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In 1978, E. O. Wilson set the agenda for the scientific study of religion by proclaiming, "We have come to the crucial stage in the history of biology when religion itself is subject to the explanations of the natural sciences." Ever since, an army of biologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and social scientists have worked to provide an explanation of the assumed universal phenomenon of religion in terms of biological and cultural evolution. But discussions of the "evolution of religion" often proceed with little engagement with the insights of humanities-based religion scholars. What light could such an engagement shed on religion's evolution?

Interestingly, recent years have witnessed the rise within religion scholarship of a critique of the very nature of the concept "religion" itself. Traditionally taken as a universal category of human experience, many religion scholars now argue that the tendency to universalize the concept "religion" has been a practice deeply embedded in Western colonial domination of non-Western peoples. Religion, conceptualized as a distinct category of human experience (the concept of *sui generis* religion) was a notion foreign to ancient people and continues to be today for many non-Western peoples. A word denoting the modern concept "religion" does not exist in the Hebrew and Greek languages of the Bible nor in the Arabic of the Qur'an. And the Japanese word for religion, *shukyo*, was not invented until the nineteenth century as a result of Japanese encounters with the West.

Moreover, natural and social scientific approaches to religion tend to reduce religion, in the words of psychologist Ara Norenzayan, to "belief in supernatural beings such as gods, ghosts, and devils." But from the perspective of religion scholars, "belief" as the hallmark of religion is a uniquely Protestant Christian concept, one that has been wielded as a strategic