Definitions: Religion

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## Guide to app usage

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key stroke | Effect |
| n, space | next slide |
| p | previous slide |
| f | fullscreen |
| esc, o | overview slide |
| m | toggle menu |
| audio inlay | start/stop audio playback |

## Studying Religion (review)

### Tools Used in the Study Religion

Religious studies is the attempt to study these things, taking **homo religiosus** seriously

Textual

study sacred texts

Historical

describe origin and development of specific religions

Comparative

compare specific types of religious behaviors, beliefs

Philosophical

philosophical analysis of religious language and arguments

Intellectual & Social History

trace development of religious ideas and institutions over time

* To review: the study of religion involves a number of different disciples. including …
* any one of these disciplines could take a lifetime trying to get good at it.
* And this doesn't cover all that there is.

## Seeking definitions for clarity and understanding.

### Definitions help by e.g.:

* clarifying the ambiguity of words
* bringing precision in communication
* providing accuracy & consistency in data gathering and finding patterns
* Definitions help us with basic questions like: How do we **know**? How do we accumulate **knowledge**?
  + consider that in the simplest communication there is a great sophistication.
  + Take the Michael Jackson song "Bad" – some of you may at least be familiar with it. In that song the word "bad" does not mean what we might usually mean by the word. Rather, even, the opposite.
  + In another example, say you perceive a "blink" from someone. What does it mean? Is it a result of a piece of dust floating into their eye and has nothing to do with you? Or is it an attractive person giving you a "wink" that might have great significance to you? (Wittgenstein)
  + In order to accumulate knowledge about religion, in order to have reliability in discussing it with others, we need to develop some clarity.
  + Over the centuries, however, there has been great diversity of approaches.

## Some historical definitions for "religion"

### 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| (**James Martineau**) | Religion is the **belief in an ever living God**, that is, in a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind. |
| (**Friedrich Schleiermacher**) | Religion is the **feeling of absolute dependence** or the consciousness that the whole of our spontaneous activity comes from a source outside of us . |

Note: 21 April 1805 – 11 January 1900) was an English religious philosopher influential in the history of Unitarianism.

For 45 years he was Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy and Political Economy in Manchester New College, the principal training college for British Unitarianism.

Note: November 21, 1768 – February 12, 1834) was a German theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Protestant Christianity. He also became influential in the evolution of Higher Criticism, and his work forms part of the foundation of the modern field of hermeneutics. Because of his profound effect on subsequent Christian thought, he is often called the "Father of Modern Liberal Theology" and is considered an early leader in liberal Christianity. The Neo-Orthodoxy movement of the twentieth century, typically (though not without challenge) seen to be spearheaded by Karl Barth, was in many ways an attempt to challenge his influence.

### 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| (**Karl Marx**) | Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of **real suffering** and a **protest against real suffering**. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. |
| (**Anthony Wallace**) | Religion is a **set of rituals, rationalized by myth**, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man or nature . |

The nineteenth-century German thinker Karl Marx, the founder and primary theorist of Marxism, had an antithetical and complex attitude to religion,[1] viewing it primarily as "the soul of soulless conditions", the "opium of the people" that had been useful to the ruling classes since it gave the working classes false hope for millennia. At the same time Marx saw religion as a form of protest by the working classes against their poor economic conditions and their alienation.[2]

Note: (April 15, 1923 - October 5, 2015) was a Canadian-American anthropologist who specialized in Native American cultures, especially the Iroquois. His research expressed an interest in the intersection of cultural anthropology and psychology. He was famous for the theory of revitalization movements.[1]

### 3

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| (**Emile Durkheim**) | Religion is only **sentiment inspired by the group in its members**, but projected outside of the consciousness that experiences them, and objectified . |
| (**Signmund Freud**) | Freud refers to religion as an **illusion** which is "perhaps the most important item in the psychical inventory of a civilization". In his estimation, **religion provides for defense** against "the crushingly superior force of nature" and "the urge to rectify the shortcomings of civilization which made themselves painfully felt". He concludes that all religious beliefs are "illusions and insusceptible of proof." |

Note: April 15, 1858 – November 15, 1917) was a French sociologist, social psychologist and philosopher. He formally established the academic discipline and—with Karl Marx and Max Weber—is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science and father of sociology.[2][3]

Sigmund Freud's views on religion are described in several of his books and essays. Freud regarded God as an illusion, based on the infantile need for a powerful father figure; religion, necessary to help us restrain violent impulses earlier in the development of civilization, can now be set aside in favor of reason and science.[1]

### 4

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| (James G. **Frazer**) | Religion is a propitiation or conciliation of **powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of Nature and of human life** . |
| (**William James**) | The very fact that there are **so many (definitions** of religion) … is enough to prove that the word “religion” cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a **collective name** … |

Note: 1 January 1854 – 7 May 1941), was a Scottish social anthropologist influential in the early stages of the modern studies of mythology and comparative religion.[2] He is often considered one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology.

His most famous work, *The Golden Bough* (1890), documents and details the similarities among magical and religious beliefs around the globe. Frazer posited that human belief progressed through three stages: primitive magic, replaced by religion, in turn replaced by science

## Searching for clarity

### Humility of the seeker

* **cautious, recognizing that we cannot escape our own perspective** …
* is this an essential **western / rationalistic** effort to **define** religion?
* it may also be a result of influence of **Judeo-Christian** tradition
* it may be result of **dualistic** thinking – (either/or)

The very attempt to define religion, to find some distinctive or possibly unique essence or set of qualities that distinguish the "religious" from the remainder of human life, is primarily a Western concern. The attempt is a natural consequence of the Western speculative, intellectualistic, and scientific disposition. It is also the product of the dominant Western religious mode, what is called the Judeo-Christian climate or, more accurately, the theistic inheritance from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The theistic form of belief in this tradition, even when downgraded culturally, is formative of the dichotomous Western view of religion. That is, the basic structure of theism is essentially a distinction between a transcendent deity and all else, between the creator and his creation, between God and man. (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion#Definitions>)

## Elements of Religion

* Human thought
* Feeling
* Action
* Social interconnectedness
* Values

### Religion and Human Thought

Religion is intimately connected with human thought.

Even those who focus on practice have beliefs, develop doctrines, and emphasize the importance of certain teachings in the religious life essential to their way of life.

We have theologians. The history of Christian thought. Middle ages philosophy & theology were the king / queen of all the sciences.

There is a long tradition of theologians. We have centuries of tradition of philosophy and systematically thinking about religion and the Bible. We are perhaps familiar with thinking about religion in the form of right thinking.

### Religion and Feeling

To some extent, all religious experience is an emotional experience.

Friedrich Schleiermacher characterized religion as a **feeling of absolute dependence**.

Rudolf Otto, characterized religion as the **experience of the holy**. And this experience is one that inspires feelings of **fear, awe, terror, and love**.

Consider the ways in which we use **feel** and **think** interchangeably. "I feel that …"

Feeling has become an important part of the way we experience religion for centuries now. It may even seem the most natural to you.

### Religion and Action

Clearly **action** is an essential component of any religion. Examples of include:

1. Islam = the duty of prayer and **salat**
2. Shinto = approach the shrine of kami by washing, ringing a bell, and clapping their hands
3. Roman Catholicism = attend mass
4. Judaism = "following the commandments"
5. Methodism = outer holiness, inner holiness, spreading holiness

* While the form and place of religious action vary, the importance of action to an understanding of religion is evident.
* Great diversity of what one **does** to be religious.
* more and more we are accustomed to recognizing that while religion is everywhere, the variety of what is understood to be "right" or "wrong" varies tremendously

### Individual and Social Existence

In religion there is an essential tension between the **individual** and **the community**

* One of the most elementary components of religion is some emphasis on the idea of society.
* Thus, the essence of religion is the ways in which it enables individual persons to identify with the values associated with a particular group.
* Most of the great religions make a place for **individual devotion** and encourage persons to search for **union with the ultimate reality**.
* But we must be careful not to overstress the individual dimension of religion.
* Some religious traditions emphasize the social dimension of religion far more than we might recognize.

### Values and Religion

In most times and places, religion and morality are intertwined

* religion may confirm moral law
* religion may give one power to perform one's duty
* religion may express society's values

In most times and places, religion has been closely connected with morality.

* To some, religion confirms the moral law and gives one power to perform one's duty.
* Religion is a way of expressing important societal values.
* For example, when believers in various settings pray or offer sacrifices to honor God, or to ward off spirits that threaten tribal unity, they express their sense of what is important in life.

## What kind of stuff? : Substance or Function?

### Substantive Definition of Religion

Perhaps a more familiar concept. List of criteria in different religions to distinguish them.

* Attempts to limit the phenomena that may be characterized as religious.
* Seeks to identify what it is that makes certain responses to death and suffering religious and others not.
* “Substantive” recognizes that **religion** to be contrasted with the many other … isms or ways of thought etc. that function to make life bearable, ordered, etc. (cf. Martineau's definition above)

This is the either/or, rationistic part of religion.

### Functionalist Definition of Religion

* Focuses on the role religion plays in the lives of persons and groups.
* Might focus on the ways religion enables people to sustain hope in the face of difficult circumstances.
* “Functionalist” understands **religion** to have a role to play in **ordering, making sense, of human existence**
* "no non-believers in fox holes" I have heard many times
* I have seen first hand how many people find meaning in their life through their religion
* Cancer diagnosis … time of death …
* making sense out of the unfairness of life

### Definition must be both

* Considerations of function are necessary but not sufficient to the task of defining religion.
* But an adequate definition of religion must include a substantive component.
* Thus, **any adequate definition of religion must account for both the function and substance of religion.** for example:
  1. Religion and politics overlap but are not the same
  2. Religion and morality overlap but are not the same
  3. religion and science overlap but are not the same
  4. historical aspect of many religions is taken for granted but the religion is more than that

## A Proposed Definition

### Religion signifies those ways of viewing the world that refer to:

1. a notion of sacred reality
2. made manifest in human experience
3. in such a way as to produce long-lasting ways of thinking, feeling, and acting
4. with respect to problems of ordering and understanding existence

\*\* A Notion of Sacred Reality

* A **notion of sacred reality establishes a boundary between religion and non-religion.**
* **Sacred** indicates a reality that is somehow distinct, set apart, other than **ordinary**.
* Sacred reality includes the God of the **Bible**, the **Qur'anic Allah**, the **Brahman** of Hinduism, Buddhism's **Nirvana**, the **kami** of Shinto.

\*\* Manifest in Human Experience

* Although the sacred is **set apart from the ordinary**, it nevertheless may be experienced, thought about, and acted upon.
* Thus, all religion has to do with the element of the **sacred manifesting itself in various ways**: in rituals, persons, and natural phenomena.
  1. Muslims = the sacred reality (**Allah**) is made manifest through prophecy
  2. Buddhists = the goal of **Nirvana** comes to life in the life and teaching of the Buddha
  3. Navaho = the story of the Navaho people makes wisdom available for those who seek harmony between all things.

\*\* Long-Lasting Ways of Thinking and Feeling

* Religious ways **develop over time**. And they come to constitute **traditions** that may be identified with the history of particular communities.
  + For example, the prophecy of Muhammad is the beginning of the tradition of Islam.
  + Islam's message and the story of its revelation in seventh-century Arabia have produced characteristic modes of thought, feeling, and action among a large percentage of the world's population.

\*\* Ordering and Understanding Existence

* Stresses the way in which notions of sacred reality are related to problems of suffering and death.
* Also stresses the way in which notions of sacred reality are related to other problems; such as the ordering of political or economic life.

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