Some scholars argue that defining religion is a decidedly Christian approach to studying religion (step back from definitions to do this)

- Woodhead (2007) (textbook) questions the dominance of functional conceptualizations of religion (sociologists tend to denigrate religious behaviours that don’t fit into a Christianity-like pattern of organization)

- If Christianity is model for the defining process, then even if unintentional, the definitions of religion tend to privilege Christian tendencies/religions

Back to Marx – false consciousness

- “The sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people”

- Soviet anti-religious propaganda (soviet dream was society free of religion)

Back to Weber – The “iron cage” is the modern world

- The future would be one of specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart”

- The more that rational norms and principles take over things, everything is much less enchanted (used to believe in God and religion, etc.) becoming increasingly subject to rational principles

- Difficult to see any meaning

William James (1902) – more in line with Marx than Weber, sees religion as something that allows us to get by in a bad situation (ultimate nightmare)

- Is the common human response to the fact that we all stand at the edge of the abyss

- Cope with fact of us all dying, offers immortality, promises better things to come, looked over by spirits

- World is otherwise cruel and senseless

Deprivation-Compensation Thesis

- Individuals in disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions more likely to be religious to compensate for plight and acquire otherwise unattainable rewards

- Most general compensators can be supported only by supernatural explanations (Stark and Bainbridge)

- If something can be solved, you don’t need religion. If something can’t be explained, supernatural explanations = most general compensators

Durkheim – Society is God