it, in terms of their relationship to something transcendent," emphasizing the elements of organization, pragmatism, cosmology, and transcendence.⁶

Similarly to Crane's cosmological and ethical view, Haught defines religion as "[a]n awakening to the dawning of 'rightness'" that is "[i]ntrinsic to human consciousness."⁷ The awakening implies a path towards understanding, and rightness implies a normative code of behavior. Ascribing religion "the primary way in which people have sought pathways through the severest limits on life"⁸ supports both understandings of religion. Whereas Crane is aware of non-religious individuals and even societies, Haught presents religion as intrinsic to humanity: as "a set of sentiments and aspirations arising from deep inside human consciousness" that "sets our species sharply apart from all others," arising from and defining humans.⁹ Despite placing religion in a cosmic context, Haught misrepresents religion's relatively momentary insignificant appearance as a blip in the span of the universe's history, instead, giving the impression that religion is an *a priori* ur-phenomenon: "[s]hortly after the birth of self-conscious minds, our ancestors began to develop the sense of a spiritual world and sought to encounter it by engaging in religious rituals."¹⁰ This narrative implies that religion was already there, waiting for humans to develop self-consciousness so that they could begin to engage the religious rituals. Haught seems to absolve the anachronism of calling early human practices "religious rituals" by claiming the existence of spirituality, suggesting the reader should view 'spirituality' as a synonym for 'religion.'

Like Haught, Smith presents religion as an *a priori* ur-phenomenon. Smith defends such a timeline with the claims that "[r]eligious practices have been a part of homo sapiens life since the beginning of our discernable history," and that "[n]o human society has existed that did not include some religion."¹¹ The juxtaposition of religious practices as "part" of human life suggests that they are a separate, already existent entity. Presumably, early homo sapiens sang and acted, told stories together and performed for one another, yet it is blatantly misrepresentative to write that opera has been part of humans' lives throughout our history. Renaissance Europeans created 'opera.' Regarding pluralism, it is equally misleading to call 戲曲 "classical Chinese opera" as it is to call Confucianism a religion: both misrepresentations are ascribing European concepts to non-European forms, whitewashing human art and knowledge. Smith's view of religion as ancient and intrinsic to human society is a temporally and spatially universal view. Focused on religion as a human *practice* rather than an intrinsic intellectual characteristic (as for Haught), Smith writes that religion is "best defined as a complex of culturally prescribed practices that are based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers."¹² The cosmological

and ethical features resemble Crane’s definition of religion, though Smith’s view is more focused on access to the transcendent (essentially how he reads religious practice) and the assumption that humans are striving for flourishing or *eudaimonia*.¹³ Smith acknowledges the possibility that religion is “the construction of modern, Western colonizers” yet maintains “that humans have been practicing something real and identifiable that we call religion for countless millennia,”¹⁴ and considers responses from Martin Riesebrodt, Kevin Schilbrack, and Thomas Tweed (addressed later in this chapter) sufficient. Like Trump, Smith believes religion is something: it is ontologically real.

In these five presentations of religion—two presidential and three professorial—we see characterizations of religion as:

1. **temporally and geographically universal** as well as intrinsic to and definitive of humanity or to human society;
2. *a priori* (deducible from reason if not empirically observable), and defined by cognition;
3. **plural** (there are many religions within the single category);
4. *sui generis* (unique, incomparable), or unlike other phenomena;
5. an **analytic category** (grouping for analysis; religions can be meaningfully compared);
6. an **ontologically existent entity** (something called ‘religion’ exists);
7. **systematic** (organized structures of belief, practice, hierarchies, etc.);
8. offering a **connection to the transcendent** (usually God);
9. suggesting a **cosmology** (explanations of the world, life, etc.); and
10. providing **normative ethics** (ethical guidelines for how to behave) or aimed at the greater good or at individual flourishing.

These characteristics reflect standard understandings of religion in contemporary political, academic, and quotidian discourse. Take a moment to think about how you have heard ‘religion’ used recently and observe which of these elements are consistent with those usages. Yet these five characterizations of religion are also quite diverse, attesting to the difficulty of defining religion. More than one theorist has used the Justice Potter Stewart’s “[b]ut I know it when I see it” non-definition of pornography as an analogy for a dominant sense that we recognize religion when we see it, even if we cannot name—and certainly cannot agree upon—its definition nor parameters. The difficulty of defining a term that is so common and seemingly knowable suggests another approach to analyzing religion. I used discourse analysis in Chapter 1 to triangulate how the term ‘pretext’ was employed in texts from rhetoric, religious studies, literature, law, classics, politics, and philosophy. In Chapter 3, I use the methodology to explore

how science fiction presents pretexts deriving from religion. Likewise, for this chapter I hope that this brief analysis of how five men¹⁵ used the term ‘religion’ has offered a representative impression of the valences of the term in contemporary discourse.

Responding to religious scholars (including many I cite in this chapter) who propose doing away with the term ‘religion’ because prevalent perceptions of the construct (e.g. as temporally and spatially universal) are inaccurate, Benson Saler attempts to salvage ‘religion’ by offering a polythetic definition that suits contemporary usage.¹⁶ Concepts, like ‘religion,’ are constructed through discourse. As I define it in the introduction, discourse is an abstract text akin to a conversation, yet extending beyond the spoken to encompass writing, visual material, actions, and the assumptions and epistemologies shaping how agents understand and interact with those texts. Since the definition and characteristics of ‘religion’ are discursively constructed and change through discursive use, discourse analysis—tracking the applications and implications of a term across a discourse or corpus of relevant texts—is a particularly appropriate methodology for parsing a contemporary conception of ‘religion.’

Through the use of words in language, they come to have a meaning, and through repeated use, our understanding of concepts becomes naturalized, as though they always carried the same meaning. Hayden White describes this process as part of the way we use language: our modes of discourse “are taken for granted either as natural or as established truth...hardened into ideologies.”¹⁷ Beyond a temporal universality of presuming that the word has always meant what it now means, naturalization gives the word epistemic weight, because obscuring the meaning’s constructedness gives the impression that the meaning is innate. A word has more value in the production of knowledge if the speaker or audience believe that the word is meaningful in itself rather than as a product of discursive construction. To illustrate, consider two utterances expressing ‘life.’ The contemporary English word comes from old Germanic roots and has cognates in other modern languages in the Germanic family. Meanwhile, the Hebrew חַי, the Sanskrit $\square\square\square\square$, and the Chinese 氣 all share a similar sound despite being from diverse language families. The almost occult suggestion of convergent evolution of these words might suggest a meaning to the sound beyond its manifestation in language, an autological life force to the sound that transcended language. Likewise, the implication that a term is natural, unconstructed, and ancient, gives more weight than the realization that words are arbitrary combinations of sounds whose value derives from the discursively constructed meaning.

Speakers uncritically use taken-for-granted words, what Michel Foucault calls “received” vocabulary.¹⁸ Without considering how a meaning may have changed or emerged over time, the speaker misses a significant element of a given word’s power. Consciously following Foucault, White critiques the “ontologically privileged status” that modern (post-enlightenment) discourse gives words “as transparent icons, as value-neutral instruments of representation.”¹⁹ Speakers and audiences view words as simple signs representing an idea, without history or judgment. The stakes of such oversight are generally negligible but may include unintended insult or misrepresentation. For instance, speakers would do well to recognize that ‘suffragette’ originated as an infantilizing insult; that the phrases ‘long time no see’ and ‘no can do’ mock Native American and Chinese-American speech patterns, respectively; and the phrases ‘peanut gallery’ and ‘gypped’ rely on anti-black and Roma stereotypes, respectively. In this chapter, I’m

concerned with the stakes of ignoring the historical discursive construction of the word ‘religion’ in favor of a naturalized meaning.

Premise B: ‘Religion’ is a European Enlightenment construct

“No ancient language has a term that really corresponds to what modern people mean when they say ‘religion.’”
– Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion*²⁰

Brent Nongbri is not making the punctilious claim that there was no institution that met all of the requirements of characteristics discussed in Premise A; rather, no word represents anything resembling a modern ‘religion’ even on a generous reading. What we now perceive as ancient religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, had no names until around the turn of the nineteenth century,²¹ which suggests that the naming of the institutions coincided with a changing perception of them. People used Google (noun) for roughly a year before co-founder Larry Page coined ‘googling’ as a verb in 1998, and before that people certainly searched for information in databases and (once upon a time) printed materials, the roots of our contemporary concept. Discourse adopted the neologism in response to a changing cultural form. Emergence of a term implies a new phenomenon, and absence of a term implies that there is no need for such a concept to be named.

It would be reasonable to assume that a language with no name for ‘snow’ originated in a climate that did not freeze, or that a society without a word for ‘school’ lacked a formal educational system, so why would we believe religion existed before humans created a name for it? One might counter that the absence of a word does not necessarily imply the absence of a phenomenon: sunbeams dappled through foliage before the Japanese coined *komorebi* (木漏れ日). Humans can even experience feelings without naming them, as people around the world presumably delight in other’s misfortunes before hearing the German *Schadenfreude*, and a good storyteller’s audience may feel enraptured without knowing the Urdu *goya*.²² Yet these three words name abstract and relatively inconsequential phenomena; they lack political power and are relevant in rare and specific situations. If religion is as intrinsic to humanity and human society as Haught and Smith suggest; or if it represents an experience as remarkable as connection with the transcendent as Crane, Haught, and Smith believe; or offers a framework for understanding the world and how to behave in it as Crane, Haught, Smith, and Obama all propose; or if religion is as wonderful a thing as Trump boasts, then surely human language would have formed a name for the concept earlier. It is the concatenation of several phenomena into one concept and its distinction from other constructed concepts such as the secular, the political, the economic that constitutes religion as itself a concept.

In the introduction, I propose that science, law, medicine, and capitalism are comparable constructs that enjoy epistemic privilege, serve as foundations for ethics, have perceived universality and often transcendence, and enjoy a degree of incontrovertibility. I suggest specific intellectual developments to which we can trace contemporary conceptions of these institutions. Yet there were methods that resembled what we call ‘science’ before Roger Bacon drafted guidelines for experimentation, social codes before Hugo Grotius’ natural law, practices of

physical care before Joseph Lister's hand-washing and anesthesia, and accumulation of wealth prior to Adam Smith. Though one could claim that European culture had 'science,' 'law,' 'medicine,' and 'capitalism' based on those early iterations, before the words entered discourse, those iterations barely resemble the institutions to which we refer today. The development and invention of the words may be a poor measure of when a concept emerged in its contemporary form. Root cognates resembling the contemporary terms may be false cognates with other meanings and implications. The Latin *scientia* refers more to knowledge than experimentation, perhaps resembling 'epistemology' more closely than it does the twenty-first century English understanding of 'science.' The roots of 'law' refer to laying down or placing something, while early forms of 'medicine' refer to healing without the contemporary implications of surgery or prevention. Conversely, concepts can emerge before the contemporary term is coined: 'capitalism' does not appear in Adam Smith's formative *Wealth of Nations*. What are the implications for the prevalent view of 'religion' as a universal phenomenon? Religion may be like *Schadenfreude* for non-German-speakers, or *capitalisme* in the late eighteenth century English-speaking world: observable yet consequential enough to name. Or perhaps religion is more like neologisms such as 'internet' and 'hipster' or institutions such as 'science' and 'medicine,' deriving from older words that have quite distinct meanings.

Academic subfields of religious studies such as critical religious studies, discourses of religion, and worldview studies grapple with this debate. At least since Wilfred Cantrell Smith's 1963 history *The Meaning and End of Religion*, religious studies has been aware that religion may not be the ur-phenomenon contemporary discourse portrays. Extensive research within religious studies and in adjacent fields such as anthropology, archaeology, history, and philosophy has contributed to the refutation of our received presumption of religion's temporal universality.²³

Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin's *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* is a remarkably expansive yet thorough example of the corpus analysis methodology I undertook in Chapter 1. In order to discursively situate the Latin *religio* and the Greek *thrēskeia*, respectively, Barton read all extant works of Tertullian and Boyarin examined Josephus' writing as case studies for how the terms were used in the first centuries AD. They suggest that the Roman *religio* was an "anxious guilt" similar to scruples in contrast with the honor of *pudor*; the Romans' *religiones* "had nothing to do with Gods," but were rather "a matter of constant conscious and careful adjustments and manipulations."²⁴ Concluding that "[t]ranslating *religio* or *thrēskeia* by 'religion' obscures more than it reveals,"²⁵ they leave us with the clear message that trying to translate Greek and Latin terms to 'religion' is anachronistic.

Severin Fowles' reinterpretation of Pueblo 'doings' offers a similar rebuttal of the belief that 'religion' is temporally (and spatially) universal. Past archaeologists had interpreted the 'doings' as a form of 'religion,' yet by interpreting them with reference to modern Pueblo paradigms and terminology,²⁶ Fowles reveals 'doings' to be their own phenomenon much broader than anything our term 'religion' comprehends, and in no way contrasted with 'secular.' Without a word that means 'religion' in ancient Latin, Greek, or Pueblo, can we claim that religion 'exists' in those societies? If there are societies without religion, then religion is not universal. The European fantasy of religion as a universal and implicit human institution is at the heart of epistemic and

historical imperialism, so the question of whether religion is temporally and spatially universal has high stakes. There is historical support for the etymological argument that the lack of a term ‘religion’ reflects the absence of a concept describable as ‘religion.’ Not only is religion *not* universal because there are societies *without* ‘religion,’ but the very definition of religion is a historical construction.²⁷

An analytic category resembling what we today call ‘religion’ began to emerge in the early modern era. Enlightenment inventions such as the printing press and longitude measurement facilitated the dispersal of knowledge and knowledge-collection around the globe. Academic interests such as the study into human ontogenesis and anatomy increased curiosity about the human objects of that global knowledge collection. In the sixteenth century, Copernicus’s heliocentric thesis led to further interest in cosmology from multiple knowledge sources. In the seventeenth century, museums of natural and human marvels appeared. The Catholic Church began to respond formally to these developments; following the first European realizations of human and natural diversity, Pope Julius II issued a Bulla in 1511 to reaffirm that all humans descended from Adam and Eve. Then in 1650, Archbishop of Armagh James Ussher published a chronology of the Earth, basing his calculations on Biblical record to date the world’s creation to 9 AM on October 23rd, 4004 BC.

Francis Bacon’s 1620 *Novum Organum Scientiarum* proposed a scientific method, formulating set modes of knowledge production and empirical measurement under a specific field. Talal Asad locates the first universal definitions of religion in the seventeenth century, as discourse begins to distinguish these modes of knowledge production. The emergence of binary twin concepts define each other in opposition: secularism and religion, allowing in the eighteenth century for a private conception of religion as personal belief to overtake religion as a public source of power and truth.²⁸ As Western Christianity comes to a private understanding of religion, it mirrors its private concept against a public ideal of secularism.²⁹ Jason A. Josephson-Storm posits an alternative reading of how religion emerged and defined itself in contradistinction to other concepts, suggesting that discourse constructed both religion and science in opposition to superstition and magic, while secularization presumes that superstition belongs to religion. He describes the mutual reference and constitution of religion, science, and superstition as an “entangled formation of terms.”³⁰

In a similarly entangled reciprocal definition by contrast, early imperialist encounters led the West to define itself against the ‘savage’ or ‘primitive man,’³¹ enshrining an ethical hierarchy, and ensuring that “cultural translation is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power.”³² Stuart Hall describes this construction of identity in power-laden contradistinction to a foreign Other as occurring “through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks.”³³ Tracing this identity construction of one’s own group against an Other to the pre-Enlightenment, Geraldine Heng argues that medieval English communities set aside the Other as “not them.” In this equation, religion functions as the dominant discourse; views of the Other were premised on religious dichotomies of Christian in opposition to Muslim, though not in the understanding of ‘religion’ that emerged in the following centuries. A medieval understanding of religion did not differentiate religion as a unique universal institution in the sense I present in this chapter. Rather, religion was one of “a multiplicity of interlocking discourses,”³⁴ and the

construction of the Other elided religion and race, which Heng expresses through the phrase “race-as-religion.”³⁵

Race and religion began to resemble the constructs with which we are familiar today during the Enlightenment, with co-constitutive concepts such as religion and the secular. Correcting a common misconception, Asad emphasizes that the secular is not the opposite of religion, but rather a twin. The ‘secular’ as a logic veils the imposition of religion, creating a rhetorical space imbued with epistemic benefits that also entail benefits in other realms that knowledge impacts, such as law and ethics. Just as *religio* meant something quite different from its modern descendant, the term secular comes from *saecularis*, a word whose original meaning is antithetical to today’s understanding, referring to the Christian clergy who were non-monastic. Our understanding of the two terms today has evolved through discursive usage in the centuries since the Enlightenment. *Imagine No Religion*’s corpus analysis supports this reading: Barton is clear that religious / secular / political divisions reflect “our modern notions” and are thus “totally inappropriate” in a reading of Tertullian.³⁶ Boyarin warns about the misreading of Josephus that would result from imposing a secular / religious binary on a culture that does not recognize that contrast.³⁷ Boyarin carefully suggests that a concept resembling religion emerged with apologists making appeals to the Roman Emperor to protect their community, yet notes that these applications are vague on the form—are Christians a race, cult, lifestyle, or philosophy?³⁸ This lack of clarity from Christian writers attempting to formulate an instance of what we might now call ‘religion’ refutes the perceived temporal universality of religion.

The imagined universality of religion allows the secular to function similarly to religion in societies such as the Soviet Union, where the ‘secular’ state takes the place of religion, one example of how the secular is a twin rather than opposite of religion. The myth of religious-secular opposition supports the construction of religion by offering a foil against which to define religion. If the secular is the common state with which we are familiar, religion can be a mystical non-state defying perception. The Enlightenment invention of religion involved significant negative definitions beyond the secular. Placing religion in the space of the private, in contrast to politics and economics in the public realm is an Enlightenment interpretation that persists today. Nongbri paraphrases twentieth century theologian John Hick’s definition of “the modern, liberal concept of religion...as convictions, privately held by individuals, that constitute multiple valid paths to salvation.”³⁹ *Multiple* legitimate religions would be somewhat at odds with the historical situation that Nongbri, like Asad, regards as engendering the modern conception. The scholars cite debates over a single *vera religio* arising from ruptures and violence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: “Christian disputes about truth, European colonial exploits,” and “power struggles between emerging nation-states in Europe and at colonial frontiers.”⁴⁰ Nongbri views these three historical stimuli, particularly colonial encounters, as inspiring “comparative acts” creating the academic study of religion—particularly comparative religion—defining itself in contradistinction to others: with “the practices of newly discovered American and African ‘pagans,’ ...*religions* came into focus as legitimate objects of academic study.”⁴¹ The binary of one’s own group and the ‘other’ will be relevant for Premise C, to evaluate how Enlightenment Europeans used the concept of religion as a justification for imperialism.

The case for religion as a modern construction strikes me as overwhelmingly convincing, yet academic opinion (let alone public discourse) has not entirely embraced this interpretation of the genealogy of 'religion.' The counterarguments must be equally compelling. Since Christian Smith declined to weigh in on the above-mentioned critical religious studies critiques on the basis that Martin Riesebrodt, Kevin Schilbrack, and Thomas Tweed had already sufficiently responded to the arguments, I trust that these three will be strong representatives of recent cases for religion's temporal universality.

Riesebrodt's responses to critical religious studies⁴² in *The Promise of Salvation* are that: 1) deconstructing religion is not pragmatic because then one must deconstruct other concepts and give up language,⁴³ 2) such critiques have "often degenerated into simplistic theories of power struggle and conspiracy,"⁴⁴ 3) claiming religion is a Western invention is insulting to non-Western cultures because it 'demotes' their practices,⁴⁵ and most importantly, 4) religion is universal because the term describes meaningful practices that are universal—practices that seek contact with superhuman powers to, as the title indicates, "produce or mediate salvation."⁴⁶ The first argument is an appeal to lazy mediocrity that I hope no doctors hear—why bother vaccinating for polio when the child is bound to get the flu, cancer, heart disease, and ultimately die anyway? The second point is a straw man, and the third an argument from consequences that does not refute the argument and, moreover, assumes that calling something "religion" affords it higher dignity which is clearly begging the question. His central argument tendentiously describes common practices as 'religious' in order to defend the universality of religion. Pranayama is a roughly 500-year-old yogic breathing practice now practiced by relatively small numbers of adherents around the world. It would be ridiculous for me to claim that pranayama is universal because people around the world throughout time have thought about their breathing. Why then should we accept Riesebrodt's claim that religion is universal because he calls ancient egg-cracking and tree-painting fertility practices 'religious'?⁴⁷

Schilbrack engages Timothy Fitzgerald in a recent published exchange⁴⁸ on critical religious studies. Schilbrack acknowledges that 'religion' was 'socially produced' in the modern era as distinct from the secular, and that religion does not exist outside discourse. Nonetheless, he advocates retaining the term, even in scholarship, for the pragmatic purpose of having a cognitive tool.⁴⁹ Retaining the term despite the critiques is akin to recognizing that North America is not India and continuing to call indigenous Americans 'Indians.' In both instances, there is more at stake than insult, deception, or a missed opportunity to clarify expression and advance knowledge, because the terms carry power. 'Indian' summons racist implications of 'barbarism' and even 'savagery,' along with a legacy of imperial oppression, while 'religion' enjoys unearned epistemic privilege.

Most remarkably, Tweed's *Crossing and Dwelling* seeks to reimagine the concept of religion through the object of Cuban-American Catholic practice to account for cross-boundary flow. He argues that 'religion' fails to account for the movement of migrant populations by presuming geographical fixity. Tweed shares some critical religious studies theorists' dissatisfaction with contemporary naturalized understandings of 'religion,' recognizing the term as a modern, European analytic tool.⁵⁰ Yet Tweed's concern is with the *term* used to describe what he presupposes is a universal phenomenon, rather than with the (also his) presumption that such

exists. He rejects Fitzgerald's suggestions for alternative terms (politics, ritual, and soteriology), as well as Daniel Dubuisson's recommendation of 'cosmographic formations,' because Tweed worries these terms' boundaries are not close enough to what 'religion' currently describes. Further, he rejects introducing a new term on the basis that the field has used 'religion' for so long,⁵¹ leaving the reader to guess whether he is appealing to consistency, suggesting that the last 150 years of discourse has constructed a new meaning, or some other reason.

Responding to unnamed theorists claiming religion is not universal because not all languages and cultures have equivalent terms and concepts, Tweed retorts that definitions are not empirical, and in any case difficult to pin down.⁵² So we cannot evaluate whether a given culture has an equivalent to religion if we cannot apply a definition as an empirical measure of a true match or false equivalency, let alone agree on such a definition. With this clever twist, he denies the universality of definition in order to defend the universality of religion. Yet the burden of proof should lie on his positive claim that there exists a universal institution resembling what we call 'religion,' rather than with the critics who find cases that falsify religion's universality according to available understandings of the analytical category. The fatal weakness of Tweed's response to critical religious studies is that he responds to the point that scholars should not use the term 'religion' without responding to the more foundational critique that the term 'religion' does not express what we imagine, because there is no universal religious phenomenon. Using the term 'religion' as a metonym for the concept of religion is a clever rhetorical move that nonetheless begs the question: his premise that there is something universal we call 'religion' depends on the truth of his conclusion that critical religious theory has no reason to claim religion is not universal. None of these responses levy a significant case against the argument that religion is a European Enlightenment construct, so I will proceed with my argument assuming that my premise holds.

Conclusion 1: Contemporary discourse misrepresents 'religion,' whose Enlightenment construction confutes those characteristics

In March 2017, protests erupted at the Whitney Biennial, calling for the museum to remove and destroy Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket*, because protestors thought a white artist should not depict the tragic black subject Emmett Till.⁵³ The same month, the release of the US adaptation of the (pseudonymous) Masamune Shirow's Japanese manga *Ghost in the Shell* garnered outrage for casting Scarlett Johansson as the protagonist and several other white actors in Asian roles. European artists have long portrayed non-white subjects,⁵⁴ and the 'whitewashing' casting of non-white characters by white actors (or in the case of the 2016 *Kubo and the Two Strings*, with a white voiceover) is a common offense in Hollywood going back to the blackface actors in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). These impositions of white culture on non-white culture through film and other visual (and aural) texts are objectionable primarily because they are misrepresentative caricatures of the Other. White authors are creating discourses around people of color that mischaracterize the Others' actions, beliefs, and identities, rather than allowing non-whites to author their own narratives. It is worth extending this critique to the conceptual realm: Europeans representing non-European practices in European terms is an objectionable caricature. Even removing the value judgment, it is inaccurate to apply European concepts universally. We recognize how misleading translations can be: calling a rickshaw a 'bicycle' or caviar "eggs"

gives misleading impressions, while calling a rosary a ‘necklace’ or a tallit a ‘scarf’ erases the significance of both objects. Likewise, ‘religion’ misleads and fails to capture the specific significance of practices beyond Christianity, on which the term is based.

Through discourse, through repeating phrases and contexts in which ‘religion’ appears, language has naturalized an understanding of the term that modern discourse arbitrarily constructed. Discourse creates meaning, a critique that is applicable to religious studies: the field creates what it intends as the object of its study. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Voodoo, etc. belong to a categorical family because humans have spoken and written them together, because discourse has “juxtaposed” them, to borrow Michel Foucault’s characterization, “in the non-place of language” to create a category.⁵⁵ Foucault invokes Borges’ “Chinese Encyclopaedia” example,⁵⁶ which offers a taxonomy of animals at odds with European scientific conceptions of how to catalogue non-human members of our biological kingdom, exposing the arbitrariness of such classification, and suggesting that human language rather than objective fact produce the taxonomy. Hayden White proposes that at “the beginning of all understanding is classification,”⁵⁷ yet such an optimistic chronology omits the misconceptions classifications can inspire.

The naturalized understanding of ‘Religion’ that dominates contemporary discourse, as the analysis above indicates, characterizes religion with strong temporal and geographical universality, plurality, soteriology, and connection to the transcendent. Such discourse views religion as demonstrating many of the ten characteristics of European Enlightenment ‘religion’ I outlined above: temporally and geographically universal, *a priori*, plural, *sui generis*, an analytical category, ontologically extant, systematic, offering a connection to the transcendent, suggesting cosmology, and providing normative ethics. Any given discursive use of religion is unlikely to express all of these traits, yet I believe the composite is representative. While religion can offer cosmology and normative ethics and be systematic regardless of when the term emerged, the other traits become difficult to defend if, as Asad, Barton, Boyarin, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Dubuisson, Fitzgerald, Fowles, Tomoko Masuzawa, Russell T. McCutchen, Nongbri, Saler, and others are correct that ‘religion’ is not ancient. If religion emerged roughly half a millennium ago, and Homo sapiens have had roughly their current form for about two-hundred millennia, and have lived in settlements with agriculture for about a dozen millennia, then religion cannot be intrinsic to humans and human society any more than printed books are intrinsic to what it means to be human. We forget the historical contextualization of most concepts, which is fine when the stakes are low. As I discuss in the following sections, the stakes are higher for religion due to value judgments and associated privileges. If Asad is correct, and religion emerges as a binary twin to secularism, then it would appear inaccurate to view religion as *sui generis*, since it has such a similar equivalent category. Perhaps most importantly, religion can be neither temporally nor geographically universal if it is a European Enlightenment construction.

There is a tension in the perception of religion as at once universal and particular: broad enough to encompass dramatically dissimilar institutions, yet specific enough to describe a meaningful set of characteristics that give religion its epistemological privilege. This tension is part of the reason theorists like Tweed have difficulty defending retaining the term. Recognizing the

historical misrepresentation of the term, yet unwilling to admit that there is no ancient, intrinsic analytic category that would fulfill their requirements, they seek an impossibility: a term particular enough to delimit what they understand by ‘religion’ and universal enough to accurately reflect institutions across time and place. To understand why some theorists are unwilling to relinquish such an understanding of religion, in the next section I offer examples of ways modern Europeans have used the perception of religion as an epistemically powerful universal, intrinsic analytic category to justify their actions.

Fallacious Imperialism

“All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”
— Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*⁵⁸

Paine wrote *Age of Reason* in the final years of the eighteenth century, in the context of the Eastern Orthodox and Muslim Ottoman conflicts in the Russo-Turkish Wars, and the Catholic church doing in the Americas precisely what he describes in the quotation.⁵⁹ Fewer than 20 years later, it is unclear whether the “Jewish and Turkish” still count as “national institutions of churches” in the 1811 Religious Freedom Act in Massachusetts, which ensures tax support for religions to be a tool for civilizing barbarians. Yet the religions are actually only Christian ones: the act limits legal protection to “every denomination of Christians, demeaning themselves peaceably,” deploying what Fitzgerald calls “value judgment about non-Christian forms of life as irrational barbarisms.”⁶⁰ Just over a decade later, the Supreme Court rules in *Johnson v. M’Intosh* that private individuals cannot purchase land from Native Americans, because the latter are not Christian, and are therefore inferior to Europeans. The authors believed that Europeans (in their “ascendency”) bringing “civilization and Christianity” constitutes “ample compensation” for the land. Psychological speculation on whether Chief Justice John Marshall actually believed that religion was fair compensation for land is beyond the scope of my project. Rather, I am interested in suggesting the possibility that ‘religion’ provided a convenient pretext for white supremacy and land theft.

A few years later, Andrew Jackson shifts the argument to race to justify taking land from Native Americans who had converted to Christianity, on the basis of their race rather than lack of Christianity. The logic of the justification remains the same: Europeans have the right to steal land from those who do not share their identity—first Christian, and then white. This progression illustrates my fifth test of pretexts: the shifting justification. This possibility that a stated reason is a mere pretext speaks to several central questions of this chapter: do justifications (whether pretexts or reasons) rooted in religious doctrine receive asymmetrical or unjust epistemic privilege? Correspondingly, as a naturalized construct, does ‘religion’ gain incontrovertibility that it extends to the texts it produces, the religious justifications? What role does the naturalizations of pretext as justification and religion as an analytical category have in reinforcing the asymmetrical epistemic privilege and extension of incontrovertibility? Religion’s

incontrovertibility is particularly dangerous if justifying pretexts for violence: epistemic and economic violence in the case of *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, as well as in contemporary cases.

Premise C: Modern Europeans have used religion to justify imperialism

“I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the South is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,—and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me. For of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them to be the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others. It was my unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder, but to live in a community of such religionists.”
 – Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*⁶¹

Douglass clearly distinguishes the “Christianity of Christ” from that of such “religionists,”⁶² a distinction one could analyze in many ways. The relevant distinction I would like to emphasize is that the religion he describes is not a theoretical religion, but a specifically historically- and socially-situated religion of slaveholders, the “religion of the South.” The specificity is important to understand the function: as a pretext for violence. Douglass writes that this religion is “a mere covering...justifier...sanctifier...dark shelter” for violent crimes. His terms are all synonyms for pretext, describing a stated justification that veils the true motivation in a more palatable façade: religion. That religion is a more acceptable source of justifications, and that religiously-based pretexts offer “the strongest protection” reflect the epistemic privilege of religion I discuss in Premise E. By negatively comparing religious slaveholders to non-religious slaveholders, he implies that the religious pretexts either allow or motivate the religious slaveholders to treat slaves more heinously. We might view the first reading as indicating an outward-focused pretext: slaveholders wish to treat slaves barbarically, and the religious pretext gives them license to do so without facing social condemnation. The second reading suggests an inward-focused pretext: slaveholders whose conscience would otherwise forbid them from treating slaves infernally feel vindicated in their offenses by the religious pretext authorizing their violence.

These contrasting interpretations raise an important question for the definition of pretext and the defense of religion: are Southern slaveholders exploiting religion as a basis for pretexts to justify their violence against slaves? Or are religious Southern slaveholders finding motivation to commit violence in their interpretations of religion? The latter implication leads to Richard Dawkinsesque arguments that religion causes violence. The former implication, that violent people look for justifications for their crimes and find religion a powerful source, seems closer to what Douglass believed, given the emphasis at the end of the passage on the *community* of religious slaveholders. Were the pretexts inward-focused, then the community’s religiosity would be irrelevant, but if the pretexts were outward-focused, then the community would reaffirm and compound the pretexts through validation and echo.

Douglass's point in this passage is that religion in the South provided slaveholders a pretext to violently mistreat slaves, a pretext they embraced. By the nineteenth century, the US had moved out of its colonial era yet colonial epistemologies still framed the country's perceptions of race. Douglass is describing vestiges of a colonial mentality that persist today and echo European imperial ideology observable in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Greenland (stay tuned). David Chidester identifies one element of the colonial epistemology of Europeans in southern Africa that informed racist governing practices over centuries of white rule in the region: the stereotype of "primitive mentality." He describes how the "symbolic instrument of social segregation, economic exploitation, and political control" is identifiable "from justifications of nineteenth-century colonial domination to the implementation of twentieth-century apartheid."⁶³ The racist misconceptions instrumental in helping imperialists justify colonizing the Americas and Africa, and in providing the ethical framework to support centuries of legalized slavery and did not end with apartheid. It would be a mistake to shake our heads at the intellectual crimes of past centuries when the misconceptions continue to inform our worldviews. Before addressing the contemporary stakes, consider how post-Enlightenment Europeans employed religion to justify imperialism.

Just as my elementary school classmates defined me as a dangerous and convertible 'other' through their question of whether I believed in God, so too modern European construction of religion defined the other as a potential object of preemptive violence and conversion. Whether one traces the origins of a contemporary conception of religion to the Enlightenment,⁶⁴ or imperialist motives,⁶⁵ or from early Christian heresiology,⁶⁶ a common thread shows 'religion' crystalizing in contradistinction to an other. Dubuisson credits this contradistinctive self-definition with imbuing religion with power, arguing that religion is hegemonic "because it defined itself from the very outset in opposition to everything it judged not to be itself."⁶⁷ In the context of defining civilization against an antithesis, White calls the definition through contradistinction "the technique of ostensive self-definition by negation," and "civilizational identification by negative definition" perhaps the most common kind of cultural definition. Quoting St Augustine's *The City of God* on how irrelevant ideas are invoked in the interest of what is significant, White suggests that such definitions point to what those definitions' authors seek to defend.⁶⁸ Faced with European definitions of the other, we should ask what the definers were interested in protecting and excusing.

Europeans defined religion as truth against heresy, orthodoxy against the heterodoxy, civilization against barbarity, the sacred against the profane. Defining a term in opposition to an other through a false binary invites equivocation. If religion is 'not politics,' then it can occupy any and all positions that are 'not politics.' Religion can refer to personal belief or grounds for legal protection, a universal category uniting all humans, or an identity setting one group apart from another. Equivocation, in turn, suggests that if the term is so indistinct, it must be incomparable, *sui generis*. Equivocation lends itself to universalizing, since speakers can leverage various definitions or elements to suggest sufficient similarity to diverse phenomena. Religion's equivocal definition allows a range of similarities to cast a broad net of Wittgensteinian family resemblances based on similarities between religion's Christian prototype⁶⁹ and practices or institutions that may share traits (such as deism, ritual, sacred texts, or belief in an afterlife) with Christianity but not each other, reinforcing the prototype's centrality. Though today people use

the term as though it has always had the same meaning, ‘religion’ was premised on Christianity. Thus, Christianity’s contrast to the other strengthens Christianity’s hegemony, and conceals its relationship to its ‘daughter,’⁷⁰ religion, protecting a universalized view of religion.

Universality of religion is necessary for the European comparison of inferior non-European manifestations to a higher Christian prototype, because the non-Christian ‘religions’ needed to be similar enough to fall within the same analytic category, and along the same imagined evolutionary path. Similarly to how Asad sees religion as a binary twin of the secular,⁷¹ Francois Le Vaillant suggests that the conception of superstition⁷² emerged from a conception of religion,⁷³ as European comparative religion sought to define the European institution against an inferior other. Europeans use(d) the figure of the barbarian to cast Africans as inferior, in religious and racialized terms; recall Douglass’s description of Southern religion as “a justifier of the most appalling barbarity.” Douglass’s choice of words is all the more powerful for its reversal of the civilization / barbarity binary to cast him, a freed black slave, as the civilized observer of white slaveholders’ barbarity.

Between being removed from his astronomy post and going blind from drink, Peter Kolb plied southern African Hottentots with tobacco and brandy until they provided him with accounts of their ‘religion’ that Kolb found sufficiently comparable to Judaism and Roman-Catholicism to constitute a ‘religion.’⁷⁴ Chidester recounts how W. E. B. Du Bois grappled with the European production of African fetishism as a religion, first endeavoring to defend it as source of African cultural pride and then critiquing the European “notion of the fetish as an ideological cover for relegating Africans to a subhuman status and justifying slavery.”⁷⁵ The European construction of religions on a hierarchy of evolution offers a tantalizing promise to non-Europeans who see the potential for their societies to ultimately reach an enlightened state. It takes a critical rejection of European norms and definitions, as Du Bois demonstrates, to free those societies from the imposed definitions that posit them as inferior.

Masuzawa characterizes the corpus of writings by educated late nineteenth Europeans (and North Americans) on comparative world religions as poorly researched and strongly motivated by the authors’ “underlying interests” to complement Christianity, “justify the presumption of its superiority over all other religions,” and provide “legitimacy to its missionary expansion.”⁷⁶ In her view, not only are Europeans using religion to justify imperialism, but they are also creating systems of knowledge production to create stronger justifications.

Chidester’s two monographs on the European construction of religion in southern Africa support Masuzawa’s argument, envisioning comparative religion in helpful models for seeing how the “studies” of “native religion” generated pretexts for imperialism. *Savage Systems* (1996) offers a hermeneutical argument about how religion was co-created by imperial powers, white observers, and indigenous informants at the peripheries of the empire. *The Empire of Religion* (2014) proposes an epistemological argument from the perspective of the urban and academic centers of comparative religion in imperialism tracing the production, authentication, and circulation of ‘religion,’ and how those stages of production indicate motives behind the process of generating religion in imperialized lands. The former—concerned with geographical divisions and physical contact or interactions—distinguishes three kinds of comparative religions: frontier

(e.g. local containment), imperial (e.g. universal coherence), and apartheid (e.g. local control on universal terms). The latter book—concerned with those stages, sites, and authentication of knowledge production—categorizes comparative religions as interfaith (e.g. privileging the insider informant), theosophical (e.g. concern with esoteric wisdom), and critical (e.g. adjudicating theories and knowledge claims). The divisions in the former emphasize the instrumental application of European ethnographic study of comparative religion and the attendant political motives for constructing certain conceptual frames. The divisions in the latter suggest how the academic frameworks have influenced broader public understanding of religion. For Chidester, the European’s motives are clear: “dispossession and exploitation of Africans could be justified by referring to this primitive mentality...in terms of the comparative findings of the modern study of religion”⁷⁷ If religion is an inherent human universal, and Christianity is the prototypical religion, then the institutions that comparative religious studies find to share some similarities to Christianity (such as ritual, appeal to a supernatural force, or ethical framework) are less evolved religions. This universal view of “religion” on a Christian prototype impels non-Christians to conceive of their beliefs on homogenous European terms and in ways that justify European imperialism.

Echoing the logic of Johnson v. M’Intosh, Canadian historian George McCall Theal supports the union British-Afrikaner government of South Africa’s 1913 Land Act that seized land from black populations to consolidate white-owned territory, displacing Africans from desirable areas of the country to infertile regions that the white colonists could not farm. The act left black populations dependent for subsistence on white rulers, providing a large population of exploitable labor and little opportunity for community enrichment that might empower dissenters. Chidester describes how, though the union government had sufficient political power to push the Land Act through without academic legitimation, “Theal nevertheless practiced a comparative religion that justified this dispossession” by defining a trans-African Bantu religion without land rights, because “the syncretistic character of Bantu religion revealed that their original homeland was in Asia.”⁷⁸ Believing that southern African religions descended from the lost tribes of Israel, Theal argues their diasporic wanderings had degraded them into barbarians, and that “the law of God” authorized civilized Europeans to take the land of the barbaric peoples.⁷⁹

In contrast to the European prototype, missionaries, imperialists, and the intellectuals whose work validated European imperialism found superstition, barbarity, and primitive religion in lands they sought to imperialize. In Chidester’s words, “imperial theorists of the human sciences generated accounts of the primitive, whether African, Indian, or Irish, that could be used to justify coercion while awaiting the long evolutionary delay in their trajectory to civilized liberty.”⁸⁰ Chidester’s diction of the imperial theorists generating rather than reporting accounts of “the primitive” suggests the construction of a narrative rather than an observation of culture: the theorists authored this portrait of an inferior other. The inclusion of the Irish in this list highlights how the concept of ‘race’ has changed even in the past 200 years, which should remind the reader to suspend contemporary understandings of other important concepts, such as ‘religion.’ European construction of the Other, including the other religion, became central to producing pretexts for imperialism. As religion’s binary twin, secularism similarly became a tool for imperial control by changing the terms of ‘religion.’ Chidester exemplifies such a move with

the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference, which reversed previous colonial conversion practices by promising native subjects “religious toleration” while dividing and distributing those African societies amongst ‘secular’ European states.⁸¹ The conference replaced European religious control over the continent with a secular political control, offering indigenous populations freedom to practice their own ‘religions’ as compensation for lost political autonomy or ‘secular’ freedom.

By the process of defining the other in contradistinction to a European prototype, Christian traits come to define evolved religion, justifying a civilizing mission of helping non-Christians evolve towards a higher-level religion than their own ‘barbaric’ and unevolved ‘religions.’ Presumptions that one’s own status is more evolved can produce misconceptions. Early European observers assumed that the spider monkey’s lack of thumbs indicated an inferior evolutionary stage, yet more recent evolutionary research indicates that the spider monkey evolved away from thumbs to increase their agility in the forest canopy. Of course, Christian theology privileging Genesis 2 views woman as taken out of man, with man as the original and thus superior creation, which is at odds with contemporary understandings of biology. What comparable assumptions have Europeans made about the inferior Other? Dubuisson decries the “disastrous consequences” of a European worldview being “tacitly raised by Western science to the dignity of the norm, model, and reference point by which all other cultures were to be measured.”⁸² Since the European observers were constructing African ‘religion’ on a Christian prototype, they could construct it in ways that served their pretexts. Chidester offers the example: “[s]ince African superstition was supposedly based on terror, the military exercise of terror against them by a Christian government could be justified as an appropriate means for replacing superstition with religion.”⁸³ Through selective ethnography based on poor data and equivocations about ‘religion’ in non-European contexts, colonial governments were able to shift local ‘religion’ to their present needs. To justify a civilizing mission, they portrayed the native religions as descendants of common religious foundations, led astray through centuries in Africa. To justify land theft, they created a nomadic history that invalidated land ownership. Then to justify violence, they portrayed the ‘religion’ as premised on violence.

Justifying imperialism on the basis of religion is not limited to European colonialism in Africa. In South Asia, identification of Indian practices as ‘religion’ helped justify not only colonialism,⁸⁴ but also the East India Company’s economic ventures on the subcontinent.⁸⁵ Christina Petterson’s analysis of the Danish Lutheran colonization of Greenland’s Inuits from the early eighteenth century through Foucaultian theory offers important insights into the application of religious pretext in colonialism more generally. Petterson presents the role of religion as offering pretext and strengthening the colonial project. Discussing the economic motivations of the Danish colonial project, she argues that the perceived religious-secular divide veils the Christian ideological underpinnings of colonial administrations. Contrasting the Danes’ Protestantism with the Roman-Catholicism of most imperial campaigns of the time, Petterson claims the reformation opened up the missionary call to a broader European base. She credits the reformation with introducing a new doctrine that sanctioned not only missionaries but also lay believers to justify evangelical conversion through what Martin Luther calls “[j]ustification by faith alone,” giving all believers spiritual authority to proselytize. Of course Roman-Catholics also engaged in conversion colonialism, such as Franciscan Friar Saint Junípero Serra y Ferrer,

who led the Catholic conversion of California and founded the missions dotting our coast (and killed thousands of indigenous babies to save their souls), or the Jesuit missionaries whose legacy plays a formative role in the first science fiction religion I analyze in Chapter 3.

While Wallace is concerned with how faith galvanized the common folk to evangelize, the reformation had a similar effect on the political elite, who could now justify their conversion colonialism without being priests. Certainly, lay missionaries like Theal played important roles in constructing religion in South Africa, and perhaps one could read the East India Company's merger of religious articulation with economic interests as a protestant mission. Rather than viewing race as a separate source of pretext for imperialism, Petterson presents racial justifications as derivatives of religious ones, with Christianity constituting an important intellectual foundation of racism. Petterson explains, citing Richard Dyer on the construction of whiteness, how the perceived link between body and soul generates the distinction between good body and bad body, with the good body being the Christ-like white body of conversion colonialism.⁸⁶ This interpretation of Greenland's colonization offers a compelling trinity of how Enlightenment Europeans used religion to justify their imperialism: post-Enlightenment / post-Reformation European Christians defined themselves against the barbaric other, constructing race and empowering the laity to go convert, which combined to offer a worldview justifying the exploitation of lesser spirits in lesser bodies.

Why, you might ask, would colonial subjects choose to belong to their colonizer's religions, if the religions were truly responsible for so much violence in their communities? Just as women perpetuate patriarchy and the poor cling to capitalism, humans tend to be desperate for power and most familiar with the mechanisms used to oppress us. So too, religious converts seek power from the mechanisms they know. Missionaries such as Henry Callaway (himself a Church of England convert) justified their work converting African colonial subjects in part through affirmations from Christian converts such as Mpengula Mbande, who told Callaway a purported Zulu cosmology warranting Christian domination as the triumph of superior wisdom.⁸⁷ Yet such missionaries failed to recognize diversity within the local populations, such as Mbande's displacement due to colonialism that might place him in a unique social position. Missionaries were uncritical of the power structures that would motivate conquered people to align themselves with the new powers.

The desire to conform to new epistemologies and appeal to new power structures did not necessarily derive from positions of vulnerability. Masuzawa suggests that the Indian elite of nineteenth century Hindu Modernism who corroborated a religious orientalist view of Hinduism as an ancient Indian faith may have done so in the interest of modernization and reform.⁸⁸ Petterson cites multiple mid-eighteenth century missionaries to Greenland who are stunned that indigenous women easily and consistently choose to marry Danish sailors whom the missionaries consider lowly and undesirable over the most distinguished Greenlanders men.⁸⁹ While some imperialist Danes worried that the disruption to local family structures might hurt their economic interests in the country, the missionaries questioned what bribes the women must be accepting. Rather, it seems that the women recognized the system of power and, perhaps with an eye to the future, chose to align themselves and their children with the new elite.

Premise D: Justifications for imperialism rely on perceived characteristics of religion

The relative youth of the concept of ‘religion’ made Africa all the riper for religious study in the imperialist age. Equivocating on their terms of what constitutes concepts such as religion, secularity, identity, and civilization served their interests. Such equivocation and the indefinability of the term ‘religion’ contribute to its instrumental power: institutions, individuals, and courts can appeal to shifting definitions of ‘religion’ to serve their interests. Meanwhile, Europe’s previous inattention to Africa allowed nineteenth century ethnographers to craft new narratives for the continent and its cosmologies, defining religion through comparison, then building identities for themselves and those they colonized based on the European-other religious comparisons. Africa was at Europe’s intellectual and colonial periphery. As Chidester emphasizes, interpretations at the periphery expose the ‘entanglements’ of ethnographic and colonial projects, of the military with studies of religion, and of defining local religions with devising methods of control. Meanwhile, European biases masked the production of religion as part of imperialism, naturalizing European references and assumptions, and allowing elisions and misrepresentations of non-European objects. As Saler argues in his discussion of prototype theory, the center’s definition of the prototype ethnocentrically distorts the peripheries.⁹⁰ The hazy line of the peripheries Chidester describes also shows the incompatibility of the colonial desire to blur the borders of ‘religion’ with the colonial understanding of religion as a hermeneutically coherent bounded object. Meanwhile, imperialist agents encouraged the unbounded expansion of the boundaries of ‘religion.’ To use examples from Chidester, imperialist anthropologists and colonial functionaries equivocated on whether, *Qamata* or *uNkulunkulu* are translatable to ‘God,’ and whether animism or totemism are classifiable as ‘religion.’⁹¹

The perceived temporal and geographical universality of religion masks such historical elements supporting justifications for imperialism. How could Europeans manipulate the definition for their political advantage or miscategorize other institutions to fit their argument if religion is an ancient and world-wide phenomenon? Imperialists depend on the view of religion as temporally universal and *a priori* to reinforce their definitions as naturalized, and on a perceived geographical universality and plurality of religions to defend claims of non-European institutions’ place in a hierarchy of religions. The studies of religion that supported the imperial project likewise depended on perceived traits of religion. Figures like Kolb and Theal treated religion as a *sui generis* analytic category in order to classify the non-Christian religions they studied. Were religion not a unique category describing such phenomena, then the traditions of non-European groups might be more fitting in another category. Were it not an analytic category, it would not be so appropriate for the scientific studies they imagined themselves to be conducting. Portraying religion as facilitating human connection to the transcendent, providing a cosmology, and offering normative ethics were instrumental in justifying European religion’s ascendancy. If Christianity is a more evolved form of religion, then it must offer a closer relationship between humans and the divine, with a more sophisticated cosmology, and more Godly normative ethics. Not only does a higher evolutionary status inspire conversion colonialism, but it also validates Christian political dominance.

Conclusion 2: Enlightenment Europeans' use of religion to justify imperialism is fallaciously based on questionable premises

“Why should we not form a secret society with but one object the furtherance of the British Empire and the bringing of the whole uncivilised world under British rule... Africa is still lying ready for us it is our duty to take it.”
– Cecil Rhodes⁹²

Rhodes is but one forthright example of Europeans justifying their imperialism as an altruistic campaign to civilize a barbarian ‘other.’ Yet Europeans were the subject defining the theoretical and taxonomical framework: Europeans defined their civilization in contradistinction to the barbarian other.⁹³ Thus, their justification begs the question, fallaciously using circular reasoning. They created their own authority to defend their authority. The *noblesse oblige* characterizing Rhodes’ nineteenth century missionary work as well as today’s white savior complex humanitarian photo-op voluntourism rely on a comparative religious and cultural studies suggesting an evolutionary spectrum of religion or civilization. In addition to defining the civilized European subject against the barbaric non-European other, modern imperialists and missionaries have justified their superiority by claiming that European religion is more evolved than non-European ‘religion.’ Europeans constructed the purported universality of ‘religion’ that would make the institutions comparable. Since Europeans defined ‘religion’ on a Christian prototype, Christianity would be definitionally closer to the prototype and therefore viewed as more evolved. Thus, Europeans were defining their own terms, so their argument is fallacious.

Premise C offered examples to show how modern Europeans have used religion to justify imperialism, then Premise D introduced how justifications for imperialism rely on perceived characteristics of religion from Premise A, which argued that a view of religion demonstrating these ten characteristics (listed following this chapter for easy reference) is fundamental to a modern (post-Enlightenment) understanding of religion. Recall that Conclusion 1 made the case that those characteristics are a misrepresentation. If the justifications for imperialism are premised on characteristics that are a misrepresentation, then the foundations of those justifications are questionable.

Religion’s Fallacious Privilege

Premise E: The perceived characteristics of religion afford it epistemic privilege

“[W]ords create worlds, especially those categories that order dominant discourses.”
– Timothy Fitzgerald⁹⁴

Describing the “conceptual and epistemological space” the post-reformation construction of religion created as separate from politics and economics, Fitzgerald describes one mechanism through which religion has gained authority in the modern era. Though precursors of contemporary ‘religions’ were hardly distinguishable from political entities,⁹⁵ modern discourse frames ‘religion’ as a sphere distinct from ‘the secular,’ creating a rhetorical space imbued with

certain epistemic, ethical, and ironically also political and economic privileges. Daniel Boyarin characterizes the modern view that “religions are fixed sets of conditions with well-defined boundaries.”⁹⁶ Admission into those boundaries carries epistemic privilege signifying the knowledge generated by the institution as more valuable than those generated by other sources. Schilbrack reinforced this metaphor of boundaries by comparing religion to national borders: both socially-constructed concepts whose continuation depends on discursive recognition.⁹⁷

The epistemological status of ‘religion’ leads even thinkers who are highly critical of religion, like Freud, to include it among the defining intellectual accomplishments of civilization.⁹⁸ So desirable is a place within that privileged boundary, that a professor of African Philosophy, a well-meaning white German woman at the University of Hamburg, told our class that to categorize African belief systems as anything short of religion was an insulting and degrading form of white supremacy. A sincerely-held belief that religion is a human universal allowed this professor to overlook the tension of holding this belief while advocating Franz Fanon’s critique of European intellectual lenses as a form of cultural imperialism.

When Frederick Douglass writes that religion offers slaveholders “the strongest protection” for their violence, he is describing the epistemic privilege that religion enjoys. When audiences assign knowledge deriving from a particular source more authority on the basis of that source, then the source enjoys epistemic privilege, granted through the audience’s perception of the source’s “epistemic trustworthiness,” to use Miranda Fricker’s phrase. For Fricker, epistemic trustworthiness falls into two categories: competence and sincerity, deriving from perceived authority, ethical virtue, race, class, gender, and other sources of prejudice.⁹⁹ As a source, religion has high epistemic trustworthiness because it creates the worldview that makes it a dominant discourse, defines its own boundaries and oppositions, and reaffirms its discursive construction through its practice. As one of the categories modern society views as shaping dominant discourse, religion sets its perceived characteristics—such as the ten I introduced in Premise A and provide again following this Chapter.

One of religion’s most powerful epistemic benefits in contemporary discourse is incontrovertibility: that arguments arising from religion hold a protected status. Institutionally, there are legal protections for religion in the US and elsewhere, as evidenced by numerous examples of decisions protecting otherwise ethically questionable actions or stances on the basis that they are religiously motivated.¹⁰⁰ On individual levels as well, audiences perceive religion to deserve epistemic trustworthiness, to use Fricker’s term. A deist audience that believes religion achieves a connection to the transcendent might believe religion deserves epistemic privilege because it communicates divine knowledge, which humans should not question. The defense of the Bible as incontrovertibly true because it is the word of God follows this logic. Agnostic audiences tend to assign religion epistemic privilege on the basis that it is a *sui generis* analytic category intrinsic to humanity or society. Viewing religion as *sui generis* absolves it of the standards to which otherwise comparable institutions would be held, while viewing it as an analytic category offers religion the formal recognition of an established knowledge system.

Fitzgerald expresses such a concern that a contemporary conception of religion as a *sui generis*, temporally and spatially universal, inherent, ontologically extant category has become

“essentialised as a generic category and used descriptively and analytically as though religion is something that unproblematically exists in the world, or alternatively as a heuristic category” whose interpretation is up to the scholar’s—or the imperialist’s—discretion.¹⁰¹ Even for an agnostic, believing religion to be intrinsic naturalizes religion, placing non-religious agents in a defensive ‘other’ category holding the burden to disprove epistemic reliability. Believing that religious faith is inherent to humanity implies that it deserves respect and epistemic privilege.

Perhaps the most important element from a discursive perspective is that religion sets the terms of the discourse, creating its own power. Those in power want to protect their power, and if they can control the discourse, they can discursively protect their power. Asad presents the problem as an epistemic asymmetry in history-making, the process of society and academia imagining and presenting histories as fact rather than interpretation. Projecting a contemporary definition of religion selectively¹⁰² homogenizes humanity and history. Given that ‘religion’ is a Western term, he worries that viewing non-Western society through the lens of a Western concept—let alone writing non-Western history in Western terms—is misleading and reveals an epistemological power asymmetry: the West sets the terms of the debate, becomes the norm, unreciprocatingly expects others to assimilate to the West, and belongs everywhere while others are “uprooted” when not in their historically limited “local place of origin.”¹⁰³ The Western concept of religion’s power in history-making skews the narrative.¹⁰⁴ Fitzgerald echoes Asad that the universalization of a Western protestant concept inaccurately projects a homogenized view of human societies and history, constructs secularism as a foil for religion, and uses the field’s rituals and scientific veneer to project objectivity.

As Asad critiques the asymmetry in epistemological power and the focus of history-making with the Christian West, Fitzgerald argues that asserting a modern conception of religion in studies of the pre-modern or the non-Western is “subordinating the whole history of humankind to our own presuppositions.”¹⁰⁵ Fitzgerald extends Dubuisson’s critique that the Western construction of religion creates a world beyond which it cannot see¹⁰⁶ in two ways: first to suggest that Western religion prevents other societies from seeing beyond the West’s construct as well. Second, Fitzgerald sees the construction circularly reinforcing itself by creating “a presumed reality in a way which validates our own practices, our own sense of who we are as enlightened moderns.” This element “of our knowledge industry” normalizes and reinforces itself, for itself and as a justification for its hegemony,¹⁰⁷ and religion’s epistemic privilege. The justificatory power of religion is crucial to Fitzgerald’s treatment of binary definitions of religion in contradistinction to science, politics, and the public state. Each iteration of this religion / secular binary reflects a way religion justifies access to power, the exercise of which can indicate the pretexts are non-motivating. For example, deploying (secular) military to protect (religious) missionaries negates the binary between religious and secular wings of society while exposing the imperialist motives.¹⁰⁸ Further, the separation of church and state in the late eighteenth century US Constitution, which for Fitzgerald marks “the full emergence of the modern idea of religion as the private exercise of a right granted by the state... defined by its separation from religion,” initially appears to grant freedom of religion while giving the secular state the power to protect religious practice, negating the binary separation and validating the power of the state.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion 3: Religion's epistemic privilege is unfounded, again fallaciously based on questionable premises

“Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. And remember, I am with you each and every day until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Missionary imperialists citing of religious authority such as Matthew 28:19-20 to justify their conversion colonialism presupposes that the Bible or religion is a valid authority. I mean the ‘or’ to imply a disjunction (‘one or the other’) rather than a synonym (‘that is to say’), understanding that, in Boyarin’s words, “Texts are not religions.”¹¹⁰ I employ the diction ‘presupposes’ as an intentional reference to J. L. Austin’s three ways in which statements convey the truth of other statements or concepts: through entailing, implying, or presupposing.¹¹¹ Common discursive use of ‘religion’ illustrates all three conveyances. The phrase “world religions” entails that there are multiple institutions that simultaneously fall under the definition of a concept of ‘religion.’ Also, positive statements entail that a negation is not true: to say “humans have practiced religion since the beginning of time” entails that religion was not constructed as a concept in human history. More dramatically, to say “religion is a human universal” entails that there was neither temporal beginning nor geographical boundary to religion’s existence, and that religion cannot not exist as an analytical category. The phrases “in God we trust” and “one nation under God” imply that there exists a God in which one can trust or under which a people could unify, as well as implying a collective ‘we’ and unified nation, respectively. The question with which I opened the chapter, “do you believe in God?” presupposes that there is a God in which one either believes or (wrongly) does not believe. Inserting an indefinite article demonstrates the unstated strength of that presupposition. Just as “do you know Niklaus?” presupposes that there is a Niklaus whereas “do you know *a* Niklaus?” allows for the possibility that no one named Niklaus exists, asking “do you believe in *a* God?” allows for the possibility of no God.

If the presuppositions are false, then the statement is unsatisfied because, for Austin, it lacks reference.¹¹² Though the statements condition the audience to believe the truth of the other concepts, even reaffirming their truth through the statement, imagine how meaningless the common phrases are if the concepts entailed, implied, or presupposed are not true. If there is no God, then “I believe in God” may still be true, but it is unsatisfied because what the speaker believes does not correspond to the truth of the term. To claim “I believe in ghosts” may mean that I think living people can perceive a manifestation of people who have died. That does not mean that ghosts are perceptible manifestations of dead people, but rather that I use the term ‘ghost’ to indicate an imagined nonexistent entity. Likewise, false entailments can undermine the meaning of a statement without falsifying the statement. If ‘religion’ refers to an Enlightenment European construction based on a prototype of Christianity rather than the universal analytical category that contemporary discourse presumes, then “world religions” is as senseless as “world Rococoisms.”

The dangers of overlooking the derivation of ‘religion’ as a modern offspring of Christianity extend beyond simply getting history wrong. The mythologized modern universal¹¹³ definition of religion permits the field of comparative religion that—Chidester warns, citing a colonial

government report—imperialists intentionally “deployed as a science of knowledge and power, as an aid to the containment and control of indigenous populations.”¹¹⁴ Those in power have leveraged comparative religion as a pretext (a stated rationale occupying the discursive role of veiling motivating reasons or manipulating the audience) for controlling others. In academia, religious studies’ disciplinary foundations are at stake, thanks to critiques of ethical value and intellectual rigor in certain modes of knowledge production (e.g. ethnography, politically-motivated data collection, translation, universality) that hold implications for the humanities more generally.

Contra theorists seeking to redeem ‘religion’ and ‘religious studies,’ such as McCutcheon, who would like to improve the field by revealing the modes of production and cleanse them with transparency, Masuzawa warns that efforts to “purify the science we have inherited...always seem to end up whitewashing our own situation rather than rectifying the past” because “the problem of Orientalist science is not a matter of would-be pure knowledge contaminated by ulterior political interests, or science compromised by colonialism.”¹¹⁵ For human society, contemporary discourses of ‘religion’ reveal that individual liberty is at stake. As Saba Mahmood shows, freedom and liberty are Western, not universal values;¹¹⁶ secularism may not free people to hold beliefs authentic to their society, but rather force them to conceive of their beliefs on European terms in ways that justify European imperialism.

There is a logical danger to accepting religion’s epistemic privilege on the grounds of a perception of religion discursively constructed by those seeking to promote religion through characteristics such as universality or connection with the divine. Recall how Trump seems to elide belief in God with being Christian, and the Bible with religion. Believing religion’s platform that it deserves epistemic privilege as deriving from divine knowledge elides holy texts with God and religion, implying a circular reasoning and pulling even non-believers into a suspended disbelief in which they hold an epistemic response in accordance with faith in God’s existence. A non-believer should not afford religion epistemic privilege on the basis of it deriving from divine knowledge, for they should not believe in divine knowledge. As I hoped to express through the short story epigraph, God and religion are distinct. Detangling the elision of holy texts with God and religion, it should not matter whether God exists, because divinity does not imply anything about the Bible, nor about religion. God could exist without that necessitating that God wrote any holy texts. If we truly separate the terms, it should not matter whether there exists a God who wrote a holy text, because both are distinct categories from religion. Even if God exists, God wrote a holy text such as the Bible, God was sincere (in Fricker’s ethical sense of the term) in the Bible without subsequently changing any views, what God wrote in the Bible still applies, and humans are capable of adequately interpreting the Bible, there is no a priori reason why ‘religion’ deserves epistemic privilege.

If we detangle that elision of God-Bible-religion, and recognize ‘religion’ as a modern European construction premised on a Christian prototype, then the knowledge that the category produces is more indebted to the Enlightenment discourse that created the category than to a God. As I imply in Premise C, the discourse that created the category of religion may have been motivated by a desire to justify imperialism; as I argue in Premise D, those justifications relied on characteristics of the discursive construction. The self-referential prototype and self-serving motives behind a

European construction of ‘religion’ should raise the audience’s suspicions, prompting great care in evaluating the epistemic value of that construction.

Premise E addressed how perceived characteristics of religion from Premise A (viewing religion as a *sui generis*, intrinsic, temporally and spatially universal, ontologically extant analytical category offering a connection to the transcendent) afford religion epistemic privilege. Recall that Conclusion 1 made the case that those characteristics are a misrepresentation. If religion’s epistemic privilege derives from characteristics that are a misrepresentation, then the foundation of the epistemic privilege is questionable; ‘religion’ does not deserve epistemic privilege. At this point, it is important to ask whether there are any dangers of continuing to grant religion epistemic privilege. To answer that question, the following sections attempt to address the stakes of religious justificatory power.

Religion’s Undeserved Justificatory Weight

Premise F: Epistemic privilege increases justificatory weight

“Wo die Moral aus die Theologie, das Recht auf göttliche Einsetzung gegründet wird, da kann man die unmoralischsten, unrechtlichsten, schändlichsten Dinge rechtfertigen und begründen. Ich kann die Moral durch die Theologie nur begründen, wenn ich selbst schon durch die Moral das göttliche Wesen bestimme...Etwas in Gott setzen oder aus Gott ableiten, das heißt nichts weiter als etwas der prüfenden Vernunft entziehen, ohne Rechenschaft abzulegen, als etwas Unbezweifelbares, Unverletzliches, Heiliges hinstellen.” — Ludwig Feuerbach¹¹⁷

*“Whenever morality is based on theology, wherever the right is made dependent on divine authority, the most immoral, unjust, infamous things can be justified and established. I can found morality on theology only when I myself have already defined the divine being by means of morality...To place anything in God, or to derive anything from God, is nothing more than to withdraw it from the test of reason, to institute it as indubitable, unassailable, sacred, without rendering an account why.”
— Ludwig Feuerbach¹¹⁸*

This passage from Feuerbach reflects several important points I wish to make in this chapter. Feuerbach’s warning that people use religion to justify immorality resonates with the previously quoted line from Frederick Douglass’ autobiography, published four years later in 1845. Where Douglass names religion as “justifier of the most appalling barbarity,”¹¹⁹ Feuerbach considers ‘morality’ premised on theology to be the source and justification of “the most immoral, unjust” and dishonorable things. Though they use different images, I believe both Feuerbach and Douglass refer to the same entity, a discursive construct that grants ethical authority. For Douglass, the authority is rooted in southern society,¹²⁰ while for Feuerbach, theology and divinity grant authority to the constructed morality or ethics.¹²⁰ The circular reasoning Feuerbach scorns parallels the circular reasoning I critique in Conclusion 3: the reason for accepting the authority of religion cannot logically depend on the authority of religion. Morality of the divine cannot depend on divinity’s morality, to use his objects, for those are two versions of the same genitive.

Most importantly for this section, Feuerbach expresses how an appeal to religious justification protects the argument from the standards to which non-religious arguments are held, for religion enjoys epistemic incontrovertibility. Appealing to God as the foundation for something—say, a justification—serves the epistemic function of revoking the requirement of reason. The appeal to God turns the justifications into something indubitable, inviolable, and holy, Feuerbach asserts. This incontrovertibility is an element of the epistemic privilege I discussed in Premise E, and its contextualization in a discussion of religious justification highlights the secondary power of incontrovertibility: increased justificatory weight. Not only can the audience not question the source of authority, but the pretext deriving from that authority is likewise protected.

Just as I am concerned in this dissertation for the possibility that religion grants *pretext* justificatory weight, Feuerbach also expresses concern that it is not true motivations that religion produces, but rather false guises that religion’s constructed ethics protects. In a preceding paragraph, Feuerbach describes the rhetorical device of pretext, in the context of using religion to justify wronging another human: “[t]he real cause is converted into an impersonal means, a merely conceptual, imaginary cause usurps the place of the true one.”¹²¹ The ‘real cause’ is what I call the ‘motivating reason’ in Chapter 1, while the ‘merely conceptual, imaginary cause’ is what I call ‘pretext.’ Both phrasings retain the implication that an agent strategically deploys a lie to appeal to an audience’s epistemic biases. Given those biases, the audience assigns justifications—whether motivations or pretexts—increased justificatory weight.

Conclusion 4: Religion enjoys undeservedly inflated justificatory weight

*“[T]here’s an enormous amount of damage done around the world
in the name of religion and certainty.”*

— Barack Obama, in the previously-cited 2004 interview¹²²

Obama not only echoes Feuerbach and Douglass on the power of religious justification, but offers the psychological interpretation that *certainty* plays a role in granting religion justificatory weight. In my argument, perceived authority takes the place of certainty. If an audience believes that a source of knowledge deserves epistemic privilege, then the audience will assign the knowledge that source produces more value; if the source of knowledge does not deserve the epistemic privilege, then the justificatory weight is undeservedly inflated. Or, as expressed above, Premise F made the case that epistemic privilege increases a statement’s justificatory weight, while Conclusion 3 is that religion’s epistemic privilege is fallacious. If the epistemic privilege is fallacious, then the increased justificatory weight is undeserved: religion’s undeserved epistemic privilege causes overestimation of value of justifications. Granting ‘religion’ undeserved epistemic privilege and justificatory weight leads to invocations of religion generating fallacious appeals to irrelevant authority. As I addressed in Chapter 1, I consider that use of religion as a justification to fall under what Austin calls a “misapplication.” For Austin, a misapplication refers to when a speaker lacks the appropriate authority or the circumstance is inappropriate for the action.¹²³ ‘Religion’ lacks the appropriate authority to serve as a basis for ethical justification.

Potent ‘Pretexts’

“I think there is this tendency that I don’t think is healthy for public figures to wear religion on their sleeve as a means to insulate themselves from criticism.”
— Barack Obama¹²⁴

The outward guise of religion to gain incontrovertibility that Obama describes resembles my critique of the justificatory power of religious pretext. His choice of the word “means” implies an instrumentality consistent with a view of pretext as a manipulation. The public figures’ invocations of religion are not an end, not of value in their own right, but rather as a technique for achieving other—often chimeric—goals. In this case, Obama interprets the goal as being “to insulate themselves from criticism,” to escape being held to the same epistemological standards as arguments from other knowledge sources. A speaker who appeals to religious authority as a means for gaining incontrovertibility for a justification is exercising pretext.

William T. Cavanaugh’s *The Myth of Religious Violence* argues that the modern religious / secular binary has produced unequal treatment of religious violence, in part due to a construction of religious violence as distinct from secular violence. Concerned that religion is the object of incommensurate blame for the world’s violence, he calls for a dissolution of that binary to apply equal scrutiny to all types of violence and attention to the interactions of factors leading to violence.¹²⁵ I believe that Cavanaugh and the religious violence theorists he addresses would benefit from an understanding of how religious epistemic privilege makes it a more potent source of justification for violence.

There is a glimmer of this understanding in his early concession that “Religion has legitimated the oppression of the poor and of women,”¹²⁶ then in Mark Juergensmeyer’s characterization of religious violence as “accompanied by strong claims of moral justification,”¹²⁷ and Cavanaugh’s retort that state violence has even more potent moral justification.¹²⁸ Yet Cavanaugh misses the opportunity to distinguish religion as a justification from religion as a cause. He is concerned that the myth of religion causing violence helps legitimate (neo)liberal political power, yet if he could identify the justifications that are a means to violent ends, if he could distinguish the pretexts, then Cavanaugh might be able to make a stronger argument for religion not being the *cause* of violence. My hope is that recognizing pretext as a rhetorical device might generate an understanding between such theorists who believe religion is not the motivating reason, and their interlocutors who trace justifications for violence back to religious grounds.

If I am correct with Conclusion 4 that religion enjoys undeservedly inflated justificatory weight, and with Conclusion 2 that Enlightenment Europeans’ use of religion to justify imperialism is fallacious, then it follows (I’ll call it Conclusion 5), that religion’s undeserved epistemic privilege has ethical and epistemic implications, making it a potent basis for justifications including pretext.

Should You Accept that ‘Religious’ ‘Pretext?’

“[T]here is a prospect of happiness in a Lethean bath that would erase the memory of all religions and philosophical systems.”

— M. O. Gershenson¹²⁹

Though Hayden White reads M. O. Gershenson’s image as an erasure of history, I see the possibility of critical view of the world, unmarred by ideological conditioning. Imagine if we could unseat the premises of religious justifications for violence by questioning our ideological conditioning leading us to accept pretexts as reasons and religion as a privileged source of justification. The first step was my presentation of ‘pretext’ in Chapter 1, and the next step has been to problematize contemporary assumptions about religion in this chapter. Thinking back to Chapter 1 with the lessons of this chapter in mind, I hope the reader has an impression of pretext as a rhetorical device appealing to the audience’s epistemic biases to increase the statement’s justificatory value. The next chapter continues the project by offering examples of constructed religion and pretext dependent on those constructions in science fiction texts; I hope that viewing a representation of our societal practices through a literary object helps distance our social assumptions from historical myth.

Imagine Canada without hockey; Indian food without chilis, potatoes, and tomatoes; South America without fútbol; and our country without apple pie. We think of these items as inherent ingredients of the respective cultures, yet European imperialists brought those sports and foods to the countries we now think of as their natural habitats. We easily embrace inaccurate perceptions of history, especially when it allows us to ignore our ancestors’ violence. The stakes of believing the naturalized histories of sports or foods are rather insignificant, but the stakes of religious pretext are measurably higher. In this chapter, I addressed the possibility that some religious justifications for imperialism are pretexts for economic and political interests, and in Chapter 4, I will return to another example: using religious justifications as a pretext to secure tax exemption and get away with murder.

After introducing the possibility of an infelicitous performative, Austin writes, “we have merely felt the firm ground of prejudice slide away beneath our feet.”¹³⁰ I hope that the destabilization of religion as a naturalized concept has accomplished a similar act in this chapter: I have sought to show how the epistemically privileged world religion creates for itself is a historical and conceptual mistake with dangerous epistemic and ethical implications.

¹ Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

² Ritual animal slaughter and hallucinogenic drug use that are otherwise illegal receive religious exemptions.

³ David Brody, "Exclusive: Donald Trump to Brody File: 'I believe in God. I am Christian.'" CBN News, www1.cbn.com/thebrodyfile/archive/2011/04/11/exclusive-donald-trump-to-brody-file-i-believe-in-god (Accessed April 29, 2018).

⁴ Cathleen Falsani, "Transcript: Barack Obama and The God Factor Interview," Sojourners, <https://sojo.net/articles/transcript-barack-obama-and-god-factor-interview> (Accessed April 29, 2018).

⁵ James Ryerson reviewed these three books for *The New York Times*.

James Ryerson, "Unknown Unknowns: Three Inquiries Into Religion," *The New York Times Book Review*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/books/review/the-meaning-of-belief-tim-crane-learning-religion.html> (Accessed April 29, 2018).

⁶ Tim Crane, *The Meaning of Belief: Religion from an Atheist's Point of View*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 5-6.

⁷ John F. Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 12.

⁸ Haught, *New Cosmic Story*, 3.

⁹ Haught, *New Cosmic Story*, 9.

¹⁰ Haught, *New Cosmic Story*, 9.

¹¹ Christian Smith, *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1-2.

¹² Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 3.

¹³ Smith, *Religion: What It Is*, 5-12.

¹⁴ Smith, *Religion: What It Is*, 15-16.

¹⁵ This sample is imperfectly representative. Since Chapter 3 is limited to the US, I hesitated to use (the British) Crane, but I wanted the atheist's view too, to show that not only (purportedly) religious people define religion in that way. At the 2017 AAR, I looked for new books by women I could use in this section but found none.

¹⁶ Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

¹⁷ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 22.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 80.

¹⁹ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 232.

²⁰ Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 2.

²¹ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 2

²² Thanks to Ella Frances Sanders' illustrations for teaching me this term.

Ella Frances Sanders, *Lost in Translation: An Illustrated Compendium of Untranslatable Words from Around the World*, (Emeryville, California: Ten Speed Press, 2014).

²³ See notably Talal Asad, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Timothy Fitzgerald, Severin Fowles, Tomoko Masuzawa, Russell T. McCutchen, Brent Nongbri, and Benson Saler.

²⁴ Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 38, 23, 16, 37

²⁵ Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 212

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- ²⁶ Severin M. Fowles, *An Archaeology of Doings*, (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2013).
- ²⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).
- ²⁸ Fitzgerald makes a similar argument.
Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility*, 13, 231-2.
- ²⁹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 27-8.
- ³⁰ Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 11.
- ³¹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 19-20. See also David Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
- ³² Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 198.
- ³³ Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 5.
- ³⁴ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27.
- ³⁵ Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 149.
- ³⁶ Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 82.
- ³⁷ Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 138.
- ³⁸ Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 202-8.
- ³⁹ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 131.
- ⁴⁰ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 9-10, 154, 130.
- ⁴¹ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 10-1, italics in the original to emphasize the plural.
- ⁴² Riesebrodt refers to this view as postmodern criticism, which I hesitate to repeat, since the term implies that it is an absurd theoretical deconstruction rather than a historical reevaluation of assumptions.
- ⁴³ Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 6, 19.
- ⁴⁴ Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 7.
- ⁴⁵ Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 15.
- ⁴⁶ Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 75-94, 148.
- ⁴⁷ Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 105.
- ⁴⁸ See Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, and two pieces by Schilbrack.
Kevin Schilbrack, "After We Deconstruct 'Religion,' Then What? A Case for Critical Realism," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 2012. 25, 1: 107-12.
- Kevin Schilbrack, "The social construction of 'religion' and its limits" *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 2013. 24(2): 97-117.
- ⁴⁹ Schilbrack, "The social construction of 'religion' and its limits," 108-110.

⁵⁰ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 33.

⁵¹ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 200-1, n. 14.

⁵² Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 37.

⁵³ Randy Kennedy, "White Artist's Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Draws Protests," *The New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/21/arts/design/painting-of-emmett-till-at-whitney-biennial-draws-protests.html> (Accessed April 29, 2018).

A few months later, activists pressured Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art to cancel Schutz's solo show even though the offending painting would not be shown.

⁵⁴ For a fun smattering of examples, see:

Medieval POC, People of Color in European Art History, <http://medievalpoc.tumblr.com/>. (Accessed April 29, 2018).

⁵⁵ Foucault, *Order of Things*, xvii.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Order of Things*, xv.

⁵⁷ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 22.

⁵⁸ Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*, (New York: Library of America, 1794).

⁵⁹ The "Jewish" there surprised me, 100 years before the first Zionist settlements in Palestine, and given the (un-repaid) financing from Haym Salomon upon which Paine's side depended in the war for independence, so I asked an early Americanist, who told me this wording was a set phrase of the era, an era when religion meant the three Abrahamics, in chronological order. Michael Bellesiles, personal email communication, August 19, 2017.

⁶⁰ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 303.

⁶¹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Millennium Publications, 2014), 68, my emphasis.

⁶² Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 68.

⁶³ David Chidester, *Savage Systems*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 232-3.

⁶⁴ See Asad, Cantwell Smith, Fitzgerald, Fowles, McCutchen, Nongbri, and Saler.

⁶⁵ See Chidester, Josephson (now Josephson-Storm), and Masuzawa.

⁶⁶ See Boyarin and Dubuisson.

⁶⁷ Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 14.

⁶⁸ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 150-3.

⁶⁹ Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, Chapter 6.

⁷⁰ Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 9.

⁷¹ Chidester's note on how the 1884-5 Berlin Conference reversed previous colonial conversion practices of promising religious tolerance of the African societies they divvied up, speaks to how secularism became a tool of imperial control by changing the terms of religion.

Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 19-20.

Since Chidester acknowledges his intellectual debt to Asad, so it was easy to see Asad's reading of secularism in European society building from European studies of 'other' religions as comparable to such a reversal.

⁷² Recall also Josephson-Storm's argument that religion, science, and superstition mutually defined one another in a contradistinctive triangle. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*.

⁷³ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 235.

⁷⁴ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 48-56.

⁷⁵ Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 11.

⁷⁶ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 72-3.

⁷⁷ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 252.

⁷⁸ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 224.

⁷⁹ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 225.

⁸⁰ Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 6.

⁸¹ Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 19-20.

⁸² Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 191.

⁸³ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 236.

⁸⁴ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 289.

⁸⁵ Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858*, (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2012).

See also S.N. Balagangadhara, "Orientalism, Postcolonialism and the 'Construction' of Religion," *Rethinking religion in India: the colonial construction of Hinduism*, eds. Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens, and Rajaram Hegde, (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁸⁶ Christina Petterson, *The Missionary, the Catechist and the Hunter: Foucault, Protestantism and Colonialism*, (Leiden: Brill. 2014), 82.

⁸⁷ Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 78.

⁸⁸ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 285-6.

⁸⁹ Petterson, *The Missionary, the Catechist and the Hunter*, 15, 91.

⁹⁰ Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, xiii-xv.

⁹¹ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 86, 155-6, 168, 211, 249-51.

⁹² Rhodes, "Confession of Faith," 1877.

⁹³ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*.

⁹⁴ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 68.

⁹⁵ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁹⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 8.

⁹⁷ Schilbrack, “The social construction of ‘religion’ and its limits,” 109. Imagine the political potency of refusing to recognize borders as ontologically extant entities.

⁹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*. Trans. James Strachey, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961), 83.

⁹⁹ Sincerity is an ethical value for Fricker, based on personal emotional response, a socially constructed value.

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45, 72, 76 119.

¹⁰⁰ For example, the Supreme Court decisions *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972) exempted Amish youth from mandatory school attendance on the basis of their religion’s expectations, *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah* (1993) overturned laws against animal sacrifice to allow Santeria practitioners to sacrifice animals, *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal* (2006) allowed the use of the otherwise illegal drug hoasca for “religious purposes,” and *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* (2014) exempted a for-profit corporation from regulations to which the corporation’s owners objected on religious grounds.

¹⁰¹ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 68-9.

¹⁰² Asad notes that power constructs and exploits difference and ambiguity to its advantage, *selecting* where best to project unity, and where divergence. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 16-7.

¹⁰³ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 8, 200, 273.

¹⁰⁴ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 69.

¹⁰⁶ Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 136-7.

¹⁰⁹ Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, 278.

¹¹⁰ Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 100.

¹¹¹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), 47-8.

¹¹² Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 50.

¹¹³ I do not mean to suggest that all characteristics are always present. As Chidester would point out, universality was not always part of a European post-Enlightenment views of religion; part of defining religion was also distinguishing it from barbarism without religion.

¹¹⁴ Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, ix.

¹¹⁵ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 21.

¹¹⁶ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter 1.

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- ¹¹⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, (Leipzig: Otto Bigand, 1841), 374-5.
- ¹¹⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, Trans. Marian Evans (George Eliot), (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1855), 344-5, italics in the translation.
- ¹¹⁹ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 47.
- ¹²⁰ As I noted in a footnote in the introduction, I have chosen to use ‘ethics’ rather than engage in the philosophical debate over the distinction between ethics and morality. However, I retained the ‘moral’ where morality is relevant to a quotation or signals the debatable distinction between ethics as a ‘secular’ field and morality as a ‘religious’ field.
- ¹²¹ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 269.
- ¹²² Falsani, "Transcript: Barack Obama and The God Factor Interview."
- ¹²³ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 28.
- ¹²⁴ Falsani, "Transcript: Barack Obama and The God Factor Interview."
- ¹²⁵ William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 230.
- ¹²⁶ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 15.
- ¹²⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Fourth Edition, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 270.
- ¹²⁸ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 32.
- ¹²⁹ Hayden White quotes an M. O. Gershenson letter dreaming of a world free of religion, washed clean by the violence of the Russian revolution. White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 37.
- ¹³⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 13.

Ten Characteristics of 'Religion'

These characteristics, introduced in Chapter 2, are intended to help audiences identify institutions that match a European Enlightenment construction of 'religion.'

1. **temporally and geographically universal** (ancient; intrinsic to humanity or society)
2. ***a priori*** (deducible from reason if not empirically observable)
3. **plural** (there are multiple iterations of a category of religion)
4. ***sui generis*** (unique; not comparable to other institutions)
5. **analytical category** (a meaningful grouping for analysis)
6. **ontologically extant** (iterations of religion exist in the world)
7. **systematic** (organized structures of belief, practice, etc.)
8. **connection to the transcendent** (sometimes God)
9. **cosmology** (explanations of the world, life, etc.)
10. **normative ethics** (ethical guidelines for how to behave)

For examples, please refer to Chapter 3's analysis of Mary Doria Russell's fictionalized Jesuit Christianity in *The Sparrow* and Octavia Estelle Butler's Biology in *Lilith's Brood*, as well as Chapter 4's analysis of a science fiction-religion border case: Scientology.

Chapter Three

“*Why did you go to Rakhat, Emilio? ... Was it just a scientific expedition? Did you go just because you were a linguist and it sounded like an interesting project? Were you just another academic grubbing for publications... No. I don't think so.*’
Giuliani took a deep breath and let it out. *‘Emilio, everything I have learned about the mission leads me to believe that you went for the greater glory of God. You believed that you and your companions were brought together by the will of God and that you arrived at your destination by the grace of God. In the beginning, everything you did was for the love of God... What changed everything?’*”¹

— Mary Doria Russell’s *The Sparrow*

Every action, from writing a dissertation chapter as I am doing now to an imperialist Jesuit mission to another planet as in *The Sparrow*, has infinite motivations. Uncountable factors (impulses, knowledge, situations, other actions, etc.) lead to the performance of a given action. When pressed for “why” one performs that act, a speaker may offer a justification or even multiple justifications, and the audience likely speculates about justifications as well. Those stated (and speculated) justifications may reflect motivating reasons, or they may take the form of a discursive tool that veils the reasons or manipulates the audience, or even the speaker herself. In Chapter 1, I define this second category as ‘pretexts.’ The speaker may not know their primary motivations, yet with a discursive lens for tracing how the justification functions in the text, the role that the justification plays is more important than the psychology behind it. I may justify working on my dissertation rather than joining friends for a picnic in the Berkeley Botanical Garden on this gorgeous summer day by appealing to a deadline. If you know that I have no deadline, then it is obvious that this justification does not reflect my motivating reasons but falls into the category of pretext. In *The Sparrow*, Emilio responds to the fictionalized Jesuit “religion’s” leader Father General Vince Giuliani’s inquiry above with “Don’t ask me, Vince... Ask God,” ambiguously suggesting either literally that the speculations are correct and God was behind the motivations, or figuratively that only God (no one) can know why. Whether affirming or denying the speculated justifications, Emilio acknowledges the complexity of parsing the purpose behind an action, particularly one that involves ‘religion.’ This chapter aims to help in that process by using science fiction to demonstrate the discursive construction of ‘religion’ and role of ‘pretext.’

‘Religious’ Pretext for Imperialist Violence in Science Fiction

The purpose and structure of this chapter are simple: demonstrating the discursive construction of ‘religion’ according to the ten characteristics I outline in Chapter 2 and identifying performances of justifications that fit the category of ‘pretext’ according to the ten tests I define in Chapter 1. Two works of twentieth century US contact science fiction written by women authors and featuring non-white protagonists, Mary Doria Russell’s *The Sparrow* (1996) and Octavia Estelle Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy (1987-1989), serve as my objects—the texts through which I illustrate the discursive construction of ‘religion’ and performance of pretexts for imperialism based in that ‘religion.’² Russell’s fictionalized Jesuit Christianity and Butler’s

Biology are ‘religions’ insofar as they fulfill the characteristics of that construct. The reason that I analyze these texts and identify literary constructions of ‘religion’ is to demonstrate how religion is discursively constructed in literature to reflect the discursive construction in society. I intentionally chose one text depicting a ‘religion’ that is similar to our conception of prototypical ‘religion’ (Russell’s altered Jesuit Christianity) and one text constructing an institution displaying core characteristics of ‘religion’ yet probably falling outside most readers’ intuitive understanding of ‘religion’ (Butler’s *Biology as the alien’s religion*).³

A genre that plays with the hypothetical, science fiction tests certain premises in society, driving readers to question assumptions and disrupt views of naturalized concepts or reality, in this case ‘religion.’ The authors employ literary mechanisms to construct ‘religions’ in their novels through dialogue, third-person narrator commentary, and first-person narrator reflections echo the discursive construction of concepts in society. I follow Carl Freedman’s argument that science fiction holds unique critical potential: “science fiction, like critical theory, insists upon historical mutability, material reducibility, and utopian possibility. Of all genres, science fiction is thus the one most devoted to the . . . rigorous self-reflectiveness of critical theory.”⁴ Crucial qualities of science fiction—such as the focus on material conditions within the narratives, speculative consideration of other worlds, and critical analysis of the literary world as an imperfect reflection of the reader’s world—suit science fiction well to critical theory projects. The two texts of visionary science fiction offer critical potential through the genre’s epistemic, character-insight, and world-making. By analyzing these texts, I seek to reveal—through comparison with the discursive construction of ‘religion’ and the use of ‘religion’ as an authority for justifications in fiction—how society discursively constructs ‘religion’ and employs that naturalized concept as an authority for pretexts.

Mirroring how post-Enlightenment ‘religion’ sought secularism against which to define itself and barbarians against whom to define their civility, Russell and Butler’s texts are ‘contact’ science fiction that depicts human encounters with non-humans as a way to define the human. Traditional contact science fiction—such as H. G. Wells 1898 *The War of the Worlds*, Stanislaw Lem’s 1961 *Solaris*, and Carl Sagan’s 1985 *Contact*—usually describes encounters with extraterrestrials, who serve as a projection of the human, as a hybrid between human and non-human. Contact depicts the alien through a human world view, or the human through the worldview of aliens. Contemporary contact narratives—such as Ekaterina Sedya’s 2008 *The Alchemy of Stone*, Daniel Suarez’s 2012 *Kill Decision*, and Kazuo Ishiguro’s 2005 *Never Let Me Go*—include androids, clones, and artificial intelligence as the Other against whose difference the authors explore what constitutes the human. In literature, as in society, such constructions of the human or Other follow a process. First, the author develops the characteristics to define the object. Then the author naturalizes those characteristics so that the reader begins to take for granted how the author has constructed the object. Finally, the author employs the object, allowing the reader to fill in the naturalized characteristics.

To more thoroughly understand the power dynamics of human-alien contact and the imperialist missions they represent, this chapter considers one work describing contact that humans initiate, and one that an alien Other has initiated, both on ‘religious’ pretexts. The human-initiated contact work, Russell’s *The Sparrow*, reflects themes of imperialism central to critical religious

studies by problematizing the tension between well-intentioned and self-righteous justifications for the Jesuits' mission to a foreign planet, as reflected in this chapter's epigraph. A mixed group of Jesuits, scientists, and friends undertake the "mission" after confusing a celebration of rape⁵ for divine inspiration.

The alien-initiated contact work is Butler's *Lilith's Brood* trilogy, tracing the rebirth of the human species following a nuclear war that would have killed most life on Earth, had aliens not rescued survivors of various species. The aliens, the Oankali,⁶ are reminiscent of Donna Haraway's *Pimonia chthulu*, the spider after whose tentacled feeling-based knowledge Haraway names her Chthulucene. For Haraway, the Chthulucene represents the "elsewhere and elsewhere that was, still is, and might yet be," a possible world of knowledge that could come from "science fiction, science fact, speculative feminism," and the strings of "tentacular thinking."⁷ The Oankali's tentacular biology suggests a speculative epistemology that dilates the science fiction genre's form to imagine new futures and new ways of knowing. The trilogy's first book follows the titular character, Lilith Iyapo, a black American woman studying anthropology whose husband and son died in a car accident before the war. Following a storyline resembling the biography of Henrietta Lacks,⁸ the Oankali are drawn to Lilith due to the genetic possibilities they see in her hereditary cancer cells, which Butler sought to depict as "utterly sexy."⁹ The Oankali choose her to select and prepare the first generation of post-apocalyptic humans, 40 English-speakers, and to breed the first generations of alien-human hybrids once they return to Earth. The second book's protagonist is one of Lilith's children, the first human-alien hybrid male, Akin. The third (much shorter) book switches to first person, narrated by a later child of Lilith, the first born third-gender human-alien hybrid, Jodahs.

Both texts begin with human protagonists, then shift to present part of the narrative from an alien perspective. This shift is temporary in *The Sparrow*, briefly featuring the primary alien character's perspective. Butler has a more complex pattern of inter-species perspective changes, compounded by the introduction of hybrid human-alien characters serving as the protagonists of the second and third books. Since *Lilith's Brood* is alien-initiated contact fiction, the initial human perspective depicts the imperialized subject's view. Peter Sands remarks that this perspective is an "inverting the usual New World narrative as told from the colonizer's point of view, telling instead of Lilith's experience from the point of view of a 'discovered' race—discovered by aliens."¹⁰ In these shifts and blurring of human-other lines, Butler complicates the reader's relationship to the characters. Rather than portraying the imperialists as the villains and the imperialized humans as the heroes, Butler tells an interviewer who asks whether the Oankali and humans are meant to have "a balance of vices" that "[b]oth species have their strengths and weaknesses;"¹¹ both species have complex ethical value. The shifting perspective further offers the reader insights into a greater number of characters, aligning with Butler's goal: "I hope readers will identify with all my characters, at least while they're reading."¹² Oscillating from identifying with the inverted narrative's imperialized subject at the start, through the shifts of perspective between alien, human, and hybrid characters, the reader will become so entangled with the other(s) as to lose grasp of the self. This detachment from the self is consistent with a view of science fiction as critical theory, which encourages the reader to question their presumptions and seek new ways of viewing the world.

Science Fiction as a Social Text

“I propose that—in an age which has seen the death of religion as an important influence on the intellectual and emotional life of Western man—science fiction is the only remaining art form which appeals to the mythopoeic side of the human psyche”¹³ — Star Trek author James Blish

I am interested in “religion’s” epistemic role that James Blish believes science fiction may fill in a contemporary era and in science fiction’s role helping humans make sense of the world and develop world views. Specifically, I interrogate what post-WWII US science fiction’s ‘religions’ and ‘religious’ pretexts can tell us about their analogs in society. My purpose in choosing literary objects through which to explain my theoretical interventions of Chapters 1 and 2 is to present an object that teaches modes of thinking. As critical theory calls our assumptions into question to open up new ways of viewing the world, non-realist literature—particularly science fiction—opens up new worlds. As my first two chapters seek to sensitize the reader to epistemic privilege (of pretext) and discursive construction (of religion), science fiction can attune readers to knowledge production and valuation, as well as how texts construct ideologies and even worlds. The genre as a model is not what allows such pedagogical potential, but rather the form of the text: the text of a novel offers a micro-level contained discourse that mirrors how discourse functions at a societal level. Texts are evidence within discourse, and literary texts go one step farther to offer discourses distilled within evidence.

Texts in the third person such as *The Sparrow* and the first two books of *Lilith’s Brood* grant the text as discourse the omniscient knowledge that deists attribute to God. In these texts, the author takes the place of God, offering the reader foreknowledge of relevant information and intimacy with multiple characters. Importantly for this project, given the questions of interior motivation in distinguishing pretexts, third person offers the reader access to the *will* of a character, an impossibility outside of fiction.

Unconcerned with authorial intent, I am not arguing that Russell or Butler intend readers to recognize ‘religions,’ imperialism, and pretexts in their narratives. Rather, I am interested in what the critical reader can learn about discursive construction of ‘religion,’ formulation of justifications that may be pretexts, and how that ‘religion’ is the basis of justifications for imperialist practices. Twentieth century US Science Fiction is particularly suited to this project due to the United States’ continued active engagement in overtly imperialist projects in the years around the two texts’ publication, from the hundreds of overseas military bases in dozens of countries to military operations such as the overtly neocolonial 1983 invasion of Grenada and 1989 invasion of Panama. The cultural backdrop inspired intellectually and literarily rich science fiction grappling with imperialism.

Why a Literary Object

In the reading ‘pretext’ through rhetoric section of Chapter 1, I describe an Enlightenment turn of modernity changing signs and thereby language from representation to signifier. This transition is pivotal for understanding pretext as a rhetorical performance using language rather than a

direct translation of motive into words. For Foucault, literature is the foremost “compensation” for this turn,¹⁴ redeeming the word from the devaluation of being decoupled from meaning. After the Renaissance, Foucault claims, “literature began to bring language back to the light once more in its own being,”¹⁵ restoring value to language. Both the “twin figure” and “the contestation of philology,”¹⁶ literature helps constitute through contrast and dispute through usage the study of language and its power. Through literature, the meaning of language grows, unconstrained by its pre-modern direct representative role, or its modern detachment from meaning.

Foucault’s view of modern literature anticipates speculative literature or even science fiction by making way for non-conformity. He traces this shift to modern literature as beginning with *Don Quixote*, whose titular character is “deviant...*alienated*...disordered...the Same and the Other,”¹⁷ crazy to consistently chase the meanings of signs and universalize resemblances. Such characters in literature offer the reader a critique of their own dominant epistemology’s tendency to take the representation of signs for granted and unproblematically generalize resemblances. Through reading about a character’s alienation, the reader might define herself in contradistinction to the alienated Other, recognizing the culturally accepted significance behind signs that confuse the character, or seeing connections that elude the literary figure. The character’s disorientation orients the reader, clarifying what is evident and what might not be as obvious as it seems. The language generates what it cannot represent. Likewise, science fiction invites the reader to orient herself in contrast to the slightly *other* world of the text, while recognizing the strangeness of her own accepted reality and potential of the fictional world.

Choosing science fiction over historical literature permits the speculative possibilities of a familiar yet different world. Choosing literature rather than history as my object for a social critique offers a contained discourse for a more thorough analysis without sacrificing societal relevance. Given my rhetor’s skepticism about universal truth and desire to communicate a concept through a textual object rather than make claims about history, going directly to the literature makes sense and is consistent with my field’s approach. I reject a traditional view of history as unproblematically depicting fact in contrast to literature’s fiction, siding with Hayden White’s characterization of historical narratives as “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented as found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.”¹⁸ White views the distinction between the fictive and the historical as artificial. Instead, the literary tradition is the first step towards understanding societal meaning.¹⁹ White argues that the “‘meaning’ of a given historical discourse is contained as much in the *rhetoric* of the description of the field as it is in the *logic* of whatever argument may be offered.”²⁰ So to understand the construction of discourse or even what we might think of as the fact or content of history, it is more helpful to analyze the rhetorical component, which is essentially literary. Likewise, in literature, rhetoric constitutes the meaning.

Like ‘religion,’ ‘science fiction’ is a discursive construction, the term and a cultural understanding of the genre arising in the past few centuries. As Freedman notes, though Mary Shelly never heard of the term, her writing—most significantly *Frankenstein*—was instrumental in determining what the genre would become.²¹ Finding “[n]o definitional consensus” in the literature,²² Freedman relies on Darko Suvin’s classic definition of science fiction as “the

literature of cognitive estrangement,” with the added distinction that literature has a unique cognitive effect.²³ Cognitive estrangement is “a clear otherness vis-à-vis the mundane empirical world where the text was produced—which is, however, connected (at least in principle) to that world in rational, non fantastic ways.”²⁴ Cognitive estrangement places the reader in another possible world, which offers critical distance to critique the reader’s own world and to imagine alternatives. The otherness allows what Freedman later calls “radical *alterity*,”²⁵ the possibility of significant otherness, science fiction’s key critical potential. The reader can begin to imagine how to improve the arbitrary and flawed status quo. I will defer to this definition for the purpose of the chapter.

Note the distinction between the possible world of science fiction from the entirely uncanny and possibly magical worlds of fantasy writing. Fredric Jameson distinguishes fantasy from science fiction on the basis of fantasy’s orientation around a good vs. evil ethical binary and the significance of magic.²⁶ Both texts firmly reject the good vs. evil ethical binary with ethically complex characters, shifting perspective, and minimal moralizing. Though both contain novel phenomena, the texts offer scientific rather than magical explanations, projecting the imagined worlds as plausible futures—even near futures. The critical strength of science fiction as a speculative genre lies in the plausibility of the constructed worlds, which allow the reader to imagine new ways of being in their existing world, or even possible utopias.

To constitute possible worlds, science fiction authors rely on temporal devices. Indeed, Freedman further distinguishes science fiction in contradistinction to the genre of travel writing, which is ahistorical, on the basis that time *frames* science fiction. Authors often set science fiction texts—including the two I analyze in this chapter—in a near enough future to allow the possibility that the present might become the world the text describes.²⁷ Projecting the narrative into the near future disrupts the reader’s rootedness in their present world, which Freedman describes as “denaturalizing the present.” Literary time play problematizes the present as merely another possible world. Time travel accentuates the distortion of the present with the added possibility that no time travel has occurred, and the reader has access to an alternative present. The plots of both *The Sparrow* and *Lilith’s Brood* rely on time travel. The former needs the temporal distortion of travel over the speed of light in order for the protagonist to remain relatively young and to have only experienced a few years of life although 40 years have passed on Earth. The latter text requires that the aliens place humans in suspended animation while they rehabilitate Earth to make it livable for the first generation of returnees; otherwise, all human survivors would have died before Earth was ready.

Science fiction literature depicting an encounter with an alien but similar Other presents a parallel cognitive estrangement to temporality. The human-like alien displays recognizable traits making its behaviors and thoughts legible to and possible for human characters. Meanwhile, its otherness offers a tabula rasa for projecting a history and culture, and even producing a new discourse. Likewise, the invented worlds of science fiction offer a blank slate for discourse creation. As the reader takes on the new vocabulary and paradigm of the text’s world, she shifts her perspective of what is real, and what is possible. *The Sparrow* and the *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy each create a unique and contained discourse, within which my analyses constitute discourse analysis. Similarly to the methodological approach of my “Reading ‘pretext’ interdisciplinarily”

section of Chapter 1, my analyses of the two texts survey the discourse to analyze how certain concepts are employed—in this case, both ‘religion’ and pretext, explicitly named and more subtly represented.

Human-initiated Contact

In Mary Doria Russell’s debut novel, *The Sparrow* (1996), humans travel to the planet of Rakhat in Alpha Centauri, on a secret Jesuit -led and -funded mission to find the species sending music-like radio signals towards Earth. Russell constructs a recognizable but other world than the reader would know, skipping chronologically between character and world development prior to the mission, contact with two human-like alien species of Rakhat, and the Jesuit inquiry after the mission’s sole survivor returns to Earth, all in the future. Through an omniscient narrator (with one brief exception), Russell depicts multiple encounters: Jesuits and atheists, various nationalities, humans and the two alien species, alien species with one another, and historical references to the Jesuit legacy of imperializing indigenous cultures on Earth. Were the novel segments ordered chronologically, the novel would follow Puerto Rican Jesuit Priest and linguist Emilio as he meets the cast of human characters to his involvement when an astronomer friend discovers the aliens’ radio signals, on a mission to the alien planet, living with various groups of aliens, then his interrogation by a committee of Jesuits after his return to Earth.

Emilio is the predominant and pivotal character, fulfilling the role of the Foucauldian deviant protagonist: *The Sparrow*’s Don Quixote. Traveling to alien spaces and interacting with alien others, Emilio is estranged from what he encounters and what he thinks he knows of his own home, which is changing significantly in his absence. Shifting public and Jesuit opinion on Earth about Emilio and the mission over the narrative destabilizes the reader’s opinions—not only of Emilio, but also the reliability of knowledge. With incomplete knowledge of the character and history, the reader must face unknowability and then incomplete knowledge of her own world.

Russell creates a speculative narrative through language and narration as well as the characters. For example, she creates an alien grammar that uses “someone” instead of “I,” which subtly critiques the relationship of the speaker and knowledge production in English, if not all human languages. Mistaken presumptions about the other species’ gender roles when humans encounter the first alien species remind the reader that gender is a cultural construct. Further, Russell challenges temporal assumptions in her description of Rome as a metonym for the Jesuits marking time in millennia rather than centuries, let alone the hours we may perceive as marking common temporality.²⁸ The narrative jumps between pre-mission Earth, Rakhat, and post-mission Rome and Naples, further disorienting the reader from normative temporality.

Construction of ‘religion’

Russell constructs the primary (human) ‘religious’ institution in the novel mainly through biblical²⁹ and historical references to Jesuit Christianity and various characters’ reflections on faith through dialogue or third-person narration. The title initially suggests Christian meaning through allusion. *The Sparrow*’s narrative reflects several biblical allusions to insignificant small birds translated as sparrows. Protagonist Emilio is like the sparrow of Psalm 102:7, alone on a

housetop symbolizing solitary desolation. His spiritual struggle between abject doubt of God and a mystical union with God that other characters describe as “saintly” reflects the tension in Matthew 10:29 between God caring even for the lowly sparrow yet not sheltering the sparrow from suffering.

Though Russell does not develop the theme, there is a suggestion that the dominant Rakhat species with whom the humans have contact, the Jana’ata, have what may fall into the category of ‘religion.’ This secondary (alien) ‘religious’ institution is far less developed, intimated mainly through the narrator’s explanations of Jana’ata justifications for their power over Runa, the imperialized alien species with whom the crew lives for most of their time on Rakhat. The Runa do not have ‘religion,’ and are even alarmed by the Jesuits holding Mass. The omniscient narrator hints that the Mass may have upset the Runa because the singing reminded them of the singing that had brought the humans to Rakhat,³⁰ which describes and is inspired by the rape and torture of Runa and other species in the singer’s harem.³¹

Through hints of the quickly changing Jesuit Church on Earth,³² Russell establishes that the Jesuit Christianity of the novel is distinct from the Jesuit Christianity we might recognize from today, even changing within the future time frame of the narrative. Upon Emilio’s return to Earth, the Jesuit leader, the Father General, points him to an article about the “new thinking” of shifting Jesuit theology on Mary Magdalene.³³ However, references to Jesuit history indicate that the literary ‘religion’ is founded on the historical institution that may be familiar to the reader. The Father General “muses” that after thirteenth century “Dominicans proposed that the end justifies the means...Jesuits took up that philosophy in their turn but multiplied the means, doing what seemed necessary in the service of God, for the good of souls.”³⁴ The long history of the Jesuits adopting the value from an earlier order suggests that ends justifying means is an important, if not foundational element of Jesuit ethics, and the magnified Jesuit interpretation of the Dominican belief amplifies its importance. Certainly, the Jesuits have interpreted the objective of benefiting souls to authorize evangelical proselytizing, including conversion colonialism. Referring to this Jesuit ethical code to justify his method of manipulating Emilio to elicit information for the inquiry, The Father General “deemed [his deception] justifiable.”³⁵ Jesuit values offer the basis for his justification of ethically questionable manipulation of a colleague. This ethical approach has important implications for this dissertation’s central focus: how ‘religion’ serves as a basis of pretexts for imperialism. If a core Jesuit value is that the ends justify the means, then the employment of pretext to justify the means may not only be acceptable, but even commendable as a way of achieving the desired ends—especially to save others’ souls.

Contrasts with other orders delineate the Jesuit belief system in contradistinction to similar institutions. In developing Emilio as a unique Jesuit, the narrator offers a comparison: whereas the Carmelites and Trappists attract mystics, “Jesuits tended to be men who found God in their [academic or pastoral] work.”³⁶ As a discursive construction of ‘religion,’ the contrast helps define the Jesuits. Narratively, presenting Emilio as a potential mystic in an order that rarely attracts mystics develops a tension of not belonging, foreshadowing his possible departure from the order or loss of his mystical relationship with God. Indeed, a few paragraphs later, Emilio advises a younger Jesuit to look for God only in service to others, in the pastoral work of many

Jesuits. Clearly referring to his own experience, he advises that “God will break your heart” if you seek a mystical relationship.³⁷ Russell defines the Jesuit Christianity Emilio experiences as faith in contrast to despair. Reflecting on how his experience on Rakhat defined his ‘religion,’ Emilio “discovered the outermost limit of faith and, in doing so, had located the exact boundary of despair. It was at that moment that he learned, truly, to fear God.”³⁸ Either this fear of God accompanies despair beyond the limit of faith, or fearing God changes Emilio’s relationship to God, and he puts the ways of his youth behind him.

When members of the crew first visit the Jana’ata city, one Jesuit’s questions about the culture they are going to encounter mostly concern potential ‘religious’ forms: “[w]ere there houses of worship? Who went? Were there religious specialists—priests or priestesses, monks, adepts? Did they believe in magic, in God or gods, in fate, in destiny, in the reward of good, the punishment of evil? How were the milestones of life marked? With cadenced ceremony or brief informal acknowledgements? . . . What was virtue and what was vice?”³⁹ Viewing these questions as indicative of how the Jesuit priest conceives of a universal ‘religion,’ we can identify important characteristics resembling those I presented in Chapter 2. Belief in magic, , or god(s) indicates a connection to the transcendent (characteristic 8). Fate and destiny suggest a cosmological explanatory purpose (characteristic 9). Then the questions about reward and punishment, as well as virtue and vice, suggest that the ‘religion’ would provide normative ethics (characteristic 10). Other questions reflect an anthropological view of world ‘religions,’ looking for resemblances to European ‘religions’ that would justify grouping the non-European practices into a ‘religion’ family. In this category we might find: places of worship, adherent and non-adherent social divisions, hierarchies of humans involved, life-stage demarcation, and rituals.

The scene of Emilio’s mystical experience portrays him as sharing a connection to the divine when he takes the first human step on Rakhat: “incandescent, arms flung wide,” such that those who could see him “stood witness to a soul’s transcendence.”⁴⁰ Such an experience of connection to the transcendent may be idealized and accessible to only an exclusive set of lucky adherents. That the Jesuits are already an exclusive organization of highly gifted, carefully selected, and exceptionally devout adherents with a history of producing saints makes such experience of transcendence more believable.

As an organization of scholars, the Jesuits are particularly concerned with cosmological questions of their own and others’ ‘religions.’ Emilio recalls how he desired to explain ‘religion’ to the Jana’ata right before he was unexpectedly sold and raped: humans experience moments of awareness in the form of “deep inner stillness or as a rush of overflowing emotion” that seems “to come from beyond us,” even sparked by quotidian experiences such as “music or by a sleeping child.” After such experiences, “our hearts long to find some way to capture it in words forever, so that we can remain faithful to its higher truth.” Emilio locates God in “the truth we feel at those moments,” and sees prayer as when humans “capture” that “higher truth.”⁴¹ These depictions, and particularly how similar concepts are presented together, contribute to a discursive construction of ‘religion’ as characterized by a connection to the transcendent. Emilio is prepared to share this depiction of Jesuit Christianity in what he believes to be the culmination of a long, tragic, yet meaningful journey that God has willed. The subsequent unexpected violence puts a skeptical cast on the claims of awareness and connection to the transcendent.

How could he have been so unaware, had he shared a transcendent connection to God? This contrast highlights Emilio's perception of 'religion' as powerful, even if he is naïve.

Emilio's emphasis on transcendent experience of a higher truth indicates that this characteristic is essential to his conception of 'religion.' Adherence to set 'religious' principles, in contrast, is less central to the characterization of Jesuit Christianity, though it seems important in defining 'religion' as a universal. In a conversation with Anne—a friend of Emilio's who joins the mission as their anthropologist and medic, and likely a projection of the author—Emilio conflates 'religion' and ethics. He responds to Anne's admission that she does not believe in God as he does with "yet...you behave like a good and moral person."⁴² Ethics without his 'religious' devotion is apparently surprising. Addressing Jesuit Christianity in particular overlooks universal ethical codes. The narrator notes that the mission Jesuit leader "distrusted mysticism, despite the fact that his order was founded upon it."⁴³ The text presents theology is an individual matter, even within the order. The mission's Jesuits differ (and change their views) on whether God is everywhere and immanent, whether the natural and supernatural are distinct, and how to interpret celibacy.⁴⁴ The text expresses this diversity through a quotation from the Jesuit mission leader explaining their values to the agnostic Anne. Similarly, the text opens the possibility for diverse interpretations of 'religious' principles through Emilio's complimentary reference to an unconventional reading of the story of Lazarus that he calls 'heretical.'⁴⁵

Connection to Imperialism

Russell presents a nuanced view of imperial power dynamics and possible constructions of 'religion,' yet it is the Jesuit imperialist legacy that frames the novel. The image in the novel's final line, in which the Father General looks out at the landscape of the Jesuit property after Emilio has left, at "a scene of great and beautiful antiquity,"⁴⁶ emphasizes that the decisions the Jesuits make reflect a legacy stretching back to antiquity. The similar message of the opening lines strengthens the image. The first paragraph situates the Jesuits in a history of imperialism: "[i]t was predictable, in hindsight. Everything about the history of the Society of Jesus bespoke deft and efficient action, exploration and research. During what Europeans were pleased to call the Age of Discovery, Jesuit priests were never more than a year or two behind the men who made initial contact with previously unknown peoples; indeed, Jesuits were often the vanguard of exploration."⁴⁷

Describing the mission's outcome as "predictable" naturalizes the imperialist violence in that legacy of Jesuit colonial missions, as though we can expect nothing else from the mission of an organization with such a history. Describing their actions as "deft and efficient" suggests a contrast to the less practiced and more cautious response of the secular body with which Russell contrasts the Jesuits, the United Nations. Whereas the United Nations are concerned with universal welfare and advancement, the Jesuits' "exploration and research" focus the production of knowledge on themselves. Russell complicates the stated goals of discovery by denying the need for an explanation, then offering several possible justifications. "In Rome, the questions were not whether or why but how soon" is one representation of Church culture suggesting that the Jesuits are uninterested in justifying their mission, but most concerned with launching the mission before the public or authorities can object, thus securing their place as the vanguard. Once the wider world learns of their mission to Rakhat, "the Society [of Jesuits] felt no

compulsion to explain or justify” themselves, perhaps because it was too late to change the mission, they believed themselves unanswerable to the public, or they felt vindicated in their own justifications.

The preface ends with a series of justifications of the Jesuit mission and then a defense: “[t]he Jesuit scientists went to learn, not proselytize. They went so that they might come to know and love God’s other children. They went for the reason Jesuits have always gone to the farthest frontiers of human exploration. They went *ad majore Dei gloria*: for the greater glory of God. They meant no harm.”⁴⁸ The first justification of learning and proselytizing is consistent with the reading of past Jesuit missions as explorations, yet at odds with later reflections on Jesuit motivations to convert those they encountered. The second, “to know and love” other creations of the divine, could be an extension of the first: an exploration with a ‘religious’ theme but without necessarily precluding the possibility that the justifications fill the role of a pretext. The third justification, echoing past reasons, is ambiguous. It could either allude to an unwritten motivation or introduce the next line as the Jesuits’ historical reasons for exploration: for the glory of God. This final justification implies a reason that the narrator denied in the first justification and may have signaled in the third: proselytizing. It also opens a range of possible violations against the Other. The concluding defense, that the Jesuits had good intentions, suggests that their actions would instead lead the observer to believe they had violent, disruptive, or otherwise harmful intentions. The preface’s shifting (and contradictory) justifications (test 5) conclude with a defense that should signal to the reader that the justifications may be pretexts.

In naming the mission’s precedents, Russell establishes a historical legacy through a dialogue between the mission’s Jesuits, discussing potential approaches to their contact. Jamil Khader historically situates *The Sparrow* in the context of what he calls “the controversy about the Quincentennial and the Columbus legacy.”⁴⁹ If Russell was writing during public discussion of that legacy in the US, the reader can surmise that such themes permeated her novel. While Russell was writing the novel, there was also intense debate over the colonial status of Puerto Rico, the home of her Jesuit protagonist Emilio Sandoz: Puerto Ricans voted in 1993 on whether to remain in the US Commonwealth, become a state, or seek independence. Though Russell does not mention Puerto Rico’s status as a colonized territory, a reader at that time would have been conscious of the implications of having an imperialized subject playing an imperialist Jesuit missionary. Russell further complicates otherwise clear-cut power dynamics of traditional colonial narratives by reversing roles on Rakhat when Emilio becomes a slave of the dominant alien species.

Appealing to theories of post-nationalism, Khader reads these reversals of imperial power patterns as “foregrounding the ambivalences and indeterminacies in the colonial condition.”⁵⁰ Whereas Khader accuses Russell of using this device “to affirm the colonizers’ innocence” in “a culturally-relativist renarrativization of the brutal history of European colonialism,”⁵¹ I read Russell as urging the reader to consider the complexity of power. Given Russell’s first career as a biological anthropologist, and the critique of imperialism she offers in the “Conversation” printed at the end of *The Sparrow*,⁵² it is unlikely that Russell would take a relativist stance on imperialism, yet perhaps the reversal is a provocation. The form of slavery to which Emilio is subjected suggests that Russell is critiquing the complexity of power rather than the innocence of

European colonialism: Supaari sells Emilio into sex slavery, thereby undermining the human's priestly vow of celibacy and his masculinity. Further, Emilio's experience as a sex slave, a position traditionally held by women, reminds the reader of the continued subjugation of women even outside imperial systems, an intersectional critique of power to which Khader may not have been attuned.

Imperialist echoes reverberate in a dialogue recalling a fictional Jesuit conversion colonial encounter. The mission's musician advocating first seeking out the singers: "the musical communication could be drawn on at the very beginning, just as we used music to make contact with the Guarnari in the eighteenth century." The musician-priest supports this argument with further historical examples of successful contact through elite classes, to which he rightly assumes the musicians belong: "there are the precedents of Xavier and Ricci, who determined to go as quickly as possible to the cities of Japan and China and worked with the educated classes first."⁵³ The suggestion is that if these Jesuits follow the example of their predecessors, the mission will be as successful as those famous missions, implying a value judgment that those conversion colonial missions were successful. The further parallels to missionaries to the new world and Asia then suggest that missionizing is part of the Jesuits' organizational *modus operandi*.

The narrative's references to other historical antecedents of Jesuit conversion colonialism missions on which the Jesuits had acted violently situate the mission to Rakhat in that legacy. Indeed, the founder of their order had been a "Basque soldier...who had killed and whored and made a thorough mess of his soul."⁵⁴ The character's stated purpose in bringing up this history is to encourage the priests to hold themselves to realistic standards of behavior, yet the narrative function could be to situate this mission in a longer legacy. Even their spaceship's name, *Stella Maris*, star (of the) sea, echoes past generations' sea explorations such as Christopher Columbus' colonial mission to the Caribbean. Emilio compares their Rakhat mission to Columbus' mission, calling the historical precedent an "analogy."⁵⁵ When the crew is deciding how to introduce the Runa to their aircraft, the narrator comments, "there were no guidelines except the negative example of their predecessors' disastrous interactions with technologically simple cultures on Earth." This time, the comparison between the Jesuit mission to Rakhat and previous European imperialist or Jesuit missions on Earth implies a negative value judgment of the historical iterations.⁵⁶ When Emilio Sandoz returns, the Father General reflects that the mission "wasn't the first time the Jesuits had encountered an alien culture and it wasn't the first mission to come to grief and Emilio wasn't the first priest to disgrace himself." There is precedence for missions to Other cultures that included Jesuits' violent and disgraceful behavior. The conclusion offers a 'religious' framing for understanding pretexts the Jesuits offer to vindicate the mission: "[t]he whole business was regrettable but not beyond redemption."⁵⁷ As a 'religious' concept, redemption implies a spiritual recovery of ethical value, perhaps that God forgives human sins, or the human proves their soul to be worthy of God's love. The Father General appears to couch his statement in concern for public opinion. The framing subject is "business," connoting public commerce rather than private concern as he would have communicated through diction like "affair." Then his characterization of the business as "regrettable but not beyond redemption" contrasts the language of public relations spin with the spiritual language of redemption.

Russell draws an obvious parallel between the space mission to Rakhat and the colonial conversion missions of the age of exploration by explaining the double entendre. When Emilio announces that the crew should “[s]tart planning the mission,” Anne asks him, “I can’t tell when you’re joking. Do you mean a mission or do you mean a mission? Are we talking science or religion?” The anthropologist is trying to determine whether or not Emilio is joking, self-consciously employing a term referring to the legacy of Jesuit missionary conversion. The implication is that the alternative is a sincere elision of space exploration and saving souls. Emilio answers “yes” before turning to practicalities of the endeavor, and the narrator offers no reactions from other characters, leaving the reader to draw her own interpretations.⁵⁸

The text does complicate the resonance between Enlightenment Jesuit imperialism and the mission to Rakhat when the sole Jewish character, Sofia, teases a Jesuit who does not seize an opportunity to baptize her while she is unconscious. The Priest responds that to do so would have been “completely unethical. . . This is not the seventeenth century, mademoiselle. We do not go about snatching the souls of dying heathens from perdition.”⁵⁹ At least this one member of the Jesuit party is denouncing the earlier model of their “religion’s” mission. The shift in ethical status of baptizing non-Christians without their consent could be a narrative signal that the novel’s Jesuit Christianity is not identical to the historical ‘religion.’ Though Jesuits contemporary to the reader are unlikely to baptize an unconscious non-believer, the historical allusions and shifting temporality leave the reader uncertain as to which iteration applies in a given scene.

Central to my critique in Chapter 2 is that European explorers sought to apply their own terms to other cultures’ institutions. Russell describes a parallel process occurring when humans reach Rakhat and name the alien forms after plausible counterparts on Earth. The humans were like “[c]hildren on a field trip to Eden, they named everything they saw” with labels like “elephant birds. . . squirrel-tails. . . peanut bushes. . . and pig plants.” Despite awareness that what they encounter on the alien world is unrelated to anything on Earth, they attribute descriptions based on what they know, speculate about shared function between the two planets’ respective life forms. They claim to see a “forest” when what they fly over “might as well be called treetops,” because the objects “filled the niche of trees.”⁶⁰ The comparisons shape how they view the new world. The humans are able to find comfort in the imagined familiarity in a forest of “trees,” inhabited by “birds” and “lizards,” vegetated by “bushes” and “plants.” Comparing Rakhat’s species to those of Earth, Emilio hesitates to compare relative intelligence, suggesting that he recognizes the danger of applying human criteria to non-human species. There may be a self-conscious awareness that the crew was misguided to apply their Earth-bound worldview to an alien planet. Emilio explains that the first alien species made the same mistake when “[t]hey fit us into their worldview”⁶¹ rather than trying to understand the humans through a human lens. Applying the wrong worldview leads to confusion, flawed assumptions, and mistakes. Having a character on the object end of that knowledge production allows the problems of misapplied worldview to emerge.

The Sparrow contains a second imperialist narrative: though the Jesuit mission is paramount in the book, the human encounter with the dominant alien species, the Jana’ata introduces that species as a second imperial power. A brief change of perspective from humans to aliens

accompanies this new imperial narrative. Russell writes in the third person except when the primary perspective briefly shifts to Supaari,⁶² the first Jana'ata to learn of the humans due to his feudal quasi-ownership of the group of Runa. The ambitious and selfish Supaari strategizes how to capitalize on the humans to secure status for himself, just as his species exploits the subordinate alien species, the Runa. The secondary imperialism complicates the reader's emotional response to how the Jesuit mission brought violence to Rakhat and demonstrates the complexity of power hierarchies in colonialism.

The pre-existing violent oppression of the Runa creates a scenario in which it is easy to sympathize with the Jesuits: they intend to enrich the lives of the Runa, not bring violence. Introducing edible plant cultivation improves the Runa's nutrition, which induces them to breed an unintended generation. When the Jana'ata learn of this unlicensed breeding, they came to kill the unsustainable influx of babies. Sofia certainly thought she was helping the Runa to lead a revolt and resist the Jana'ata, yet the Jana'ata slaughter one third of that Runa group along with three humans.⁶³ Thanks to the omniscient third-person narrator, the reader can sympathize with the Jesuit mission's desire to improve and then protect the lives of the Runa, yet also understand how the humans upset the social and environmental balance that the Jana'ata carefully maintained through genetic manipulation and law. Russell reinforces a sympathy for the Jana'ata through Emilio's argument that controlling procreation and eliminating problems such as "unemployment...overcrowding...starvation...environmental degradation...genetic disease," is no less ethical than the freedom to reproduce and ensuing suffering on Earth.⁶⁴ The ethical impasse between both sides of the unintentional imperialist introduction of violence permits Russell's nuanced critique of the history of violence from centuries of Jesuit imperialist missions, however well-meaning the Jesuits may have been.

Pretext

From the subtle emotional justifications of the secondary imperialist narrative inclining the reader to sympathize with the Jesuit mission to explicitly justificatory phrases such as "contemptible rationale," "plausible excuse,"⁶⁵ and incredulously, "what possible justification."⁶⁶ The first phrase expresses the speaker's negative valuation of certain justifications, discrediting those justifications as failing to satisfy the audience's ethical standards. 'Rationale' in this phrase expresses 'pretext,' which should receive the audience's contempt for disguising true motives or seeking to manipulate. The second phrase expresses how justifications seek to shift blame or responsibility, often in ways that appeal to the audience. The 'plausibility' is why I find it so important to distinguish pretexts, which may persuasively appear to be justifications deserving epistemic and ethical consideration but which have a devious discursive design. The third phrase uses irony to emphasize a similar situation, where justifications appear possible, yet the audience judges them otherwise. When a justification is ironically 'possible,' then it does not obtain as a valid justification and may fall into the category of a pretext.

The Sparrow contains numerous examples of justification and even pretext. Differentiating pretext is central to the novel's epistemological force. Emilio locates God in the distinction between pretext and reason: "God is [...in] the *why* of it,"⁶⁷ in the lacuna before understanding why something occurs or why someone holds a certain belief. He is trying to comfort Anne by explaining his faith that God will resolve their current concerns and that the first crew member

death was not merely an inexplicable tragedy. Emilio's repetition of this phrase after he has lost his previous faith in God implies a shift in his understanding of God's role in his action, as I shall show in the next paragraph.

Back on Earth, the Father General interrogates Emilio about what happened on Rakhat. In response to the question of what Supaari meant by Emilio being in a position "more suited to his nature" once he became a prostitute, Emilio issues "an ugly laugh." He recalls to the audience that he once told Anne "God is in the why," then proposes that Supaari "believed he was justified in what he did,"⁶⁸ selling Emilio into prostitution. If God is unknowable, if humans are caught in the question of 'why,' then the value of the justification is similarly unknowable. It would be senseless to speculate as to whether Supaari truly believes that selling Emilio was justifiable or whether his 'religious' faith in the Jana'ata cosmology made the action justifiable. From Emilio's perspective, the sarcasm of the ugly laugh suggests that he views Supaari's decision as motivated by self-interest rather than belief that Emilio was better suited to prostitution. The reader knows that by selling Emilio into prostitution, Supaari achieves the status he longs for, a status that includes permission to reproduce. Thus, the reader is privy to Supaari's plausible motive (test 10) of greed, suggesting that the justification Supaari may have believed he had was a pretext. Whether Supaari was conscious of the pretextual purpose of that justification, is not as important to the interrogation as the question of whether the justification filled that discursive role.

Russell constructs an understanding of pretext as a category, even if she does not name it. One expression, "under cover of..."⁶⁹ expresses the veiling meaning of 'pretext.' Further, the narrator reflects the distinction between pretext and reality when explaining Anne's motivations for a narratively insignificant choice, contrasting what she had done "ostensibly because..." with her motivation "[i]n reality."⁷⁰ Russell's insight into Anne's purported and actual motivating reasons may signal that Anne is a projection of the author or may be a device to clue the reader to the narrator's omniscience.

Russell even offers a pretext test through the Jana'ata character, Supaari, who employs his own pretext test when considering his culture's justification for only allowing the first- and second-born children to procreate. He judges the creation myth "too pat an explanation for duogeniture, too convenient for the first and seconds justifying their grip on the world."⁷¹ The mythology is too well-suited to the interests of the individuals it serves, too perfect a justification to be true or to be the motivating reason for limiting procreative privileges to the first and second born offspring of every pairing. Supaari characterizes the two readings of the mythical justification as reason or pretext as, respectively, "legends [that] grew from ancient seeds of truth or sprang fully formed from the self-interest of the rulers."⁷² In this imagery, the genesis is either an evolution of truth or an invention that serves self-interest but not the original motivating reason.

The mission's place in the long history of Jesuit conversion colonialism provides it with a 'religiously'-based pretext. Russell is explicit about the connection between religion and imperialism, writing that "[t]he theological rationale for this mission had been worked out decades before there was any evidence of other sentient species in the universe: mere considerations of scale suggested that human beings were not the sole purpose of creation."⁷³ Assuming that other sentient species existed, the Church determined that once such species were

found, the Church would send missions to teach the other species that they were God's creations—to convert them.

The narrative's engagement with colonial legacy leads Khader to suggest that the narrative's imperial mission is a response to figures such as Columbus and "classic Eurocentric texts that orientalized the Other in order to justify their colonization and genocide."⁷⁴ Khader foregrounds the practice of defining the Other against European self as a pretext for imperialism that I describe in Chapter 2. He calls such defenses of imperial violence "preposterous,"⁷⁵ indicating that he views those justifications as fulfilling the discursive role of 'pretext' I describe in Chapter 1, serving to defend the imperial actor against blame to veil motivating reasons such as violent racism and manipulate the audience to be sympathetic to the action. Khader charges that through the invocation of Jesuit legacy of justifying imperialism through the exorcized and subordinated Other, "Russell's novel, thus, seeks to cover up the complicity of the Jesuits in the project of colonization."⁷⁶ However, Russell's presentation of those justifications as *pretexts* suggests that she is not reproducing but rather criticizing those justifications as discursive tools to manipulate the audience so they can get away with violence.

Russell includes two pieces of evidence that the pretext is 'religiously'-based. First, modifying "rationale" with "theological" implies that the rationale is rooted in a theoretical framework of 'religion.' Second, the rationale is premised on a 'religious' understanding of creation. The logical jump between the rationale of non-human purposes of God's creation and the justifiability of launching an intergalactic mission requires that the audience accept that spreading Christianity to other species God created justifies imperialism. Russell avoids bridging the gap, and presents the other stated justifications as based on tenuous foundations, which further suggests they are pretexts to obscure unstated reasons. The Father General at the time of the mission launch quotes Emilio's justification: "[t]here is simply no alternative. We have to know them."⁷⁷ Read after the previous justification about humans not being God's only creation, we might interpret the necessity of knowing other music-producing life forms as rooted in academic interest in humanity's sibling species or possibly an insight into God's "purpose of creation." The text implies less academically-motivated curiosity through the later Father General's quotation in this chapter's epigraph (and the following paragraph) and the earlier Father General's smiling dismissal of questions about whether the justification was sufficient, ignoring "the troubling slenderness of the reed that supported all their deliberate and complex plans."⁷⁸ Russell's imagery of the justification as a reed, and pretexts as flawed by "troubling slenderness" expresses the critique I hope to have offered in Chapter 1 that justifications that grow from pretexts rather than reasons are insufficient to support ethical beliefs and actions.

After Emilio has returned to Earth, the later Father General asks explicitly: "[w]hy did you go to Rakhat, Emilio?" This interrogation of the mission's motive indicates that the Father General recognizes that the previous regime's stated justification about God's non-human creations reflected a prepared pretext, whereas the motivating reasons were obscured even to the next generation of Jesuit leadership. As I quote in the epigraph, the Father General suggests potential academic and 'religious' reasons: intellectual curiosity or "academic grubbing" for publishable data;⁷⁹ and "for the greater glory of God" or the belief that it was "the will of God and...the grace of God," or for the love of God."⁸⁰ Following the contemptuous tone of the suggested

academic reasons, the reader may be primed to doubt the ‘religious’ justifications, or to accept them as reasonable justifications in contrast to contemptible academic ones. The Father General offers Emilio the benefit of the doubt that the ‘religious’ justifications could have been motivating reasons on the basis of auxiliary information (test 10) from Emilio’s crew mates that the Priest was devout with a possibly Saintly mystical connection to God. This credulity may incline the reader to accept those justifications as reasons, while disinclining the reader from questioning whether such reasons should be admissible. When Emilio refuses to answer, the Father General poses another question suggesting that Emilio’s reasons for going were honorable, even if the outcome of the trip was shameful: “what happened to you out there?” Emilio’s⁸¹ response is ambiguous, potentially answering the question of why he went, or what happened on Rakhat: “[d]on’t ask me... Ask God,”⁸² he recommends bitterly. The mood of bitterness implies sarcasm or potential insincerity, as though Emilio is offering God as an obvious pretext to obscure reasons he will not share, and perhaps mocking the Father General’s suggestion that Emilio’s reasons for the mission were ‘religious.’ Alternatively, Emilio could be blaming God for what happened on Rakhat. Emilio’s later question about why God refused Cain’s sacrifice supports this interpretation, because Emilio remarks that Cain “made his sacrifice in good faith.”⁸³ If both Cain and Abel’s sacrifices were made in faith, then God must have rejected Cain’s because it was bloodless, which portrays God as a bloodthirsty divinity who promotes and provokes violence.

While some Jesuits are trying to manipulate Emilio after his return, another priest puzzles over such handling; the narrator remarks that it “wasn’t in [the priest’s] nature to be suspicious of motives.”⁸⁴ Without that discernment between stated and actual motives (pretexts versus reasons), the priest misses the significance of his colleagues’ statements and actions. Wanting to encourage Emilio to justify his actions on Rakhat during hearings the Jesuits plan to hold, another priest caring for Emilio after his return to Earth urges Emilio “[t]o defend yourself... To explain what happened.”⁸⁵ The pairing expresses two possibilities of justification: an explanation implies a reflection of the truth, whereas defensiveness might imply a potential pretext that may not be true yet would exonerate the defendant. What the care-giver priest does say is, “[i]f we understood, we could help you. Make it easier for you, maybe?”⁸⁶ This pairing holds a similar dual possibility of understanding implying a reflection of the truth, while helping or making it easier suggests that the Jesuits might offer an alternative justification to absolve Emilio or at least assist his case.

The justification of God’s will recurs throughout the book, most notably when the first of their party unexpectedly and inexplicably dies. The medic, Anne’s, autopsy reveals no cause of death. When pressed, she sarcastically replies, “want a reason? *Deus vult, pater*. God wanted him dead, okay?”⁸⁷ Previous passages in which she criticizes the Jesuits, and especially the leader, for offering *deus vult* as a justification for positive coincidences or good luck clues the reader to her sarcasm and lack of belief that the death has a divine etiology: God’s will. Rather, she presents the phrase as a pretext: a justification the Jesuits repeatedly accept, even when it strikes her as a poor explanation. The reader knows that Anne is not a deist, so this explanation is clearly pretextual: if she does not believe in God, then God is an irrelevant authority (test 4). Anne “turned his habitual cry of faith against them.”⁸⁸ the leader asks for a reason, and she gives a rhetorical performance that at once serves the purpose of a justification in the absence of a

known reason, and also challenges the Jesuits' use of the same justification in cases where she does not believe it reflects a reason.

Alien-initiated Contact

The MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant” Fellow, two-time Hugo Award winner, and Science Fiction Hall of Fame member Octavia Butler is a California science fiction author whom Freedman names as one of the authors epitomizing “strongly critical work openly and unambiguously presented as science fiction.”⁸⁹ Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood*, originally titled the *Xenogenesis Trilogy*, comprises three books: *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989). Following a human-initiated nuclear apocalypse on Earth, an alien species seeking to ‘trade’ genetic material with humans for both species’ mutual genetic benefit saves as many survivors as possible to keep them in suspended animation on a spaceship until the aliens determine that it is time to ‘awaken’ humans to train for survival on the alien-restored Earth. Donna Haraway, Cathy Peppers, and Jamil Khader read this time in suspended animation on the ship as an allusion to historical slave ships that would have carried ancestors of Lilith, a black American woman,⁹⁰ though Butler may not have intended that reference. In an interview, Butler lamented that critics impose slavery on her work where she did not intend it, offering the example that “so many critics have read [‘Bloodchild’] as a story about slavery, probably just because I am black... The only places I am writing about slavery is where I actually say so.”⁹¹ The Oankali choose Lilith to ‘parent’ the first group of humans for return.⁹²

Butler developed this trilogy out of several series of unpublished short stories. One of these series predicts *The Sparrow*’s storyline and particularly the character of Sofia remarkably closely. Human Missionaries crash their ship, stranding them on an alien planet; much of the crew dies, yet one strong young woman survives, falls pregnant, then becomes a leader.⁹³ The trilogy Butler ultimately published builds a different narrative. *Dawn*⁹⁴ follows Lilith’s coming to awareness of the text’s world and alien species, and her journey through training to return to Earth. This first book is significant in constructing the aliens’ ‘religion’ of Biology and establishing their imperialist relationship to humans.

Adulthood Rites analyzes the ethical dimensions of the alien-human relationship as the protagonist Akin tries to understand both species and their power dynamics, then seek a solution to free humans who do not believe in the Biological imperative with which the aliens justify their imperialism. Akin is a child of Lilith and the first ‘construct’ (alien-human hybrid) male to be born. Butler thoroughly researched West-African mythology for this trilogy, as Akin’s name reflects: Akin is “hero” in Yoruba.⁹⁵ Recalling Michel Foucault’s observation about the insights that nonconformity in modern literature allows, we might interpret this hero as the trilogy’s Don Quixote.⁹⁶ On a series of misadventures after being kidnapped as a toddler, he tries to make sense of the human and Oankali Others, providing insights for the human reader who might relate to the practices and attitudes Akin views through a half-human, half-alien lens. As the protagonist, Akin invites the reader to share that disorientation in the face of the Other and the Same. Like Emilio in *The Sparrow*, Akin plays the role of the journeying protagonist in a third-person narrative who encounters characters with whom he should identify and with whom he

should not yet is alienated from them all. Both characters experience cultural isolation: Emilio spends 17 Earth-years alone in a shuttle before returning to the Jesuits and feeling that no one understands him; Akin is the first construct male ever born, then kidnapped as a toddler by humans from whom he must hide his capabilities and thoughts. Jesuit Emilio and Human-Oankali Akin share a tension of outwardly identifying with those around them yet feeling inwardly isolated: Foucault's characterization of "the Same and the Other."

Genetically optimized perception and intelligence along with inherited knowledge allow the protagonist of *Imago*, Jodahs, to replace the omniscient third-person narrator of the previous two books. Another child of Lilith, Jodahs is the first construct to become an ooloi, the Oankali third sex. The phonic similarities between Jodahs and Judas suggest a reference to Lilith's struggle with being seen as a Judas that I address later. Butler further explores human nature, violence, 'religion,' and power structures through the first-person perspective of a human-alien hybrid character epitomizing yet also distinct from humanity, born of a world that is Earth but not quite the Earth the reader knows. The trilogy's original title, *Xenogenesis*, means an Other's origin of development, describing the aliens' objective. Butler's three books approaching the narrative from various directions echo the multiple stories of Genesis, the title's explicit 'religious' reference. The new title, *Lilith's Brood*, includes a 'religious' reference with the character's name, Lilith. Interpreting the name as an allusion to Sumerian or late twentieth century feminist mythology yields significant interpretation. Or, for example, even a simple reference to the Lilith in Isaiah 34:14, who finds her place in a post-apocalyptic wilderness, is fitting.

Through the trilogy, Butler builds a vocabulary for her world, constructing a discourse. The *Oankali* are the alien species who make contact with humans to trade genetic material; they have been genetically selecting traits to make themselves more human-like in preparation for the trade. *Chkahichdahk* is the Oankali ship, an organism living symbiotically with the Oankali. *Awakening* describes humans' coming to awareness after the unconscious suspended animation that keeps them alive for centuries without allowing them to age. *Constructs* are the half-human half-Oankali genetic hybrids the Oankali seek to produce, who may come to constitute a new species. *Ooloi* are members of a third gender: highly intelligent, knowledgeable, and seductive, they facilitate rapturous sexual intercourse and engineer reproduction by mixing genes. Given that they take information from a human and create a new entity, the ooloi have a role similar to the "vultures" in *The Sparrow*. Whereas vultures such as Sofia interview and observe their subjects to create AI computer programs, the ooloi mix genes in reproduction to create multi-species constructs. Yet both Russell's vultures and Butler's ooloi are optimizing their creation to retain the human's best qualities and knowledge without their deficiencies or disadvantages. *Resisters* are the humans who refuse to reproduce with the Oankali, so live in their own sterile, violent settlements.

Construction of 'religion'

Butler never applies the term 'religion' to the Oankali belief system, although she does explicitly compare it to Christianity in ways that suggest it holds a similar cultural place or epistemological function. Indeed, she uses the word 'religion' only once, to describe one of the few books the Oankali give Lilith when they decide she may have books, including "a study of religion."⁹⁷ The small and precious library is a smattering of science, history, and fiction, with the text on religion

wedged unremarkably in the middle, and about which Butler provides no more information. Butler's biographer for the Modern Masters of Science Fiction series, Gerry Canavan writes that Butler saw the Oankali 'religion' as transcending that category: "Butler's position is that the Oankali's reverence for life goes beyond religion to the level of 'genetic inclination.'"⁹⁸ However, I argue for placing that 'genetic inclination' in that category of 'religion' by reading it through the critical lens of viewing 'religion' as a modern Enlightenment construct with certain characteristics.

The titles of the trilogy's books, *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, and *Imago*, reflect an evolutionary process from genesis through sexual maturation to imago, a biological term for the final stage of development for any animal who undergoes metamorphosis. This biological framing reinforces that the Oankali 'religion' is Biology. (Hereafter, when I capitalize 'Biology,' I am referring to it as the Oankali 'religion.')

Lilith's female Oankali mate states the central belief of the Oankali 'religion,' as though it were a creed: "[w]e believe in life... When I'm dead, I will nourish other life... If I died on a lifeless world... organelles within each cell of my body would survive and evolve... Nothing is more tenacious than the life we are made of. A world of life from apparent death, from dissolution. That's what we believe in... Nothing more."⁹⁹ Their belief system consists of the creation and cultivation of life from the level of organelles within cells, evolution, and life even in what appears to be death. The belief system leads the Oankali to engage in biological manipulations that resister humans view as violence against their individual bodies and the human species as a whole.

The Oankali practice is to find a species on a planet, and stay on that planet, mixing genetic information and material with the local species until the new construct species is mature enough to begin the cycle again. The material of their ship, a co-evolving life form that shares their 'religion,' Chkahichdahk, collects genetic information from the planet, depleting the planet's flora and fauna before moving to the next planet. It is unclear why Butler presents Chkahichdahk's actions as extraction, and the Oankali's action as trade, even though they both change existing species and planets: Chkahichdahk takes genetic information so that it can reproduce the life forms,¹⁰⁰ while the Oankali take genetic information to mix with their own and produce a new species. Then together they remove the genetic information from the original planet. Akin identifies the essence of this process in the act of collecting plant specimens with a resister while he is kidnapped, reflecting that what they "were doing was what the Oankali always did—collect life, travel and collect and integrate new life into their ships [Chkahichdahk], their already vast collection of living things, and themselves."¹⁰¹ By explaining the way Chkahichdahk works, Akin by extension explains the "religion's" processes: "[y]ou either joined with them, shared their experiences, and let them share yours, or there was no trade. And without trade, the ships ignored your existence."¹⁰² Likewise, the Biology 'religion' distinguishes the insiders who engage in trade from the outsiders they ignore.

Nikanj—an ooloi trained from birth to work with humans, who falls in love with and seduces Lilith, remaining her ooloi mate for the rest of the trilogy—describes the process the Oankali 'religion' prescribes by comparing the behavior to what organelles do in human bodies, using the language of the Oankali 'religion' to describe the symbiotic biological relationships of organelles and bacteria with humans.

*Inside his cells, mitochondria, a previously independent form of life, have found a haven and trade their ability to synthesize proteins and metabolize fats for room to live and reproduce. We're in [a human's] cells too now, and the cells have accepted us. One Oankali organism within each cell, dividing with each cell, extending life, and resisting disease. Even before we arrived, [humans] had bacteria living in their intestines and protecting them from other bacteria that would hurt or kill them. They could not exist without symbiotic relationships with other creatures...I think we're as much symbionts as their mitochondria were originally. They could not have evolved into what they are without mitochondria.*¹⁰³

The metaphor comparing Oankali to mitochondria naturalizes and then necessitates Oankali 'religion.' Nikanj employs the words for processes of Oankali 'religion' to describe the mitochondria—trade, synthesis, reproduction. The descriptors of bacteria—protection, relationship, creatures—also allude to Oankali 'religion.' This borrowed vocabulary reinforces the metaphor and thereby an impression of Oankali actions as natural biological processes. Distilling the Oankali violence against humans to the cellular level through this metaphor makes the violence seem less objectionable because it occurs on such a physically minute scale. Nikanj's claim that the human cells have accepted the Oankali organism within the cells uses synecdoche to imply that the human body and even perhaps the human species have accepted the Oankali. In this synecdoche, the Oankali organisms within cells represent the Oankali species or even imperial project, the cell that is part of the human represents the whole body, and the singular human body may represent the human species. The rhetorical device of the synecdoche cues the reader to make these generalizations without the speaker in the narrative having to explicitly state them.

Comparing the Oankali violence to the naturalized processes of life forms already living in the human body suggests that the new organisms are following the precedent of mitochondria and bacteria, diminishing their own violation in contrast to the previous entrenched violations. Once Nikanj has established the parallel between Oankali (organisms) and the mitochondria and bacteria living in human bodies, the claim that bacteria protect humans parallels an unstated suggestion that the Oankali also protect humans. Even before explicitly stating that Oankali are in a symbiotic relationship with humans, Nikanj suggests this symbiosis through the metaphor. Thus, when Nikanj claims humans "could not exist without symbiotic relationships with other creatures," the implication is that humans could not exist without their relationship with the Oankali. The following line, that "such relationships frighten" humans, makes more sense in reference to human fear of Oankali biology than human fear of gut bacteria or the mitochondria within cells, which reinforces a reading of Oankali as the symbionts without whom humans could not exist. Within a few lines, Nikanj makes a case for the violence that their 'religion' of Biology demands as natural and necessary.

This passage serves as both a description of the Oankali 'religion' and also a justification for the Oankali violence against humans, an enactment of their 'religion' in general. Nikanj defends the processes of their 'religion' as natural expressions of relationships between living beings that are necessary for those beings, potentially shifting the reader's impression of the processes from a violation to a liberation. Yet the Oankali interlocutor in this passage challenges the metaphor in

such a way as to suggest that the justification may be a pretext: “we aren’t like mitochondria or helpful bacteria. . . You shouldn’t lie to them.”¹⁰⁴ Since the reader knows that it is difficult for Oankali to lie,¹⁰⁵ the diction of lying is odd, perhaps suggesting an exaggeration or misplaced metaphor rather than an untruth. Oankali organisms *are* like mitochondria and bacteria in that they enter cells and manipulate them, or that they protect human bodies in some way. On the larger scale that synecdoche allows, humans would help Oankali by teaching them how to use cancer to regenerate anatomy, and Oankali have already helped humans by saving them from extinction after the nuclear war and strengthening their bodies through cellular adjustments. So the species do have the potential for symbiosis. Perhaps Nikanj’s metaphor is misapplied rather than misrepresentative. Therefore, applying my misreading or misapplication pretext test (test 7) to the critique of Nikanj’s metaphor suggests that the justification for Oankali imperialism against humans as practice of their ‘religion’ is a pretext. As an ooloi, Nikanj possesses innumerable generations’ worth of accumulated biological knowledge, and as an Oankali, it has difficulty lying. Since the interlocutor’s challenge that Nikanj should not lie and that the Oankali are not symbiotic is misleading, the interlocutor appears to be drawing attention to some other mistake in Nikanj’s argument. Both Nikanj and the interlocutor have perfect information about the motivating reasons for all Oankali with whom they are in contact, so they have the knowledge necessary to discern reasons from pretext, and yet the interlocutor takes issue with the justification, suggesting that it is a misapplication.

Biology dictates more than the Oankali’s processes, it also determines ethical value, normative actions, and capabilities. Sentience is their test for who deserves dignity,¹⁰⁶ the biological status delineating what treatment a being deserves. As a child, Akin recognizes that, “much had to wait until he was an adult.”¹⁰⁷ The biological changes of metamorphosis, the Oankali equivalent of human puberty, completely changed the individuals’ physiology, ability, and gender. For ooloi (the Oankali’s third gender), the transition is even more dramatic, with two puberties, after which the new ooloi adult inherits the cumulative knowledge of their ooloi forbearers.

The third book’s *Bildungsroman* character development and first-person narrative from an ooloi construct protagonist allows Butler to express more of what Biology means to the Oankali through Jodahs’s musings coming to understand itself and its culture. The humans against whom Jodahs primarily compares itself are its human mates who have grown up in an isolated Catholic community. As Jodahs goes through metamorphosis to become an adult, it comes to new understandings. Introspecting about its physical makeup, Jodahs recognizes the DNA of its gendered parents and “a single Oankali organelle” establishing it as an Oankali: “[t]he organelle had divided within each of my cells as the cells divided. It had become an essential part of my body. We were what we were because of that organelle. It made us collectors and traders of life, always learning, always changing in every way but one—that one organelle. Ooloi said we *were* that organelle—that the original Oankali had evolved through that organelle’s invasion, acquisition, duplication, and symbiosis.”¹⁰⁸ The organelle, that basic biological component giving living cells their identity and purpose, is also the fundamental component of the Oankali, physically and behaviorally. For the Oankali, the organelle is ubiquitous (in every cell), essential, defining, even determining their practice of trade and related course of evolution. The Oankali’s relationship to organelle mirrors a mystical Christian perception of the relationship between humans and God, with God pervading the ground of the soul.

Butler's omniscient narrator compares Akin's experience of being in collective communication with other Oankali through Chkahichdahk to a Christian experience of the transcendent or mystical unity, likening the experience to feeling "as though he were a floating, disembodied mind, like the souls some resisters spoke of in their churches."¹⁰⁹ Butler also draws similarities through Akin's dialogue. There is an echo of the Christian conception of grace in Akin's portrait of Biology: "[c]hance exists. Mutation. Unexpected effects of the new environment. Things no one has thought of."¹¹⁰ Interpreted through the omniscient narrator, neither example requires the character to understand Christian theology, allowing the reader to believe that the twentieth century human author has the cultural knowledge to make such comparisons.

As a discursive construct, 'religion' arises from narratives: in *Lilith's Brood*, the comparison between untrue human stories and true Oankali stories helps Butler construct Oankali 'religion.'¹¹¹ Through Akin, Butler defines Oankali 'religion' as what is empirically true in contradistinction to untrue human 'religion.' The true basis of Oankali 'religion,' a worldview built upon empirical Biological evidence rather than the mythology of human 'religion,' contributes to their sense of superiority and thus noblesse oblige justifications for colonizing Earth and humanity. The scientific basis of the 'religion' and the Oankali's perfect memory mean that Akin is sure that stories he tells from Oankali 'religion' are all "absolutely true," while humans frustrate Akin with their "stories that were clearly not true—stories peopled by beings called witches or elves or gods."¹¹² Human "religion's" basis in fiction rather than science reinforces the epistemological strength of Biology, in contrast to human 'religion.'

Jodahs offers a direct comparison of Christianity and Biology, defining the latter in contrast to the former, with ritual as the mode of comparison, telling its human mates, "I don't think one of your priests would make us a marriage ceremony, but Oankali and constructs don't have much of a ceremony. For us, mating is biological."¹¹³ The Oankali counterpart of Catholic marriage is Biological mating. Other Oankali rituals that might parallel human 'religious' rituals are similarly Biological. For example, the coming-of-age ritual that serves as the climax and synecdoche for the final book is a neurological exchange of Biological information. The ooloi parent passes to its ooloi offspring generations of genetic memory through a flood of information passed through a physical neural connection.¹¹⁴ This moment encapsulates *Imago*, in which Jodahs attempts to reconcile Oankali and human genetic information with the flora and fauna of the new world, creating a human-alien construct genetic intelligence.

Perhaps the most important explicit reference to Christianity is Lilith's reference to herself as "Judas" or "Judas' goat" five times in the first book.¹¹⁵ The first instance is the metaphor Lilith uses when trying to make sense of how the Oankali intend to use her: as a goat the Oankali would train to herd her own kind to a dangerous fate while she would be spared. The nineteenth century sense of the term implies a herding towards slaughter, which may suggest that Lilith also believes breeding with another species would lead to human extinction. When she lectures on *Lilith's Brood*, Namwali Serpell notes three other meanings of the Judas goat: as a goat sent out with a radio transmitter to reveal the location of other goats, the goat set out as bait in front of a wild animal's den to draw the larger game out, and the WWII application to describe the

outdated and insufficiently armed bombers the US Air Force would paint in bright patterns and send at the head of a formation to lead a bomber group on missions.¹¹⁶

The first time Lilith refers to herself as Judas reflects how the humans she has awoken view her, telling a group of her allies that she cannot help them “if everyone’s sitting around waiting for me to play Judas.”¹¹⁷ The usage could be an allusion to the biblical Judas or the goat leading its herd to slaughter. On Earth, Lilith admits that humans on the ship called her Judas,¹¹⁸ though the reader never sees another character use that metaphor. The allusion reappears once, in the trilogy’s final chapter, to refer to the two humans who become the mates of Lilith’s ooloi child.¹¹⁹ In this case, the “Judases” are not betraying their community by deciding to mate with a half-Oankali and half-human construct, but rather because they lead the Oankali to the hidden human-only community. Here, “Judas goat” most likely compares them to goats sent out with radio transmitters to reveal where the herd is hiding, though the human characters are aware that they are revealing their community’s location. In all of these cases, the reader would have good reason to be sympathetic to the three characters labeled Judas, since the narrative explains their motivations and presents them as honorable figures.

Some biblical references are overt, such as the character names of Lilith and Joseph, or the Christian paraphernalia Akin finds in the rubble of a pre-war human city—holograms of Christ and “crosses of metal, each with a metal man hanging from them” that tasted to Akin like “more poison packed tight together in one place than I’ve ever known.”¹²⁰ The concentrated poison Akin identifies on the crucifix ambiguously derives from the metal or the ‘religion.’ Names like Jesusa and Tomás signal that the Spanish-speaking mountain community in which Jodahs and Aor¹²¹ find their mates is clearly Catholic. The Christian trinity reverberates through Butler’s description of Oankali ‘religion’ in the *trilogy*, with the repeated recurrence of “the powerful threefold unity that was one of the most alien features of Oankali life,”¹²² referring not only to the three genders, but to other tripartite elements of their cosmology, such as splitting their species in three, and the three stages of ooloi maturation.

The Oankali ‘religion’ of Biology is not only comparable to prototypical Christianity, but also features characteristics of a modern conception of ‘religion’ I describe in Chapter 2, notably that this iteration of ‘religion’ also expresses temporal and geographic universality (characteristic 1), while providing a connection to the transcendent (characteristic 8), cosmology (characteristic 9), and normative ethics (characteristic 10). Secondary features of Oankali Biology that match the characteristics I outline are plurality (characteristic 2), analytical category (characteristic 5), ontological existence (characteristic 6), and systematic structure (characteristic 7). To briefly explain the secondary features, by contrasting Biology with Christianity, the text suggests that they are two actual iterations from the same analytical category of comparison. Further, the scientific logic and reproductive cycle of Oankali Biology impose a systematic rhythm on their existence.

Biology is a temporal and geographic universal within a similarly universal category in the trilogy. Butler portrays the Oankali as moving eternally through time and the universe on the quest that their Biological imperative determines. Their species began too long ago and far away to recount, and the projected future stretches forward farther than the narrative can anticipate:

once Earth is depleted and once the Oankali have gained all they can from humanity, they will move on to repeat their process on another planet with another species, ad infinitum. Peppers interprets this species without a genesis in reference to Haraway's cyborg and Baudrillard's simulacrum, which omit origins to subvert dominant narratives.¹²³ Naming the titular first protagonist "Lilith" already suggests a narrative subversion by alluding to an alternative reading of the genesis narrative in which Lilith was made simultaneously with Adam, out of the same dust. The alternate origin story urges the reader to reconsider their perception of genesis, or on Pepper's reading, a "'cyborg' origin story" emerging from the allusion to the biblical Lilith that challenges perceived origins of race and gender.¹²⁴

The trilogy revolves thematically around Oankali Biology's transcendence: it drives the plot and characters, permits the reader's suspension of disbelief, and makes the text visionary fiction. The Oankali have their vision for a more utopian alternative for humanity, each group of humans imagines a new and better future, and the constructs envision and enact their own ideals—notably, Akin establishes a human colony on Mars to try to reconcile Oankali and resister desires. Within the details of the trilogy, Butler folds further elements of the visionary future, imagining a human species awoken to the danger of their hierarchical tendencies embracing a collective decision-making process that we begin to see in the final chapter's mountain community.

Lurking behind the utopian vision is a critique of utopia, a distrust of apparent progress. The imperial power, after all, is the one that purports to bring utopia to Earth in *Lilith's Brood*, and all three books' protagonists are ambivalent in their collaboration with the system. While acknowledging Butler's critique of utopia, Hoda Zaki offers two arguments for reading her work as utopian: some characters transcend human nature to do good "indicating that Butler has not completely written off the human ability to change for the better," and the alien societies she constructs bear the marks of utopias.¹²⁵ Nolan Belk highlights Butler's distrust of utopias in his epigraph quoting Butler: "[p]ersonally, I find utopias ridiculous. We're not going to have a perfect human society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely."¹²⁶ Perhaps the Oankali can genetically engineer "a few perfect humans," or perhaps by that point the genetic hybrids would no longer be human. The aliens strengthen the first generation of humans in the book by helping humans access their preexisting capabilities, suggesting that humans on their own could work to improve their memory, strength, and wisdom. After this generation, all offspring are either severely unhealthy products of inbreeding in the mountain community, or human-alien hybrid products of Oankali genetic engineering, which Belk describes as the humans being "forced to become the alien."¹²⁷ It is unclear where to draw the borders of the human species, though the physical descriptions of the severely deformed mountain community and Lilith's tentacled children of the second and third books would hardly resemble the reader's image of a prototypical human.

Were we to define Oankali 'religion' purely by the connection to the transcendent that it provides, one might read *sex* as the Oankali 'religion.' As Nekanj promises, Oankali sex can "offer a oneness that your people strive for, dream of, but can't truly attain alone."¹²⁸ Oankali sex offers oneness not only between individuals, but with a sensory network representative of the Biology that I read as their 'religion.' In some of the books' more erotic scenes, Butler describes

the euphoric multi-sensory stimulation of Oankali sex, a point of access that humans have to the broader ‘religion’ of Biology. The cosmological and ethical characteristics reinforce a reading of Biology as their ‘religion’ and permit a reading of their ‘religion’ as more than sex.

The Oankali challenge human assumptions through their Biological understanding of the world, emphasizing that it is their guiding cosmology. The first Oankali with whom Lilith comes in visual contact scolds Lilith for presuming that other species imitate human gender, and that the tree-like entities she sees are trees or even plants.¹²⁹ Lilith learns not to take for granted so basic a cultural construct as hair-cutting,¹³⁰ nor perceived physical universals such as color or pain. Lilith asks Nikanj to share with her what it is feeling in a moment of grief, to which Nikanj “gave her...a new color. A totally alien, unique, nameless thing, half seen, half felt or...tasted. A blaze of something frightening, yet overwhelmingly, compelling.”¹³¹ They agree there is no human word for what Nikanj has shown Lilith, an emotion-color beyond what humans can express in language. Nor can humans, lacking the biology to communicate multi-sensorially, express it the way Nikanj does. From a human perspective, Oankali Biology offers connection with the transcendent, with knowledge humans cannot express like this “half known mystery beautiful and complex. A deep, impossibly sensuous promise.”¹³² The rapturous sexual experiences that the ooloi facilitate offer not only tentacular knowledge, but also a connection to the transcendent. Jim Miller reads an early description of human-Oankali sexual pleasure as transcending gender, heterosexuality, the ego, and the human.¹³³ Oankali tentacular knowledge is sensory rather than intellectual: “being linked into our nervous systems enabled them to feel the truth of what we said.”¹³⁴ Thus, comprehension of Oankali Biology transcends linguistic expression. Akin denies the possibility of an empirical Oankali hermeneutic, rather describing Oankali understanding of genetics in an almost spiritual way, closer to a human view of faith than genetics. “It isn’t like reading words on a page. They feel it and know it. They...There’s no English word for what they do. To say they know is completely inadequate.”¹³⁵ Biology offers not only a framework for understanding the world, but also incontrovertible access to that knowledge.

Butler allows some departure even from an incontrovertible belief system that is epistemically perfectly credible, which may be an invitation for the reader to extend similar flexibility of belief to their own ‘religion.’ Akin describes as a conversion his shift of worldview from believing wholly in an Oankali Biology of genetic trade imperative, to a sympathy for the resister’s desire for autonomy. His characterization of his own position while “he had come to believe” this resister paradigm as “both captive and convert”¹³⁶ further suggests an equation of worldview with ‘religion.’

Still, for the Oankali, truth is in Biology: it is not only the belief system that guides the processes of how they should act, but a source of truth. As Akin expresses, trying to explain to a resister doctor why the Oankali believe the human species could not survive without their help and biological intervention: “Human purpose isn’t what you say it is or what I say it is. It’s what your biology says it is—what your genes say it is.”¹³⁷ Biology is belief, presented as cosmology. Here, Biology is clearly also a source of justification for the Oankali. Akin is justifying his belief that human hierarchical behavior mixed with intelligence led to the species’ downfall, and he is justifying Oankali imperialism of or even violence towards humans through their Biological

imperative to preserve the other species. An action that ends life—in this case, allowing humans to have their own settlement on Mars, which the Oankali imagine will ultimately end in human self-extermination—is “profoundly immoral, antilife.”¹³⁸ Biology thereby becomes linked to ethics: the Biological imperative determines how they *must* act to fulfill of their nature, and *should* act for the good of other species.

Repeated throughout the book is the Oankali’s evaluation of the essential human “contradiction,” a problem that consistently drives them to self-destruction or species self-extinction: they are both intelligent and hierarchical.¹³⁹ Humans use their more recently acquired intelligence to serve the older impulse to hierarchy, with disastrous consequences. By contrast, Butler portrays the Oankali as expressing possibly greater intelligence (they can perceive and process deeper and faster), but mostly horizontal power structure and consensus-based decision-making,¹⁴⁰ which offers them ethics. Theorists such as Zaki suggest that the strong themes of Biological imperative and essential human contradiction evidence Butler’s biological determinism, viewing gender and species biology as ordaining behavior.¹⁴¹

In an example resonant with some human ‘religions,’ Oankali and the constructs are vegetarian because their (‘religious’) commitment to Biology means that life is sacred. Jodahs contrasts Oankali vegetarianism with human meat consumption, specifying that the humans do not eat meat for nutrition since the Oankali provide for all their needs, but rather, “to prove to themselves that they still own themselves [... and have] customs—that are their own.”¹⁴² This framing of human consumption of animals as unrelated to nutrition makes it a cultural practice rather than a biological need. This reading of the human practice as reaffirming a custom puts animal consumption in a cultural category we might read as ‘religion,’ implying a parallel categorization for the corresponding Oankali dietary choice. I read Butler’s decision to make the Oankali vegetarian and Russell’s choice to present the Runa as a vegetarian species¹⁴³ as signaling to the reader that they should question how humans treat the Other.¹⁴⁴ The themes of vegetarianism are reminders of how many humans use ‘religious’ pretext to justify violence against other species, according to both texts’ understandings of ‘religion,’ Biological and biblical. This Oankali sacralization of life, and the normative ethics it produces, is a transformative lesson for Akin, who comes to realize through multi-sensory communication with that life holds the ultimate value to the aliens: “Oankali understanding of life itself as a thing of inexpressible value. A thing beyond trade. Life could be changed, changed utterly. But not destroyed.”¹⁴⁵ He begins to understand how Oankali think, as living with the humans taught him a bit of how humans think.

In a sense, Biology is the true ‘religion’ of the Enlightenment: it offers quantifiable and universalizable processes for producing knowledge. Positioning Biology as a ‘religion’ could be a form of critique, mystifying science as a source of knowledge by showing that it is constructed and manipulable, just like ‘religion.’ The series of Oankali judgment mistakes, accounting for Biology but not human tendencies could support this reading of Butler’s Biology offering a critique of science. However, the Oankali’s prevailing rationality, fairness, and resolution of human problems such as hierarchy and disease suggest an endorsement of science. Further, Biology as ‘religion’ resolves questions of ‘religion’ that linger in the Enlightenment definition. In a species’ blood or DNA, ‘religion’ would be universal and intrinsic. As Namwali Serpell

notes, Oankali Biology settles the free will conflict in modern ‘religion.’¹⁴⁶ Since the Oankali base their actions on Biological imperative and their beliefs on the scientific framework of Biology, the impetus for action is innate to the system that constitutes humans, rather than an intervention by God, and their beliefs derive from observations of that system. This resolution of the problem of free will has important and clear implications for the question of pretext. If Biology determines will, then an observer who understands Biology should be able to distinguish whether a justification reflects a motivation or is mere pretext. Even the intensity of the impetus Biology provides should be scientifically knowable, based on the intensity of relative hormones or physiological demands. For the Oankali, with direct access to their interlocutors’ central nervous system, determining such factors is even more reliable. Perhaps that is how the ooloi purport to know the will of the humans they encounter: not through interpreting their affective response, but instead by evaluating what their biological imperative would demand. Rather than evaluating speech or other discursive context, the ooloi can evaluate the speaker’s biology from individual biological information and in the legacy of biological history.

Connection to Imperialism

Like the anthropologists of European imperialism in the “Age of Discovery,” the Oankali are studying humans,¹⁴⁷ and defining themselves in contrast to the inferior Other. Jodahs defines the Oankali in contradistinction to humans on the basis of the practices their respective evolutions have engendered: “Humans had evolved from hierarchical life, dominating, often killing other life. The Oankali had evolved from acquisitive life, collecting and combining with other life.”¹⁴⁸ Given the repeated sentiment throughout the trilogy that human hierarchical behavior is a fatal contradiction, this contrast reflects an ethical judgment establishing the Oankali as the superior species. The Oankali evidently view the human practice as objectionable but their own as desirable, since they are trying to help humans evolve out of their hierarchical, dominating, and murderous natures, yet are not trying to evolve away from their own acquisitive, collecting, and combining nature. This definition of species (like races) in contradistinction to one another, the ethical hierarchy of one definition over the other, and the campaign to cure the ‘Other’ race of their inferior practices mirrors European conversion colonialism in a project that Haraway explicitly calls a “colonial venture,”¹⁴⁹ and Zaki describes as a “recolonization of an Earth” centered around the power dynamics of humans and aliens:¹⁵⁰ the colonized and colonists.

Presenting human constructions like race and gender from an Oankali perspective allows Butler to imagine a visionary society. Akin relates confusion at being welcomed in villages that speak Chinese, Igbo, Spanish, Hindi, and Swahili, yet being forced to leave a village that speaks his mother-tongue English, “because he was browner than the villagers were. He did not understand this.”¹⁵¹ Butler allows us to imagine a human who does not rank and value people by their race—not only because he is non-hierarchical, but also because he does not see race; he can identify skin tone without attaching a value judgment.

Through Lilith, Butler raises a central mistake of the modern conception of ‘religion’ I addressed in Chapter 2: applying European concepts to a non-European Other. Lilith thinks it is important to try to understand the Other on their own terms, rather than through human concepts, since applying human terms to Oankali concepts would be “self-deception. . . We need to know them for what they are, even if there are no human parallels—and believe me, there are none for the

ooloi,”¹⁵² the third-gender aliens. Maintaining false assumptions or trying to use one’s own worldview to understand the Other is self-deception.¹⁵³

The Oankali see themselves as saviors and peacemakers who will rightly inherit the Earth, whereas the imperialized humans see the imperialist Oankali as captors.¹⁵⁴ Lilith recognizes that the aliens own her; her body is no longer hers, which is compounded through the biological and genetic imperialism the aliens conduct. There is a conflict for the reader, who recognizes that humans would have died out had the Oankali not rescued them from Earth; humans would have completed their mass extinction, had the Oankali not healed them, changed their genes, and otherwise intervened to stop violence. Lilith responds “bitterly” to the civilizing mission message, comparing the Oankali treatment of humans to the pre-war human treatment of animals as “supposedly for her own good,” though wrong because it is “without her consent.”¹⁵⁵ Over the novel, Lilith’s perspective may change regarding whether the humans’ sacrifice was worth the price.¹⁵⁶ She wants to understand the Oankali,¹⁵⁷ and thinks not adapting is “foolish,” exercising “a kind of deliberate, persistent ignorance.”¹⁵⁸ There is the lingering question of true consent, of whether she is truly satisfied, or merely under Nikanj’s chemical influence impeding her free will.

Humans and constructs present breeding with the Oankali as bringing about the human species’ extinction—for one human, “my people won’t exist at all.”¹⁵⁹ However, the text never addresses the apparently essential distinction between selecting the most desirable traits from each to merge species as the Oankali ‘religion’ promotes and evolution through natural selection as species on Earth have always experienced. Cognitive intention cannot be the essential difference, since it is not also ethically repugnant for humans to intentionally mate with individuals they view as having more desirable traits for their offspring. Nor can accelerated speed distinguish this genetic transformation from evolution, since there is no set threshold for ethically acceptable rates of evolution. The same human had previously positively desired another form of genetic mixing without applying the claim that it would bring about human extinction, so my selective enforcement test (test 2) would suggest that the argument against human-Oankali mating because it will end the human species may be a pretext. The Christian mountain people in the third book reaffirm this interpretation, since their human-only genetic mixing brings about severe birth defects that are more likely to end the species than the cross-breeding with Oankali.

There is an element of Orientalism¹⁶⁰ in the Oankali approach to humans in the fascination with humans as Others that even characters who are themselves half-human constructs describe. Nikanj recognizes the imperialist harm of that obsession, telling Lilith, “[i]t might be better for both our peoples if we were not so strongly drawn to you.”¹⁶¹ This imperialist obsession with the Other echoes historical European practices. One scene is reminiscent of *Menschenzoos* that displayed human specimens from around the world for European audiences’ amusement. A young Nikanj wants to show Lilith off to his friends; Lilith becomes very uncomfortable as they touch her, ask Nikanj to remove Lilith’s clothing, yet do not speak with her, treating her as “nothing more than an unusual animal.”¹⁶² Similarly, the (human) protagonist of *The Sparrow* also tries to make sense of his experience once he has been captured by aliens and “fitted with a jeweled collar,” through the figure of a zoo in which he represents the human species.¹⁶³ Further,

Oankali justifications and methodology are particularly resonant with European imperialism of South Asia and the slave trade in Africa.

The Oankali even present their imperialism as “trade.”¹⁶⁴ Though trade is a Biological imperative for the Oankali that the reader observes in interactions between Oankali, the species-level trade is a justification for imperialism, and the term suggests clear historical precursors. ‘Trade’ has been a motivation—if not always stated justification—of many colonial projects, most obviously the Dutch East India Company, and most violently the slave trade. Comments on the kind of ‘trade’ the Oankali have initiated with humans could also serve as a commentary on colonial trade to which I am drawing a correlation. In response to Nikanj’s description of the “cultural as well as genetic diversity [necessary] for a good trade,” the human replies “scornfully[,] ‘I don’t know what I’d call what you’re doing to us, but it isn’t trade. Trade is when two people agree to an exchange...It doesn’t involve coercion.”¹⁶⁵ For the Oankali, agreement or consent is not necessary if the alternative for humans is extinction. Their ‘religion’ of Biology prioritizes continuation of the species and preservation of life above consent. Perhaps because they reach consensus almost intuitively through their collective communication, they do not consider the humans’ need for consent prior to action.

Pretext

Credibility, particularly the difficulty of distinguishing what one can believe from what one should doubt, is a major theme throughout the trilogy. An important question in *Dawn* is whether humans can believe the Oankali that they are on a ship—even Lilith expresses doubts that it may all be an illusion, though she never manages to catch an Oankali in a lie. In *Adulthood Rites*, Akin struggles to earn the resisters’ trust that he is truly trying to help them by establishing a human-only community on Mars. In *Imago*, the mountain villagers debate whether they can believe Jodahs’s promises about migration to Mars and life with the Oankali. The text contrasts the credible Oankali with humans who “lied easily and often. They could not trust one another.”¹⁶⁶ Though Oankali can lie, they rarely do, since communicating the full multi-sensory picture makes insincerity difficult: “their sensory language had left them with no habit of lying—only of withholding information, refusing contact.”¹⁶⁷ The human inability to conceal desires from the ooloi who access their central nervous system exposes their pretexts to the reader through Oankali interpretation when not through the omniscient narrator.

When Lilith protests that Nikanj should not have nonconsensually impregnated her, she offers the pretext that Nikanj should not have done so because the fetus is not clean, for it is not human. Nikanj, whom the reader knows has access to Lilith’s neurological response and perhaps therefore her true reasons, scolds her: “[y]ou shouldn’t begin to lie to yourself. It’s a deadly habit,” before justifying its own action through the Biological imperative of creating a child biologically superior to all of its parents.¹⁶⁸ Nikanj later defends the decision to impregnate Lilith because it was only “[a]gainst one part of her will.”¹⁶⁹ Nikanj refers to insights into more complex desires she experienced, of wanting a child with a human mate who had died, but not offering full consent with all of her will. Although Lilith is the protagonist in both scenes, the reader does not have access to Lilith’s will, nor motivations for protesting. There is no discussion of consent, Lilith’s readiness to gestate, nor of the human father being dead. The more important motives in this scene are Nikanj’s: to create a child of humans without hierarchical tendencies

leading to war, and a child of Oankali that can use human cancer to regenerate anatomy. If Biology is the Oankali ‘religion,’ then Nikanj roots its justification for impregnating Lilith in ‘religion:’ in the Biological imperatives to reproduce and evolve. Throughout the trilogy, Oankali and constructs explain their actions and stances using Biological justifications.

The Oankali’s biological imperative demands spreading knowledge, a task that the Oankali view as altruistic. Mirroring the *noblesse oblige* of conversion colonialism, the Oankali believe they are improving the universe by bringing genetic manipulation and knowledge to other species on other planets. Sarah Outterson reads the Oankali knowledge mission not only as violence—“learning requires suffering, so teachers must become part of a violent system”—¹⁷⁰but as a justification for violence. The Oankali give Lilith permission, in the name of her role as a parent and teacher sharing knowledge with the humans, to commit violence. As Outterson observes, “[t]he Oankali explicitly permit Lilith ‘to defend herself’ even to the point of killing...and if she is to teach, the violence she encounters and inflicts is inescapable.”¹⁷¹ Biology, the ‘religion’ of the Oankali, is providing the basis of justifications for violence.

The omniscient narrator accuses the Oankali of pretext in a human’s dialogue including self-accusation of possible pretext. In the form of introspection, the text presents the possibility that the Oankali incited the nuclear war as a pretext for imperial action against humans: “there were times when he wondered if somehow the Oankali had not caused the war for their own purposes.”¹⁷² The reader is left without evidence for Oankali involvement in the war, though it serves as a reminder that the (transparent) Oankali motivation is to trade genetic material with humans. The self-accusation suggests consciousness of an unconscious pretext: “I tell myself there’s some justification for what I’m doing. Most of the time, I think I’m lying.”¹⁷³ In this situation, “lying” describes the use of justification that is a pretext, rather than a motivating reason whose ethical validity the speaker or audience could evaluate. Another human accuses Lilith of repeatedly offering pretexts: “[y]ou’ve always got an answer. And it never quite rings true.”¹⁷⁴ The narrator reports that Lilith’s initial reaction is not an attempt to prove her justification reflected a true motivation, but rather an urge to accuse her interlocutor of the same practice—“his own tendency not to ring true.” The defensive response suggests that the accusation may have been accurate, since Lilith’s justification shifts from a reciprocal accusation of the interlocutor to concerns about the content (test 5). Lilith’s spoken response is to change the topic to address his fears rather than her motives, which suggests that Lilith is preoccupied with fear that the other humans view her as the scapegoat or a Judas goat.

Lilith describes a pretext that perfectly fits my *post hoc* pretext test (test 8). When another human asks Lilith whether Nikanj’s justification for impregnating her without her consent is true (reflecting a reason rather than a pretext, which Butler expresses as ‘true’ or not), Lilith admits she is not sure: “Nikanj usually tells the truth. On the other hand, reasons and justifications can sound just as good when they’re made up as an afterthought. Have your fun, then come up with a wonderful-sounding reason why it was the right thing for you to do.”¹⁷⁵ Though Lilith is using ‘justification’ and then ‘reason’ where I would use ‘pretext’ in contrast to a motivating reason, the meaning in this passage matches mine. Butler does use “pretense,” though in a separate sense from “pretext” or “justification.” She uses “pretense” to express an impression given to conceal the truth: Jodahs observes that a woman he encounters who wants to go to Mars “didn’t even

make a pretense of not wanting” the food it offered her.¹⁷⁶ Throughout these uses, one’s motivations for having the initial fun may not have anything to do with the justifications one produces later, when it comes time to justify the fun as the right thing to do.

Conclusion: Construction of ‘Religion’ as ‘Pretext’

Science fiction worlds are like Foucauldian heterotopias, changing just enough to be other-than our world, with levels and intersections of meaning to explore. Well-written science fiction often conceals the otherness of the heterotopic world, slowly uncovering the otherness through the narrative. Both texts I have chosen are examples of such veiled heterotopia. Russell sets a significant portion of *The Sparrow* in 2019 USA, so particularly a reader in this country today would reasonably approach those scenes with an expectation that the fictional world resembles their own. Even at the time of publication in 1996, that world was not so far in the future. Yet details about the Jesuits (e.g. planned alien conversion), industry (e.g. asteroid mining), and labor practices (e.g. legalized indentured servitude), reveal the otherness of Russell’s world. In *Dawn*, Lilith arrives in a jungle simulation so realistic she believes it might be Earth, and later Lilith does reach an unfamiliar restoration of Earth (probably the Peruvian Amazon, which she visited in 1985). Butler carefully unravels Lilith’s perceptions of familiarity: what she believes she knows becomes uncanny. The humans eat fruits they believe they recognize, only to have the omniscient narrator observe that the ship produced the matter based on a biological map of the now-extinct fruit, dangling them from branches that do not belong to trees, regardless of resemblance. The humans who so desire the familiarity of Earth doubt their own senses, questioning whether the far bank of a river is truly land or merely a mirage, and whether Lilith is actually human.

Heterotopias perform a vital epistemological function, the very critique of perceived reality that bridges science fiction and critical theory. Foucault writes that heterotopias “desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.”¹⁷⁷ Russell and Butler “desiccate speech” by forcing the reader to reevaluate what constitutes a ‘tree’ or ‘Jesuit.’ The uncanniness of familiar words encourages the reader to distinguish the usage each author employs from the discursive construction with which readers are familiar. For example, both texts add discursive salience to ‘ship,’ ‘plant,’ ‘extraterrestrial,’ and ‘sex.’ Russell giving new meaning to ‘AI’ and ‘music,’ and Butler to ‘Biology’ and ‘construct.’ These new meanings are not merely part of the literary experience of immersing oneself in a text, they also broaden the reader’s understanding of the terms and problematize presumed meanings. I look up from *Lilith’s Brood* to see *Agave americana*, colloquially the ‘century plant,’ not the century tree, despite woody stems, a tall trunk, and lateral branches—my dictionary’s definition of a ‘tree,’ from the Greek word of oak, *δρυς*. Our words are European, based on European prototypes, continents away from the fauna to which we imperfectly apply them; I wonder whether the giant sequoia is any more a tree than the fruit-bearing outgrowths of Chkahichdahk that may well resemble oaks.

Science fiction’s heterotopia are possible worlds, unlike the worlds of the fantasy genre’s magic, according to Jameson, extending far beyond the realm of possibility. The familiarities in science

fiction's heterotopias invite the reader to apply the text's critiques to the reader's own world. The heterotopia's difference prompts the reader to question the familiarities, to "dissolve the myths" of concepts we take for granted (i.e. 'religion') and "sterilize the lyricism" of rhetorical performance (i.e. pretext). Extending Freedman's argument that utopias reveal "how banal and corrupt are the barriers of the status quo,"¹⁷⁸ I view heterotopia as making a subtler parallel critique. The near future of visionary science fiction reminds the reader of the potential of future progress. Both the Runa and Jana'ata in *The Sparrow*¹⁷⁹ as well as the Oankali and constructs in *Lilith's Brood* have much stronger senses of smell than do humans,¹⁸⁰ and derive much more information for scent. We can read this difference as a critique of human sight reliance, calling into question the relative value of information we derive from our various senses. The reader can imagine their own world's political and epistemic potential through the familiar yet other societies and knowledge production of the heterotopia.

The reader who puts down heterotopic science fiction looks up to a world now strange in its slight otherness. After immersing oneself in the worlds of Rakhat or Chkahichdahk, human Earth's violent chaos comes into perspective. Russell and Butler use the omniscient third person narrator to reveal the human characters' misconceptions of their alien counterparts' perspectives, and the aliens' accompanying frustration that the humans are stuck in their own mode of conceiving of objects and space. In *The Sparrow*, whereas the humans assume that the word for 'bottle' refers to the glass's form, for the Runa it denotes the space: "capacity for containment was the important element, not the physical object. . . Similarly, there is a word for the space we would call a room but no words for wall or for ceiling or floor."¹⁸¹ Like the Japanese practice of mapping blocks rather than streets, and numbering chronologically rather than spatially, slight cultural distinctions in how people perceive space and boundaries reveal the epistemic limitations of what a given group believes are the relevant factors. It is easy to believe that one's own perspective is universal, if one has never considered objects by their function rather than form, or space as what is contained rather than what delineates. When science fiction texts, such as the ones I analyze in this chapter, problematize presumed categories, they are mirroring the critique of presumed symbol-meaning correlation that a modern view of language also makes.

There are political implications for such paradigm differences. Emilio relates these conceptual frames to their social organization, remarking that the Runa "have no concept of borders. . . They speak in terms of what a geographic region contains—a flower for making this distillation, or an herb which is good for that dye." The focus on purpose rather than boundaries "reflects their social structure and perceptions of the physical world and even their political status."¹⁸² Understanding the conceptual framework for their worldview offers insights into their social and political constructions, while also leading the reader to question uncritical acceptance of a society's worldview. These insights into the Runa perspective invite the reader to imagine an Earth where geographic distinctions relate to purpose of the land (or sea) rather than the boundaries of political ownership. Once Emilio has grasped the importance of function over form, Russell uses a related grammatical example to express the dangers of applying one's own worldview to another culture. The Runa distinguish functionally between non-visual and spatial, rather than formally between abstract and concrete. Emilio warns that imposing the latter human conception on the aliens will lead to "consistent errors."¹⁸³ Whether a culture takes a functional or formal approach is arbitrary, perhaps we could even call it a social construct, but a

misapplication is nevertheless serious. There is a danger in applying one's own concepts when trying to understand the Other.

Science's modern epistemic hegemony makes science fiction all the more powerful an epistemic source of critique, because the reader is socially conditioned to trust knowledge that science produces. The critical science fiction text offers a generative tension in challenging science's epistemic hegemony. Both of my texts incorporate this critique, reflecting what Freedman calls "post-Mary-Shelleyan unease with science."¹⁸⁴ Technology allows the imperialist powers in these texts to bring violence to the imperialized species, and to justify doing so. In *The Sparrow*, the Jesuits are able to bring their mission to Rakhat thanks to space travel technology. The alien imperial power, the Jana'ata, control the Runa and justify that control through their scientific knowledge system. In *Lilith's Brood*, the aliens are dangerous not only due to their scientific technology allowing them to control human reproduction, but also because their science is a 'religion,' with which they justify their violation of human autonomy. The extension of this critique is an unease with knowledge production and valuation, and distrust of the arguments deriving therefrom, which is the project of this dissertation. The 'religions' and imperialisms in both texts I analyze offer the slight otherness of the heterotopia that should distance the reader from her own culture's naturalized 'religions,' imperialism, and arguments. I hope the distance highlights the constructedness of naturalized 'religion' and imperialism, allowing the reader to question the knowledge production and valuation in her own culture, and significantly, the privileges that certain sources of justification enjoy.

The primary female characters in both books, Anne in *The Sparrow* and the titular character of *Lilith's Brood*, are anthropologists. This casting invites the reader to also approach the characters as subjects of social scientific study, to consider the social dynamics and constructions, and to look for power structures and institutions. Through comparisons with a Christian prototype of 'religion,' and demonstrating characteristics of a modern conception of 'religion' that I outline in Chapter 2, both Russell and Butler develop institutions to which their imperialists adhere that resemble 'religions.' The imperialism in both texts takes the overt form of inter-planetary travel that brings irrevocable changes and violence, and a subtler symbolic imperialism through the figure of controlled reproduction including forced sterility of the Other by the dominant group. I read controlled reproduction as a metaphor for the imperial power depriving the Other of continued culture.¹⁸⁵ After taking control of the continent, the Jana'ata in Russell's text force sterility upon the Runa and their own species, only allowing breeding through ooloi-like Jana'ata geneticists, as a mechanism of resource control and eugenics.¹⁸⁶ Butler's Oankali are explicit about sterilizing humans, and only allowing reproduction through the genetic manipulation of the ooloi, to prevent humans from continuing the human defect of combining hierarchy with intelligence. Indeed, intelligently controlled human reproduction is how Butler proposes resolving the essential human contradiction of being both hierarchical and intelligent. As Belk puts it, Butler's "utopia is based on the Oankali's total control of human breeding."¹⁸⁷ Both texts juxtapose forced sterility with chosen sterility. In *The Sparrow*, the Jesuits take a vow of chastity that the narrator and characters indicate they do not always keep, and in *Lilith's Brood*, the resisters choose sterility over breeding with the Oankali. These cases pose those who choose sterility as reluctantly or unhappily capitulating to the dictates of those in power. The powerful in both texts employ ideologies of sustainability and Biological optimization to justify the

controlled reproduction. For Russell's Jana'ata, the ideology has hints of 'religious' categorization, and as I argued above, Butler's Oankali Biology fits the category of a 'religion.'

While the heterotopia's recognizable otherness is crucial to exposing the constructedness of institutions such as 'religion' and imperialism, the omniscient third person narration of (science) fiction is what offers the reader insight into pretext by exposing the will. Through narration, the reader has access to knowledge about the characters that the characters themselves may not have, even opening the possibility of a reader knowing whether a justification is a reason or pretext. In *Lilith's Brood*, the ooloi's direct access to others' central nervous systems allows some characters to access other characters' wills. The possibility that the ooloi misrepresent or misunderstand other characters' will strengthens the omniscience of the third person narrator, who becomes a more trustworthy source than the ooloi. In contrast to the omniscient narrator, characters' self-reporting of their will is unreliable. At the end of the first book, when the focus shifts from Lilith to another human as the central character, Lilith becomes less reliable. The focus on Lilith's son Akin as the central character of the second book further raises the question of deception, perhaps more so since Akin is a construct rather than a human. The construct perspective further questions human epistemic reliability. As Namwali Serpell observes, Lilith's transformations occur at the narrative level, so transparency becomes correlated with truth.¹⁸⁸ From Lilith's transparent naïve vulnerability when the Oankali 'awaken' her from suspended animation in the first scene, to her obscured loyalty and desires when Jodahs reflects on her choice to live with the Oankali in the final book, Lilith's evolution takes place through narrative shifts over the trilogy. The reader's credulity follows that trajectory, as the distance between the reader and Lilith's inner thoughts and feelings widens over the narrative. Butler's decision to write the third book in the first person shifts away from Godlike narration of the previous two books. Particularly through this contrast, the reader perceives the limitations on what the author allows characters and readers to know, and begins to doubt a universal understanding of the truth for that world.

In contrast to the question of pretext that shifting narration reveals, a clear motivation for characters in both texts is orgasm. Russell and Butler's characters attempt to obscure this motivating reason behind justifications based in what I read as 'religion.' In *Lilith's Brood*, Biological imperative to pass along one's genetic material and evolve towards an improved species serves as the pretext for Oankali copulation, which Butler describes as an orgasm exquisite beyond human imagination. Since the Biological imperative serves as a pretext, and the Oankali 'religion' is Biology, their Biological imperative is a 'religious' pretext. In *The Sparrow*, the alien musician whose music attracted the humans to Rakhat rapes countless individuals, including protagonist Emilio, on the pretext that the rapes inspire his music that takes on a 'religious' significance. The narrator describes the music as the product of his "focusing the mind and soul" through which he "discovered in climax a reservoir of piercing erotic beauty." The "experience of orgasm" purportedly allows him to "sing of that evanescent moment."¹⁸⁹ Using words reminiscent of Earthly 'religion'—notably, Jesuit Christianity—the narrator further imbues the source of this pretext with 'religious' significance, likening the music to "the oldest chants," and characterizing the converts who succumb to the "sterile but ravishing brilliance... [as] the children of his soul."¹⁹⁰ Moreover, finding the species that produces this music was the justification for the Jesuit mission.

Whether or not the Oankali and Jesuits (or Jana'ata) intend harm, their imperialism brings violence to groups that do not share the 'religions' from which the aggressors derive their justifications for imperialism. Russell's Runa are extremely upset when the Jesuits perform mass, fear the Jana'ata belief system under whose oppression they live, and despise the music representative of both 'religions' in the book. Butler's resisters reject the Oankali Biological imperative, choosing sterile and violent subsistence over the rich lives of genetic optimization the Oankali offer. By developing a sympathetic view of the imperialized Runa and resisters, both books prime readers to question whether the 'religions' should form a universal foundation for ethical justifications. Then the omniscient narrator's insights into characters' will inspire the reader's doubt about the value of stated pretexts that are at odds with that will.

Butler and Russell's omniscient third person narrators are crucial to establishing the heterotopias, though character dialogue, diction, allusion help construct the institutions, actions, beliefs, and identities. A God's eye view of characters' will affords readers perfect information about justifications that would be impossible in life outside of literature, and as aliens, we view the most human experiences with new clarity. Stripping you of your socialized assumptions, science fiction invites you to visit another possible world to envision your own, take an alien's place to see yourself as the Other, and disconnect from your temporal and spatial frames to feel exactly where you are. Flip through the possible realities of a bookshelf, and your reality becomes like a forgotten bookmark: as uncanny to you as your assumptions should be, when it flutters out from another world.

¹ Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*, (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996), 282-3.

² Recognizing that 'religion' is a European Enlightenment construct rather than a universal institution intrinsic to human experience, I use single quotes around the word.

³ I have also chosen one book by a deist (Russell), and one by a non-deist (Butler), to allow for possible bias of perception on both sides. Raised Catholic, Russell converted to Judaism as an adult. She cites this conversion as an inspiration for writing *The Sparrow*, which "allowed me to weigh the risks and the benefits of belief in God, to examine the role of religion in the lives of many people." Russell, *The Sparrow*, 422-3.

⁴ Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), p. xvi. Freedman repeats the first part of this quotation on 32.

⁵ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 276.

⁶ Butler began developing the Oankali in the 1970s with unpublished short stories about Missionaries coming in contact with an alien species called the Ooankali. Gerry Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 93.

⁷ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 31.

⁸ Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, (New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 2011).

Gerry Canavan asserts that Butler was inspired by the story of Henrietta Lacks. Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler*, 99.

⁹ Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler*, 92.

¹⁰ Sands, "Octavia Butler's Chiastic Cannibalistics," 11.

¹¹ Stephen W. Potts and Octavia E. Butler, "'We Keep Playing the Same Record:' A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler," *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Nov., 1996), 332.

¹² Potts and Butler, "'We Keep Playing the Same Record,'" 335.

¹³ James Blish, "The Tale That Wags the God: The Function of Science Fiction," *American Libraries*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (1970): 1032

¹⁴ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 299.

¹⁵ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 44.

¹⁶ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 300.

¹⁷ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 49, italics in the original.

¹⁸ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 82.

¹⁹ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 89.

²⁰ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 106.

²¹ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 14, 48.

²² Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 13.

²³ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, xvi.

²⁴ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 37.

²⁵ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 55, italics in the original.

²⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, (London: Verso, 2005), 58.

²⁷ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 49.

²⁸ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 6.

²⁹ Biblical references include the "mark of Cain" (Russell, *The Sparrow*, 23), and "hunter of Genesis" (Russell, *The Sparrow*, 371).

³⁰ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 260.

³¹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 276.

³² e.g. Russell, *The Sparrow*, 45.

³³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 50.

³⁴ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 77-8.

³⁵ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 78.

³⁶ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 49.

³⁷ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 50.

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- ³⁸ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 21.
- ³⁹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 354-5.
- ⁴⁰ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 189.
- ⁴¹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 391.
- ⁴² Russell, *The Sparrow*, 110.
- ⁴³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 238.
- ⁴⁴ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 252.
- ⁴⁵ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 37.
- ⁴⁶ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 405.
- ⁴⁷ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 3.
- ⁴⁸ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 3.
- ⁴⁹ Jamil Khader, "Race Matters: People of Color, Ideology, and the Politics of Erasure and Reversal in Ursula Le Guin's 'The Left Hand of Darkness' and Mary Doria Russell's 'The Sparrow,'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (62) (Summer 2005), 117, 120.
- ⁵⁰ Khader, "Race Matters," 118-9.
- ⁵¹ Khader, "Race Matters," 119.
- ⁵² Russell, *The Sparrow*, 411.
- ⁵³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 184. Though Xavier and Ricci are prominent missionaries, I am not sure whether "the Guarnari" are historically existent, beyond being a house of quality string instruments.
- ⁵⁴ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 107.
- ⁵⁵ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 328.
- ⁵⁶ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 267.
- ⁵⁷ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 11-12.
- ⁵⁸ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 96.
- ⁵⁹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 293.
- ⁶⁰ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 190.
- ⁶¹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 231.
- ⁶² Russell, *The Sparrow*, 310-312.
- ⁶³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 375-9.
- ⁶⁴ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 379.
- ⁶⁵ Anne "covered herself with a plausible excuse" and left the house for reasons she did not want her audience to know, Russell, *The Sparrow*, 87.
- ⁶⁶ Emilio is upset that the Jesuits did not publish academic papers he sent back while on Rakhat, posing the rhetorical question, "[w]hat possible justification is there?" to indicate that he does not believe there is an acceptable justification, Russell, *The Sparrow*, 279.

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- ⁶⁷ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 288.
- ⁶⁸ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 386.
- ⁶⁹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 197-9.
- ⁷⁰ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 49.
- ⁷¹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 340.
- ⁷² Russell, *The Sparrow*, 340.
- ⁷³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 113.
- ⁷⁴ Khader, "Race Matters," 120.
- ⁷⁵ Khader, "Race Matters," 120.
- ⁷⁶ Khader, "Race Matters," 122.
- ⁷⁷ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 114.
- ⁷⁸ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 114.
- ⁷⁹ Reminding the reader that Russell is a former academic.
- ⁸⁰ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 282.
- ⁸¹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 283.
- ⁸² Russell, *The Sparrow*, 283.
- ⁸³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 285.
- ⁸⁴ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 46.
- ⁸⁵ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 9.
- ⁸⁶ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 9.
- ⁸⁷ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 197.
- ⁸⁸ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 198.
- ⁸⁹ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 91.
- ⁹⁰ Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 379.
- Cathy Peppers, "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler's Xenogenesis," *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), 51-2.
- Khader, "Race Matters," 114.
- ⁹¹ Potts and Butler, "'We Keep Playing the Same Record,'" 332.
- ⁹² Though by capitulating to those in power and giving birth to the first constructs, she may be closer to Eve than to Lilith.
- ⁹³ Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler*, 95-7.
- ⁹⁴ Currently, award-winning filmmaker Ava DuVernay, who directed the film adaptation of Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, is adapting *Dawn* for TV, which will be the first screen adaptation of Butler's work.

⁹⁵ Peter Sands, “Octavia Butler’s Chiastic Cannibalistics,” *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2003), 10.

Éva Federmayer, “Octavia Butler’s Maternal Cyborgs: The Black Female World of the *Xenogenesis* Trilogy,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (HJEAS), Vol. 6, No. 1, Science Fiction Issue, (2000 Spring), 107.

⁹⁶ Certainly, Butler did not intend her texts to speak to Foucault’s literary theory, since she told an interviewer, “I avoid all critical theory because I worry about it feeding into my work.”

Potts and Butler, ““We Keep Playing the Same Record,”” 331.

⁹⁷ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 108.

⁹⁸ Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler*, 113.

⁹⁹ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 662-3.

¹⁰⁰ See Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 430 and 440-1 for more on Chkahichdahk.

¹⁰¹ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 410.

¹⁰² Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 435.

¹⁰³ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 427.

¹⁰⁴ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 427.

¹⁰⁵ Butler establishes early on that Oankali cannot lie to one another when they communicate through multi-sensory transmission to the central nervous system, as they usually do. Given that this form of communication is their default, they are not accustomed to being able to lie. As Butler explicitly writes a little later, “No lie could be told successfully in this intimate form of communication. The only way to avoid unpleasant truths was to avoid communication.” It is not clear whether an Oankali could lie if they were self-deluding.” Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 436. However, the Oankali *are* fallible, as Butler reveals in *Imago*, with two construct ooloi before constructs are supposed to produce ooloi offspring, and fertile humans living in the mountains without detection by the Oankali.

¹⁰⁶ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 259.

¹⁰⁷ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 430.

¹⁰⁸ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 544, italics in the original.

¹⁰⁹ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 455.

¹¹⁰ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 501-2.

¹¹¹ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 366.

¹¹² Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 366.

¹¹³ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 636.

¹¹⁴ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 693.

¹¹⁵ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 67, 152, 215, 241, and 245. Lilith also compares herself to Cassandra, cursed to issue true predictions that no one would believe.

Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 236.

¹¹⁶ Serpell, *Personal Communication*.

¹¹⁷ Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, 215.

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- ¹¹⁸ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 297.
- ¹¹⁹ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 719.
- ¹²⁰ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 387.
- ¹²¹ Before Butler wrote this trilogy, she experimented with a series of unpublished stories she called “the Aaor stories” about missionaries encountering aliens, named after a distinct Oankali protagonist. Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler*, 94.
- ¹²² Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 220.
- ¹²³ Peppers, “Dialogic Origins,” 47-8.
- ¹²⁴ Peppers, “Dialogic Origins,” 51-2.
- ¹²⁵ Hoda M. Zaki, “Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler (Utopie, dystopie et idéologie dans la science-fiction d'Octavia Butler),” *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Science Fiction by Women (Jul., 1990), 243.
- ¹²⁶ Nolan Belk, “The Certainty of the Flesh: Octavia Butler’s Use of the Erotic in the Xenogenesis Trilogy,” *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Octavia Butler Special Issue (2008), pp. 369.
- ¹²⁷ Belk, “The Certainty of the Flesh,” 373.
- ¹²⁸ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 189.
- ¹²⁹ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 37.
- ¹³⁰ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 373.
- ¹³¹ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 226. Ellipses in the original.
- ¹³² Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 226.
- ¹³³ Jim Miller, “Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler’s Dystopian/Utopian Vision,” *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Jul., 1998), 344.
- ¹³⁴ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 639.
- ¹³⁵ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 502, ellipses in the original.
- ¹³⁶ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 768.
- ¹³⁷ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 501, mid-sentence capitalization in the original.
- ¹³⁸ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 475.
- ¹³⁹ First at Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 39.
- ¹⁴⁰ First at Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 453.
- ¹⁴¹ Zaki, “Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology,” 241-2.
- ¹⁴² Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 696-7.
- ¹⁴³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 308, 312.
- ¹⁴⁴ Though Belk reads the vegetarianism more simply as Butler’s vegetarian proselytizing, showing that a more intelligent species would not eat flesh.
Belk, “The Certainty of the Flesh,” 376-7.

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- ¹⁴⁵ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 470.
- ¹⁴⁶ Namwali Serpell, personal in-person communication, October 19, 2017.
- ¹⁴⁷ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 22.
- ¹⁴⁸ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 564.
- ¹⁴⁹ Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 380.
- ¹⁵⁰ Zaki, "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology," 241.
- ¹⁵¹ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 434.
- ¹⁵² Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 170.
- ¹⁵³ Nevertheless, Butler fails to distinguish gender from sex (Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 261, 427), or to account for queer characters, though some humans suspect Lilith is a lesbian (Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 299). There are even instances of slight homophobia (Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 459, 599). In contrast, the Jesuit leader of the mission in *The Sparrow* is gay, and the coming out scene is positive and affirming, Russell, *The Sparrow*, 248-9.
- ¹⁵⁴ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 6.
- ¹⁵⁵ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 33.
- ¹⁵⁶ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 34.
- ¹⁵⁷ Though she still intends to tell other humans to "learn and run," Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 248.
- ¹⁵⁸ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 89.
- ¹⁵⁹ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 424.
- ¹⁶⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
- ¹⁶¹ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 202.
- ¹⁶² Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 56-7.
- ¹⁶³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 388-9.
- ¹⁶⁴ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 42, 260.
- ¹⁶⁵ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 289.
- ¹⁶⁶ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 238.
- ¹⁶⁷ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 238.
- ¹⁶⁸ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 247.
- ¹⁶⁹ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 299.
- ¹⁷⁰ Sarah Outterson, "Diversity, Change, Violence: Octavia Butler's Pedagogical Philosophy," *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Octavia Butler Special Issue (2008), 435.
- ¹⁷¹ Outterson, "Diversity, Change, Violence," 436.
- ¹⁷² Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 290.
- ¹⁷³ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 425.
- ¹⁷⁴ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 240.

¹⁷⁵ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 301.

¹⁷⁶ Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 579.

In contrast, the uses of justification (Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, 301, 425) refer to possible to given statements.

¹⁷⁷ Foucault, *Order of Things*, xviii.

¹⁷⁸ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 67.

¹⁷⁹ e.g. Russell, *The Sparrow*, 259.

¹⁸⁰ Further, various species in *The Sparrow* are able to see in different levels of light: some in larger ranges than humans, and some in smaller.

¹⁸¹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 278-9.

¹⁸² Russell, *The Sparrow*, 233.

¹⁸³ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 246.

¹⁸⁴ Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Particularly since both authors are women, one might interpret this theme as offering a rejection of biological determinism.

¹⁸⁶ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 275, 376. Emilio comments that the eugenics is “quite a humane system, compared to the way *we* breed meat animals,” italics in the original. This is either a vegetarian talking point slipped in, or an effort to vindicate the genetic manipulation.

¹⁸⁷ Belk, “The Certainty of the Flesh,” 381.

¹⁸⁸ Serpell, personal communication, January 23, 2018.

¹⁸⁹ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 276.

¹⁹⁰ Russell, *The Sparrow*, 277.

Chapter Four

Clearing up ‘Religion’ through the Case of Scientology

“Religion is the bullfighter’s cape that avoids the gore.” — Attributed to L. Ron Hubbard¹

Scientology founder Lafayette Ron Hubbard did not want to get his hands bloody, nor face the consequences of his organization’s violence and exploitation. So he veiled Scientology in the bullfighter’s cape of ‘religion,’ which he thought would place it above the law and even social censure. This chapter employs the story of Hubbard’s constructed ‘religion’ to demonstrate the argument of this dissertation: discursively constructed ‘religion’ is a pretext and a basis for pretexts for imperialism and violence. Scientology was a clear choice for this chapter, not only for the blatant pretextual use of ‘religion,’ but also because it straddles ‘religion’ and science fiction,² drawing together the previous two chapters. Scientology’s foundational ‘religious’ texts by L. Ron Hubbard—who began his career as a pulp science fiction author, publishing his first story, “The Green God,” in 1934³—can be read as science fiction, while followers read his science fiction as ‘religious’ texts. Courts and governments abroad question whether Scientology legally qualifies as a ‘religion,’ while in the US, there is debate over whether the ‘religion’ is a pretext to disguise the financial greed that actually motivated the founder. Positioned within and between ‘religion’ and science fiction, Scientology blurs boundaries and definitions, illuminating how both are constructed categories.

My purpose in this chapter is to support my definition in the first chapter of ‘pretext’ as a justification for an action, stance, or identity that serves to veil motivating reasons and rhetorically appeal to the audience, and my argument in the second chapter that the epistemically privileged modern concept of ‘Religion’ is a historical and conceptual mistake with dangerous epistemic and ethical implications. Building upon my analysis in Chapter 3 of two twentieth century US science fiction texts (Mary Doria Russell’s *The Sparrow* and Octavia Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood*), I describe the discursive construction through another corpus of twentieth century US science fiction that is also a ‘religion.’ Demonstrating how Scientology is science fiction and a ‘religion’ that has produced imperialist programs and violence, I focus on how Scientology has employed pretext in two ways: ‘religion’ as pretext, and ‘religion’ as a source of pretext. In the former case, the speaker uses the status of religion as a justification (*x* is acceptable because Scientology is a ‘religion’); in the latter case, the speaker derives the justification from a religious basis (*x* is acceptable according to Scientology’s ‘religious’ beliefs). By expressing my argument through this case, I hope to clarify for the reader what pretext is and how it functions; how ‘religion’ is discursively constructed and used as a basis for pretext; and the epistemic privileges (entailing ethical, legal, societal privileges) an institution enjoys from being recognized as a ‘religion.’ As with Chapter 3, I am analyzing twentieth century US science fiction and ‘religion.’ Scientology is a culturally specific contemporary case, to which I do not intend to attach spatio-temporal universality, though I do believe much of my argument may be generalizable to other contexts. Rather, Scientology is a specific object with which I illustrate my argument about discursive construction of ‘religion’ as a powerful pretext and basis for pretexts.

The ‘religions’ in Chapter 3 are literarily constructed, though readers’ understanding of Jesuit ‘religion,’ and ‘religion’ as a category informs those constructions. The literary construction of Scientology, however, is only a small part of the construction of a ‘religion’ through discourse coming from founder Hubbard, the Church and its members, government institutions in the US and abroad, former members, and unrelated social commentators. Indeed, the online hacker collective Anonymous has been instrumental in crafting the current view of Scientology through online and offline campaigns to discredit the ‘religion’ and expose ‘religious’ secrets such as the Church’s occult materials. We can also read Scientology and Anonymous as mutually constitutive, since the campaign against Scientology first elevated Anonymous to public view.⁴ Scientology therefore constitutes a more complex case for analysis of constructing ‘religion,’ and is a generative case since it is on the boundary of ‘religion,’ science fiction, and society, which demonstrates the discursive construction of ‘religion’ by literature, scholarship, the law, and cultural forces.

Pressures from within Scientology have shaped the institution as a ‘religion’ according to individual leaders’ visions and various external expectations. Externally, public response; the media; and legal challenges from government agencies like the IRS and FBI, foreign nations, as well as individual members and non-members have all shaped how the organization defines itself. Though not all of these forces take the form of texts, they all belong to the discourse that is collectively, continuously, changeably shaping Scientology as a ‘religion.’ Whereas Chapter 3 was primarily concerned with the science fiction texts discursively constructing ‘religion’ and employing religious pretext, this chapter engages significant secondary materials to reflect the diversity of sources contributing to the discursive construction of Scientology as a ‘religion’ and to begin to accommodate the huge corpus of relevant material on the ‘religion.’ Religious studies scholar Hugh Urban’s history *The Church of Scientology*, book on New Religious Movements, and articles on Scientology are the foremost academic texts in the field. Gordon Melton’s 2000 monograph on the Church is the foundational academic text on Scientology, and perhaps the most neutral in its forthright presentation. I make substantial reference to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and New York University School of Law fellow Lawrence Wright’s 2013 *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*, because it is the most thoroughly researched and conceptually nuanced text on Scientology. The accounts from former members such as author-activist Kate Bernstein and actress Leah Remini reflect views from inside the Church, yet Hubbard’s writings comprise the true primary Church texts, since they are Scientology’s ‘religious’ texts.

As with the discursively constructed ‘religions’ I analyze from the two works of literature in the previous chapter, the discursive and literary construction of ‘religion’ in this chapter does not unproblematically fit the term. I am claiming that Scientology is a ‘religion’ according to the ten characteristics of a modern construction of ‘religion’ I present in Chapter 2. I am using the case of Scientology to consider how discourses—whether from literature, histories, public relation campaigns, or other social texts—construct an institution we might categorize as ‘religion’ on a modern understanding of ‘religion’ as I present in Chapter 2, then how that ‘religion’ serves as the basis for pretexts for imperialism and violence. This chapter introduces Scientology as an organization, as science fiction, then as a discursively constructed ‘religion.’ I identify examples of imperialism and violence in Scientology’s history, then use textual analysis to consider

examples of Scientology's pretexts, as identified by scholars and ex-Scientists, and through my own analysis of the relevant texts. Finally, I propose using discourse analysis and pretext identification to challenge Scientology's exploitation of its status as a 'religion' to commit violence, from torturing children to fatally denying adults allopathic medical treatment.

From Dianetics To Scientology

'Scientology' is the brand name Hubbard admits to choosing based on market research: in 1953, Hubbard incorporated three churches with three separate names, discarding "the Church of American Science" and "the Church of Spiritual Engineering" after what Wright calls the "brand-name contest."⁵ The name may also reflect an ironic acknowledgement of Scientology's sham, since a satirist coined the term in 1910 to refer to pseudoscience parading as fact.⁶ The earliest iteration of what would become a 'religion' was "Dianetics," the basis of Scientology's practice. Hubbard was inspired to write *Dianetics*—and propose a new school of psychology or 'religion'—after his wife Sara Northrup Hubbard introduced him to philosopher Alfred Korzybski's theory of general semantics. The passive construction in the previous sentence is intentional: I do not want to suggest that Korzybski inspired Hubbard, since according to Wright, Hubbard never actually read Korzybski. Rather, he gleaned second hand his impression of Korzybski's idea that language informs cognition, through glosses from Northrup and his friend, fellow science fiction author, and reported lover Robert Heinlein.⁷ In Chapter 1, I discussed Foucault's view that the Enlightenment brought a new understanding of language: a move from representation to signification. Rather than exactly symbolizing what they describe, words in modernity have complex discursive force. Korzybski presented a similar view of language, which Hubbard thought he could use to unlock the human mind.

Hubbard offers grand claims of what Dianetics can achieve, including eradicating mental illness and war, and even accomplishing resurrection. He is careful to qualify that these outcomes are only possible through institutionally administered practice of Dianetics, beginning his introduction to *Self Analysis* with the claim, "*Self Analysis* cannot revive the dead. *Self Analysis* will not empty insane asylums or stop war. These are the tasks of the Dianetic auditor and the Group Dianetic technician."⁸ As Scientology's obsession with "squirrels" who practice Dianetics outside of the church attests, Hubbard and his successors are concerned to keep Dianetics focused within the Church, where the 'religion' can control—and profit from—the practice.

Hubbard created a language for Dianetics and then Scientology, inventing terms like "thetan" (Scientology's version of the soul, expressed through thought)⁹ and "enturbulate" (to agitate, confuse, disturb), and employing a host of acronyms like OT (Operating Thetan) and RPF (Rehabilitation Project Force). Hubbard also gave his own meanings to common terms. A "Clear," for example, is a person who has attained the mental state towards which Dianetics is working, or in Hubbard's pseudo-scientific jargon, "[a] Clear is an unabberated person... The Clear has no engrams which can be restimulated to throw out the correctness of computation by entering hidden and false data."¹⁰ By "unabberated" he means that the person does not experience interruptions in her mental moves, and "restimulated" refers to recalling past conditions, even circumstances from past lives. "Engram" is a neologism Hubbard defines as

“mental image pictures which are recordings of experiences containing pain, unconsciousness and a real or fancied threat to survival,”¹¹ a concept central to the Dianetics practice, which seeks to make the subject aware of her engrams. Given Hubbard’s emphasis on the reader understanding every term, with his glossary and footnotes offering definitions, the vocabulary is remarkably opaque, leaving the confused reader thinking that any lack of comprehension is the fault of her own shortcomings. The vagueness may also be a form of equivocation. If the characteristics of a Clear are opaque enough, then the Church can claim that individuals are ‘Clear’ without other Scientologists or outsiders being able to evaluate for themselves whether the Clear meets the right criteria. If Scientologists cannot determine what exactly characterizes a Clear, then that designation can also function in more ways, for example to denote social status, as William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark argue.¹²

Wright credits Hubbard’s webs of meaning with the linguistic capacity to “entrap his followers in a self-referential semantic labyrinth.”¹³ Alluding to Genesis 1, Hubbard suggests that the Word is a “fundamental principle” of immeasurable value that Dianetics would uncover so that scientologists could “[u]se it to know ourselves. And to predict the actions of other men.”¹⁴ Hubbard was preoccupied with vocabulary, even viewing comprehension of words as foundational to individuals’ practice of Dianetics, starting *Self-Analysis* with an “important note” emphasizing the centrality of making sure to understand each term. Hubbard writes, “be very certain you never go past a word you do not fully understand,” calling this rule “the most important fact in the whole subject of study.”¹⁵ Presumably, that study refers to Dianetics, though given his holistic view of Dianetics as the answer to everything from elementary education to advanced medical solutions, perhaps he meant all study. This language, in concert with the discourse he created to constitute Scientology, and the societal discourse around the institution, created a ‘Religion.’

Scientology calls itself an “applied religious philosophy” rooted “in the deepest aspirations and beliefs of all great religions,”¹⁶ at once distancing itself from traditional ‘religion’ while appealing to the privileges of “great religions.” At the same time, Scientology employs scientific vocabulary and symbols to lend Dianetics epistemological privilege as a trustworthy approach to self improvement. A card insert in *Self Analysis* promoting a “Personality Analysis Profile with Computerized Results” similar to the ones that Scientologists use to hook target recruits on the street, appeals to technology’s epistemic reliability by promising “[y]our answers will be fully analyzed by computer,” and a line graph that initially looks very scientific, until you realize that there are no referents for the x- or y- axes, nor the line.

The psychological community’s overwhelming rejection of Hubbard’s techniques underscores what the meaningless line graph suggests: Hubbard’s science has dubious scientific merit. Hubbard’s background in fiction shines through his invented ‘science,’ spectacular (and untrue) autobiography, and even the insignificant examples he presents as fact throughout his writing. For example, in a chapter on finding the right way to handle oneself in one’s environment, Hubbard produces what appears to be an anthropological example he picked up on his purported world travels. “On Lake Tanganyika the natives have a very interesting way of catching fish. There on the equator the sun shines straight down through the clear water. The natives take blocks of wood and string them along a long rope...” He goes on in great detail about the fishing

technique exploiting the lake's equatorial location. Anyone who has heard of Lake Tanganyika probably knows that it is amongst the deepest freshwater lakes on Earth, so it is implausible that Hubbard could be correct that "blocks of wood on the rope made shadows which went all the way down to the bottom of the lake."¹⁷ Moreover, anyone who has tried to sleep near a fishing beach will know that professionals do not wait until mid-day to pursue their catch. Indeed, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization page on Lake Tanganyika's fisheries reports that "[m]ost fishing is done at night as virtually all fishing methods (e.g. purse seines, lift-nets, beach seines and scoop-nets) rely on [the endemic fish] being attracted to light."¹⁸ So important is the darkness to local fishing techniques, that they do not even fish during the full moon. Hubbard's description of the fishing techniques on Lake Tanganyika could not be farther from the truth. Of course the generous reader might view such stories as mere parables, hardly intended as fact, yet the fabrications reflect poorly on an institution appealing to science for authority.

Initially, Hubbard distanced Dianetics from 'religion,' writing in 1950, "Dianetics is a science; as such, it has no opinion about religion, for sciences are based on natural laws, not on opinions."¹⁹ The very next year, legal pressures began to mount against Dianetics for practicing medicine without a license. The Dianetics Foundation and individual practitioners faced investigation, fines, jail time, and confiscation of equipment by authorities from the New Jersey State Board of Medical Examiners to the FDA. These threats motivated Hubbard to pursue a 'religious' defense of Dianetics, for example responding to the FDA in 1962 with the justification, "religions in the 1960's use modern aids. The Electropsychometer is a valid 'religious' instrument, used in Confessionals."²⁰ Calling the Dianetics practice "confessional," and the primary instrument "religious" is a clear appeal to the protections of 'religious' classification. The following year, the FDA confiscated E-meters and literature in a raid, yet the Church of Scientology settled with the FDA on the strength of the argument that the instruments were 'religious,' so could be used if clearly labeled as intended for 'religious' activity.²¹ Hubbard's turn from insisting that Dianetics has nothing to do with religion to his concerted efforts to have Scientology recognized as a religion a post-hoc justification (test 8). After Hubbard faced challenges from the state, he decided to justify his institution as a 'religion' to secure legal benefits.

In Chapter 2, I introduced anthropologist Talal Asad's critique of secularism and 'religion' as co-constitutive twins rather than binary opposites,²² and religious studies scholar Jason Josephson-Storm's argument that 'religion' and science defined themselves against each other and superstition.²³ The discursive construction of Scientology as 'religion' in contrast to science, while maintaining the trappings of science in the name, along with the scientific appearance of the practice, reflects this co-constitution of a concept in contradistinction to an object while relying on that object's similar status as an institution. Hubbard's response to the FDA requires a contrast between science, over which the FDA has legal domain, and 'religion,' which carries Constitutional protections against such regulation. At the same time, Hubbard exploits the epistemic and legal privileges of both categories, appealing to the authority of science and protections of 'religion,' claiming the possibility of achieving transcendence through modern science and the un-scientific potential of 'religion.' Through this defense, Hubbard reinforces the discursive construction of 'religion' in opposition to science that Asad and Josephson-Storm describe.

The transition from Dianetics to Scientology has many possible interpretations. Hubbard explicitly wrote in a 1953 letter (that anti-Scientology parties have produced in court as evidence that the ‘religion’ is a pretext for financial advantages) to an executive that he was considering a spiritual operation as a means of keeping the operation “solvent. It is a problem of practical business,” referring to this strategy as “the religion angle.”²⁴ As Wright points out, in addition to tax advantages, a ‘religion’ offers a product that the consumer will continue to desire (salvation), in contrast to a psychotherapeutic product that should eventually cure the patient who would then stop paying.²⁵ Kjersti Hellesøy acknowledges that interpretation and proposes a more generous possible reading, that perhaps “Hubbard shifted his movement from therapy (Dianetics) to religion (Scientology)...[as] the result of Hubbard’s discovery of past life experiences and his exploration of thetan.”²⁶ Hubbard may have found the spirituality of ‘religious’ categorization more appropriate for his movement once he incorporated reincarnation into the belief system and had more spiritual experiences. North American Studies scholar Bernadette Rigal²⁷ conjectures that Hubbard took this concept of reincarnating thetan from the Eastern religions gaining popularity in California at the time,²⁸ implying marketing motives.

The mid-twentieth century United States was a site of growth and experimentation for new ‘religious’ movements such as Scientology and the California interpretations of Eastern religions, so Hubbard’s dalliance with a new ‘religion’ is not as anomalous on the cultural scene as it might have appeared several decades before, or even today. Sociologist of religion James A. Beckford observes that “new ‘religious’ movements are important indicators of stressful changes in culture and society...by imposing new interpretations on it and by experimenting with practical responses. They therefore amount to social and cultural laboratories [to test] ideas, feelings, and social relations.”²⁹ In the post-WWII period, veterans such as Hubbard may have been coming to terms with their role (or in Hubbard’s case, lack thereof) in the war, and society was looking for new ways to make sense of the world. Dianetics was certainly testing ideas, feelings, and relations, positing a whole new cosmology, an anti-psychology approach to understanding and dealing with emotion, and proposing a new world order. That Scientology fits Beckford’s explanation of the social place of new ‘religious’ movements (NRMs) should help place Scientology in its cultural milieu and explain why it may initially have appealed to new converts but should not necessarily suggest that it is a ‘religion.’ Beckford’s instrumental description of what NRMs do could equally well apply to science fiction. Susan Palmer, also a sociologist, explicitly connects new ‘religious’ movements to science fiction, arguing that NRMs develop “protocivilization[s]...fantasy worlds that rival those of Philip K. Dick.”³⁰ a famous twentieth century US science fiction author. Perhaps Scientology would be better understood as one of Hubbard’s protocivilization fantasy worlds: a work of science fiction.

Scientology as Science Fiction and ‘Religion’

The first selection of Hubbard’s published work on Dianetics appeared as an article in the science fiction ‘pulp magazine’ *Astounding Science-Fiction*, with a note from the editor assuring the reader that the “article is *not* a hoax, joke, or anything but a direct, clear statement of a totally new scientific thesis.”³¹ Since such disclaimers are a common device across fiction genres, the claim that what follows is true or scientific does not preclude a characterization of the article as

science fiction, allowing the possibility of a written work being both science fiction and a scientific thesis. Or it is possible that Scientology is both science fiction and ‘religion,’ or at least displays elements of each.

As Chapter 2 argues, ‘religion’ is a complicated construct rather than a clear-cut category, and as I discuss in Chapter 3, defining the genre of science fiction is a matter of literary theoretical debate. The reason I chose the genre of science fiction for this dissertation is for its tendency to play with the hypothetical, testing certain premises in society, driving readers to question their assumptions and disrupt their views of naturalized concepts and reality. I appeal to Carl Freedman’s view of science fiction as the literary genre “most devoted to the historical concreteness and rigorous self-reflectiveness,”³² and thus most suited to critical theory analysis. The “cognitive estrangement” that characterizes science fiction, pushing the reader away from her quotidian world to allow critical distance from which to challenge her received worldview and create her own worldview is an antidote to the strategy characteristic of many ‘religions’ that require blind faith of and construct worlds for their adherents. Rather than telling the reader to believe the most bizarre occult mythology, science fiction urges the reader to question even the most obvious quotidian concepts she takes for granted. Hubbard advocates a similar cognitive estrangement, promising his followers clarity as they move up the “bridge” levels of Scientology, freeing themselves from the delusions society and their lives have taught them. Theologically, in terms of the theory of the ‘religion,’ Scientology mimics science fiction’s critical potential.

Religion and science fiction are certainly entangled in Hubbard’s characterization of Scientology. Hubbard, an extraordinarily prolific science fiction author,³³ continued to produce works that we might consider science fiction even after starting Scientology, and calls the “religion’s” origin story a “space opera,” situating the theological literature within the science fiction literary genre. In a typically bombastic epigraph to *Self-Analysis* mimicking ‘religious’ language, Hubbard suggests that Christianity will oppose Dianetics: “[d]o not harken too well to he who would tell you this system will not work...Not all the authorities in Christendom can alter natural law.”³⁴ Today, Hubbard’s language may sound ridiculous, with Scientology’s scripture sounding all the more like bad science fiction; the genesis story of Xenu, for example, includes a line about Xenu taking time “to really goof the floor.”³⁵ Yet it is this aesthetic that Wright credits with attracting readers to Scientology, comparing the enthralling “folksy tone and [Hubbard’s] impressionistic grasp of human nature” with the aesthetic appeals of a cathedral or mosque that draw adherents to other ‘religions.’³⁶ Urban analyzes Hubbard’s tone in his Scientology (and originally Dianetics) writing as indicating a desire to appeal to a science fiction audience; Hubbard’s choice to publish his first Dianetics text in a science fiction magazine further supports this aim.³⁷

Fellow science fiction writer Jack Williamson observes that elements of Scientology are manifestations of Hubbard’s fictional fancy.³⁸ The symbol of Hubbard’s fictional Soldiers of Light resembles what would become Scientology’s eight-point cross, and his character Doc Methuselah presages Hubbard’s self portrayal as Scientology’s leader. Hubbard borrowed elements from other fiction, such as using the James Bond term “SMERSH” to refer to secret governments scheming to rule the world.³⁹ Most dramatically, in 1967, Hubbard turned a quasi-

naval organization from his past science fiction into a branch of Scientology, founding the Sea Org with the fleet of ships, the *Diana*, the *Athena*, and the *Apollo*.⁴⁰ When Hubbard was active in the Sea Org, he incorporated science fiction plot elements in the daily operations of the crew. An early Sea Org recruit Hana Eltringham recalls Hubbard gathering the crew of *Avon River* in 1968 to, as Wright describes, “read them a new revelation...an underground space station” with hundreds of space craft. He promised the crew that “a secret doorway would open by a palm print on the lock—but only one person’s hand would do the trick,”⁴¹ a twist right out of a science fiction plot. Perhaps Hubbard had difficulty distinguishing reality from science fiction, or perhaps he truly believed that writers can create their own universes, and that if he and his crew believed in this space station sincerely enough, that it would manifest. In his science fiction as in his Scientology writings, Hubbard portrays the writer as having “even godlike power...to generate entire universes out of his own imagination,” comparing the writer’s potential to create to the power of theta, even eliding the writer and the Scientologist as creators imbued with divine capabilities.⁴²

A central question of this chapter is whether Hubbard believed in science fiction’s divine capabilities, or whether he was taking a calculated approach to attaining money, fame, and power on the pretext of ‘religion.’ I agree with most scholars of the subject and many former Scientologists, that Hubbard used the organization’s status as a ‘religion’ as a basis for pretexts, and that calling Scientology a ‘religion’ was itself a pretext. Before considering support for that conclusion in the next section, observe how Hubbard and his followers approach what he called “the religion angle.” Hubbard was explicit about the strategic need and categorical right for Scientology to achieve classification as a ‘religion,’ arguing in a 1954 lecture, “[a]s far as Scientology being a ‘religion’ is concerned, it has more right to be a ‘religion’ than the Catholic Church has and could stand up and be proven in court to that effect.”⁴³

Chapter 2 engaged a number of scholars from the discourses of ‘religion’ debate who are concerned with how society and discourse construct ‘religion.’ Urban brings Scientology to this debate, responding to some of the same theorists⁴⁴ to portray Scientology as exemplary of such a construction and of how the category of ‘religion’ is shifting. Debates over Scientology’s status as a ‘religion’ mirror, for Urban, these debates over what constitutes a ‘religion,’ showing how the category is “better described as a ‘simulacrum of religion,’” that is, a self-conscious mimicry of the outward trappings of ‘religion’ in order to obtain the legal benefits, privileges, and protections that come along with that status.”⁴⁵ Culturally, diverse sources contribute to shaping Scientology’s simulacrum of ‘religion:’ not only academic scholars and institutions, but also Hubbard, current and former Scientologists, foreign and domestic governments, agencies like the IRS⁴⁶ and FDA, and activists like Anonymous.⁴⁷

Legally, the US neither registers nor ranks ‘religious’ organization, and the Constitution does not define ‘religion.’⁴⁸ Thus, it is up to the courts and institutions such as the FDA and IRS to determine whether an institution such as Scientology should qualify as a ‘religion’ and receive protections to which ‘religions’ are constitutionally entitled. Due to the unique legal position of ‘religion,’ organizations falling within that category also enjoy certain de facto benefits. As legal scholar Jean Zorn notes, counsel often raises various claims in cases against religious organizations, in the hope that the court might accept one of them. She offers two examples

involving Scientology: the plaintiff in *Van Schaick v. Church of Scientology* “set out ten counts, invoking five different legal theories,” and in “*Christofferson v. Church of Scientology*, the complaint raised three potential causes of action, based on two different torts,” both of which yielded “partial success.”⁴⁹ Without established standards for which claims are valid in cases involving religion, it is much harder to bring suit against a ‘religion’ than another type of organization.

Initially, new Scientology congregations obtained tax-exempt status almost automatically; then in 1958, the IRS challenged that status for the first time.⁵⁰ In 1997, the same year as the FBI conducted a raid uncovering Scientology’s operation to spy on US government offices,⁵¹ the IRS introduced a thirteen-point set of criteria for ‘religious’ organizations.⁵² IRS meeting minutes indicate the IRS was “trying to define religion in a manner that excluded Scientology but not other faiths.”⁵³ This engineered selective enforcement (test 2) of IRS power to extend or exclude organizations from tax exempt ‘religious’ status obviously signals pretext: the criteria were a pretext to exclude Scientology. Nevertheless, Scientology both adapted to fit the criteria, and offered the IRS a ceasefire with the Church’s endless lawsuits against the agency, if the IRS determined that Scientology was a ‘religion.’ The strategies succeeded in 1997 when the IRS settled with the Church of Scientology, agreeing to drop all investigations and grant ‘religious’ status if Scientology paid \$12.5 million of its \$1 billion bill for unpaid taxes and penalties to the IRS.⁵⁴ The Scientology network quickly moved to capitalize on its tax-exempt status to profit tax-free on all of Hubbard’s science fiction through the Church publishing houses. Even the science fiction texts unrelated to Scientology or Dianetics, but to which the Church owned the rights, would yield more profit due to the IRS’ new recognition of the network as a ‘religion.’

Franciscan Friar Frank Flinn has testified multiple times on behalf of Scientology’s categorization as a ‘religion,’ offering the criteria that a ‘religion’ must have rituals and behavioral norms that create a community concerned for the meaning of life. Defending Scientology against charges of abuse, Flinn compares the new Church to Catholicism. Hubbard’s embellished autobiography is consistent with the unbelievable hagiographies of Catholic angels and Jesus. Further, the disproportionate financial benefits Hubbard and his posse amass are reasonable, given that the Pope enjoys particular luxury, service, and protection. Most shockingly, Flinn absolves Scientology of wrongdoing in torturing members in the selective Scientology corps known as the RPF by likening the treatment to Catholic rehabilitation houses for priests and Friday flagellation of mendicant Catholics like himself.⁵⁵

To evaluate whether Scientology is a ‘religion’ in the modern construction of the concept, allow me to return to the characteristics I assembled in Chapter 2 (and applied to the literarily constructed ‘religions’ in Chapter 3’s science fiction texts). Scientology clearly fits eight of the ten characteristics by being a temporally and geographically universal (characteristic 1) *sui generis* (characteristic 4) analytic category (characteristic 5) that is ontologically extant (characteristic 6), systematic (characteristic 7), offers a connection to the transcendent (characteristic 8) suggests cosmology (characteristic 9), and provides normative ethics (characteristic 10).

1. Scientology is ancient, and part of a temporally universal lineage of ‘religion’ that is intrinsic to humanity and society: though Hubbard first applied the name ‘Scientology’ to his ‘religion’ after years of marketing Dianetics as a non-‘religious’ Science, he then wrote an ancient origin story for the ‘religion.’ Indeed, Hubbard seems to compensate for the newness of his ‘religion’ by writing a genesis story older than our universe—the scientifically impossible etiology includes histories quadrillions of years ago,⁵⁶ though scientists believe the universe is about 13.8 billion years old.⁵⁷

Hubbard’s supersessionist view of ‘religion’ supports a view of ‘religion’ as intrinsic to human society: “New ‘religions’ always overthrow the false god of the old.”⁵⁸ Locating Scientology within an imagined temporal universal of ‘religion,’ Hubbard claims “[Scientology] is a practical religion and religion is the oldest heritage that Man has.”⁵⁹ Even Scientology’s mercantile objective of “selling” the spiritual attainment of “going Clear” is part of Hubbard’s view of universal ‘religion;’ he claimed in a 1971 advertisement that the messiahs of old were “selling Clear...a commodity which is as old as man...Clearing, the goal of every religion.”⁶⁰ Christianity was not the only ‘religion’ to which Hubbard compared Scientology; he claimed that Scientology was even closer to Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Native American ‘religion,’ and Taoism, correlations that Urban argues made sense in the “spiritual marketplace” of the era.⁶¹ Yet the Church relies on associations with Christianity to validate its status as a ‘religion.’

Scientology adopted Christian ‘religious’ nomenclature to resemble the prototypical, recognizable ‘religious’ institutions, appealing to the vocabulary of ‘religion’ to present a ‘religious’ façade. In the late 1950s, Hubbard introduced the language of Christianity to describe Scientology, calling offices ‘missions,’ enforcing a dress code of crosses and clerical collars, and instituting a ‘creed.’⁶² Hubbard made Thetan into a spiritual concept, introduced the reincarnation he had previously scorned, and clarified an origin story of the Creator, Xenu.⁶³ The *Los Angeles Times* describes Scientology’s adoption of ‘religious’ trappings as a “most sweeping religious makeover.”⁶⁴ Now, Scientology gives its “ministers” or “chaplains” the title of “Reverend,” and refers to the E-Meter as a “religious artifact.”⁶⁵ By borrowing the vocabulary of established Christian ‘religion’ and categorizing its devices as ‘religious,’ Scientology secures certain social privileges.

4. Supersessionist and intrinsic views of ‘religion’ are key to constructing Scientology as an iteration of an ancient archetype (characteristic 1) of ‘religion’ as a *sui generis* analytic category (characteristic 4). Without such a foundation, there is no ideological reason to categorize Scientology as a ‘religion,’ rather than as simply its own phenomenon. If Scientology is following in a lineage of comparable institutions, and fulfilling an innate human need, the institution becomes meaningful and useful. If the label of ‘religion’ places Scientology in an established category with a unique role in society, then Scientology is in conversation and competition with other ‘religions.’ This last factor, of competition, is important for defining Scientology, and as a conversion tool for potential recruits who may (like Hubbard) harbor suspicion of ‘religion’ or already adhere to an older ‘religion’ upon which Scientology claims to improve. Consistent with the co-constitutive binary twin model of discursive construction I introduce in Chapter 2, Hubbard posits Dianetics as a binary twin to Christianity, using his movement’s opposition to the established ‘religion’ to position it as a new ‘religion.’ Thus,

Scientology belongs to a *sui generis* analytic category: in distinguishing Scientology as a ‘religion’ rather than a business, philosophy, lifestyle, or some other iteration, the Church reinforces a view of ‘religion’ as a unique institution. Scientology reinforces the view that only a ‘religion’ would deserve the privileges of ‘religious’ categorization.

6. Scientology is part of an ontologically extant category of ‘religion:’ throughout the church’s battles with the FDA, IRS, journalists, and foreign governments, Church officials insist upon Scientology’s membership in the category of ‘religion’ that refers to specific institutions and confers rights. In adopting symbols and practices from other ‘religions,’ Scientology seeks to resemble something real that is recognizable as ‘religion.’

7. Scientology is systematic: organizationally, the network of institutions that constitutes Scientology is highly systematic. Urban proposes that Scientology is “best understood not simply as a religion but as a complex, multifaceted multinational corporation of which religion is simply one aspect,” citing the publishing and film production houses, enterprises, missions, foundations, as well as drug and criminal rehabilitation programs.⁶⁶ These latter programs applying Hubbard’s techniques have been successful beyond the Church. The drug rehabilitation program Narconon was so popular in the prison industry, that in the 1970s, Scientology applied Narconon to the broader population, and developed Criminon, a criminal rehabilitation program. As of 2000, over 200 correctional facilities in the US were using Criminon to lower recidivism.⁶⁷ These are merely two examples of Scientology’s network of supporting organizations upholding operational processes, image, and ideology beyond its ‘religion’ organization. Then within the Church, the branches and hierarchies suggest the bureaucratic systematization of an institution worthy of respect, or fear.

Theologically, the stages of “Operating Thetan” offer a systematization of Scientology as a spiritual path. Like Buddhism’s Eight Fold Path offering a roadmap to end suffering, or Abraham Maslow’s Eight Stages from physiological needs to transcendence, Hubbard coined “the Eight Dynamics,” stages through which individuals move on their path to enlightenment.⁶⁸ This systematic process for attaining transcendence was part of Hubbard’s marketing strategy. As he acknowledges in a 1983 interview, “[Scientology] appeals a great deal to Americans, I think, because they tend to believe in instant everything, from instant coffee to instant nirvana. By just...doing a few assignments, one can become a god.”⁶⁹ As an instantiation of a ‘religion,’ Scientology reaffirms a view of ‘religion’ as systematic, both organizationally and theologically.

8. Hubbard’s version of connection to the transcendent is a common feature of ‘religion:’ God. Portraying himself as a writer-creator, there are also hints that Hubbard fancied himself a God-like figure. Several ex-Scientists have reported that in the 1970s, Hubbard launched the “Messianic Project,” which began as a form of market research and turned into a strategic exercise to see first what Scientists would like in their Messiah, and then to project a characterization of Hubbard in that image.⁷⁰ During his life, Hubbard enjoyed an omnipotent status within the Church. His was the final word, and adherents revered him with desire and dread. Former Scientist Nancy Many reflects these two sentiments, recalling how she felt about Hubbard when she worked in Scientology. “Hubbard’s attentions became something I both craved and feared.” In contrast, once she had escaped, her opinion of Hubbard changed: “I feel

that he was a sociopath. I think that L. Ron Hubbard created a criminal, human-trafficking, human rights-abusing money tree.”⁷¹ The Church’s posthumous treatment of Hubbard and his habits resemble deification as well, perhaps enacting the results of the Messianic Project. As Wright characterizes the idolization, “each of [Hubbard’s] decisions and actions would become enshrined in Scientology lore as something to be emulated,” including “cigarette smoking” and “casual misogyny.”⁷² The misogyny may be unusual for a mid-twentieth century New Religious Movement, yet it is fitting for more traditional North American ‘religions,’ and as Rigal argues, correspond to the ideals of a large proportion of the US population.⁷³

9. Scientology suggests cosmology: Hubbard’s elaborate cosmology begins with a genesis story of Xenu, the tyrannical ruler of the “Galactic Confederacy,” who brought billions of individuals to Earth 75 million years ago, before exterminating them with hydrogen bombs. Wright describes Hubbard’s cosmology as the “mythology” Hubbard invented to “fill this gap—between reality and his interpretation.”⁷⁴ The elements of this cosmology that veer into analyzing the meaning of life support Wright’s hypothesis that Hubbard was trying to bolster his ideas in a way that would help people reconcile Scientology with what they knew of the world. “Life must procure pleasure. Life must avoid pain,”⁷⁵ Hubbard writes, viewing the mind as constantly working to attain these goals of life, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, with Dianetics aiming to help clear the mind to better accomplish these goals. Life is a sufficient ratio of pleasure over pain, while death comes when the pain overtakes pleasure, or in Hubbard’s language, the human or other “organism is suppressed toward death by accumulated pain.”⁷⁶ This understanding of death as the triumph of pain leads to the claim that Dianetics can prevent death. Hubbard claims “discoveries” about the location of pain in the brain that causes death, and how through Dianetics, “this pain could be nullified or erased with a return to full consciousness and a rehabilitation toward survival.”⁷⁷ Hubbard insisted that Dianetics can reverse the process of death through work in the mind to increase consciousness. The increased consciousness, knowledge, and of course clarity is part of the cosmology: Scientologists aim through their practice to master their own minds, and become titans on the universal stage. It is this appeal that Rigal identifies as the primary reason for Hubbard’s success. Like all great American religious traditions, she concludes, Scientology offers man the means to conquer the world.⁷⁸

10. Scientology provides normative ethics: in his final years, Hubbard wrote “a concise moral code in response to the perceived decline in public ethics.”⁷⁹ Even before then, he viewed Scientology’s ethics “as a rational ethical system, as opposed to the dominant ethical systems of both Eastern and Western ‘religions’ built on tradition and revelation. Deemed good are those actions which promote survival across the eight dynamics or realms of action. Good actions are constructive, bad actions are destructive. In a manner that echoes John Stuart Mill’s utilitarian approach, Hubbard taught that actions which aid the greater number while harming the fewest are good.”⁸⁰ The interpersonal interaction guidelines suggest a clear normative ethics in that they direct adherents in a right way they should treat others. Many current or former adherents cite this ethical feature of Scientology as a significant motivation in their decisions to join Scientology, believing that the ‘religion’ offers guidelines for interpersonal interaction that will improve the world. They credit Dianetics approaches with strengthening and preserving their marriages and helping them make the world a better place.

Former Scientologist actor-celebrity Leah Remini writes that what makes Hubbard's presentation of Scientology so "incredibly alluring" is that, "Scientology offers a clearly laid out scientific process that helps you to overcome your limitations and realize your full potential for greatness. It is presented as a well-defined path to achieving total spiritual freedom and enlightenment and a full understanding of yourself and others."⁸¹ Remini describes several characteristics of 'religions,' and hints at Scientology's capacity to make members feel somewhat God-like.

The "clearly laid out scientific process" and "well-defined path" speak to the systematic feature of Scientology as a 'religion' (characteristic 7), while "spiritual freedom and enlightenment" references the cosmological component (characteristic 9), and the almost soteriological capacity to help adherents "realize your full potential for greatness" alludes to the normative ethics element (characteristic 10) since Scientologists believe that they are saving the universe along with themselves. It appeals to selfish motivations of trying to answer one's own problems under the guise of selfless work to cure humankind. The implication of the realization of greatness and achievement of Enlightenment is the attainment Hubbard promised of attaining a transcendent state: Hubbard claimed that the practitioner who attained a state of "clear" assumed super-human physical and mental powers. These characteristics obviously make the 'religion' attractive: a systematic program (characteristic 7) to explain and save the world and become a god-like figure through whom members could experience a connection to the transcendent (characteristic 8). The systematic and symbolic elements of Hubbard's construction of 'religion' are what Rigal identify as the two powerful characteristics that weaponized Scientology as a 'religion.'⁸² The psychological appeal, which was more prominent in Dianetics, is also important for Remini. She credits the organization's foundational practice of listening with making the individual "feel special" and vindicated.⁸³ Hubbard was evidently conscious about the strategy of listening to people, since his term for Dianetics practitioners (carried on into Scientology) is 'auditors,' from the Latin *audire*, to listen. Hubbard's wife Sarah also cited listening as the most important key to Hubbard's success.

The question of whether Scientology is a 'religion' is tightly interwoven with the question of whether the classification as a 'religion' is a pretext to make more money. This question is at the heart of the International Cultic Studies Association's 15 characteristics of 'cultic' groups to distinguish dangerous or exploitative organizations.⁸⁴ Despite efforts by New Religious Movement scholars to eliminate the derogatory 'cult' category, the distinction between 'cult' and 'religion' remains legally significant (e.g. for the IRS), and culturally significant (e.g. for Scientology's public relations). Yet the distinction is difficult to draw. In trying to separate cults from 'religions,' some anti-cult groups have sought to define cults as "organizations that are distinguished by their utilization of a form of brainwashing"⁸⁵ or mind control. Melton questions whether brainwashing is even possible, citing psychological studies that found no evidence of successful brainwashing.⁸⁶ However, if techniques we might call "brainwashing" do exist, legal precedent suggests that institutions commonly accepted as 'religions' are permitted to use such techniques as a form of membership activities or socially condoned indoctrination.⁸⁷ The continued relevance and power of this distinction between 'religion' and cult underscores my argument that society affords the construction 'religion' epistemic privilege: 'religions' are not subject to the same level of suspicion or critique as 'cults,' and institutions seek recognition as a 'religion' to secure privilege and protection. As Cowan and Bromley put it, "suspicions about

Scientology's ultimate interests are fueled by a conviction that Scientology added religious trappings only to conceal its true commercial interests."⁸⁸ The "religious trappings" are clearly symbols of 'religion,' but also extend to legal recognition as a 'religion.' The concealment of true interests describes the quality of 'religion' as a pretext that motivates this chapter.

Legally, there is international disagreement over whether to afford Scientology the benefits of 'religious' recognition. 18 countries,⁸⁹ including the US, legally recognize Scientology as a 'religion.' However, 19 other countries⁹⁰ have officially decided—through court decisions or in response to petitions for 'religious' recognition—that the organization is not a 'religion.' Several of these recognize Scientology as a non-profit organization with some of the same protections as a 'religion,' while others have more severely censured Scientology by labeling it a 'cult.' For example, a court in Greece determined that Scientology endangers society and the churches should close. German government authorities classified Scientology as *verfassungsfeindlich*—a threat to the constitution and society—⁹¹ and Stuttgart's city government withdrew the local Scientology mission's 'registered association' status, claiming that it did not fulfill the requirement for such organizations of pursuing 'idealistic purposes,' but rather operated as a commercial undertaking.⁹² Further, 70% of Germans thought Scientology should be outlawed,⁹³ and Hamburg's anti-Scientology task force leader compared Hubbard to Hitler since both advocated taking over the world to rule the inferior people.⁹⁴

The epistemological privileges that a 'religion' enjoys are central to scholars like Urban's view of what defines a 'religion.' Quoting religious historian Bruce Lincoln, he distinguishes 'religious' discourse by "its claim to transcendent authority," in contrast to scientific knowledge sources that produce knowledge through processes such as calculations and reasoning. Hubbard's intentional framing of Scientology as 'religion,' and the institution's self-definition using 'religious' terms indicates for Urban that Hubbard decided in the 1950s "to increasingly pursue what he called the 'religion angle'" in order to secure that authority.⁹⁵ This reading of Hubbard's calculative projection of Scientology as a 'religion' in order to benefit from the authority 'religions' enjoy demonstrates my interpretation of 'religion' as pretext: Hubbard pursued categorization of 'religion' as a pretext for the benefits thereof. Moreover, it supports my dissertation's argument that the construction of 'religion' is a powerful source of pretext.

Scientology's Imperialism and Violence

Any evangelical organization exhibits a degree of cognitive imperialism in aiming to extend its power by spreading its belief system and practices to a broader population. Scientology demonstrates more overt imperialism through the Sea Org, the quasi Navy of the 'religion,' replete with naval uniforms, ranks, terminology, assignments, and ships. In the early decades of Scientology, during the Cold War and while Scientology was battling to gain legal recognition as a 'religion,' Hubbard commanded a whole fleet of ships around the world, picking up converts, spreading the Scientological message, and engaging in covert operations. Scientology even engaged in domestic espionage, most notably through "Operation Snow White." From 1973-1977, the Church of Scientology ran this operation to spy on the IRS, successfully infiltrating the agency, bugging offices, and stealing documents.

In Chapter 2, I address the imperialist technique of defining the civilized group that is worthy of human rights against the barbarian Other. Hubbard echoes this binary, even using a racist British slur for South Asians, “wogs,” to describe non-Scientologists. Though Hubbard knew the term came from British imperialism, he either misunderstood or intentionally misrepresented the meaning. Though he claimed it stood for “worthy Oriental gentleman,”⁹⁶ he used it to apply to ordinary people, the inferior non-Scientologists, which suggests that he was aware of the term’s derogatory origins. Wright contends that Hubbard’s teenage diaries from his trip to China “reflect the mind of a budding young imperialist, who summons an unearned authority over an exotic and unfamiliar culture.” Hubbard’s⁹⁷ treatment of non-Western people in adulthood—from the term “wogs” to his assault of the Algerian Belkacem Ferradj who wanted to date Hubbard’s daughter—suggests⁹⁸ that he did not overcome this racism.

Accusations of Hubbard’s and other Scientologists’ violence extends far beyond the attack on his daughter’s suitor, and account for some of the most damning charges against Scientology, from stalking and doxxing former church members to torturing and killing current members. Eleven men, including executives in the church, told Wright that the current leader of Scientology, David Miscavige, had physically assaulted them.⁹⁹ One young woman was imprisoned on Scientology’s cruise ship for twelve years.¹⁰⁰ Though the Church denies the existence of any dungeon-like space where members are held against their wills, former members have consistent accounts of being incarcerated for years at a time and tortured in “The Hole.”¹⁰¹ Wright describes the torture one woman in the Scientology hierarchy endured in The Hole after rejecting rumors that two colleagues were gay: she was forced “to stand in a garbage can for twelve hours... The women in the room repeatedly slapped her and poured water over her head. A sign was hung around her neck, saying LESBO.”¹⁰² The combination of physical and psychological torture is a hallmark of Scientology’s approach to controlling people within and outside of the organization.

High-ranking Sea Org officer Hana Eltringham recalls torturing a man on Hubbard’s orders, keeping him awake for five days and nights, preventing him from sleeping, because Hubbard claimed it would save the man’s soul. Eltringham complied with Hubbard’s torture orders because she was “a true believer,” having faith that Hubbard knew what was best for their souls.¹⁰³ This suspense of one’s own ethical framework on faith that the ‘religious’ authority is correct reflects a significant danger of ‘religious’ justifications: distancing the actor from ethical evaluations. If the actor committing the violence—in this case, torturing a fellow adherent—relies on ‘religious’ authority to determine the right action, then that actor does not first evaluate the potential action through their own ethical frameworks. The person who invokes ‘religious’ authority—in this case, Hubbard—holds “religion’s” epistemic privilege, because believers or adherents will not question the stance or action, and will not subject the question to their own ethical evaluations.

Scientology has faced numerous accusations of child labor law violations and child abuse, from forcing children to work full-time in dangerous conditions without protective equipment instead of attending school,¹⁰⁴ to accusations of torture. Hubbard personally ordered his officers to lock a four-year-old in a small space with the anchor chain of a Sea Org ship. For two days and nights, the officers imprisoned the child, forcing him to relieve himself in the small space, without

blankets, and in danger of grave bodily harm had the chain slipped.¹⁰⁵ Wright cites evidence of other children who faced similar punishment, including an affidavit from a former Scientologist that one child was kept in the chain locker “for 40 nights, crying and begging to be released.”¹⁰⁶

Remini describes abuse she witnessed and experienced as a 13 year old Sea Org member. Going to visit her baby sister in the Sea Org nursery, she describes being “devastated by what I found. The person in charge was a kid like me, just some random teenage Sea Org member on post, who was hardly qualified to be taking care of children.” The result of the unqualified caregiver was neglect of the children; Remini found her sister “crying and soaked with urine in her crib.”¹⁰⁷ Recounting the abuse she personally endured as an underage Sea Org member, she recalls an afternoon on which, having finished her (unpaid) hotel housekeeping work early, she and her crew went to relax beside the hotel pool. When the adult supervisor found them, he angrily forced them out to sea in a motorboat. He screamed at Rimini, then used a practice Hubbard recommended for controlling Sea Org members, what Hubbard called *overboarding*: “he picked me up and before I even realized what was happening, he threw me overboard. The shock of the moment and the freezing water took my breath away, and for an instant I thought I was going to drown.”¹⁰⁸

The practice of overboarding contributed to Greece forcing Scientology ships to leave Greek waters in 1969. Wright describes several examples, including Hubbard ordering Otto Roos “thrown from the ship’s bridge into the sea, a height of about four stories,” and John McMaster being “tossed over the side six times, breaking his shoulder on the last occasion.”¹⁰⁹ The church justified literally throwing members overboard as “ecclesiastical penance” with intended “spiritual benefit.”¹¹⁰ The ethical privileges ‘religion’ enjoys suffice to convince some—like Rimini’s supervisor and Eltringham—that the ‘religious’ leaders do know what is most spiritually advantageous for adherents, so suspend their own ethical judgment in supporting and even engaging in such practices. Legal privileges protect ‘religions’ such as Scientology, even allowing practices that would be punishable crimes outside of a ‘religious’ institution, because they are ‘religious’ practices protected under the First Amendment.

Celebrity Scientologists Kelly Preston and John Travolta even lost their son to the medical violence of Scientology: the 16-year-old died of a seizure after the parents took him off seizure prevention medication, based on Hubbard’s denunciation of the medication. Though the couple’s lawyer later claimed the couple would never have subjected the child to Hubbard’s prescribed “Purification Rundown” drug-withdrawal regime, before her son’s death, Preston stated in a TV interview that they had put the child through the program.¹¹¹ Preston also advocated Scientology’s Narconon, a drug-addiction treatment program, indicating that she did support Scientology’s alternative medical regimes.

Scientology’s rejection of pharmaceuticals and psychiatric treatment endangers individuals outside of the Church as well. For example, in 2003 a Scientologist with a history of schizophrenia who refused psychiatric treatment due to his ‘religious’ beliefs stabbed his mother 77 times.¹¹² One highly publicized case demonstrating the harm of the Church denying Scientology members psychiatric treatment was the death of Lisa McPherson. Following her mental breakdown, Scientologists removed McPherson from a traditional medical facility to

‘treat’ her with Scientology methods including what Hubbard called an “Introspection Rundown.” The Church was anxious to contain McPherson, because she had recently attained the level of “Clear,” at which Scientologists claim one does not suffer any mental weakness. So Church officials locked her in solitary confinement, where she worsened until she fell into a coma and then died of pulmonary embolism. The medical examiner determined that McPherson’s condition declined gradually, and that McPherson had been deprived of liquids for over five days, calling it “the most severe case of dehydration I’ve ever seen.” Then the Church hounded the examiner until she changed her evaluation of the death to accidental, sparing them a lawsuit that might have broken the Church.¹¹³ McPherson was the ninth Scientologist to suspiciously die at the same Church facility,¹¹⁴ yet a combination of bullying from the Church’s legal department and protections for free practice of ‘religion’ has shielded the Church from facing any repercussions.

The Church of Scientology and its defenders claim that the Church’s violence is protected under ‘religious’ freedom. Friar Flinn testified in *Church of Scientology of California v. Armstrong* (1984) that the Church’s “fair game” policy of allowing or even encouraging members to attack any enemies of Scientology by any means¹¹⁵ was “a typical religious phenomenon for the purpose of protecting the faith and doctrine and practices of the religious group.”¹¹⁶ The Franciscan compared the practice to ‘religious’ exclusion that Leviticus and the Epistles of Paul advocate. Even after Scientology claimed to have ended the fair game policy, lawyers maintained that it is protected under ‘religious’ expression. Explicitly, Scientology claims that the Constitution protects violence in the name of ‘religion.’

Scientology’s ‘Pretexts’ and Applying the Plausible Motive Test

Hubbard was certainly conscious of the distinction I draw in Chapter 1, between a justification deriving from motives, versus a justification created to appeal to the audience. Indeed, in *Self Analysis*, he uses a child’s obvious pretext to demonstrate the types of speech at a certain level of his “tone scale” of emotional being. He describes strategies the child may try in order to get a nickel, from projecting happiness (the top of the scale), to explaining his desire, going away, returning angry, before “that failing, he may lie about why he wants it,” then next sinking to grief and finally apathy (the bottom of the scale).¹¹⁷ The fifth step, of lying about the reason for wanting a nickel, depicts a pretext. Since the first justification—from step 2 of explaining the desire—did not convince the audience to give the child the nickel, the child shifts justifications (test 5) to try another justification that is a lie, since it does not reflect the child’s true motivation. This example appears in a foundational work of Dianetics, a theological text of the Church of Scientology, a remarkable source for a discussion of pretext in a ‘religion’ that appears to be itself a pretext.

In the following section, Hubbard offers more examples of pretext on a chart of predictions for various areas of behavior and wellbeing at 9 steps along the tone scale, from lowest (0.1) to highest (4.0). The pretextual level of the tone scale (1.1), the level at which Hubbard would place the child who lies about his reason for wanting the nickel, features a number of descriptions that suggest pretext along the lines I describe in Chapter 1. Under the “Command over Environment”

category, Hubbard predicts that an individual with a 1.1 tone level “[u]ses sly means of controlling others, especially hypnotism.”¹¹⁸ The “sly means” imply a dishonest, manipulative communication strategy, while the desire to control relates to the manipulative objectives of pretext, to influence the audience in a way that benefits the speaker. Measuring the individual’s “Actual Worth to Society Compared to Apparent Worth,” the 1.1 individual’s “[a]pparent worth [is] outweighed by vicious hidden intents.”¹¹⁹ The “hidden intents” reflect the true motives that a speaker using pretext conceals with the “apparent” justifications they offer. Such an individual’s “Ethic Level” on this chart is “[d]eviously dishonest without reason. Pseudo ethical activities screen perversion of ethics.”¹²⁰ The devious dishonesty could describe pretexts, which provide untrue justifications with the intent to achieve desired responses from the audience. Similarly, Hubbard anticipates “Ingenious and vicious perversions of truth. Covers lying artfully” in the individual’s “Handling of Truth.”¹²¹ The “perversions of truth” sound like justifications that do not reflect motivations, and covering those lies sounds like the pretext veiling the truth. Characterizing 1.1 level speech as “[t]alks apparent theta, but intent vicious,”¹²² Hubbard uses Scientology lingo to contrast sincerity and desirable qualities (theta) with malicious intent, expressing the contrast between apparent sincerity of a justification, and the insincerity and bad intention of a pretext. Hubbard repeats some of these themes to predict the 1.1 level “Method Used by Subject to Handle Others: . . . Nullifies others to get them to level where they can be used. Devious and vicious means. Hypnotism, gossip. Seeks hidden control.”¹²³ Manipulation and exploitation of the audience, “vicious means,” “hypnotism,” and “control” are all repetitions of other predictions for this category that express pretext’s design to deceive, and the aim to control the audience through speech. Finally, under “Potential Survival,” Hubbard remarks direly, “Brief.”¹²⁴

Given the poor opinion and damning prognosis Hubbard renders individuals at this level of the tone scale so clearly characterized by use of pretext, it is surprising that he himself seems to liberally employ pretextual justifications to defend his ‘religion’ and himself. I treat these pretexts as two forms of ‘religious’ pretext: ‘religion’ as a pretext versus ‘religion’ as a source of pretext. The former is easiest to see in Scientology’s intense campaigns to gain legal recognition as a ‘religion,’ and the ensuing legal defenses claiming First Amendment protections and benefits as a ‘religion.’ My selective enforcement (test 2), borrowed justification (test 3), shifting justification (test 5), and auxiliary information (test 10) tests often suggest that the speakers are employing ‘religion’ as a pretext. For both of these categories, my plausible motive test (test 10) indicates that the astute audience might be skeptical of Scientology’s purported ‘religious’ justifications. The latter form appears in many of the justifications for the imperialism and violence I describe in the previous section, with Church lawyers and spokespeople justifying the actions as theologically-based practices or exercises of spiritual value. My selective enforcement (test 2), borrowed justification (test 3), arguably the unobtaining outcome (test 6), post hoc (test 8), ventriloquist (test 9), and auxiliary information (test 10) tests often suggest that these Church representatives are using ‘religion’ as a basis for pretexts.

Religion as a Source of Pretext

In Chapter 3, I discuss the figure of controlled reproduction including forced sterility as a mechanism of imperialism and the powerful use of ‘religious’ justifications to control

subordinate groups in both *The Sparrow* and *Lilith's Brood*. Hubbard echoes this science fiction trope in the Sea Org, first by forbidding babies, and later by requiring that Sea Org members secure his permission before getting pregnant, and allegedly even forcing the majority of female members to abort pregnancies.¹²⁵ Since his own daughters bore children while they were Sea Org members, his selective enforcement (test 2) signals that the 'religious law' is a pretext. Using his authority as leader of Scientology, Hubbard controlled the reproduction of his Sea Org adherents under what appears to be a spiritual guise. Without explicitly stating that this 'religious' justification is a pretext, Wright includes auxiliary information about the sexual culture on board at the time from trans activist and former Sea Org officer Kate Bornstein. Following a time of increasing promiscuity culminating in a drunken New Year's Eve orgy with 100 participants all over the ship, Bornstein recalls, Hubbard's final wife expressed concern for her teenage daughters.¹²⁶ This auxiliary information (test 10) suggests that it is more plausible that Hubbard, in requiring permission to get pregnant, acted to appease his wife's concern, rather than due to spiritual inspiration.

The Church's repeated justifications for the violence that Hubbard and his successor Miscavige commit consistently fail my post hoc and ventriloquist tests signaling pretexts (tests 8 and 9), because lawyers and spokespeople offer the justifications after the actions. For example, the Church claiming that overboarding holds "spiritual benefit"¹²⁷ is a public relations excuse made after Hubbard initiated the practice, from speakers other than Hubbard. Calling it "ecclesiastical penance" is an example of borrowed justification (test 3), using the language and theology of Christianity to justify the actions of Scientologists, including Hubbard, who places Christianity in an opposing position to Scientology. More contentiously, I would argue that the violence that the Church justifies as being for the victim's "spiritual benefit" can lead to insanity and death. Since Scientology claims that it leads to practitioners' immortality and mental clarity, neither insanity nor death should be possible if the 'religion' is successful, so the violence does not lead to spiritual benefits, thus failing my unobtaining outcome pretext test (test 6). Consider a specific incident. In response to the parents' pleas to release the four-year-old locked up with the ship's anchor chain, Hubbard cited "the Scientology axiom that children are actually adults in small bodies, and equally responsible for their behavior." The axiom gives Hubbard's torture of children a 'religious' justification, by defending the abuse as prescribed by scripture (the axiom). Auxiliary information (test 10) that the child was black and that he had lost a wealthy member's watch suggest that Hubbard's documented racism and deference to a wealthy donor may have been more significant motivations.

Scientology leadership claims a fundamentalist reading of Hubbard's writing as inerrant scripture. In an interview with Wright, Tommy Davis insists that "Mr. Hubbard's material must be and is applied precisely as written...It's never altered. It's never changed," and that these writings are the foundation of the 'religion.' When Wright pushes Davis on later deletions of homophobic remarks from Hubbard's texts, Davis counters that such remarks must not actually have come from Hubbard, without explanation for how the remarks might have entered Hubbard's texts.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, prominent Scientologists have justified support for Proposition 8 to ban same-sex marriage in California, along with other homophobic views¹²⁹ by citing Hubbard's anti-gay remarks.¹³⁰ Given that Church spokespeople sometimes deny their "religion's" homophobia, while at other times using it as a justification for homophobic political

choices, selective enforcement (test 2) of the purportedly inerrant scripture indicates that the justification is a pretext. Further, the spokespeople who justified a Church member's support for Proposition 8 were not the ones who had made the campaign donations in the Church's name, thus failing my ventriloquist test (test 9), since the people who took the stance were not the ones to offer the justification.

Scientology has also censored passages include critiques of 'religion' from Hubbard's pre-religious-turn writings. Urban offers the example of Hubbard's subsequently censored 1952 *A History of Man*, which calls 'religion' a "superstition" in contrast to Dianetics, whose auditors should "rule out" such "mumbo jumbo."¹³¹ This shifting approach to 'religion' leads us to Scientology's use of 'religion' as a pretext. Until Hubbard realized he could exploit the status of 'religion,' he was thoroughly opposed not only to Christianity, but the other fonts of superstition he placed in the category of 'religion.' Hubbard was conscious of the financial benefits and legal protections that categorization as a 'religion' could offer Scientology, writing in an organizational memo, "ministers have in many places special privileges including tax and housing allowances...also Parliaments don't attack religions."¹³² A notoriously self-righteous character, it is unlikely that Hubbard would have changed his mind, were it not for the opportunity to personally and institutionally benefit from the protections and privileges of that category.

Religion as a Pretext

Recall that Urban proposes the figure of the "simulacrum" for understanding a contemporary construction of 'religion' as not adhering to set standards for a category, but rather an image of that concept, an approximation resembling or imitating what the concept represents. Modern 'religion' as a simulacrum allows institutions to present themselves as 'religions,' to project a simulacrum, in order to gain benefits of that classification. Critics of Scientology, Urban claims, embrace this view of the Church as a "simulacrum that has done everything in its power to mask itself in religious trappings in order to win certain benefits such as tax-exemption."¹³³ Such critics believe that Scientology's campaign to gain recognition as a 'religion' is "a cynical ploy and an attempt to protect what is essentially a for-profit business from government scrutiny."¹³⁴ 'Religion' as a simulacrum empowers the institutions that project such images to exploit the category: the simulacrum enables 'religion' as a pretext. Given that Hubbard was initially against all 'religion,' and then decided to use the protections afforded to institutions such as Christianity to benefit his own organization, his invocation of the status of 'religion' is both a shifting (test 5) and borrowed justification (test 3).

The Church of Scientology consistently justifies its imperialism and violence as its 'religious' practices, protected under the First Amendment. Indeed, the Church successfully argued in a 2009 lawsuit from two former (escaped) members charging violation of human trafficking and labor laws, that such labor falls under 'religious' practice, so is protected under the First Amendment.¹³⁵ The auxiliary information that the Church benefited financially from the human trafficking and labor law violation and would have faced criminal penalties were it not a 'religious' organization may suggest that its appeal to first Amendment protections is a pretext (test 10).

Three decades before, in the trial of the “Operation Snow White” conspirators (including Hubbard’s last wife), *United States of America v. Jane Kember*, the court had chastised Scientology for hiding its crimes behind First Amendment freedom of religion protections while harassing its critics through lawsuits, effectively depriving critics of First Amendment freedom of speech protections. This selective enforcement (test 2) of the First Amendment for Scientology’s benefit suggests that the justification is a pretext. The court’s sentencing memorandum determined from the trial’s documents that “the defendants...and their unindicted co-conspirators, as well as their organization, considered themselves above the law. They believed that they had *carte blanche* to violate the rights of others...”¹³⁶ on the basis of the Church’s status as a ‘religion.’ The court believed that the Church was using its status as ‘religion’ as a pretext to spy on the government, among other crimes.

Former Scientologists Marty Rathbun and Gerald Armstrong substantiate the court’s analysis of Scientology’s reading of how the First Amendment protects the Church. As Rathbun claims, Scientologists believed that “if you have tax exemption, if you have religious recognition, you’re treated differently in courts, there’s some level of almost immunity, First Amendment immunity.”¹³⁷ Scientologists believe the First Amendment will protect them in the courts—perhaps from any crime. Armstrong writes, “Scientology calls itself a religion to obtain the benefits, privileges, protections and the benevolent public image that are conferred on religions. Being a religion...makes its aggressive, abusive, dishonest and criminal activities...legally protected ‘religious expression’ or ‘religious freedom.’”¹³⁸ Not only did Scientology have these protections in mind when positioning itself as a religion, but the Church was also successful in repeatedly invoking ‘religious expression’ and ‘religious freedom’ to escape criminal conviction. Rathbun and Armstrong report an attitude that status as a ‘religion’ can be used to place an organization above the law, providing a powerful pretext for a range of offenses. Certainly, early (mid-1950s) critics of Scientology, from private citizens to the IRS, accused Scientology of pursuing legal recognition as a ‘religion’ as a calculated step to protect the organization. As Melton describes it, critics accuse Hubbard of seeking “a shield from any claims that he was practicing medicine without a license, and allowed him to pocket the money received for the services provided by the church.”¹³⁹ The reports from Church leadership indicate that the critics are right.

Zorn is concerned that such cases of courts extending First Amendment protections to institutions such as Scientology will “threaten simultaneously to permit nonreligious defrauders to hide behind a protective religion cloak and to subject religions to impermissible scrutiny.”¹⁴⁰ This concern presumes that institutions such as Scientology are “nonreligious defrauders” and that ‘religions’ deserve the “protective religion cloak” making them impervious to “scrutiny.” The first part of this chapter establishes that Scientology matches the characteristics of a modern construction of ‘religion,’ by which measure it would be false to label Scientology “nonreligious.” The IRS has classified Scientology as a ‘religion,’ granting it all the attendant legal privileges, and Scientology self-identifies as a ‘religion.’ It is unclear by what measure Zorn disqualifies Scientology from the category, and even less clear why institutions she deems eligible of membership in the category of ‘religion’ deserve protection from scrutiny. As Zorn acknowledges, defenses of Scientology significantly include comparisons of Scientology’s

potential crimes to sanctioned practices from more established ‘religions.’ For example, brainwashing is acceptable because it resembles indoctrination practices of traditional ‘religions,’ and torturing members (including children) is close enough to Catholic asceticism to warrant protection. I hope that my dissertation challenges assumptions like Zorn’s, that ‘religion’ deserves special protections.

Nancy Many, another former Scientologist, uses the veiling imagery of a pretext to support an interpretation to ‘religion’ as a powerful source of pretext, and to suggest plausible ulterior motives. Many describes how Scientology uses ‘religion’ as a pretext to hide other operations and motives: “Scientology is a business that uses the ‘religious cloak’ to enjoy the legal and financial benefits of a religion.”¹⁴¹ ‘Religion’ serves as the veil concealing motives rooted in evading legal responsibility and accumulating financial assets, which brings us to the most relevant of my pretext tests for evaluating whether Scientology’s claims are pretextual: the plausible motive test (test 10). Evidence from the discourse Scientology produces as well as the discourse that law and society generate through responses to the ‘religion’ can help identify factors that are more likely to motivate Scientology. As I argued above, my pretext identification tests indicate that certain justifications are incredible. I hope that this call for skepticism, combined with key facts from the Church history, might help the critical reader make educated guesses regarding Scientology’s plausible motives.

Plausible Motive Test

Since 1953, the Church of Scientology has been desperate for recognition as a ‘religion.’ Though the IRS officially recognizes Scientology as a ‘religion’ in this country, there are ongoing debates abroad about whether to extend the legal protections and privileges of ‘religious’ status. Perhaps the most significant Scientology presence abroad has been in the UK, which tolerated Scientologists until 1968, when the health minister banned non-citizens who were attempting to enter the UK to work at the Scientology facility. The UK did not lift that ban until 1980.¹⁴² The stakes of determining whether Scientology deserves recognition as a ‘religion’ are higher than mere desire for truth or as a mechanism for controlling immigration. Recognition as a ‘religion’ financially benefits the organization and individual members. Legal protections shield Scientology from disclosing not only financial information, but also practices impacting adherents’ health and safety. Moreover, as I outline in the sections above, Scientology uses its privileged status as a ‘religion’ to justify imperialism and violence, and even to evade justice.

Rigal identifies three motivations (*mobiles*) for Hubbard to turn Dianetics into a ‘religion:’ 1) to evade charges of medical fraud, 2) he benefited (*profiter*) from how simply one can register an institution as a ‘religion’ in the US, and 3) that ‘religion’ would offer Dianetics a transcendent dimension (*transcendance*) elevating it above other psychotherapies and making it infallible (*infaillible*).¹⁴³

Scientology offers various genial stated justifications for wanting ‘religious’ status, including protecting its members from ‘religious’ persecution. Hubbard also admitted more dubious justifications, including legal protection and financial advantages, acknowledging to a reporter that some might think that by aligning itself with ‘religion,’ “Scientology is simply making itself

bulletproof in the eyes of the law.”¹⁴⁴ The imagery of Scientology as “bulletproof” reinforces the former members’ claims that Scientology saw itself as “immune” from legal action. Multiple people have recounted Hubbard telling them, “I’d like to start a religion. That’s where the money is”¹⁴⁵ or, poetically contrasting the possibility with his former career: “[w]riting for a penny is ridiculous, if a man really wanted to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion.”¹⁴⁶ Then there is the aforementioned 1953 letter Hubbard sent to a Dianetics executive, suggesting “the religion angle” as a solvency strategy. These oft-quoted lines are not the only examples of Hubbard’s admissions of profit motive. As early as 1962, Hubbard transparently reported his fiscal and legal motives for Scientology, writing in a policy letter that the organization’s future “is now being planned on a religious organization basis throughout the world...It is entirely a matter for accountants and solicitors.”¹⁴⁷ Hubbard recognized that legal status as a ‘religion’ would afford Scientology financial benefits and legal protections domestically and internationally.

Though Scientology was on the verge of bankruptcy when it gained IRS recognition as a ‘religion,’ the church has since amassed significant financial assets. The most recent reliable estimate I found is Wright’s 2013 description of Scientology’s “colossal financial resources” including “\$1 billion in liquid assets” in addition to a cruise ship and “about 12 million square feet of property around the world,” notably, \$400 million in Hollywood real estate and \$168 million worth of land in its headquarter city of Clearwater, Florida.¹⁴⁸ A German labor minister speculated about Scientology’s motivations in a 1997 interview, proposing that “Scientology is a machine for manipulating human beings,”¹⁴⁹ presumably the objective of manipulation being to amass wealth. The CIA agreed with a reading of Hubbard as motivated by greed, concluding in a 1971 report that “HUBBARD appears to be a shrewd businessman who has parlayed his Scientology religion into a multi-million-dollar business by taking advantage of that portion of society prone to fall for such gimmicks.”¹⁵⁰ The German minister and CIA report focus on the individuals giving money to Scientology, yet its near bankruptcy attests to the more significant role of legal recognition as a ‘religion’ in securing its financial success.

There is evidence to support the interpretation of Hubbard as acting on business savvy. For example, in 1950 the board of what was then still called the Dianetics Foundation banned discussion of past lives or “prenatal memories,”¹⁵¹ but then Scientology embraced reincarnation. Scientology is more than willing to shift important elements of its theology in ways that could be responses to market pressures. Scientology adopted Hubbard’s aggressive marketing approach: the final 35 printed pages of the 1995 printing of *Self Analysis* comprise an advertisement to get readers to become further involved and invested in Scientology. The book includes lists of further reading on Dianetics and Scientology, an ad for a Dianetics hotline (as of April 30, 2018, the number still reached a Dianetics hotline), advertisements for seminars and courses, offers of catalogues and solicitations of feedback from the publisher, and a list of Dianetics offices in the US, Puerto Rico, Canada, the UK, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Africa [*sic*], Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela.¹⁵²

In an interview, Hubbard’s personal auditor from 1973-1980, David Mayo, stated that Hubbard acknowledged his “insatiable lust for power and money.”¹⁵³ The Church was a legal way to

access the power, yet Hubbard pursued illegal means of amassing the money for which he lusted. Questionable accounting practices including a shell company in Liberia allowed Hubbard to embezzle Church funds into his own untaxed accounts in Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. Former¹⁵⁴ high-level Scientologist Marty Rathbun estimates that the Church holds “nearly two billion dollars” in untaxed offshore accounts.¹⁵⁵ Eltringham’s analysis of Hubbard’s motives with Scientology support Mayo’s report that money and power drove Hubbard. “Making money, I think, to Hubbard was paramount...the money that he wanted predominantly was for power,”¹⁵⁶ she stated in an interview. Spiritual goals were subordinate to Hubbard’s desire for money as a means to power, as evidenced by Hubbard’s 1972 HCO policy letter to staff: “MAKE MORE MONEY. MAKE OTHERS PRODUCE SO AS TO MAKE MONEY,”¹⁵⁷ which indicates that Hubbard was explicit to staff about his fiscal objectives. *Time* magazine was similarly explicit about Scientology’s motives, titling a 1991 article, “Scientology: The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power.” That article suggests that Scientology’s classification as a ‘religion’ is a pretext: a strategy to position itself as a victim of persecution, while pursuing financial objectives.¹⁵⁸

Hubbard reveals a preoccupation with material accumulation, writing “the only real guarantee of survival is *abundance*...the farmer who knows he has to eat twelve bushels of wheat in the coming year had better plant a hundred.”¹⁵⁹ He uses a parable of a farmer to instill the importance of amassing far more resources than one needs, taking security to an extreme of greed. This fear of insufficient resources threatening his survival, and taking abundance to such an extreme, are consistent with the paranoia various psychologists cited when characterizing Hubbard. The paranoid fear that he would not have enough for survival and would need to accumulate a writer’s equivalent of a hundred bushels of wheat per year may explain his desire to accumulate excessive wealth through Scientology.

Hubbard’s literary tastes support the reading of his motivations as stemming from greed and desire for fame. Urban analyzes Hubbard’s reported favorite nonfiction, *Twelve Against the Gods* by William Bolitho, as a reflection of Hubbard, and perhaps his conscious self-image. Bolitho explicitly describes the figure of the adventurer as “an individualist and an egotist, a truant from obligations...His motive may be simple greed. It most often is, or that form of greed we call vanity...swinish and godlike.”¹⁶⁰ This portrait offers insight into Hubbard’s motivations within Scientology, and also his possible motivations for starting a ‘religion’ rather than another business, if he wanted to assume a godlike role.

The Judge in the 1984 *Church of Scientology of California v. Gerald Armstrong* determined that the case’s evidence “reflect [Hubbard’s] egoism, greed, avarice, lust for power, and vindictiveness and aggressiveness against persons perceived by him to be disloyal or hostile.”¹⁶¹ Though he is charismatic, Hubbard is actually motivated by his ego and desire for wealth, power, loyalty, and reprisal for wrongdoing, according to this judge. This evaluation also implies a certain mental instability, such as narcissism, pathological aggression, and paranoia.

Wright speculates that Hubbard himself may have received psychiatric treatment at a Georgia psychiatric clinic in 1948-9,¹⁶² after writing to the Veteran’s Administration, requesting to be “treated psychiatrically or even by a psychoanalyst.”¹⁶³ Others’ psychological evaluations of

Hubbard suggest that such treatment may have been necessary, but if Hubbard did receive it, was insufficiently effective. A former lover of Hubbard's who had become a psychologist characterized Hubbard as "a manic depressive with paranoid tendencies." An Australian government report found in Hubbard evidence of symptoms "indicative of a condition of paranoid schizophrenia with delusions of grandeur."¹⁶⁴ Two psychiatry professors hazarded that Hubbard might suffer from "malignant narcissism" or "[p]aranoid personality. Delusions of grandeur. Pathological lying."¹⁶⁵ The judge in a case involving Hubbard offered the less professional but no less condemnatory evaluation that the case's "evidence portrays a man who has been virtually a pathological liar...[whose] egoism, greed, avarice, lust for power, and vindictiveness and aggressiveness...[are] reflected in his alter ego, the Church of Scientology." The judge saw Hubbard's mental state mirrored in the church, deciding that Scientology "is clearly schizophrenic and paranoid, and this bizarre combination seems to be a reflection of its founder LRH."¹⁶⁶ Hubbard may also have been poisoning himself with testosterone, which he took in an attempt to increase his libido for young women to whom he wanted to be attracted.¹⁶⁷

To speculate, Hubbard may have suffered from impotence because he insisted on focusing his sexual attraction on women, rather than men. The second wife of Hubbard's close friend and fellow male science fiction writer Robert Heinlein, claims that Hubbard and Heinlein had an affair,¹⁶⁸ while Hubbard's extreme homophobia suggests that he may have been struggling with his own sexual desire for other men. Or as Wright puts it, "Hubbard's relationship to homosexuality was apparently more complicated in life than in theory."¹⁶⁹ Even were he not struggling to be sexually attracted to men, Hubbard may have self-medicated with testosterone because he struggled to project a masculine gender presentation: Hubbard apparently liked to teach the teenage girls in the Sea Org how to apply makeup,¹⁷⁰ possibly projecting his drag desires.

The ideological basis of Dianetics is as an alternative to psychotherapy, and a rejection of psychotherapy is still fundamental to Scientology. Like 'religion' defining itself against the secular, Hubbard posits Dianetics as the opposite of psychotherapy, yet it is closer to a twin form due to the similarities between the two approaches. Perhaps Hubbard was crazy, and his rejection of psychotherapy was a self-defensive attempt to refute the science that deemed him flawed. Early adulthood acquaintances of Hubbard recount that the writer was known for lying. Alva Rogers, a housemate of Hubbard's in an Aleister Crowley witchcraft and free sex occultist commune in the mid-1940s, remembered Hubbard as having a "reputation for spinning tall tales (both off and on the printed page) [causing] a certain degree of skepticism in the minds of his audience."¹⁷¹ There are intriguing similarities between Scientology and Crowley's earlier magic cult, *Ordo Templi Orientis*, bordering on plagiarism. Camille Paglia notes that Scientology's practices "to cleanse and clarify the mind are evidently a reinterpretation of Crowley's singular fusion of Asian meditation with Satanic ritualism," and that according to Hubbard's son, the Scientology leader viewed himself as Crowley's successor.¹⁷² Hubbard claimed that he infiltrated the cult "in his capacity as a U.S. intelligence officer" and rescued a woman.¹⁷³ His account of this participation in Crowley's cult suggests a pathological level of untruth consistent with the fabrications of his autobiography as a whole. Or perhaps Hubbard had difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction. Urban offers a literary interpretation of Hubbard's motives, proposing that the writer constructed the 'religion' as a critique of reality: "Hubbard's new religion of Scientology

with its elaborate cosmology might best be understood as his own imaginative attempt to ‘disagree with this universe’—that is, to create an alternative universe.”¹⁷⁴ Of course, not every text that Scientology produces is pretextual: there are instances of Scientology invoking its status as a religion in a way that is not a pretext, and instances of Scientology giving justifications based in its ‘religious’ beliefs in ways that do not serve as pretexts. There are, however, ample examples from Scientology of both ‘religion’ as a pretext, and ‘religion’ as a source of pretext.

Discursive Solutions

An individual (or organization) will have infinite motives for a given action or ethical stance, as I argued when introducing pretext in Chapter 1. It is quixotic to seek a single motivation, because individuals are multifaceted and products of their context and conditioning. Likewise, institutions are complex, subject to clashing pressures, and changeable. Perhaps the most honest approach to the question of whether ‘religion’ is a true or valid motivation for an action or stance is to recognize this complexity, and not attempt to identify a single answer. Scientology is an obvious illustration of this complexity. Initially Dianetics, Scientology has grown to an international network of ‘religious,’ financial, missionary, spy, media production, publication, educational, drug rehabilitation, and even purportedly anti-cult organizations. This multifaceted structure allows Scientology to veil motives and control the discourse all the more effectively.

Scientology has an official Church calendar starting with the publication of *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* in May 1950.¹⁷⁵ The beginning is the word of Dianetics, the basis of the “religion’s” practice, and a significant piece of its worldview. The proof of Dianetics’ power is Hubbard’s claim that he used Dianetics to cure injuries he sustained while serving in WWII, which left him crippled and blinded. Yet the Navy has no records of Hubbard’s injury, nor of any treatment to suggest that he had been injured. The Church still insists that Hubbard’s claims of self-cure are true, even providing photographs of medals it claims Hubbard won (though some of the medals were not in use until after Hubbard left the Navy, and others not given to US soldiers), and documents purportedly supporting the claims (that archivists of such materials identify as forgeries).¹⁷⁶ The Church has a lot to lose if the story is untrue, because as the sole success story, it is fundamental to the “religion’s” claims and practice. If Hubbard did not use Dianetics to cure his war wounds, then there is no reason to believe that Dianetics works, so there is no evidence of benefit from practicing Scientology.

Hubbard lying about his war wounds and curing himself through Dianetics is not particularly remarkable in the history of ‘religious’ movements—whether new or tradition—and the creation of hagiographies for leaders. Wright compares this fabrication to Mormon theology being based on papyri that Joseph Smith claimed were part of the Old Testament, but which translations (after the Rosetta Stone’s discovery decoded hieroglyphics) revealed to be quotidian funeral documents.¹⁷⁷ Or to use Hubbard’s critique, “Heaven is a lie.” There is more at stake than simply a biographical lie.

Ideologically, since the ‘religion’ claims to be an applied science, the methodology of practicing that applied science is highly relevant and requires scientific support for its efficacy.

Pragmatically, Scientology's purpose is to affect individual and universal change through Dianetics. A 'religion' founded on feeding the world through cooking should produce some food, so too Dianetics should produce some change. This lie is the foundation of a belief system, and adherents' belief in Dianetics' efficacy (rooted in the lie that Hubbard cured himself) is instrumental to the argument that Dianetics practice is comparable to 'religious' study. Ethically then, the lie is fundamental to Scientology's status as a 'religion,' a status that affords the Church epistemic (and thus legal and ethical) privileges. As Wright argues, lies are fundamental to every 'religion;' a problem arises when a church uses its status as a 'religion' to veil its crimes with the Constitutional. "They have the right to believe whatever they choose. But it is a different matter to use the protections afforded a religion by the First Amendment to falsify history, propagate forgeries, and to cover up human-rights abuses."¹⁷⁸ You may believe a lie, but there is a problem if that lie affords you epistemic privilege. To apply my nomenclature to Wright's point, pretexts abound in 'religious' discourse, which is fine when they are white lies. However, it is unacceptable for pretexts to garner significant audience support for the 'religion' to veil violence, permit fraud, or protect the institution from the "scrutiny" from which Zorn suggested some 'religions' (presumably Abrahamic ones) deserve to be protected. I argue that the 'religions' she seeks to shield are as undeserving of such protection as those—such as Scientology—she seeks to expose.

Even if we overlook how the foundational lie undermines Scientology's ideological and pragmatic goals, we should be concerned about the ethical ramifications of accepting a lie that leads to a quack practice being classified as a 'religion,' because 'religious' status allows institutions to conceal their crimes. This ethical danger of the category of 'religion' motivates my dissertation: uncritical privileging of justifications rooted in 'religion' allows individuals and institutions to commit violence. This chapter presents a case for how Scientology's status as a 'religion' clearly affords the institution the recognition, authority, and privilege to be a basis of pretextual justifications for violence, economic interests, and even quasi-military activity.

The time-frame, extensive written and interview record, legal debates, and sensational stories from Scientology's construction allow readers to easily denaturalize Scientology's status as a 'religion' and recognize the pretexts Scientology employs to justify its imperialism and violence. I hope this model encourages readers to turn similar critical lenses on other institutions whose naturalized status we take for granted, and on justifications that may not be so outlandish, yet may also be veiling true motives or serving as a discursive figure to elicit certain responses from the audience. Stepping away from the social presumptions of what a 'religion' is, and how the knowledge that 'religion' generates deserves to be treated, I hope the reader can discard pre-texts in Widdowson's linguistic sense I discussed in Chapter 1, of the conditioning of text design and comprehension that shapes how an audience interprets information, and find tools to generate resistant readings.

As a border case spanning science fiction and 'religion,' Scientology is particularly epistemically potent, combining the extension of disbelief of science fiction with "religion's" incontrovertibly to lead the reader into believing the unbelievable. Prominent linguist S. I. Hayakawa's¹⁷⁹ review of *Dianetics* hints at this powerful combination, charging the science fiction of "concealing *from the reader*, for novelistic purposes, the distinctions between established scientific facts, almost-

established scientific hypotheses, scientific conjectures, and imaginative extrapolations far beyond what has ever been conjectured.”¹⁸⁰ The science fiction genre encourages readers to question their worldviews, and consider the possibility of those “imaginative extrapolations” they would have dismissed in another form. Hayakawa refers to the epistemically dangerous possibility of “cognitive estrangement:” that the reader might believe what is neither justified nor true. The element of Scientology that is a ‘religion’ allows the Church to create an entire discourse so that those extrapolations become a potential worldview, without justification or truth. Hayakawa warns that a massive discourse such as Hubbard created would lead the author if not the reader “to internalize the assumptions underlying the verbiage.”¹⁸¹ Hubbard’s internalization of the discourse he created, a fiction on which to found a religion, may help explain some of his outlandish and unrealistic claims.

Through the discourse, the ‘religion’ creates a world, and through the re-articulation of that discourse, that discursively constructed world becomes real. Scientology taps into the power of this combination through its basic recruitment method. First, the recruiter tries to disabuse the potential convert of her prejudices against Scientology so that the recruit is open to considering the ‘religion’ as a possible source of wisdom. This step mirrors what science fiction enacts in blurring the boundaries between sources of knowledge, and inviting the reader to consider the possibility that the hypothetical could be true. The next step is to identify a problem in the recruit’s life and suggest that Scientology might offer a solution, analogously to how science fiction presents an otherly world in which the reader can imagine solutions to her own world’s problems. The recruiter creates a world for the recruit, a fiction in which the recruit solves her problems and becomes god-like, while Scientology offers whatever the recruit might need.

Scientology constructs itself as a ‘religion’ discursively: Hubbard and his followers use written and visual media to project an image (or a simulacrum) of a ‘religion’ on a Christian prototype. Given Hubbard’s writing on how an author constructs his (for Hubbard, important characters were always male) reality through writing, this discursive construction of a ‘religion’ was likely intentional. “If anything,” Urban concludes, “Scientology is a *self-conscious attempt to make a religion*, that is, a concerted effort to use explicitly religious sorts of discourse to describe, defend, define, and redefine itself.”¹⁸² Scientology’s intentional discursive construction confronts the broader societal discursive construction, including texts from media, internet, and publishing outlets; government institutions like the courts, FBI, and IRS; and public opinion. Combined, they produce the discursive construction of a ‘religion,’ exemplifying the argument I make in Chapter 2, that ‘religions’ are a discursive modern construct.

¹ Hugh B. Urban, *The Church of Scientology: A History of a New Religion*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 209.

² Scientology is not the only new ‘religious’ movement to draw on science fiction. Jeffrey Sconce traces terminology and concepts of Heaven’s Gate (famous for their 1997 group suicide) to *Star Trek*.

Jeffrey Sconce, “*Star Trek*, Heaven’s Gate and Textual Transcendence,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

³ A prolific author, he wrote under pen names because the magazines wanted to give the impression of having many authors.

J. Gordon Melton, *The Church of Scientology. Studies in Contemporary Religion Series vol. 1*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), 4.

⁴ See Michael Peckham, “New Dimensions of Social Movement/Counter-movement Interaction: The Case of Scientology and Its Internet Critics,” *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), pp. 317-347.

⁵ Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2013), 82-3.

Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 65.

⁶ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 64.

⁷ Wright, *Going Clear*, 60.

⁸ L. Ron Hubbard, *Self Analysis: A Simple Self-Help Volume of Tests and Techniques Based on the Discoveries Contained in Dianetics*, (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, Inc., 1995), 5.

⁹ Hubbard named ‘Thetan,’ “the entity observing the images that the mind was storing” after the Greek letter. Melton compare thetan to “what other religions had called the soul or spirit.”

Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 11.

¹⁰ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 256.

¹¹ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 260.

¹² William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, “Scientology: To Be Perfectly Clear.” *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer, 1980), 128-136.

¹³ Wright, *Going Clear*, 60.

¹⁴ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 13.

¹⁵ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, unnumbered page directly after the publication information.

¹⁶ Church of Scientology International, *Scientology: theology and Practice of a Contemporary Religion*, (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 2002), 16.

¹⁷ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 152-3.

¹⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Lake Tanganyika Research: Fisheries.” 1999. Accessed April 29, 2018. <http://www.fao.org/fi/oldsite/ltr/fish.htm>.

¹⁹ L. Ron Hubbard, “Dianetics and religion,” *The Technical Bulletins of Dianetics and Scientology*, vol. 1, June 1950.

²⁰ Quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 63.

²¹ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 63.

²² Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

²³ Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

²⁴ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 2013, 82; and Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 65.

²⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 82.

²⁶ Kjersti Hellesøy, “Scientology: The Making of a Religion,” in *Controversial New Religions*, Second edition, James Lewis and Jesper Petersen, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 265.

²⁷ Now Rigal-Cellard.

²⁸ Bernadette Rigal, “‘The Church of Scientology’ ou la fabrication d’une religion américaine,” *Revue française d’études américaines*, No. 12, La Religion aux États Unis, (October 1981), 240-1.

²⁹ Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley, *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 0.

³⁰ Cowan and Bromley, *Cults*, 0.

³¹ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 61, italics in the original.

³² Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), xvi.

³³ Since 2006, Hubbard has held the *Guinness World Record* for the most prolific author, having published 1,084 books.

“Most published works by one author.” Guinness World Records, <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/most-published-works-by-one-author> (Accessed March 28, 2018).

³⁴ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 1.

³⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 104.

³⁶ Wright, *Going Clear*, 360.

³⁷ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 43.

³⁸ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 79.

³⁹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 112.

⁴⁰ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 17.

⁴¹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 102-3.

⁴² Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 36, 82.

⁴³ Quoted in Hugh B. Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 57.

⁴⁴ Talal Asad, David Chidester, Tomoko Masuzawa, and Russell McCutcheon. See also Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 222, n. 14.

⁴⁵ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 16-7.

⁴⁶ Following the IRS’ first investigation of Hubbard, the Scientology leader issued a bulletin in 1959 instructing followers to criticize the tax system as communist and antithetical to US values. Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 159-60.

⁴⁷ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 4.

⁴⁸ Urban, *New Age*, 137.

⁴⁹ Jean G. Zorn, “Cults and the Ideology of Individualism in First Amendment Discourse,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1989), 491.

⁵⁰ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 13.

⁵¹ Urban, *New Age*, 151.

⁵² The IRS still observes this definition: “Distinct legal existence, Recognized creed and form of worship, Definite and distinct ecclesiastical government, Formal code of doctrine and discipline, Distinct religious history, Membership not associated with any other church or denomination, Organization of ordained ministers, Ordained ministers selected after completing prescribed courses of study, Literature of its own, Established places of worship, Regular congregations, Regular religious services, Sunday schools for the religious instruction of the young, Schools for the preparation of its members.”

“‘Churches’ Defined.” Internal Revenue Service. <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/churches-religious-organizations/churches-defined> (Accessed March 28, 2018).

⁵³ Wright, *Going Clear*, 231.

⁵⁴ Wright, *Going Clear*, 232.

⁵⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 227-8.

⁵⁶ Wright, *Going Clear*, 312.

⁵⁷ Sabrina Stierwalt, “How Old Is the Universe?” *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-old-is-the-universe/> (Accessed March 28, 2018).

⁵⁸ Wright, *Going Clear*, 355.

⁵⁹ L. Ron Hubbard, “The Hope of Man,” *The Technical Bulletins of Dianetics and Scientology*, vol. 2, June 1955, 215.

⁶⁰ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 132.

⁶¹ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 165, 82.

⁶² Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 66-7.

⁶³ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 69, 71, 103, respectively.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Urban, *New Age*, 150; and Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 157.

⁶⁵ Cowan and Bromley, *Cults*, 32.

⁶⁶ Urban, *New Age*, 144.

⁶⁷ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 46.

⁶⁸ “First, the individual seeks to survive as an individual, to enjoy the longest, fullest life for the self. [2] The individual then sees survival through procreation or creativity, through the family unit and the next generation. [3] Then successively the thetan seeks survival through groups, [4] the entire human species, and [5] eventually life itself. The sixth, seventh, and eighth dynamics fine the individual seeking to survive through identification with the universe, spirituality, and infinity through the Supreme Being.”

Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 31.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 57.

⁷⁰ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 138-9.

⁷¹ Urban, *New Age*, 145-6.

⁷² Wright, *Going Clear*, 108.

⁷³ Rigal, “‘The Church of Scientology’ ou la fabrication d’une religion américaine,” 243.

⁷⁴ Wright, *Going Clear*, 27.

⁷⁵ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 26.

⁷⁶ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 33.

⁷⁷ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 34.

⁷⁸ “l’explication de la réussite de Hubbard dont l’Eglise participe de la grande tradition des religions américaines qui, sacralisant les idéaux séculiers du peuple, sont édifiées pour faciliter à l’homme la conquête du monde.”

Rigal, “‘The Church of Scientology’ ou la fabrication d’une religion américaine,” 244.

⁷⁹ He called this code *The Way to Happiness*. Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 23.

⁸⁰ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 34.

⁸¹ Leah Remini, *Troublemaker: surviving Hollywood and Scientology*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2016): x.

⁸² “Hubbard divinisa enfin son système en l’armant d’une hiérarchie ecclésiastique et d’un symbolisme religieux.”

Rigal, “‘The Church of Scientology’ ou la fabrication d’une religion américaine,” 244.

⁸³ Remini, *Troublemaker*, xii.

⁸⁴ These characteristics, which they call an “analytical tool” rather than “diagnostic instrument,” concern zealous commitment, punishment of dissent, mind-altering practice, behavioral norms, elitism, “us-versus-them mentality,” unaccountability to authority, belief that ends justify any means, employment of shame, requirement to disconnect from others, organizational growth motives, financial motives, high time demands, high social demands, and threat of reprisal upon leaving. They are viewable on their website.

Janja Lalich and Michael D. Langone, “Characteristics Associated with Cultic Groups.” International Cultic Studies Association. http://www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/checklis.htm (Accessed March 28, 2018).

⁸⁵ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 53.

⁸⁶ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 54.

⁸⁷ Zorn cites the California Court of Appeals decision in *Molko v. Holy Spirit* (1988) “does not require cults to forego the brainwashing techniques that are part of their recruitment and membership activities. It merely requires that they disclose their identity.”

Further, she quotes the decision from *Meroni v. Holy Spirit Ass’n* (1986) that the plaintiff’s “brainwashing claim is based upon . . . activities . . . which . . . are commonly used by religious and other groups, and are accepted by society as legitimate means of indoctrination.”

Zorn, “Cults and the Ideology of Individualism in First Amendment Discourse,” 510, 513.

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- ⁸⁸ Cowan and Bromley, *Cults*, 34.
- ⁸⁹ Argentina, Australia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, New Zealand, the Philippines, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- ⁹⁰ Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy (with the exception of some state courts), Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Russia.
- ⁹¹ Cowan and Bromley, *Cults*, 19.
- ⁹² Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 63.
- ⁹³ Wright, *Going Clear*, 240.
- ⁹⁴ Wright, *Going Clear*, 242.
- ⁹⁵ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 19.
- ⁹⁶ Wright, *Going Clear*, 144.
- ⁹⁷ Wright, *Going Clear*, 24.
- ⁹⁸ Wright, *Going Clear*, 135.
- ⁹⁹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 345, n. 1.
- ¹⁰⁰ Wright, *Going Clear*, 282.
- ¹⁰¹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 264, 266, 268-9, 275.
- ¹⁰² Wright, *Going Clear*, 265.
- ¹⁰³ Wright, *Going Clear*, 112.
- ¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Going Clear*, 279-80.
- ¹⁰⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 111.
- ¹⁰⁶ Wright, *Going Clear*, 388, n. 111.
- ¹⁰⁷ Remini, *Troublemaker*, 30.
- ¹⁰⁸ Remini, *Troublemaker*, 27.
- ¹⁰⁹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 110.
- ¹¹⁰ Wright, *Going Clear*, 110, n. 1.
- ¹¹¹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 196.
- ¹¹² Wright, *Going Clear*, 297.
- ¹¹³ Wright, *Going Clear*, 238.
- ¹¹⁴ Wright, *Going Clear*, 236.
- ¹¹⁵ Hugh B. Urban. "Fair Game: Secrecy, Security, and the Church of Scientology in Cold War America," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 74, No. 2, Religion and Secrecy (Jun., 2006), 356-389.
- ¹¹⁶ Quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 109.

¹¹⁷ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 51.

¹¹⁹ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 51.

¹²⁰ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 52.

¹²¹ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 52.

¹²² Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 53.

¹²³ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 56.

¹²⁴ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 60.

¹²⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 121, 266.

¹²⁶ Wright, *Going Clear*, 120-1.

Kate Bornstein, *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 93.

¹²⁷ Wright, *Going Clear*, 110, n. 1.

¹²⁸ Wright, *Going Clear*, 348-9.

¹²⁹ Recognizing the strong arguments against Proposition 8, and more broadly for rejecting marriage equality from a queer theory perspective that is not homophobic, I do not think that rejection of extending the exclusionary institution of marriage to same-sex couples is necessarily homophobic. However, in this case, other information about the donation suggests that it was rooted in homophobia; this instance reflects a fear of homosexuality and the implications of extending rights to same-sex couples.

¹³⁰ Wright, *Going Clear*, 322.

¹³¹ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 166.

¹³² Quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 161.

¹³³ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 176.

¹³⁴ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 209.

¹³⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 325.

¹³⁶ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 170, italics in the original.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 171.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 209.

¹³⁹ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 55.

¹⁴⁰ Zorn, "Cults and the Ideology of Individualism in First Amendment Discourse," 522-3, italics in the original.

¹⁴¹ Urban, *New Age*, 147.

¹⁴² Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 15.

¹⁴³ Rigal, "'The Church of Scientology' ou la fabrication d'une religion américaine," 238.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 83.

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- ¹⁴⁵ Quoted in, e.g. Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 58, citing writer-publisher Lloyd Eshbach, who claims Hubbard made this statement in 1949.
- ¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Rigal, “‘The Church of Scientology’ ou la fabrication d’une religion américaine,” 242.
- ¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 68.
- ¹⁴⁸ Wright, *Going Clear*, ix-x.
- ¹⁴⁹ Jennifer Tanaka, “Hollywood versus Germany over Scientology,” *Maclean’s*, Jan. 20, 1997.
- ¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 128 n. 1, capitalization in the original.
- ¹⁵¹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 79.
- ¹⁵² Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 287-321.
- ¹⁵³ Wright, *Going Clear*, 119.
- ¹⁵⁴ Janet Reitman, *Inside Scientology: The Story of America’s Most Secretive Religion*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing: 2011), 97.
- ¹⁵⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 408, n. 278.
- ¹⁵⁶ Wright, *Going Clear*, 120.
- ¹⁵⁷ Wright, *Going Clear*, 119, capitalization in the original; 389, n. 119. Also quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 133.
- ¹⁵⁸ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 148.
- ¹⁵⁹ Hubbard, *Self Analysis*, 15, italics in the original.
- ¹⁶⁰ As quoted in Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 55.
- ¹⁶¹ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 32.
- ¹⁶² Wright, *Going Clear*, 57.
- ¹⁶³ Wright, *Going Clear*, 49-50.
- ¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 91.
- ¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 50.
- ¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 55.
- ¹⁶⁷ Wright, *Going Clear*, 51-2.
- ¹⁶⁸ Wright, *Going Clear*, 347.
- ¹⁶⁹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 92.
- ¹⁷⁰ Wright, *Going Clear*, 107.
- ¹⁷¹ Quoted in Wright, *Going Clear*, 43.
- ¹⁷² Camille Paglia, “Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Third Series, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Winter, 2003), 49.
- ¹⁷³ Melton, *Church of Scientology*, 8. This woman became his first wife, though he denied that they had legally married and became a bigamist when he married his second wife without divorcing the first.
- ¹⁷⁴ Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 87-8.

¹⁷⁵ Wright, *Going Clear*, 184.

¹⁷⁶ Wright, *Going Clear*, 351-3.

¹⁷⁷ Wright, *Going Clear*, 355-6.

¹⁷⁸ Wright, *Going Clear*, 354.

¹⁷⁹ Since Hubbard based Dianetics on a loose second-hand impression of Korzybski's theory that language informs cognition, as a follower of Korzybski, Hayakawa might have had other stakes in his evaluation of *Dianetics*.

¹⁸⁰ Wright, *Going Clear*, 64, italics in the original.

¹⁸¹ Wright, *Going Clear*, 65.

¹⁸² Urban, *The Church of Scientology*, 211, italics in the original.

Conclusion

“Tough Titties” Ma Anand Sheela notoriously responded to a 60 Minutes interviewer asking about people who do not want members of her ‘religion’ in their towns.¹ She smiled with all the confidence of one who believes her crimes impervious to legal or societal challenge, for Sheela represented a *Religion*. This new ‘religious’ movement, the Rajneesh Movement, began as a meditation practice at communes in Poona, India in 1970, quickly attracting wealthy young adherents from around the world. When the Indian government began to pressure the movement—perhaps a mixture of desire for tax revenue or to condemn the Rajneeshi’s scandalous free-sex culture—Sheela, the movement leader’s powerful secretary and spokesperson, found a large property in Oregon to fulfill her dream of a city-sized commune under the religious protections of the US Constitution.²

The legal and societal privileges ‘religions’ enjoy in the US offer fertile space for organizations that fit the category of a ‘religion.’ Groups from abroad that already identified as ‘religions,’ such as Sheela’s Rajneeshis, come to the US for the legal benefits. In contrast, in Chapter Four, I explain how one non-‘religious’ group originating in the US, the Dianetics Movement, assumed ‘religious’ categorization in the face of threats, becoming the ‘religion’ of Scientology. Other ‘religions,’ such as Pastafarianism (the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, founded in 2005 by Oregonian Bobby Henderson as a parody and protest of the First Amendment justifications the Kansas State Board of Education employed for teaching creationism), are invented to challenge the privileges ‘religions’ receive.³

These ‘religions’ all demonstrate the overarching argument of my dissertation: what we call ‘religion’ is a construct that enjoys epistemic, legal, and social privileges making it a potentially dangerous source of pretext—a discursive category of justifications (for actions, stances, and identities) that do not reflect the speaker’s motives but seek to veil the motives or rhetorically appeal to the audience. The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster has used discursive construction to establish itself as a ‘religion,’ creating an origin story (humans evolved from pirates, with whom they share a higher percentage of DNA than primates), ordination process (\$25, including worldwide shipping), ‘religious’ headgear (the colander), and an evangelical wing of the Church (encouraging adherents to bring giant spaghetti monster puppets to parades). Aside from adherents in several countries successfully arguing that it is their ‘religious’ freedom to wear colanders in government ID photos and when being sworn into public office, or a Berkeley Economics professor recently announcing that he would not be teaching on Friday in accordance with the Church’s Sabbath, Pastafarians have done little harm through the pretext of ‘religion.’ The Rajneeshi Movement, like the Church of Scientology, carefully discursively constructed their ‘religion’ with the US legal requirements in mind. The Rajneeshis eventually left the US, succumbing to pressure from the government, press, Oregon citizens, and primarily an INS investigation into immigration fraud. First though, they attempted arson, assassination, and murder, and succeeded at wiretapping, embezzlement, and releasing salmonella into local salad bars to poison their neighbors before an election.⁴ Not only were followers persuaded to commit these crimes out of faith in the ‘religious’ movement, the leaders believed themselves immune under the Establishment Clause: legal protections for ‘religion’ served as a pretext for crimes from fraud to violence.

Scientology, the Rajneeshi Movement, and Pastafarianism may seem like easy targets for my claim that ‘religion’ is discursively constructed, enjoys unwarranted epistemic privilege, and is a potentially dangerous source of pretext. New Religious Movements⁵ like these, emerging largely in the US over the past two centuries, are easy targets because they are not naturalized in our cultural imagination the way that more established ones such as the Abrahamic ‘religions’ have been through centuries of discursive entrenchment. Yet the movements and institutions we call ‘religions’ are all susceptible to such critiques, and as I discussed in the Introduction, similar critiques are applicable to constructions beyond ‘religion,’ such as science, law, medicine, and capitalism. I hope that my readers will readily recognize pretexts and the construction of ‘religion,’ while appreciating the ethical, political, and social stakes of allowing such pretexts and constructions to operate unchallenged.

Summary

This dissertation has two theoretical chapters—on the discursive category of ‘pretext’ and the discursive construct of ‘religion’— and two chapters applying these critiques to objects—two science fiction texts, and a science fiction ‘religion.’ I begin with an Introduction presenting the thesis and core theoretical arguments or ‘denaturalizations’ of the project; defining key vocabulary, introducing the three objects to which I apply the theory, and stating my objectives.

Chapter One, “Fallacy of Justification: ‘Pretext,’” defines ‘pretext,’ lays out my ten tests for identifying pretexts in discourse, conducts a discourse analysis of how scholars use the term in relevant literature, and reads ‘pretext’ against core rhetorical theory scholarship. Following this chapter, I restate my Ten Tests of Pretext for the reader’s reference.

Chapter Two, “The Privileged Space of ‘Religion,’” argues that the epistemically privileged world ‘religion’ creates for itself is a historical and conceptual mistake with dangerous epistemic implications. I begin with evidence that what we call ‘religion’ is an Enlightenment European construct, identifying ten common characteristics of the construct, then proceed to argue that ‘religious’ arguments for imperialism are fallacious, “religion’s” epistemic privilege is undeserved, ‘religious’ pretexts can have dangerous implications, and the reader has strong grounds to be suspicious of ‘religious’ pretexts. Here is this chapter’s argument in logical form:

Premise A: Perceived characteristics such as universality and incontrovertibility dominate contemporary discourse of ‘religion’

Premise B: ‘Religion’ is a European Enlightenment construct

Conclusion 1: Contemporary discourse misrepresents ‘religion,’ whose Enlightenment construction confutes those characteristics

Premise C: Modern Europeans have used ‘religion’ to justify imperialism

Premise D: Justifications for imperialism rely on perceived characteristics of ‘religion’

Conclusion 2: Enlightenment Europeans’ use of ‘religion’ to justify imperialism is fallaciously based on questionable premises

Premise E: The perceived characteristics of ‘religion’ afford it epistemic privilege

Conclusion 3: “Religion’s” epistemic privilege is unfounded, again fallaciously based on questionable premises

Premise F: Epistemic privilege increases justificatory weight

Conclusion 4: ‘Religion’ enjoys undeservedly inflated justificatory weight

Following this chapter, I restate my Ten Characteristics of ‘religion’ for the reader’s reference.

Chapter Three, “Religious Pretext in Science Fiction,” systematically applies the previous two chapters’ theoretical interventions to two objects of science fiction literature: Mary Doria Russell’s *The Sparrow* (1996) and Octavia Estelle Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy (1987-1989). For each of these texts in turn, I analyze the discursive construction of a ‘religion’ with reference to my ten characteristics of ‘religion,’ then examine how these constructed ‘religions’ serve as sources of pretext for imperialism and other violence. I was careful to reflect my own cultural milieu in choosing the texts: both were published in my lifetime, by authors from the country—or in Butler’s case, city—of my birth. I sought texts that match the definition of science fiction I use in this chapter (“the literature of cognitive estrangement”), exemplify ‘contact’ science fiction (depicting encounters between humans and non-human others) to reflect historical imperialism, include literary constructions of ‘religion,’ and provide strong textual evidence of constructions of ‘pretext.’ I selected one human-initiated contact text in which humans are the imperialist power contacting an alien Other (Russell’s Jesuit mission to Rakhat, though one of the alien species is also an imperialist power), and one alien-initiated contact in which an alien species imperializes a human Other (Butler’s Oankali conquest of humans and Earth). Further, I intentionally chose one text depicting a ‘religion’ that is similar to our conception of prototypical ‘religion’ (Russell’s altered Jesuit Christianity), and one text constructing an institution displaying core characteristics of ‘religion’ yet probably falling outside most readers’ intuitive understanding of the category (Butler’s Biology as the Oankali ‘religion’). Both texts have numerous minor and significant examples of pretexts for imperialism and other violence that illustrate my 10 tests for identifying pretext—for example, significantly, the Jesuit mission’s “rationale” for their mission to the alien planet, which Russell situates in a legacy of Jesuit imperialist pretext, and the Oankali appeals to Biological imperative to justify their kidnapping and genetic manipulation of humans. My purpose in this chapter is twofold: to demonstrate how to apply the theoretical tools and to substantiate my dissertation’s core warning: that ‘religion’ is a dangerously powerful source of pretext on Earth as it is in literature.

Chapter Four, “*Clearing up Pretext and ‘Religion,’ through the Case of Scientology,*” echoes this methodology with a border case between science fiction and ‘religion:’ the Church of Scientology. This final chapter takes the conclusions of Chapters One and Two as its premises and synthesizes a response to the literary analysis in Chapter Three through the example of Scientology. Here again, I systematically trace the discursive construction of Scientology as a ‘religion,’ then discuss how Scientologists use their status as a ‘religion’ as a pretext, and their ‘religion’ as a basis for pretexts for imperialism and other violence. My goal is to reiterate the theoretical points of Chapters One and Two, and offer further illustrative examples to engrain the

analytic approach I seek to teach. I challenge the privileging of justifications premised on ‘religion,’ and ‘religion’ as a justification. My intervention of showing ‘religion’ and ‘justification’ to be signs that announce how the listener should interpret texts and images that frame a modern ethical paradigm makes a parallel case to Calvino’s philosopher in the introduction’s epigraph: discourse creates signs that may not mean what you think. I hope the reader extends my critiques of Scientology to other ‘religions,’ to recognize how the epistemic privilege of that categorization permits unethical actions, stances, and identity constructions.

The conclusion offers a few further objects to indicate the generalizability of my theoretical contributions, and reminds the reader of the sequence of the argument to reinforce the analytical tools this dissertation offers.

The two core features of this dissertation are my new presentation of ‘pretext’ and claim that ‘religion’ is a discursive construct that enjoys unwarranted epistemic privilege. As I write in the Introduction, I define pretext as a discursive category of justifications (for an action, stance, or identity) that do not reflect the speaker’s motivations and serve to veil those motives or rhetorically appeal to the audience. Pretext refers to the space in communication that the speaker, audience, and construction of meaning around the exchange all help delineate. Pretext is not a fixed temporally- nor culturally-universal linguistic form, but rather a kind of speech dependent on the way humans communicate in that milieu.

Justifications are explanations a speaker offers to validate a proposition. I choose to emphasize justifications for actions, stances, and identities due to their relevance to my core argument summarized above. A speaker employs justifications for actions to validate an action such as imperialism, torture, or controlled reproduction (as in the cases of all three of my objects: Russell’s *The Sparrow*, Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy, and the Church of Scientology). Justifications for stances are support for arguments such as the ethical primacy of God (Russell), Biology (Butler), or L. Ron Hubbard (Scientology); or that it is wrong to prostitute oneself (Russell), eat meat (Butler), or seek medical treatment (Scientology). The second set of examples may appear to be in the previous category of justification for actions. However, the ethical framing of a justification for a stance has particular potential for generalization and epistemic power that I hold to be significant, particularly in the context of ‘religious’ justifications for stances. To borrow examples from Scientology, a ‘religious’ justification for forcing a child to work may be persuasive in a given context. Yet a justification for the stance that children are merely small adults and should be treated as such can carry ethical weight that adds authority, and may have sustained impact as a justification for further actions, such as punishing children as adults, having unreasonable expectations for children, and permitting abuse.

Justifications for identity are particularly relevant to the case of ‘religious’ pretext, given that defining the ‘barbarian’ Other in contradistinction to the ‘civilized’ European was historically co-constitutive of defining ‘religion’ against its binary twin of the ‘secular,’ and in turn Christianity against ‘less evolved heathen religions.’ In addition to the historical examples in Chapter Two, I would refer the reader to how the dominant species in both of Chapter Three’s science fiction texts justify defining the subordinate species in reference to themselves due to the ontological supremacy of the entity to which they assign ethical primacy. Russell’s Jesuits justify

their mission to the alien planet on the basis that the other species are also God's creation, while Butler's aliens justify their genetic manipulations to define and redesign the human species by appealing to Biological imperative.

Where I diverge significantly from past scholarship on devices resembling my 'pretext' is in designating the role of the justification rather than purporting to make psychological judgments. I emphasize that pretexts have the purpose not of reporting motivations, but rather of veiling the motive or rhetorically appealing to the audience. The purpose of my 10 tests to distinguish pretext is precisely to identify pretext as a discursive rather than psychological category, a rhetorical device beyond simply a lie. The tests point to how the justification functions in the discourse, rather than analyzing the speaker's psychology. This distinction of viewing pretext through a discursive rather than psychological lens is particularly relevant to my analysis of pretext in Butler. Because the aliens find it difficult to lie, a psychological view of pretext as insincerity would be shallow. The aliens could hardly offer insincere justifications if they were communicating through direct multi-sensory contact with their interlocutors. One can, however, read pretext in the discursive role of justifications that shift to distract from motives or manipulate the audience.

My discursive rather than psychological approach is also valuable when dealing with high-stakes cases such as Scientology. If calling Scientology a 'religion' serves the function of justifying violence, then it should not matter whether Hubbard sincerely believed Scientology was a 'religion' (for cases of religion as a pretext) nor whether Miscavige assaulted adherents because he sincerely believed his 'religion' required him to physically harm members (for cases of religion as a source of pretext). These normative claims reveal my central motivation for writing this dissertation: a desire to expose pretext as a rhetorical trick that manipulates audiences into accepting and even commending ethically problematic arguments. Recall when you learned about literary devices. The concept of a metaphor brings alive new meaning in what you hear and read; suddenly, the world is full of similes, each 'like' and 'as' sparking recognition. Being attuned to pretext as a rhetorical device can likewise illuminate discursive manipulations. I hope my readers will now also question justifications from politicians' posturing about supporting some policy, to hiring committees' invocations of 'fit,' to your own sotto voce muttering when reaching to pour yourself another drink. Pretexts pervade our social, professional, and personal discourses, operating invisibly when they are naturalized as reasons.

Naturalization grants both justification and 'religion' epistemic privilege. As I address in the introduction, epistemic privilege encompasses ethical, legal, societal, and other privilege, because the value that an audience assigns to an ethical stance, legal principle, or societal more, is rooted in the production of knowledge within that field. Audiences overlook the discursive function of justifications that are pretexts veiling motives or manipulating the audience because they accept justifications as equally valid, whether they reflect motivating reasons or are merely rhetorical devices. I view this elision of reason and pretext as naturalization because the audience is conditioned to treat both categories as equally valid justifications. Likewise, audiences overlook the modern construction of 'religion' due to the myth of spatio-temporal universality that naturalizes 'religion' as intrinsic, and the discursive entrenchment of 'religion' as a privileged concept.

Even if audiences are unaware of the characteristics of a modern construction of ‘religion,’ the way in which people speak about such institutions writes them into the category of ‘religion.’ Sarah Ahmed coins the phrase “problematic proximities” to describe how placing terms near other terms can suggest an elision or value judgment in the listener’s mind, or prompt a certain emotional response, without explicitly stating that the terms are related. Through this rhetorical strategy, a speaker can express views without explicitly articulating them, with proximities of terms building those associations.⁶ Discursive construction uses proximity in the same way, though with positive, negative, and value-neutral senses. Including Scientology in a list of institutions the audience intuitively considers ‘religions’ such as Judaism and Catholicism suggests that they belong together in the same category. Including items, such as Mormonism, with similarities to both Scientology and the traditional ‘religions’ implies that the items share sufficient overlapping features to belong in a single category through family resemblances:⁷ that Scientology has enough in common with Mormonism, which has enough in common with Catholicism, which has enough in common with Judaism for all four to belong in one category. Discursive proximity between an institution and concepts or qualities the audience associates with ‘religion’ has a similar effect. Hubbard employed this rhetorical device in assigning Scientology the trappings of ‘religion.’ Placing ‘Church,’ ‘minister,’ ‘spiritual,’ or even a visual symbol similar to the Christian crucifix near ‘Scientology’ effects an association with ‘religion’ (based on a Christian prototype) in the listener’s mind and an emotional response echoing how the listener would respond to other ‘religions,’ without explicitly stating “Scientology is a religion like Christianity.” I hope that my emphasis on discursive construction in this dissertation encourages the reader to look for the proximities that suggest certain attributions without explicitly stating them. As the examples in Chapters Three and Four illustrate, it is important to read for how proximate symbols and language from ‘religion’ give institutions ‘religious’ valences and influence ethical valuation in ways that are, to use Ahmed’s phrase, “bound up with the justification of action.”⁸

To expose how pretext functions as a rhetorical trick, and how ‘religion’ is a particularly powerful pretext or source of pretexts, I seek to denaturalize pretext and ‘religion’ to make them uncanny to the reader, so that, like the Foucauldian heterotopia of science fiction, pretext and ‘religion’ are strange enough to evaluate from a detached perspective. Casting down naturalization allows the reader to evaluate texts without their ‘pretextual’ meaning in the literary sense (without the prior texts that prefigure the audience’s interpretation) and in a linguistic sense (the conditioning of text design and comprehension that shapes how an audience interprets information and finds tools to generate resistant readings). Specifically, denaturalizing justification and ‘religion’ has important ethical potential. Evaluating justifications as potential pretexts rather than accepting them in their naturalized role of reasons opens new hermeneutic space to consider what discursive role the justification occupies, escaping the manipulations of pretexts. Recognizing that ‘religion’ is a discursive construct with epistemic privilege helps remove the bias from societal conditioning that prefigures interpretations of ‘religion.’

My case of Scientology in Chapter Four exemplifies the discursive construction and naturalization of ‘religion,’ mirroring similar processes of other New Religious Movements, such as the Rajneeshi Movement, and Pastafarianism, as well as older, established ‘religions’ such as

Christianity. The question then is not whether Scientology is a ‘religion,’ but what a ‘religion’ is, and whether that is a useful category. As I suggest in Chapter Four, Hugh Urban’s comparison of a contemporary construction of ‘religion’ to the figure of the “simulacrum” helps conceptualize how religion is not a category with set standards, but rather an image of that concept, an approximation resembling or imitating what the concept represents. Modern ‘religion’ as a simulacrum allows institutions to present themselves as ‘religions,’ projecting a simulacrum to gain certain benefits. The simulacrum ‘religion’ empowers institutions that project such an image to exploit the category: the simulacrum enables ‘religion’ as a pretext.⁹

When considering Scientology as a New Religious Movement, Urban repeatedly asks what is at stake in categorizing an institution as a ‘religion.’ One of the questions I seek to answer with my dissertation, and to which the reader hopefully now has a robust answer. ‘Religions,’ modern discursive constructs, enjoy epistemological, ethical, legal, and societal privileges that makes them a more potent basis for pretexts. When those pretexts serve to justify violence, including verbal and material violence, then the status of ‘religion’ serves as a powerful shield to veil motivating reason and protect the institution from legal and societal requital. I begin to answer what is at stake in calling an institution a ‘religion’ in Chapter One, arguing that the discursive category of ‘pretext’ poses an ethical danger, by allowing speakers to submit justifications that do not reflect their motivating reasons, yet protect their actions or ethical stances. Chapter Two continues the answer, showing how ‘religion’ has been discursively constructed as a tool to justify imperialist violence. Chapter Three analyzes the discursive construction of ‘religion’ and use of that ‘religion’ as a basis of pretexts for imperial violence, to demonstrate these phenomena within an intentional and contained discourse, for the reader to better conceptualize the processes. Chapter Four merges the ‘religious’ constructions of the previous two chapters, presenting the case of Scientology which is both a ‘religion’ and science fiction. Scientology explicitly uses its status as a ‘religion’ to justify imperial and interpersonal violence, and there is ample support from former members, scholars, and the “religion’s” own discourse to suggest that this classification as a ‘religion’ is a self-conscious pretext to veil Scientology’s motives and shield the ‘religion’ from accountability. To Urban’s question I answer that what is at stake in calling an institution a ‘religion’ is that the institution can literally get away with murder.

Enactment

The motivating question of this dissertation is how to define and identify pretext as a discursive category. A colleague recently told me she was employing my 10 tests for identifying pretext to help parse her own motivations in an important career decision without giving in to psychoanalytical interpretations. I encourage readers to apply these tools in their various hermeneutic analyses, significant and trivial, personal and academic (with proper attribution, please). In my post-dissertation work, recognizing ‘pretext’ as a discursive device has already opened richer interpretations. This summer, I visited two New England archives to read the papers of Mary Ellen Chase and Eleanor Shipley Duckett, Smith College professors working on ‘religion’ who lived together in the US and England from 1935-1973. I came to the project hoping that the two women’s writings to and about one another would offer insights into how they viewed not only their relationship, but also their identities as women who loved women in

the mid-20th century. Initially devastated to find that none of the correspondence between Chase and Duckett, nor any of their diaries, are preserved in either the Smith College Archive nor Maine Women Writers' Collection, the concept of 'pretext' led me to an even more intriguing observation. The papers of Chase and Duckett, primarily letters to and from friends and colleagues, demonstrate how 'religion,' career, and female friendship serve as pretexts to veil their romantic relationship. Their Christian devotion, apparently at odds with homosexuality, their decisions to pursue scholarly careers, and a naturalized view of female friendships as intimate all function as pretexts to conceal their identities. Chase and Duckett reinforced these pretexts, as did those talking about them vis-à-vis their faith and careers.

The objective of my dissertation, as I state in the Introduction, is to offer my readers tools they can use to catch pretexts and discursive constructs like 'religion.' I hope my readers will enact the critical recommendations, applying my 10 tests for identifying pretext and recognizing my 10 characteristics of the construct 'religion,' then use these tools to develop their own critiques. At a disciplinary level, my dissertation contributes to rhetoric, literary studies, and philosophy through the theorization of how justification functions in texts, modeling a discursive approach to defining such a category without recourse to psychology. My treatment of 'religion' contributes to religious studies by illustrating the stakes of a naturalized Enlightenment European conception of 'religion.' Most critically, I hope to bridge these fields through my argument that "religion's" undeserved epistemic privilege has epistemic implications, making it a powerful basis for pretext. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to alert readers to these powerful discursive diversions, for in the words of Mary Ellen Chase, "the greatest danger in any argument is that real issues are often clouded by superficial ones." Initial interpretations rarely yield as much as the audience could know; my wish is that my denaturalizations help readers see beyond the signs they take for granted, and look for the real issues.

¹ The interview, with Ian Leslie in Australia, aired on *CBS 60 Minutes* on November 3, 1985.

² Lewis F. Carter, "The 'New Renunciates' of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh: Observations and Identification of Problems of Interpreting New Religious Movements," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Jun., 1987), pp. 148-9.

³ Carole M. Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith*, (Ashgate New Religions Series) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), chapter 5.

⁴ Carter, "The 'New Renunciates,'" 161-2.

⁵ "New Religious Movements" is a concept from religious studies indicating 'religions' that have emerged in the past few centuries. See, e.g. Hugh B. Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

⁶ Sara Ahmed, "Problematic Proximities: Or Why Critiques of Gay Imperialism Matter," *Feminist Legal Studies*, 19 2 (2011).

⁷ For more on family resemblances in establishing the category of 'religion,' see Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

⁸ Ahmed, "Problematic Proximities."

⁹ Hugh B. Urban, *The Church of Scientology: A History of a New Religion*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 16-7.

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Thank you.