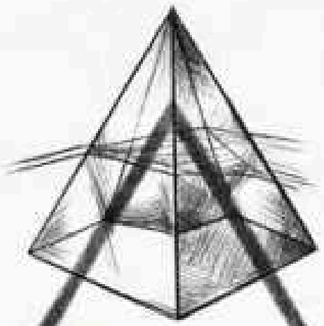
Three Organizing Questions for the Study of Religion

[¶ 1.1]



What do we mean by religion?

The terms established here will serve as the foundational vocabulary for all subsequent lectures.



How can we study it fairly?

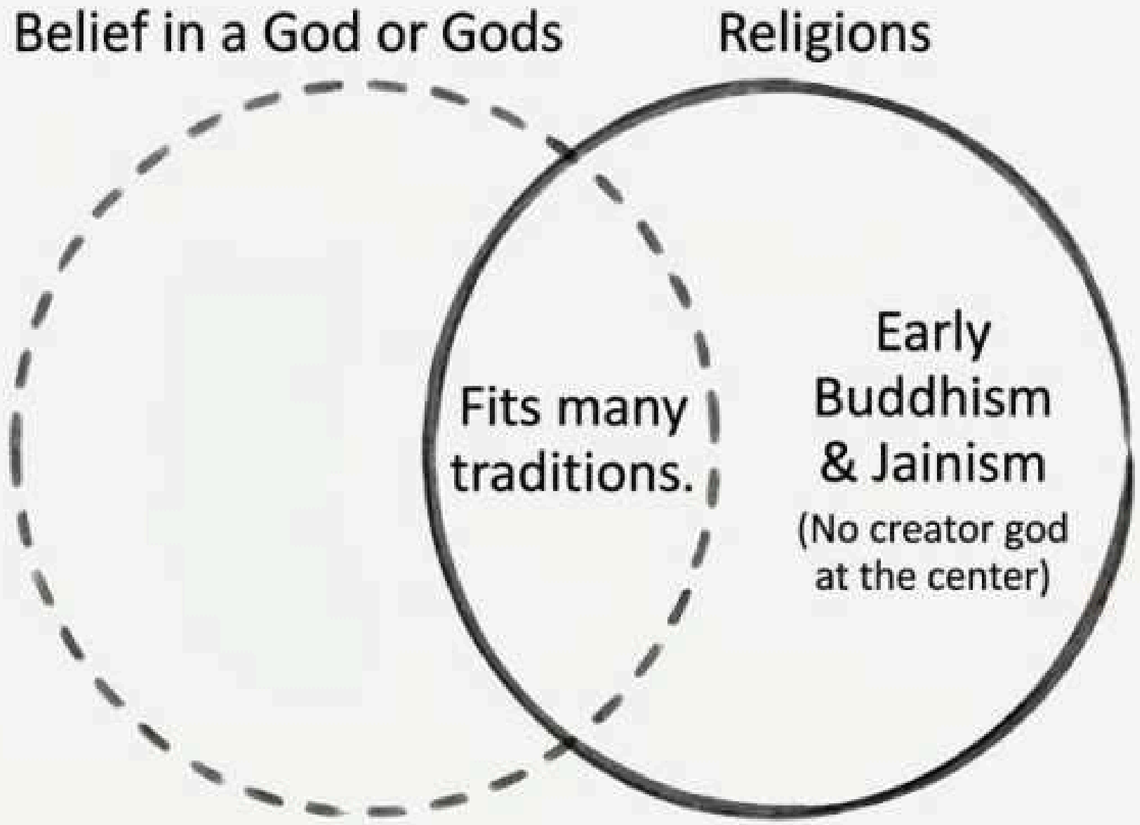


How many people follow the main traditions?

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[¶ 1.2]

The Definition Problem

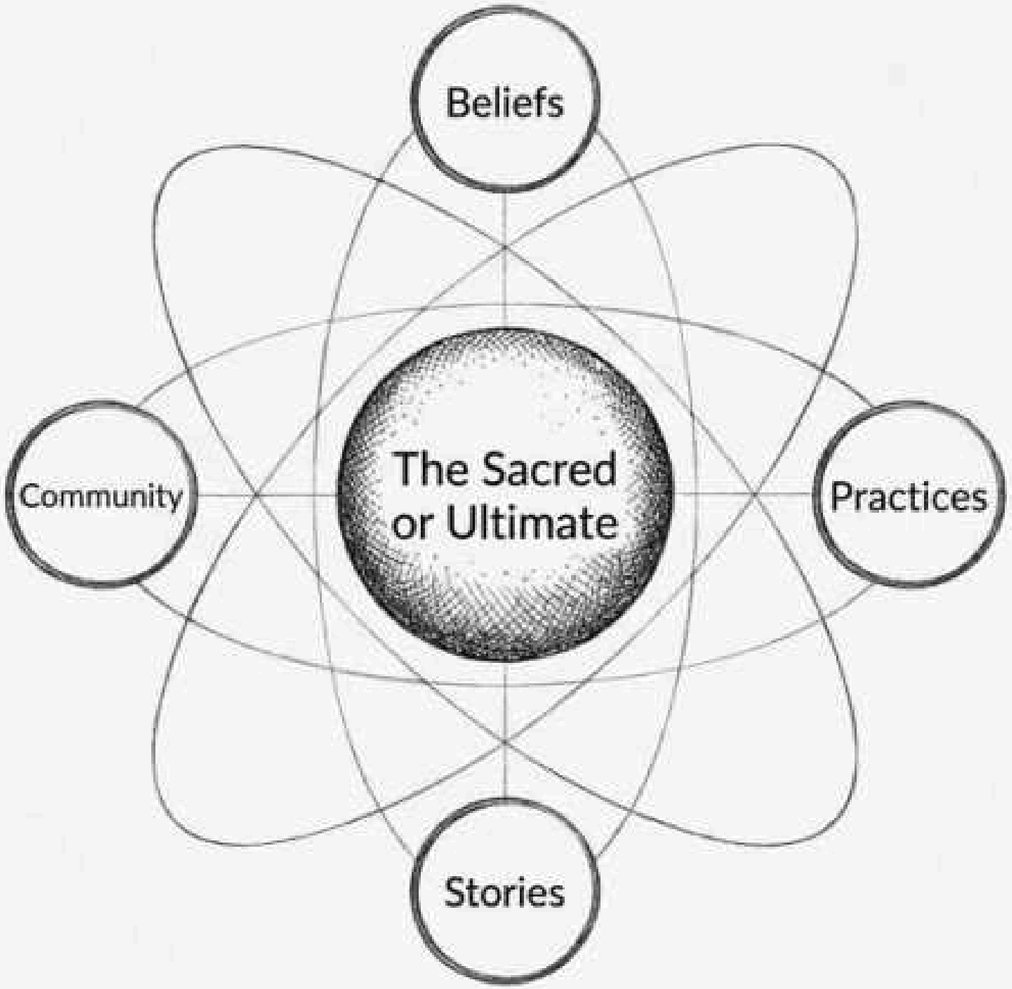


Defining religion by the sacred, by practice, or by community fits some cases better and others worse. Scholars have never agreed on one absolute definition.

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A Working Definition for Scholarship

[¶ 1.3]



[Treat this as a tool for study. It is not the last word, and it will not fit every case neatly.]

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The Four Elements of Religious Traditions

[¶ 1.4]

$$R \approx \sum (B + E + Rt + C)$$

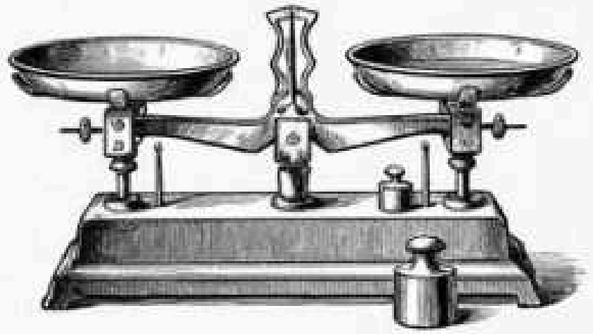
B (Beliefs)
What is real and what matters.

E (Ethics)
How to live.

Rt (Ritual)
Repeated acts of worship and marking time.

C (Community)
The people who share all of this.

Each tradition weighs these four variables differently.



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Two Foundational Approaches: Society vs. Experience

[¶ 1.5]

Émile Durkheim (1912)

Focus: Society

Definition: Beliefs and practices about sacred things that unite people into one moral community.



Rudolf Otto (1917)

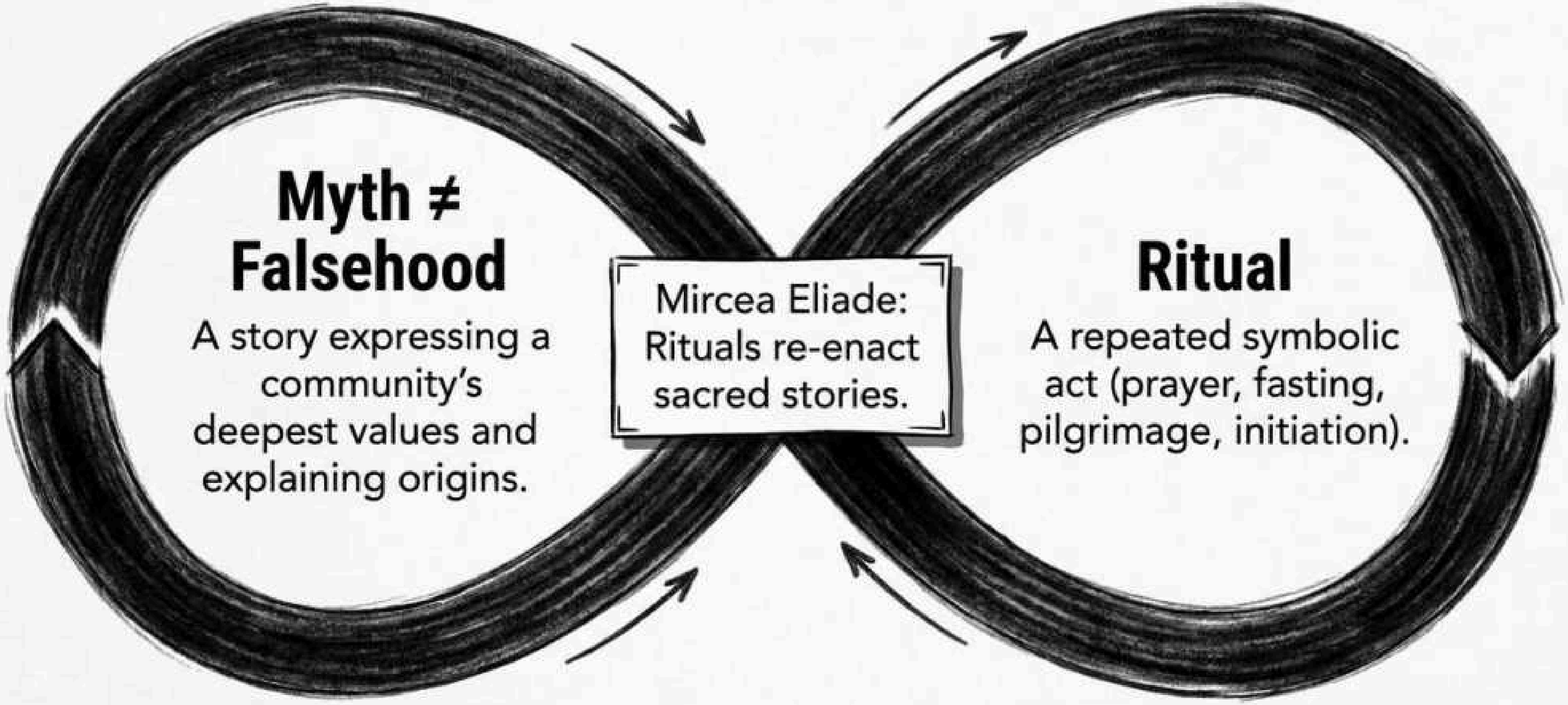
Focus: Experience

Definition: The holy as a mysterious presence that both fascinates and frightens.



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Myth and Ritual: The Engine of Tradition



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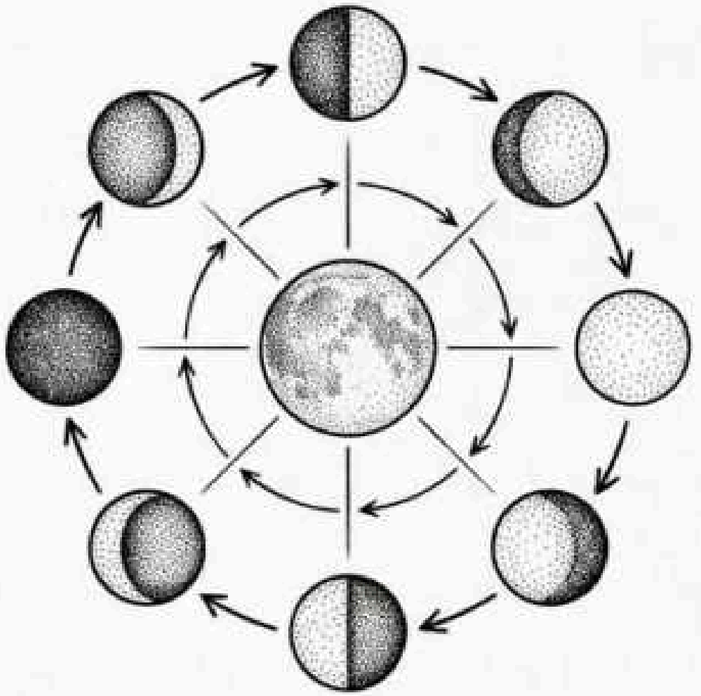
Markers of the Sacred

[¶ 1.7]



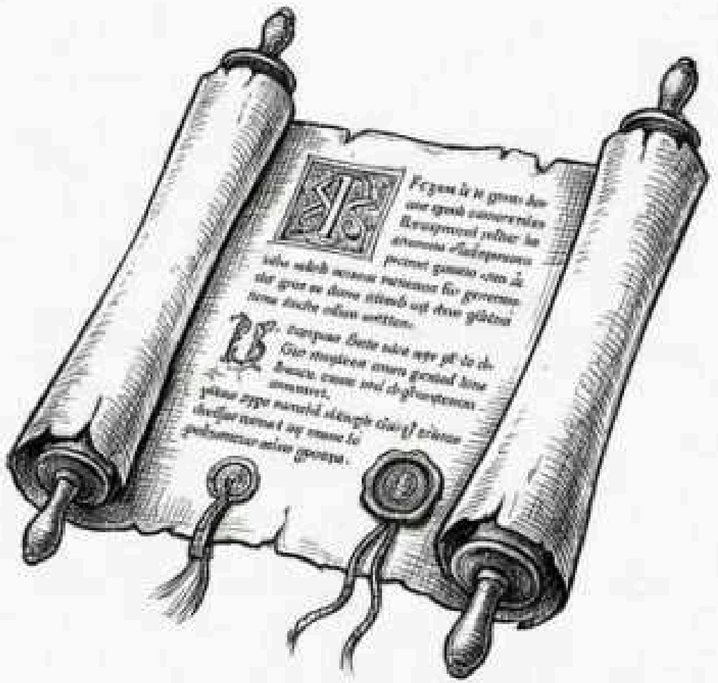
Places

Varanasi, Mecca, or Jerusalem.



Times

Weekly days of rest, months of fasting, harvest festivals.



Texts / Scripture

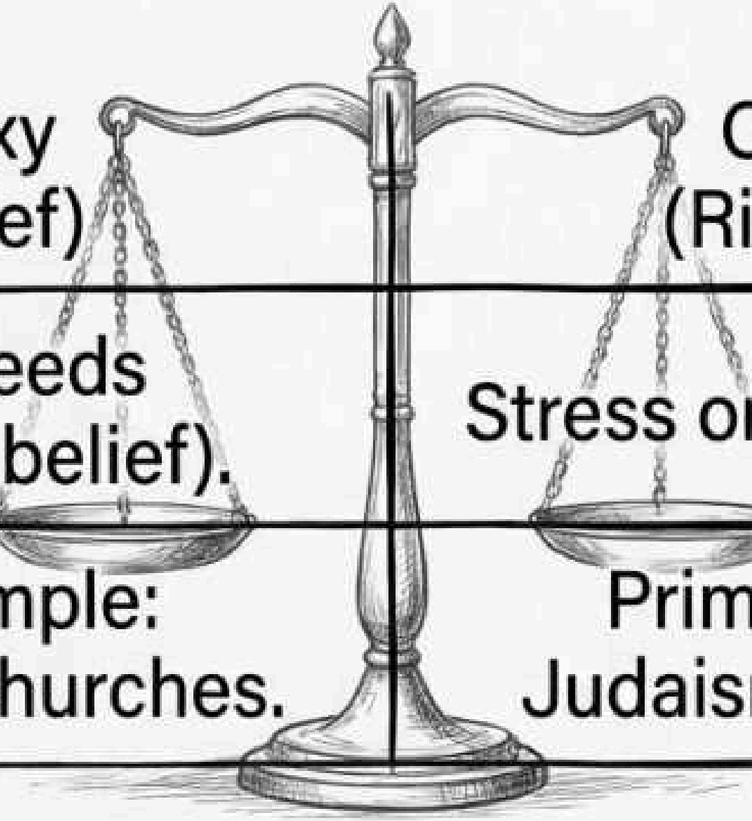
Authoritative texts (mostly spoken for generations before being written).

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The Praxis Matrix: What Matters Most?

[¶ 1.8]

Ortho-doxy (Right Belief)	Ortho-praxy (Right Practice)
Stress on creeds (statements of belief).	Stress on practice and law.
Primary Example: Many Christian churches.	Primary Examples: Judaism and Hinduism.



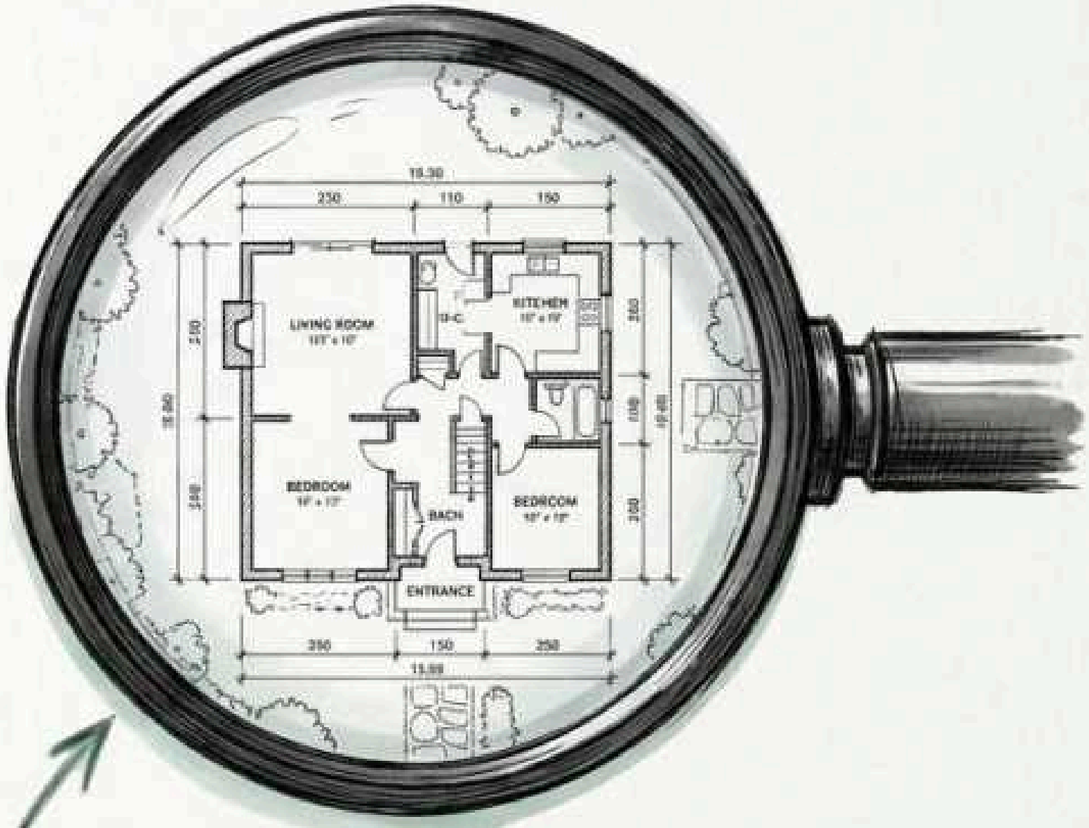
Assumption Trap: Asking only what someone believes can completely miss what their tradition cares about most.

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The Perspective Dualism: Insider vs. Outsider

[¶ 1.9]





Insider View

How followers understand their tradition in their own terms.

Yields: Meaning

Outsider View

Describing with categories of scholarship like history or sociology.

Yields: Patterns

Good study requires both. Insider without outsider misses patterns. Outsider without insider misses meaning.

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The Academic Disciplines

[¶ 1.10]

Historians



Trace how traditions change over time.

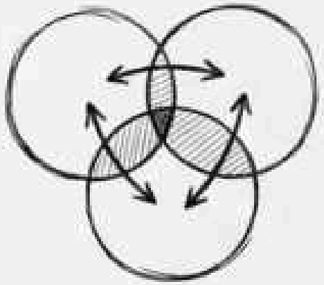
Anthropologists



Live among communities and observe actions.

Clifford Geertz (1966) – Religion as a system of symbols that gives life meaning.

Sociologists



Measure religious life across a society.

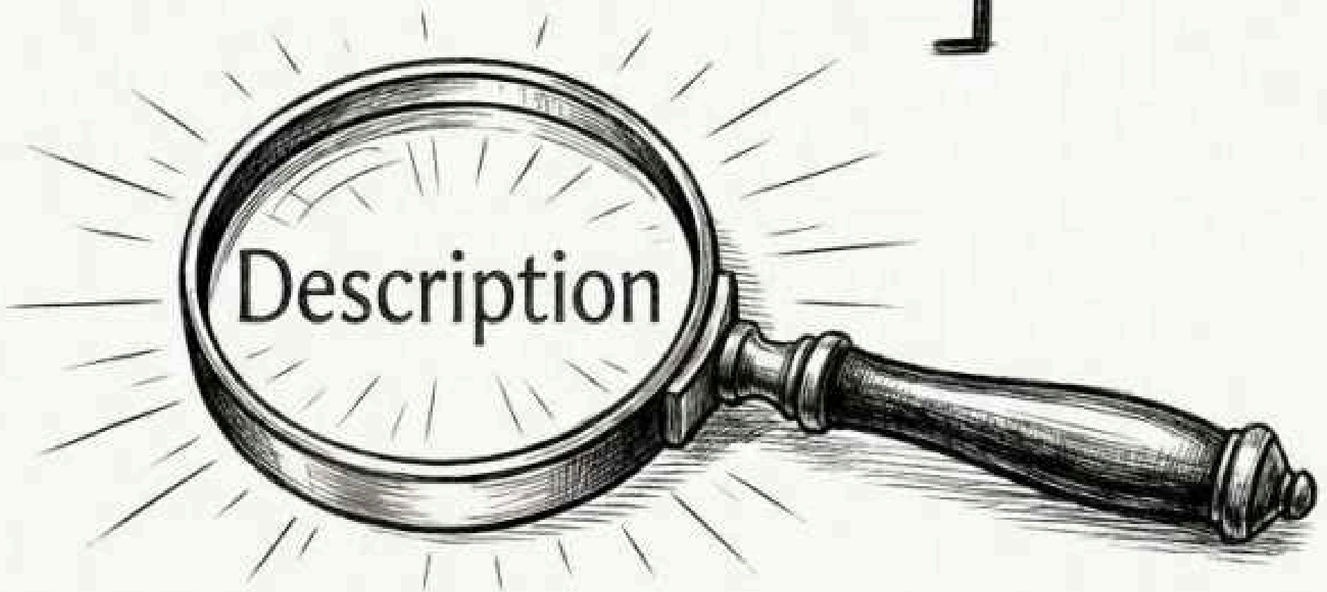
Max Weber – Argued Protestant ideas encouraged habits aiding modern capitalism.

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The Scholar's Stance: Methodological Agnosticism

[¶ 1.11]

[Truth (T), Falsehood (F)] → Set Aside

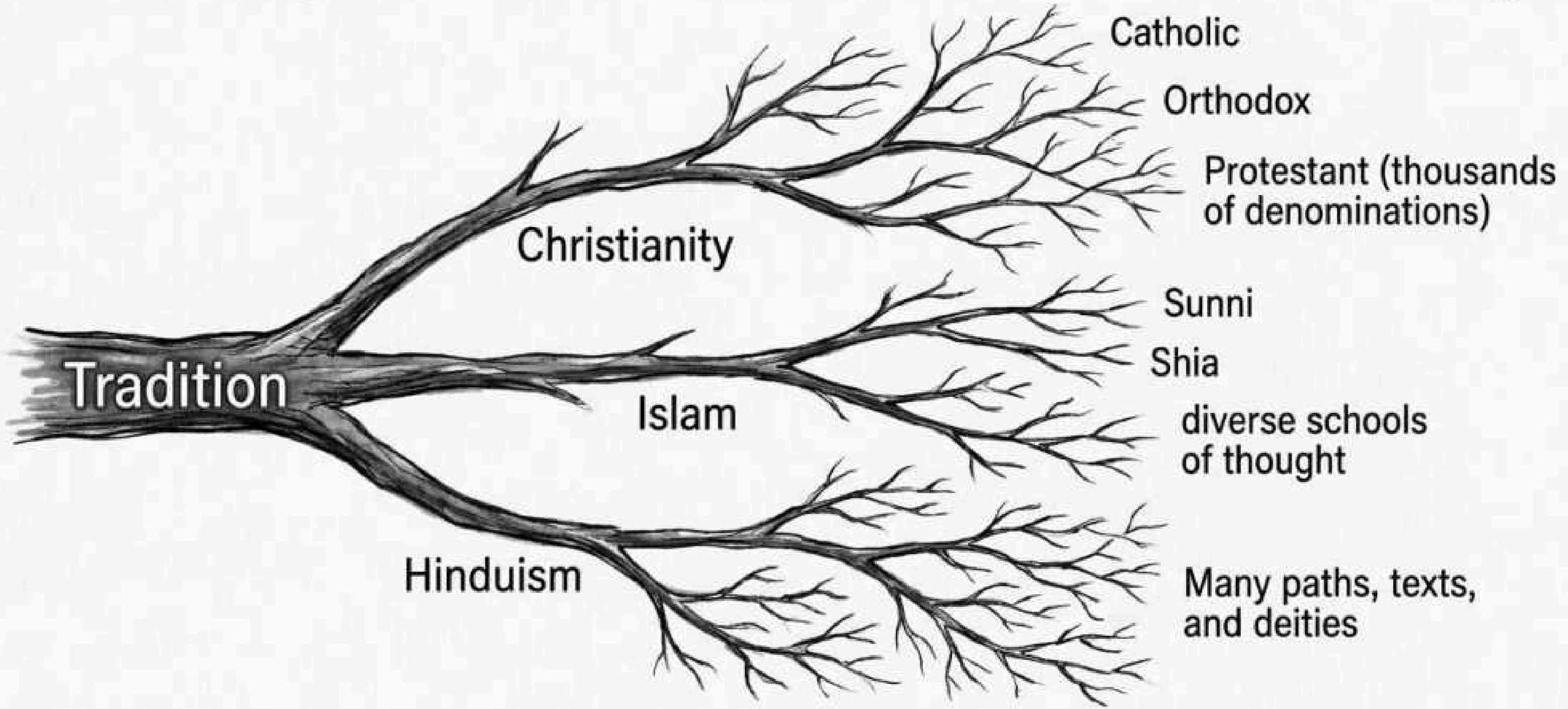


By setting aside the question of whether a religion's claims are true for the purposes of study, scholars can describe it fairly. This lets people of every view read the same description.

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Internal Diversity: Beware the Monolith

[¶ 1.12]



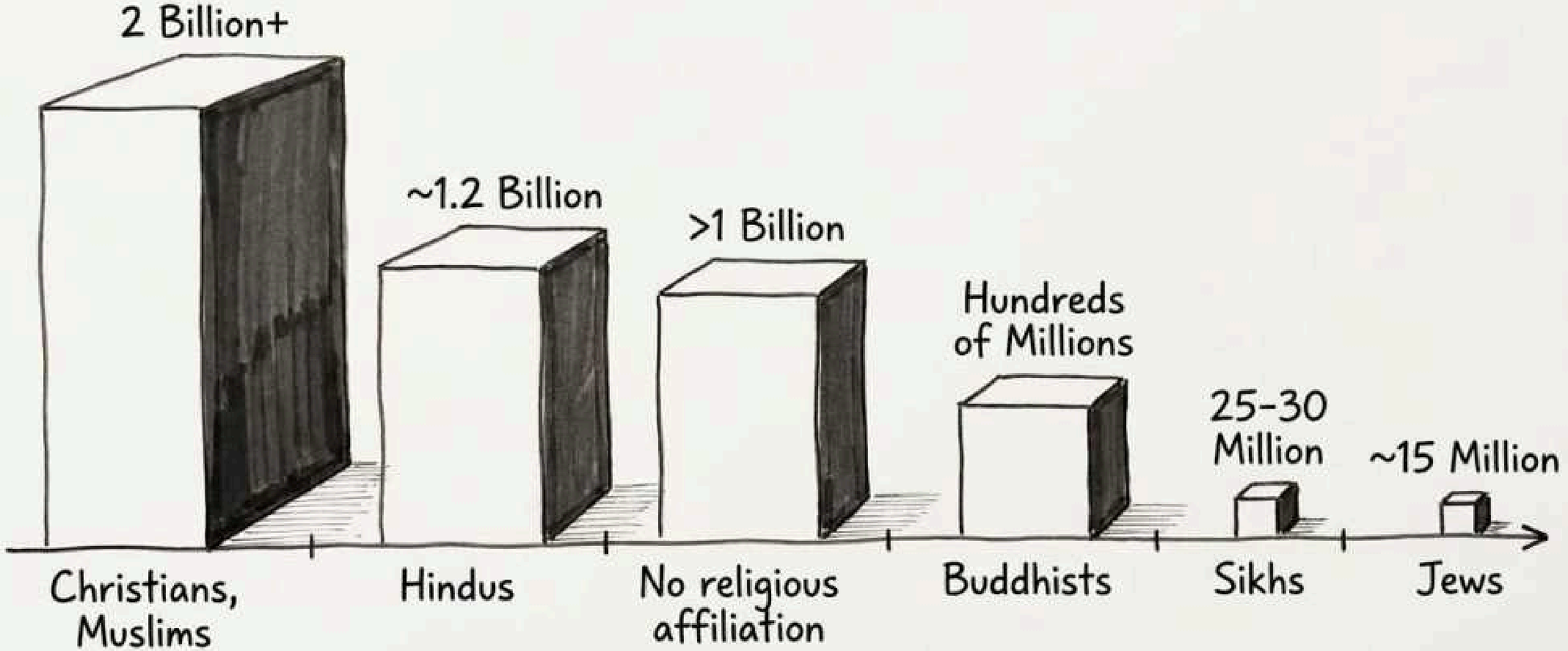
"All Muslims..." or "All Buddhists..." = Almost Always Too Broad

Always say what a particular tradition or community teaches.

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The Global Landscape: Demographics

[¶ 1.13]

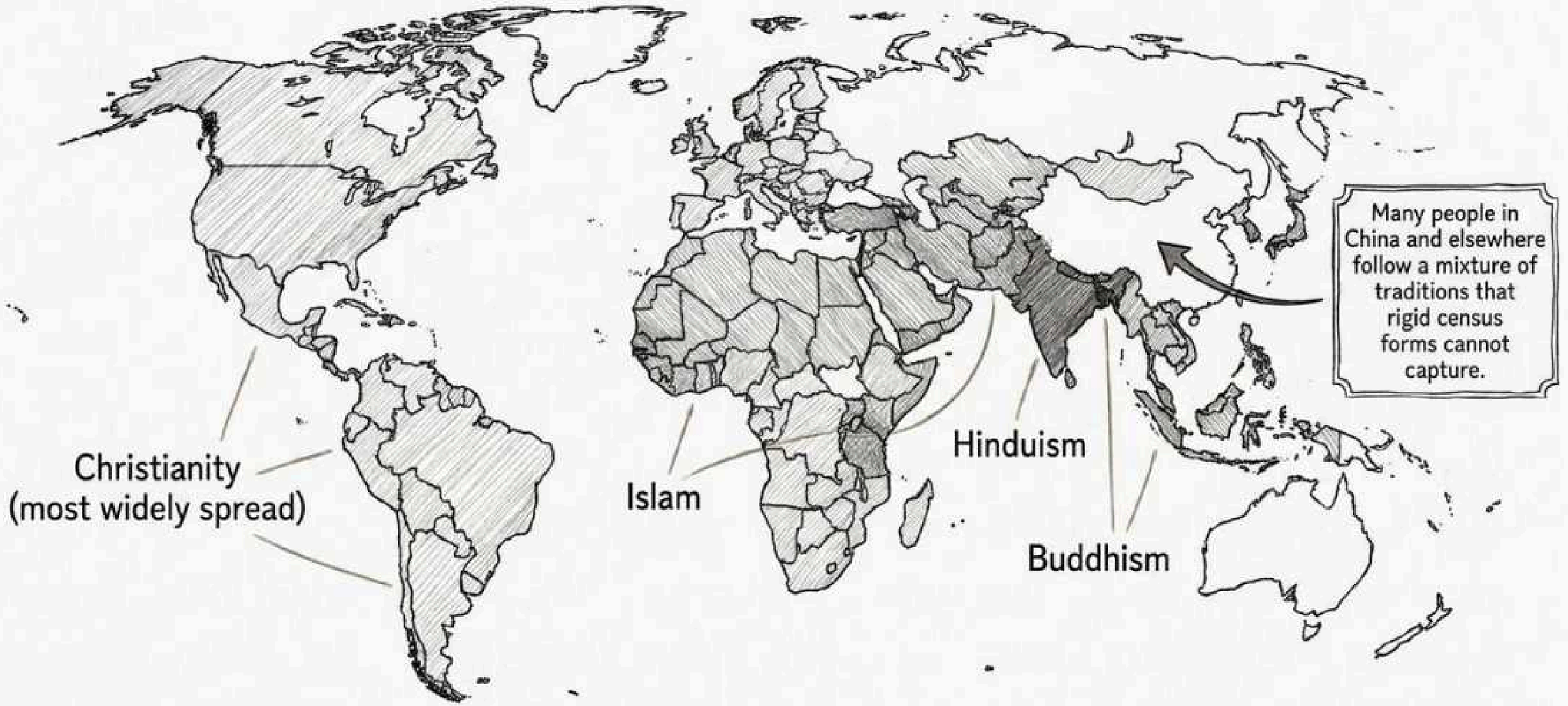


Sources differ and figures change, but these magnitudes reveal the global scale of the traditions.

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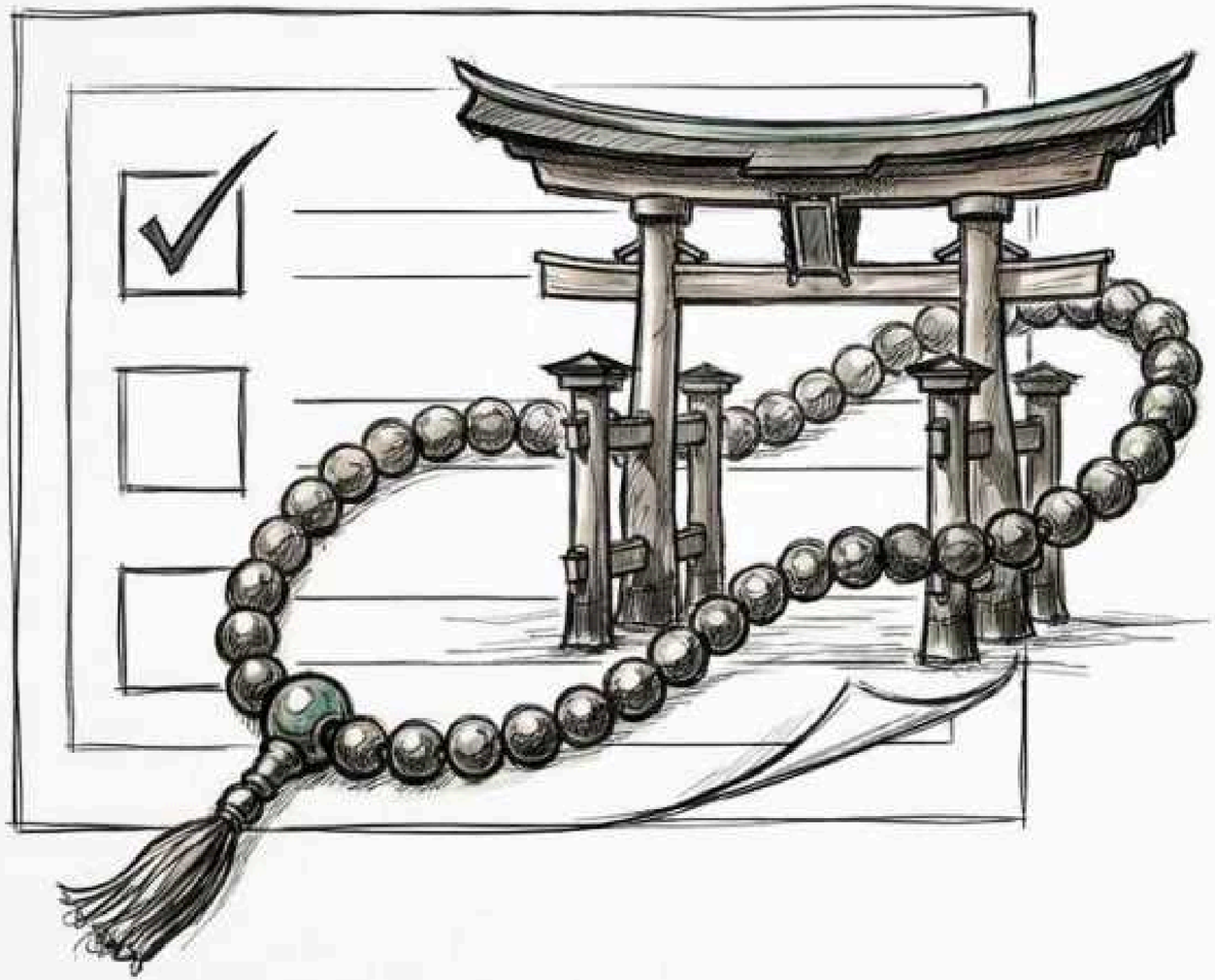
Geographic Distribution

[¶ 1.14]



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The Messy Reality: Syncretism & Multiple Belonging



Syncretism: When traditions blend.

Multiple Belonging: When one person takes part in several. (Example: In Japan, visiting a Shinto shrine for births/festivals, but holding Buddhist funerals).

Asking a person to choose one religion on a form can hide how they live.

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How Scholars Build Evidence

[¶ 1.16]



Texts & Manuscripts



Archaeology, Art & Buildings



Living Practice



Oral Traditions

Stream 1

Stream 2

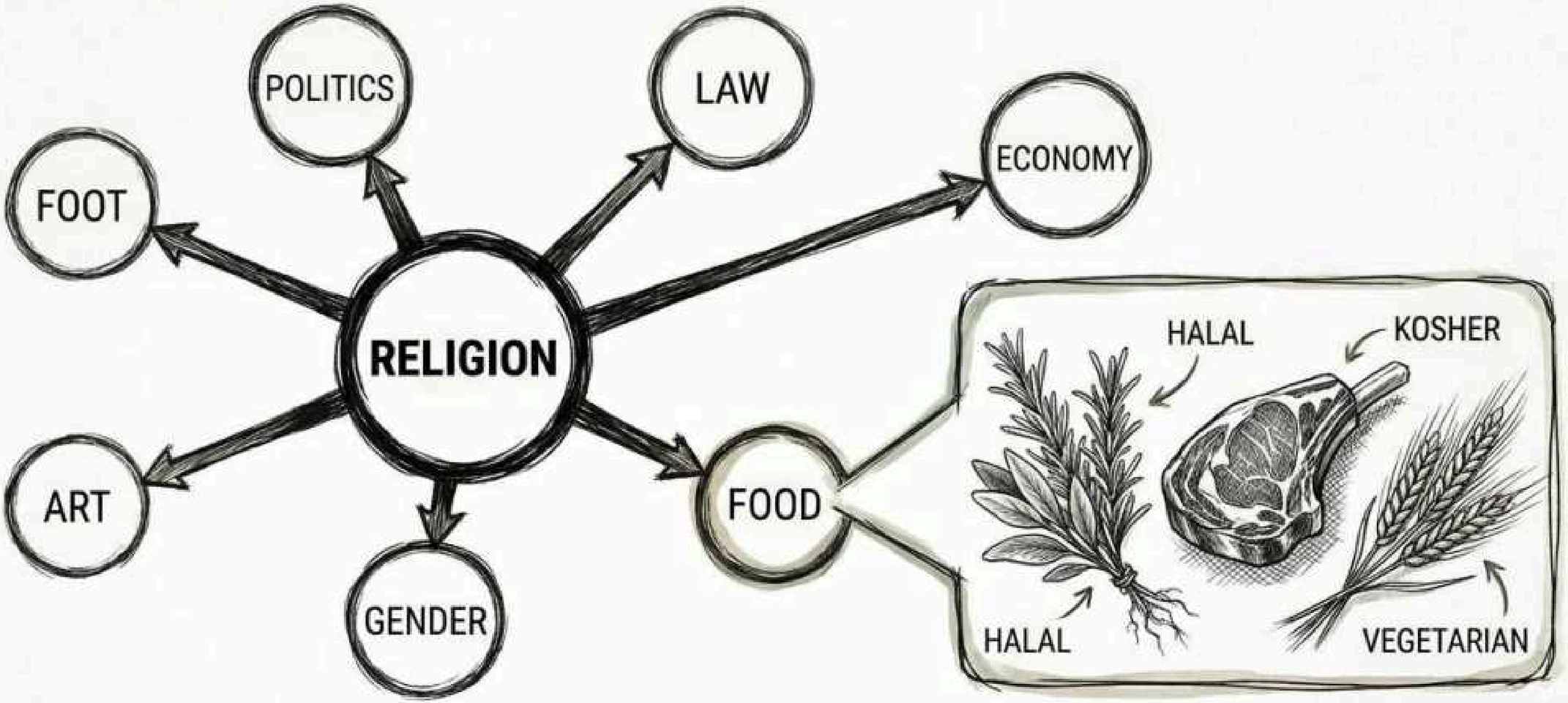
Scholarly Consensus

No single source settles a question. Scholars cross-check one against another, and state their degree of certainty.

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Religion = Life

[¶ 1.17]



The study of religion is never only the study of beliefs.
It is also the study of people.

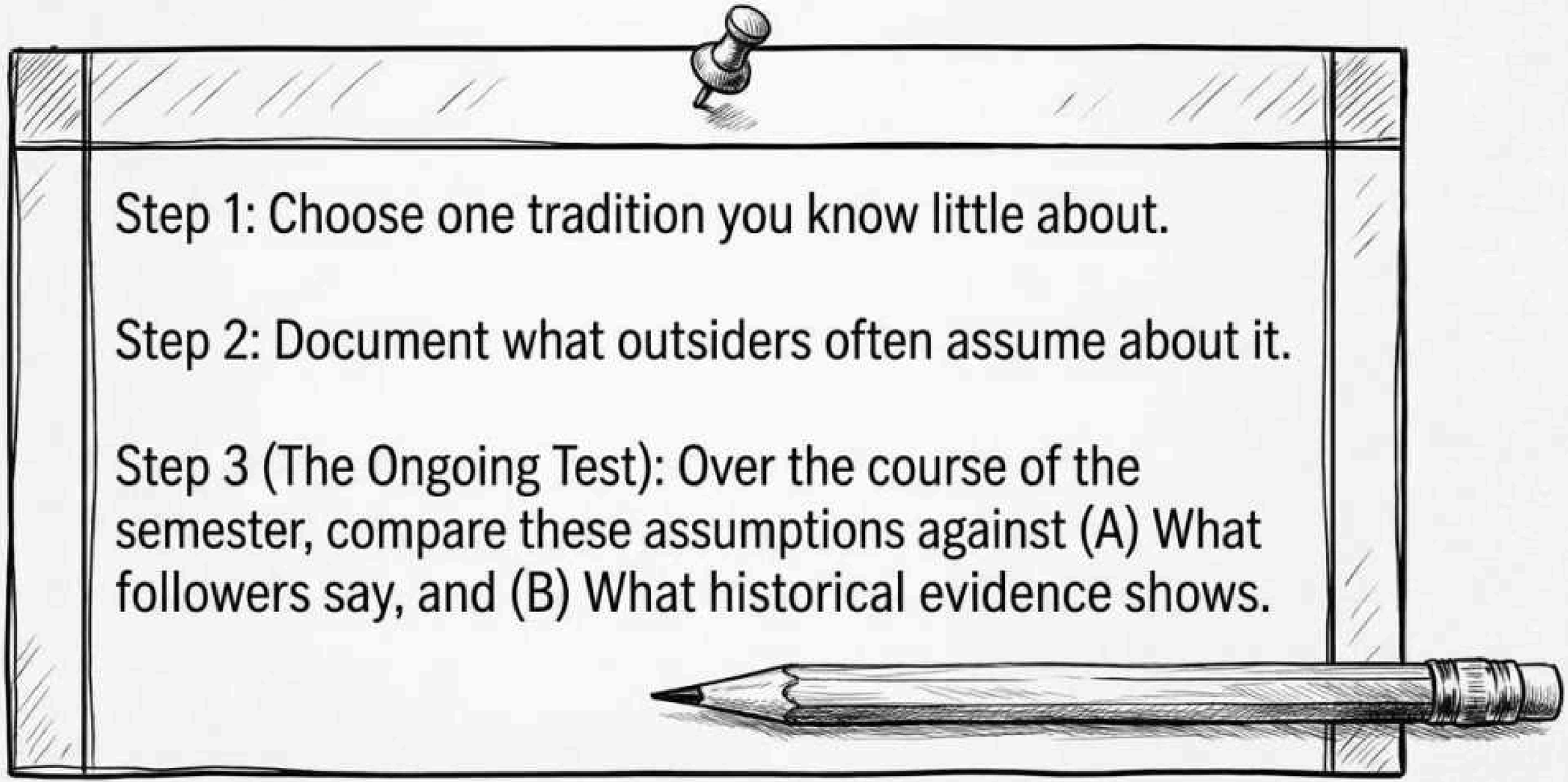
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Core Vocabulary Summary

Sacred The set-apart and treasured.	**Ritual** A repeated symbolic act.
Myth A story of deep meaning.	**Scripture** An authoritative text.
Orthodoxy / Orthopraxy Right belief vs. right practice.	**Insider / Outsider Views** Meaning (own terms) vs. Patterns (academic categories).

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The Assumption Test (Lecture Question)



Step 1: Choose one tradition you know little about.

Step 2: Document what outsiders often assume about it.

Step 3 (The Ongoing Test): Over the course of the semester, compare these assumptions against (A) What followers say, and (B) What historical evidence shows.

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[¶ 1.20]

Up Next: South Asia



In Lecture 2, we apply these tools as we turn to the home of three major global traditions.

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