

Lecture 7: Religious Belief

Midterm

Opens on Quercus November 1st 4pm and closes on November 2nd 9pm (29 hours total)

Consists of 30 questions.

The questions are all multiple choice, multiple answer, and true/false.

The material covered includes weeks 1-7

You are allowed to use all of your notes and are allowed to speak to one another, however, each person will get a different combination of questions.

If you are unable to complete the midterm during the scheduled time, you need to email me asap (khalidah.ali@mail.utoronto.ca) and provide appropriate documentation (such as a medical certificate, absence declaration) to demonstrate your inability to complete the test. For those with accommodations, please email me with a reminder of your specific needs for the test. If you miss the midterm without a valid excuse *and* documentation, you will receive a grade of 0.



Culture

Carl Olson: "In a general sense, culture is the totality of a social, historical, and creative heritage of human beings who represent a particular social group. A particular culture includes the human products of a society with a shared history and location. These human products include language, art and architecture, style of dress, distinct foods, social behavior, music, intellectual heritage, ethics, a legal system, government, religion, and a worldview."

Edward B. Tylor's Views on Culture

Tylor defined culture as a complex whole that includes custom, belief, knowledge, art, morals, law, and other human creations.

He considered culture to encompass various aspects of human life, both material and immaterial, and proposed that certain cultural features were universal to all human societies. Culture could be traced back to primitive societies.

He believed that cultures progressed from simpler, primitive forms to more complex, advanced ones, a perspective that has been critiqued for its ethnocentrism and simplistic view of cultural development.

Talal Asad's critique of the concept of "culture"

1. Hierarchies - culture has been used in ways to connote hierarchies of civilization. It also privileges the perspectives and values of the dominant group to define what a "culture" is.
2. Fixed and Essentialist - The concept of culture often presents cultures as fixed, bounded, and essential entities with distinct characteristics - an oversimplification.

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Ethics:

Ethics reflects proper rules of conduct recognized as valid by a particular religious tradition. Ethics also suggests the values and moral principles related to human conduct and the analysis of such actions. Rules about what constitutes correct behavior can vary according to a person's status in life, such as whether one is an adult or child. Ethics is often used interchangeably with morals in the West.

The study of "ethics" = the systematic analysis of moral principles, values, and norms within the context of religious belief systems and practices. Ethics in the context of religion involves examining how religious traditions, texts, teachings, and rituals inform and guide individuals and communities in making moral decisions and determining what is considered right or wrong.

Components of the study of ethics:

1. Guidelines
2. Moral Decision Making
3. Moral Norms and Practices
4. Religious Teachings
5. Ethical Dilemmas

Buddhist Ethics

1. Non-violence (ahimsa)
2. Not stealing
3. Chastity
4. Abstaining from false speech
5. Not using intoxicants

For particular purposes, based on certain conceptions of life and the universe



Islamic Ethics

Belief in God, the necessity of virtuous deeds, and that humans will be judged on these principles in the next life

Based on a different conception of life and the universe



Religious Belief

Do you believe in aliens?





Senses of 'belief'

I believe in myself

I believe in Santa Clause

I believe in the power of love

I believe in a political party or a political ideology

I believe in a particular philosophy

I believe in ghosts

I believe in gods

I believe in a certain way of life

Definitions of belief from the OED:

- Something believed; a proposition or set of propositions held to be true. In early usage: a doctrine forming part of a religious system; a set of such doctrines, a religion.
- The mental action, condition, or habit of trusting to or having confidence in a person or thing; trust, dependence, reliance, confidence, faith.
- The trust that the believer places in God; the Christian virtue of faith.
- Acceptance that a statement, supposed fact, etc., is true; a religious, philosophical, or personal conviction; an opinion, a persuasion.



Christian Philosophers Aquinas
and Augustine defined belief as
"to think with assent"

Belief as something midway between knowledge and
opinion

Carl Olson defines belief as:

"convictions, assertions, and habitually accepted unquestioning viewpoints that define a religious culture's worldview, its way of life, its social structure, the nature of human existence and its problems, the solution to the problems of life, and an often concise statement of the fundamental agreed upon religious claims."

(Olson 2011, 36)

He goes on to explain that forms of belief:

- can unite a people and differentiate them from outsiders
- can be very durable over time; does not mean they are static
- beliefs can be transmitted verbally
- sometimes beliefs are sometimes embodied and transmitted through myths and rituals

How do religious beliefs connect to other aspects of religions?

- guide adherents in understanding what is considered morally and spiritually right or wrong; includes codes of conduct
- inform the rituals, prayers, and worship practices within a religious tradition
- Beliefs about the presence of the divine or sacred within particular spaces or objects can shape religious behaviour
- In some religious traditions, beliefs are closely tied to specific legal and regulatory systems
- Religious beliefs often foster a sense of community and fellowship among adherents
- Religious beliefs often intersect with cultural and social norms



Richard Gombrich: Cognitive vs. Affective Beliefs

Cognitive beliefs: These beliefs are based on understanding and reasoning about religious teachings, scriptures, and principles

Affective beliefs: pertain to the emotional and experiential dimensions of faith

Beliefs in Buddhism

Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering: The first truth acknowledges the existence of suffering or dissatisfaction in life.
2. Origin of Suffering: The second truth explores the causes or origins of suffering. It teaches that attachment, desire, and clinging to impermanent things are the root causes of suffering.
3. Cessation of Suffering: The third truth points to the possibility of ending suffering. It suggests that by eliminating the root causes of suffering – attachment and desire – one can achieve liberation and experience the cessation of suffering.
4. Path to the Cessation of Suffering: The fourth truth outlines the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the practical guide to achieving the cessation of suffering. This path consists of eight interconnected principles or practices, including right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Following this path is believed to lead to enlightenment and the ultimate end of suffering.

Beliefs in Islam

6 Articles of Faith

1. Belief in God
2. Belief in the existence of angels
3. Belief in the scriptures as God revealed them (which include the Qur'an, the Torah, the Psalms, etc)
4. Belief in the Prophets of God (Abraham, David, Jacob, Jesus, Muhammad, among others)
5. Belief in the existence of a Day of Judgement
6. Belief in the existence of God's predestination



Orthodoxy

The term orthodoxy is derived from the Latin terms *ortho* (which means correct) and *dox* (which means doctrine).

Orthodoxy often involves adherence to a specific set of core beliefs or doctrines that are considered essential within a religious tradition. These beliefs are usually derived from sacred texts, historical traditions, or authoritative figures within the religion.

Carl Olson on Orthodoxy

- Established by a group of believers who determine what teachings are authoritative
- Attempts to determine what is orthodox position often references historical figures of authority
- The process of deciding the exact nature of orthodoxy follows a pattern of inclusion and exclusion
- Once orthodoxy is determined it becomes binding on all adherents and often assumes the status of law
- However, what is orthodoxy is also often determined by competing groups

Carl Olson on Heterodoxy

Pertains to religious beliefs, doctrines, or practices that deviate from the established or mainstream orthodoxy (unorthodox)

Complexities of Studying Belief

Privileges Protestant Christian understanding of religion

E.B. Tylor's definition of religion = "the belief in spiritual things."

Religions called "belief systems" or "faiths"

Understanding Religiosity and the 3B Framework:

Belief - Behaviour – Belonging

A way of understanding religiosity

Example of Muslim Americans vs. Jewish Americans