It is interesting that Professor Segal, a gifted essayist by anyone's account, would purport to defend a school of thought whose existence he denies (1995). Moreover, he cites an impressive array of scholars whom he would associate with this non-existent school. Now, he may cite all these people either with good reason or without. If the latter is the case, his citations are in error and he should retract them. If the former is the case, then there must in fact be a coherent school of thought, a school that I linked, for convenience's sake, with the journal, Religion.

Most of the claims that are presented in the Segal defense are directed at misreadings of my crude and naive prose. For example, where I ineptly wrote, "I will take up each of these apparent essentials of the Religion school and address them from a symbolic interactionist perspective" (1995: 252), the defense essay presents the suggestion that "Blasi surprisingly confines interpretive sociology to symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology would seem equally efficacious for his purposes." (Segal 1995: 259) Now, my purpose was to present a standpoint shared by a large number of sociologists; phenomenology would be useful to present a standpoint from a kindred but different number of them. I imply no intent to exclude phenomenological sociology from the interpretive problematic, and indeed I authored a book some years ago devoted specifically to using phenomenology in such an interpretive sociological program of inquiry.

In his defense, Segal cites Max Weber as a sociologist who "sought to combine an interpretive approach with an explanatory one" (Segal 1995: 260), suggesting such an influential scholar as he had no difficulty "explaining" religion and other human institutions. The implication is that my insistence on grounding concepts in the social actors' understandings is more or less out of the mainstream of the field. Weber's prose was probably less naive than mine, but let us allow him to speak for himself:

In all the sciences of human action, account must be taken of processes and phenomena which are devoid of subjective meaning, in the role of stimuli, results, favouring or
hindering circumstances. To be devoid of meaning is not identical with being lifeless or non-human; every artifact, such as for example a machine, can be understood only in terms of the meaning which its production and use have had or were intended to have; a meaning which may derive from a relation to exceedingly various purposes. (Weber 1978: 7)

In the lengthy continuation of his naive prose, Weber does not address stimuli and favouring or hindering circumstances effecting human institutions other than as objects to which humans typically accord meanings. In his many analyses, Weber dwells often on consequences of various meaning systems—legal, political, religious, economic—and uses typologies for ideographic ends, not to promote disproving some covering law.

The defense also cites Talcott Parsons and Clifford Geertz. Parsons’ functionalism, as is well known, has failed to inspire empirical social science. Clifford Geertz is an anthropologist, not a sociologist, and I will allow anthropologists to present their own field. Moreover, I decline to be associated with the philosopher William Dray, or to attack Carl Hempel’s advice to historians. I neither “echo” Dray nor deny Hempel’s contention that in some sense “reasons” can serve as causes (as he rather broadly uses the expression, “cause”). Rather, I maintain that “meanings”—by which in my crude prose I intend to convey “meanings” and not “reasons”—yield accountings that differ from nomothetic, causal, reductive explanations. The reader needs to make allowances for the crudity of the prose, but if the intent was to speak of reasons the expression “reasons” would have been employed. Meanings may be aesthetic, affective, moral, and, yes, religious, as well as reasonable and rational; reasons comprise a species of meanings. When I referred to the various uses made of signs in religions, I clearly (or “crudely”) referred to more than reasons.

I must pursue this point a little further in order to make manifest the extent to which I failed to communicate only what I meant to say, and why I must beg the indulgence of the reader. It was never my intention to introduce a dualism between spiritual and bodily accountings; rather, that seems to pertain to the conceptual framework of Melford Spiro, cited by Segal. Symbolic interactionism, to which I intended to refer, proposes as an analytical model, a dialectic between the physical interaction of individuals carried on by means of overt signs, and the imagined responses of others anticipated by any given individual. Mind is neither spirit nor matter, but act; it has as its nature process and event; its contents are emergent within interactive processes. Thinking is rendered as imagined symbolic interaction, or “making indications to oneself”. Because of the emergent nature of the contents of thinking, one cannot study them reductively without explaining them away. Because the actual or imagined interactions, historically and