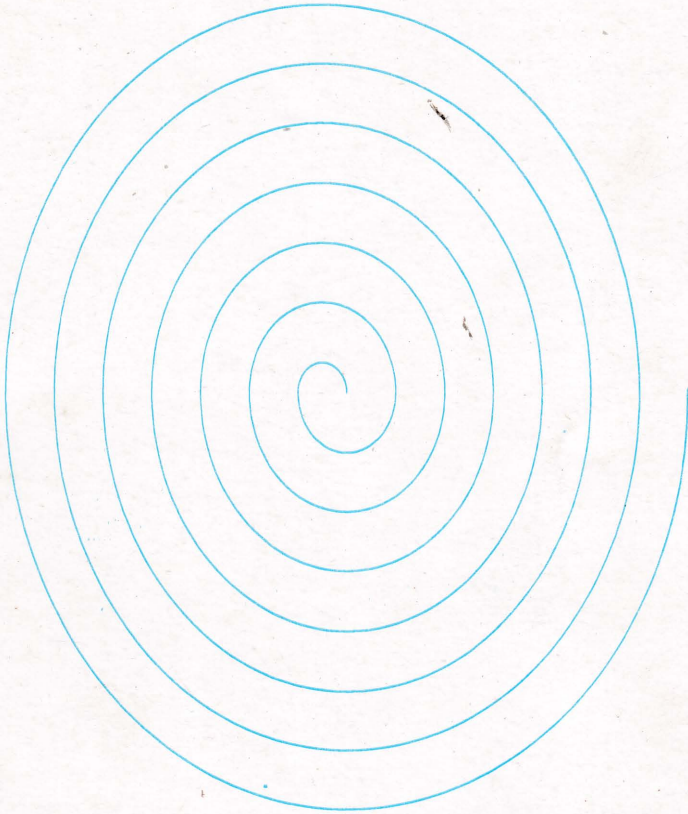


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Philosophy of Religion



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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

1. Provisional Understanding of "Religion"

The concept of religion is rather difficult to define. So much so, there is no universally accepted definition of the term religion.

The difficulty is this. A definition must apply to *all* instances of what is to be defined and *only* to them. (There are other essential features of a definition which need not be considered here, e.g., that it be clearer than what is defined, that it does not make use of figurative speech, that it be stated in positive and not in negative terms, that it does not employ the word in which what is defined is expressed or any of its derivatives, etc.).

What people in general call "religions" include such disparate religions as e.g., Christianity and Buddhism, Islam and Jainism, etc. It would be difficult to find a definition which would apply to all of them. On the other hand, if one were to give a definition which would easily apply to some religions (e.g. Judaism, Christianity and Islam) one would have to refuse to consider other religions as religions and decide to consider them, for example, as ethical systems.

For our study here, for the time being, the "common language understanding" of religion (i.e., what people in general, both scholars and common people, rightly or wrongly call religion), is being accepted as a working definition. This shall be a provisional, a working definition subject to further modification, deepening or, if need be, outright rejection at the end of the study.

For the study of the philosophy of religion, it is better to distinguish between "religion in general" and the different religious movements. The different religious movements are referred to here as "religious traditions".

Scholars classify what I am here calling religious traditions, more or less in the following way:

- a. Pre-historic traditions. Here their study is based mostly, if not exclusively, on archaeological finds.
- b. Ancient and extinct religions. E.g. Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, etc. (in the Near East); Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Norse and Germanic (in Europe); Aztecs and Incas (in Central and South America).
- c. Primitive religions – these are also called tribal religions or ethnic religions.
- d. The main living world religions, namely, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam (in the West and the Near East); Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism (in India and the Far East); Confucianism, Taoism (in China), Shintoism (in Japan).
- e. Contemporary new religious movements – these religions were mostly inspired by one or the other of the traditional world religions:
 - e.g., the so-called “new religions” in Japan inspired by Buddhism (and to a certain extent by Christianity);
 - Baha’i Faith (inspired by Islam and Christianity);
 - Krishna Consciousness, Transcendental Meditation, Meher Baba (inspired by Hinduism);
 - Christian sects – Jehovah’s Witnesses, C.P.M., 7th Day Adventists etc. (inspired by Christianity).

Some scholars categorise the main religious traditions into two traditions:

- a. The “Western” — (including Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Islam and other offshoots). They are also called “prophetic” in the sense that these religious traditions spring from and are based on the revelation made to chosen people.
- b. The “Eastern” (including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism) — these are also called mystical, in the sense that these religious traditions spring from and are based on one’s personal experience.
- c. Some scholars do not accept the above categorization. What is the reason for this? According to them, the so-called “prophetic” religious traditions lay also great emphasis on one’s personal experience and the so-called “mystical” religious traditions too spring from and are fundamentally based on the authoritative teachings of their respective initiators.
- d. The categorization between “natural” and “Supernatural” religions is a Christian theological one. This can be seriously contested today.
- e. The other categorization frequently made is between: “world-denying” religions (referring particularly to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism), “world-affirming” religions (e.g., Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Islam), and “world-transforming” religions (meaning especially the Judeo-Christian religion).
- f. Some scholars are of the opinion that all such categorizations are simplistic and even misleading.

2. Difficulties in Studying Religion

It is often maintained that religion cannot be an object of study at all, for it is essentially a matter of a deep, personal experience. One can go so far as to say that not only is a study of religion impossible, but it even distorts it. By studying what love is, one cannot really understand what it is; it is only when one really experiences love deeply that one really understands what love is. Much also depends on the attitude and spirit of the student of religion when one takes religion as the subject matter of one's study. This concept influences the student of religion in the matter of religious experience.

A mere intellectual curiosity, or worse still, a desire to obtain a mere academic qualification would certainly not be enough. But the study of religion, given the proper attitude, can itself be a religious experience, or at least an invitation to an ever-deeper religious experience. So here all depends on the spirit and attitude of the student of religion. At the same time one has to be cautious because too great an involvement can render one a too close-minded person or even an outright fanatic. So a bit of religious "indifference" will help one to arrive at objective conclusions.

A study of religion — no matter what method one makes use of (e.g. historical, sociological, psychological, phenomenological, etc.) — can only study religion in its outward manifestations. But outward manifestations are just that: outward manifestations of a reality which essentially remains inward and therefore elusive of any study. This is true. But it is also true to say that inward realities (feelings, passions, emotions, etc.) can be studied, at least partially and initially, by their outward manifestations.

When one studies for example, the outward manifestations of love, even if one has never really fallen in love, one can already form at least a remote, vague and obscure notion of what "to fall in love" really means.

But the fact cannot be denied that in human experience, even if one has never fallen in love, one does frequently feel love towards

persons. Similarly with other feelings and emotions. These can never be so alien to any human being.

The mistake would of course still be to mistake an outward manifestation for the reality manifested. This is very important always to keep in mind.

3.1 Requisites for a Comparative Study of Religious Traditions

To compare (and contrast) religious traditions is indeed a very difficult job. One can easily fall prey to all kinds of oversimplification and facile comparisons. A comparative study of religious traditions requires, on the part of the student, certain fundamental psychological, spiritual and intellectual requisites.

i. The first requisite is psychological

Here one approaches the study of religious traditions with an open mind and heart. This means that one has to bracket off one's prejudices as to what is true or false, right or wrong, reasonable or foolish, etc., thus abstaining from all *value judgements*.

One has to distinguish between a "*factual judgement*" and a "*value judgement*". That a certain religious tradition contains such and such beliefs is a factual judgment (or a judgment of fact); that these beliefs are true or false, beautiful or ugly, reasonable or foolish, etc., is a "*value judgment*" (or a judgment of value).

This is not as easy as it may sound. One can reasonably *object* whether such an approach is psychologically possible. However, this approach is necessary.

Such an approach is certainly very difficult because, when one studies such a self-involving subject as religion, it will be difficult to observe the subject from outside, in a totally detached way, without consciously or unconsciously interpreting and evaluating what one observes, in the light of one's own religious convictions.

However, such an approach is very necessary for an objective and scientific study of the subject. To understand the other, one must become the other. This is so not only in religious matters but also in many others, such as social, political, cultural matters, etc. The correct understanding of the other is absolutely necessary not only

for value judgments to be fair, but also for factual judgments to be correct.

ii. The second requisite is more of a spiritual nature

What mostly impedes one from having that openness of mind and heart towards religious beliefs and practices other than one's own is the absolute claim to religious truths in one's own religion. — This means a claim to be the sole possessor of religious truth and the only way to salvation.

When one is firmly convinced of the truth of one's religious tradition and its absolute claim, one is naturally led to regard all other religious traditions to be false.

iii. The third requisite is more of an intellectual nature

A religious tenet of belief or a religious practice has to be understood in the whole matrix of the religious tradition, i.e. in the whole context of the religious tradition, that is of the religious tradition as a whole.

Hence before daring to compare and contrast tenets of religious belief or practices of different religious traditions, one has to be thoroughly well informed of the different religious traditions whose tenets of belief or practices one is to compare and contrast.

One cannot simply pick on a tenet of belief of a religious tradition, isolating it from the rest of the tenets, and compare and contrast it with the tenets of belief of another religious tradition similarly isolated from the rest of its religious context.

A Christian, for example, believing in God as Triune, can easily be led to make facile comparisons between the Christian belief in the Trinity and the Hindu belief in the Trimurti (i.e. Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), and by doing so he will be misunderstanding all the terms of his comparison. Similarities are often very deceptive.

In fact there are similarities, both in belief and practice, among religious traditions. It is perhaps easier to detect and compare similar practices. For example, one can find in practically all religious traditions birth, initiation, marriage and funeral rites. The actual ceremonies may be different but the fact of the existence of such

rites in practically all religious traditions is in itself significant. One can also detect and compare similar moral values.

One of the main aims of this comparative study is to discover similarities and differences between various religious traditions. In this process one has to be wary of jumping to facile conclusions. Before comparing and contrasting, one has to really understand the terms of his comparisons and contrasts, and for this one to really understand each religious tradition as a whole.

In addition to that one needs to be slow in passing negative judgments on other people's faith and practices – because one can rarely be sure that one has really understood them.

iv. The fourth requisite is also of an intellectual nature

One should acquire a good understanding of religious language expressive of religious consciousness. This will be discussed in detail in the sections “Religious Language” and “Stages of Religious Consciousness”.

3.2 Comparative Study of Religions

(This section has been summarized from: Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, pp. 1-7.)

The subject comparative study of various religious traditions is relatively a late development. This is so because most of the scientific studies of modern times have originated from the West, and the Western people until recently entertained such a sense of supremacy regarding their own religion that they thought that it was not worthwhile to compare it with the religious of the East.

Such a study requires an impartial, neutral and tolerant out-look and if at all there is any leaning or sympathy for any religion, it must be for religions other than one's own.

Comparative Religion, precisely speaking, is a comparative study of the important features of the different religions of the world in a perfectly scientific spirit.

Factual comparison with points of real similarities and differences must be brought about in making a real comparative study of the

religions of the world. This task becomes all the more difficult due to a natural and unavoidable leaning that one has towards one's own religion. In making comparisons, one is generally inclined towards taking one's own religion as the standard of comparison and judging other religions in the light of that.

Comparative study of Religions: A Scientific Study

1. The scientific study of religions should be realistic and unbiased, in other words it should be factual.
2. No point concerning any religion, either one's or any other, is either to be overemphasized or underestimated.
3. The comparative study of the main points of various religions must be made in a natural and detached manner characteristic of a scientist.
4. The tendency to lean towards one's own religion should be avoided.
5. An attitude of objective knowledge-seeking will have to be adopted, so that all sorts of preferences or prejudices for or against any religion are completely shunned.
6. It has been suggested that to carry out a really scientific study in the sphere of religion it is necessary that one is more sympathetic towards religions other than his own.

4. Religious Language

By language we mean here conceptual and verbal expression of religious belief which can also be expressed in art in all its forms — painting, sculpture, architecture, cult-dancing, etc.

In the recent past, there has been much discussion in Western philosophical circles regarding the nature and function of religious language. In Western philosophical thought, what was at issue was more specifically Christian theistic language. But what was said for or against it can easily be applied to all religious language.

The Logical Positivists held the view that all religious language is "meaningless" — here, by the word "meaningless" they did not mean "false," but "saying nothing which can be proved by sense experience." Why did they hold this view? According to them, if a

sentence is not empirically verifiable, it is “meaningless”; since religious statements cannot be verified empirically, they are “meaningless.” (They said this not only about religious language, but about metaphysical and moral language as well.)

This radical standpoint generated much discussion in philosophical circles. Many thinkers pointed out that in many instances language is used to express some kind of truth or other, even if this cannot be proved by sense experience — and still such language can be said to be meaningful. So the meaning of the word “meaningful” had to change, and it began to be expressed in terms of “function.” Language has many functions (e.g., to command, to thank, to amuse, to ask questions, etc.). Note: Cf. Wittgenstein’s explanation of language-games.

Many scholars refused to assign religious language the function of asserting or denying anything regarding supra-sensible realities. Some saw the function of religious language as a means to express one’s purely subjective feelings; others, as a means to convince others of one’s opinions or convictions, still others, as a way of seeing reality “in a certain way,” etc.

We *do* accept that religious language has many functions — including that of stating or denying matters regarding supra-sensible realities. But here we are concerned with the manner in which religious language exercises this function.

St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, speaks of three kinds of ways of referring to supra-sensible realities:

a. The principal one is the “*way of negation*”: This means referring to supra-sensible reality by saying not so much what it is but rather what it is not. Here St. Thomas is one with non-Christian thinkers like the Hindu Advaitic Sankara, etc.

St. Thomas goes further and sees that the world of sensible objects bears some resemblance to the supra-sensible world. Hence two ways of referring, both positive ways, are possible:

b. The “*way of transcendence*” or of “*eminence*” (One of the Five Ways of St. Thomas for Demonstrating the Existence of God): Seeing that reality is good and that it cannot but be caused by this

supra-sensible Reality, one speaks of the latter as “the Supreme Good,” the “Absolute Good,” the “All-Good,” the “Supra-Good,” etc.

c. The second positive way is the “*analogical way*”: Here analogy is the use of terms used for both sense-perceptible and non-sense-perceptible realities in a somehow different and somehow similar meanings.

Univocity: complete sameness of meaning of terms used for sense-perceptible and non-sense-perceptible realities.

Equivocity: complete difference of meaning

Here, neither is univocity acceptable (reason given above); nor is equivocity acceptable, for it leads to complete unknowability and complete ineffability of supra-sense-perceptible realities.

e.g., “God is the Father of all human beings”—the word “father” is used analogically.

Analogy is used here extrinsically, amounting to a mere metaphor (e.g., “God is the rock of my salvation,” i.e., God is like a rock, as if he were ... a rock ...). But in the case of the transcendental attributes of being (“exists,” “one,” “good,” etc.), the analogy is used *intrinsically*. (To a believer in God, God “really exists” and not “as if he existed”; He is “really good” and not “as if he were good.”)

We speak of religious language as being essentially symbolical. It makes use of similes and metaphors.

- In similes, comparisons are clear and explicit, using such words as “like,” “as if,” etc.
- In metaphors, comparisons are hidden and implicit.
- An expanded simile (e.g., a whole narrative) is a parable (e.g., “The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...”).
- An expanded metaphor is an allegory.
- A “myth” is an allegory expressive of a truth, of a reality, in a way which appeals to the imagination and feeling (and not to reason and logic). Today scholars of religion speak of demythologization.

WAYS OF SPEAKING ABOUT GOD

(in Scholasticism)

Way of Affirmation

(Positive)

(Way of Analogy)

(Kataphatic)

Transcendental

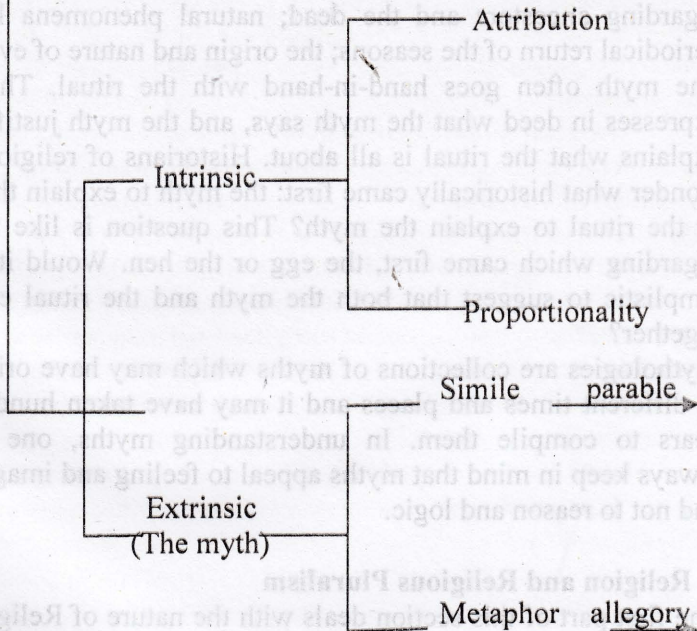
(Eminent Way)

Way¹ of Denial²

(Negative Way)

(Way of Remotion)

(Apothetic)



¹ Can be considered as a kind of union of the other two ways. Besides in the use of such prefixes as "supra," "eminently," "transcendentally," it is expressed in the conjunction of two opposites (in the *coincidence of opposites*)

² According to St. Thomas, this is the "principal way." Besides in the use of negatives, like *not*, *non-*, etc., prefixes like *un-*, *in-*, etc., it is expressed in seemingly positive terms but which are really negative (e.g., *eternal* = without beginning or end, *spirit* = not material, *simple* = not composed, etc.).

How can demythologization take place? It is through growth in human and religious awareness. Prayerful and reflective study is also a means, though sometimes a very painful one. A comparative study of different mythologies has been one of the factors which led to a better understanding of the functions and nature of myth.

The truth expressed or conveyed by myth has a very wide range: the genesis of the world and of the human being; the fate regarding ancestors and the dead; natural phenomena like the periodical return of the seasons; the origin and nature of evil; etc.

The myth often goes hand-in-hand with the ritual. The latter expresses in deed what the myth says, and the myth justifies and explains what the ritual is all about. Historians of religion often wonder what historically came first: the myth to explain the ritual or the ritual to explain the myth? This question is like the one regarding which came first, the egg or the hen. Would it be too simplistic to suggest that both the myth and the ritual emerged together?

Mythologies are collections of myths which may have originated in different times and places and it may have taken hundreds of years to compile them. In understanding myths, one should always keep in mind that myths appeal to feeling and imagination and not to reason and logic.

5. Religion and Religious Pluralism

The first part of this section deals with the nature of Religion. To state what is the nature (or essence) of something is to define it. Since there is no universally accepted definition of Religion, one has to be content with giving a stipulative definition.

A stipulative definition of Religion

When one studies different religions one can detect a certain common structure: that is a set of beliefs (different though these may be), a set of rituals, and in accordance with these beliefs,

feasts and festivals and a set of rules and regulations governing one's life as an individuals and as a member of a given society.

One can discover that all religions are concerned with, centred and based on certain vital questions like: the origin of the world and of the human being, the right way of living as an individual and as a member of a given society, and the destiny of the human being after one's death.

One can also discover that answers given to these questions have been learnt by certain privileged persons (or handed down from forefathers) in a certain kind of mysterious insight or intuition, (not in a mere speculative deduction).

In the case of the literate religions, their teachings have been put down in writing and were regarded as "Sacred Scripture". They are "sacred", which means they are to be held in great reverence and handed down most faithfully from one generation to another. Sacred Scripture are so central and basic to the respective religious tradition that not to believe in them and reject them would be tantamount to a rejection of the religion itself.

We could stipulatively define Religion as follows: an existential expression of the Ultimate Significance of Reality experienced in Faith. Some words in this definition need further clarification:

"*Existential*" — i.e., by one's whole existence:

- By one's mind
(intellectually, hence belief)

- By one's heart
(affectively, hence cult – and this both on an individual level and on the societal level – hence feast and festivals.)

- by one's will —
(volitionally, hence morality)

"*Ultimate Significance of Reality*"

The why's and wherefore's of reality, the absolute origin and final destiny of the whole world and particularly of the human person.

"*Experienced in Faith*"

That is not rationally deduced or scientifically proved. But by "Faith", that is by that kind of mysterious insight or intuition. It is different from belief; but "Faith" gives origin to belief. Belief is the conceptual and verbal expression of Faith. Like other deep human experiences (of love, of beauty) it remains supra conceptual and supra-notional. Here we call Faith an "Ordinary" experience.

"Ultimate Significance of Reality":

This is spoken of here in a very abstract way. If one were to speak of "God" – who for theists, whether Christian or not, is the Ultimate Significance of Reality, — one would exclude a good number of religious traditions, including Jainism and Buddhism. Some scholars consider these as ethical systems and not religions. But this would leave one wondering how to explain the many obviously similar features of these religions and the theistic ones. The stipulative definition excludes such ideologies as Marxism, Fascism, Scientism, etc. Marx who said that religion was the opium of the people would strongly protest if one were to consider Marxism as a religion. But a theologian of the stature of Paul Tillich does not hesitate to call them "quasi-religions".

Accounting for the world's religious pluralism

Here we deal with how to account for the existence of so many different religions, that is of religious pluralism. We suggest only hypothesis.

What do we mean by a hypothesis? We mean a supposition suggested for further enquiry and investigation without claiming that it is certainly true. It would make sense to ask whether the hypothesis is true or false, but it would make sense to ask whether it is a good (reasonable) or bad (unreasonable) hypothesis, is it well founded or arbitrary?

The three main characteristics of a good hypothesis

(1) That it be founded on good reasons. When a hypothesis is suggested to account for a fact in any branch of science, it is the respective scientific community which has to judge whether and which reasons are good and worthy reasons to be taken into consideration.

(2) It must explain as many phenomena connected with the hypothesis suggested as possible. The more phenomena it explains, the better the hypothesis is considered to be.

(3) It must be consistent in itself and in conformity with well established truths in other areas.

Many theories have been put forward to explain religious pluralism. Here we mention only two.

1) Radhakrishnan: says that actually all religions are the same, in the sense, that they are saying the same thing but in different cultural idioms.

2) Another theory says that all religions are the same in their essence but differ in their accidental features.

Though there is some in what these theories say, they need some explanation. Phenomenologically religions are not saying the same thing. Is what Judaism says of Yahweh the same as what Christianity says of Christ? Is what Islam says about Allah the same as what Buddhism says of the Buddha or of Nirvana?

Then the other question remains as to how to define culture. Religion is a part of culture and so it would make no sense to account for religious pluralism by different cultural idioms. Even if one were to exclude religion from the meaning of culture, the theory would not explain how in one and the same culture different religious traditions emerged (e.g., Judaism and Christianity in the Hebrew culture, Confucianism and Taoism in the Chinese culture, etc.).

It would be very difficult to say in a given religion what the essence is and what the accidents are.

Our hypothesis is: "*Religious pluralism can be accounted for by different religious ordinary experiences.*" Examples taken from daily life can make this clearer. A group of persons can have, of the same person or of the same event, different experiences. Still "different" need not necessarily mean contradictory; on the contrary, they are often complementary.

How are we to account for these very differences of the religious ordinary experiences? There can be different reasons:

- i. On the part of Reality which, as it results from these experiences, is extremely profound and mysterious;
- ii. On the part of the one who experiences it, who (limited human being that he is!) can only do so in a limited, partial and imperfect way. Add to this the fact that the human being is essentially what is called an "existentially situated being" — a fact which necessarily colours or conditions one's religious experience.

At least two main philosophical objections can be raised against this hypothesis.

- a) "This hypothesis leads to a kind of relativism which is philosophically self-contradictory." According to *relativism*, what is true to one may not be true to another, or in other words, there is no such thing as a universal truth, a truth which is true for all. Such relativism is self-contradictory. For relativism to be true, it itself presupposes and implies some universal truth.

This objection could be answered by distinguishing between relativism and relativity. According to *relativity*, though there are truths which are true for everybody and true absolutely, many other truths, especially those of a religious nature, can only be

understood and expressed according to the capacity of the limited human mind and therefore only partially and imperfectly.

- b) The second objection is the following: "To state that the human being can only experience Reality as conditioned by one's existential situation would imply that one can never tell whether one's experience is valid and true or not."

This objection also could be answered by distinguishing between "being conditioned" and "being determined." To be conditioned means to be influenced, often unconsciously, by one's familial, social and cultural upbringing and environment.

To be determined means to be so conditioned that one can never become aware that one may be so conditioned, can never bring into question one's experience and belief, can never arrive at a personal conviction adopting what one sees for oneself to be true or reasonable and rejecting what one sees for oneself to be false or unreasonable. Now, both general experience and history teach us that this is definitely not the case.

6. Stages of Religious Consciousness

Religious consciousness is the awareness of the Ultimate Significance of Reality. Here this object of religious consciousness is referred to as the "Sacred."

Mystics and many authors of different religious traditions speak of gradual development of religious consciousness. Gradual development means development by stages. Description of this growth varies and so does the number of stages. Some speak of three stages, others of seven and still others of fourteen. But this is unimportant. What is important is that they all agree that religious consciousness is a gradual process. So the number of stages is not to be understood in a mathematical but in a diagrammatical sense.

We speak of three stages which, for the sake of convenience, we call the "mythical," "mytho-logical" and the "mystical." There is no clear-cut boundary line between the stages. One may be in the second stage in certain respects, but in certain other respects in the first, or for that matter in the third.

Belief (Truth)

At the mythical stage, belief is still based on the witness of others (parents, social groups, society, etc.) and, besides, the myths are still understood literally. One passes to the mytho-logical stage, after a process of demythologization. One has somehow or other, even perhaps unconsciously, applied the "logos" (reason, understanding) to the "myth" and has arrived at a personal conviction. For such a person, the myth becomes an allegory. Here one does not believe this or that truth simply because one has been told what and what not to believe; but because one has seen for oneself if not directly, at least indirectly, in the sense that one has seen for oneself that it is reasonable to believe.

At the mystical stage, one "apperceives" the truth by a direct (not merely based on witness), immediate (not through concepts), intuitive (not discursive) and self-transforming way. That is why belief at this stage is said to be "supra-rational", "supra-conceptual", etc.

Cult

Cult at the mythic stage, is expressed in what one can call "idolatry" in the sense of a ritual by which one seeks to see, touch and handle, as it were, the Sacred, and in "magic" by which one seeks to force the Sacred to do one's bidding by the exact performance of the ritual. One prays mostly for the acquisition of earthly goods. At the mytho-logical stage, there takes place a certain kind of iconoclasm in the sense that the "idol" is broken, as it were, being replaced in one's (mind and) heart by the symbol. Still,

unlike a mere sign (which merely points to the reality signified), the symbol re-presents (renders present) the reality symbolized. At this stage, prayer becomes more and more Sacred-centred (adoration) rather than self-centred as it was at the previous stage. At the mystical stage, cult does away with all kinds of images and symbols, and gradually becomes trans-symbolical; the symbol vanishes completely to reveal the Sacred in Itself. Here prayer takes the form of meditation, of silence, of the experience of union (of "at-oneness") with the Sacred.

Morality

Morality, on the mythic stage, is governed by the "taboo" (here understood in the sense of certain prohibited actions as dictated by the social group and whose breakage, whether deliberate or not, results in automatic punishment in terms of material ills). At the mytho-logical stage, morality is based on a certain kind of law dictated by reason and often based on a kind of an interpersonal relationship between human beings. On the mystical level, even this law is transcended — not in the sense that it is broken but that it stops being a "law" imposed from outside, as it were, and becomes an inward drive. What is right is done because it is right, and what is wrong is not done because it is wrong. This inward drive is based on one's very "at-oneness" with the Sacred. (It is in this sense that I understand what is often claimed of the mystic as having a state "above good and evil".)

To give a bird's eye view of what we have been saying:

Stage of religious consciousness	Belief	Cult	Morality
Mythic	Myth Belief on witness	Idol-latry Magic Prayer for earthly goods	Taboo
Mytho-logical	Allegory Personal conviction	Symbol Sacred-oriented prayer	Law
Mystical	Apperception	At-oneness	Trans-law

7. **Religious Consciousness and the History, Psychology and Sociology of Religion**

Religion has been and still is the object of study from various points of view, depending on the field of interest of different scholars. A historian would be more interested in the historical origin and development of religion, a psychologist in the psychological factors underlying religious phenomena and a sociologist in the social dimension of religion and the role and function religion plays in a given society. Many disciplines treat

religion as their common ("material") object but from ("formally") different points of view.

History of Religion

Many theories have been suggested as to the historical emergence of religion in humankind. Such theories try to trace the earliest form of religious manifestations. And to do this, they generally base themselves on studies of contemporary primitive people; it is these people who, in their way of life, can throw the greatest possible amount of light on what the historically earliest manifestations of religion could have been. Some find these earliest manifestations in animism, totemism, fetishism, magic, ancestor worship, etc. Some would go so far as to see a historical development from one "lower" form of religion to another, "superior" form. Some would see in the historical development of religion not a progression but rather a regression — a regression, that is, from a primitive revealed monotheism to polytheism down to "lesser" religious beliefs and practices.

Psychology and Religion

Some psychologists try to trace the origin of religion in the make-up of the human psyche itself. Religion incorporates certain characteristic feelings and emotions such as wonder, awe and reverence. The religious person tends to show a concern for values, moral and aesthetic, and to seek appropriate actions to embody these values. He is likely to characterize behaviour not only as good or evil but also as holy or unholy, and people as not only virtuous or unvirtuous but also as godly and ungodly.

The study of the psychology of religion has shown that though religion for some is a crisis experience, for others it is a natural growth. As psychology became a more analytical study it became more interested in the abnormal, in neuroses and dreams, in the

techniques of hypnosis and in the kinds of experience induced by drugs.

When Freud spoke of religion as an illusion, he maintained that it is a fantasy structure from which a man must be set free if he is to grow to maturity; and in his treatment of the unconscious he moved towards atheism. (To be seen: the theory of Jung.)

One of the most widely accepted studies of religious experience in regard to feelings was written by the modern German Protestant theologian Rudolf Otto. In his *Idea of the Holy*, Otto analysed what is distinctively religious in terms of the unique concept of the "numinous"; i.e., something both awesome and appealing, both fearful and attractive.

Psychology, however, is concerned not only with individuals but also with what is known about group behaviour, which can also be of importance in any study of the Christian church or other religious institutions regarded as communities of religious people. The authority of a religious leader, like that of all leaders, is derived from his symbolic character and the extent to which the leader and his followers share a common ideal.

Sociology of Religion

The scientific study of religious institutions, beliefs and practices had its origin in Marxism and the neo-Hegelian critique of religion. But it is primarily associated with the late nineteenth-century research into religious phenomena by Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and others. A psycho-analytic theory of religious behaviour was also developed by Sigmund Freud.

The sociology of religion should be distinguished from religious sociology which has been employed by the Roman Catholic Church to improve the effectiveness of its missionary work in industrial society. But it is related to phenomenology and anthropology of religion.

The positivists explained the origins of religion on rationalist and individualistic assumptions. The positivist tradition regarded

religion as the erroneous beliefs of individuals which would eventually disappear when scientific thought became widely established in society. It was assumed, for example, that Darwinism would undermine the religious belief in a divine creator. Religion was thought to be irrational.

The sociology of religion was concerned with religion as non-rational, collective and symbolic. It was not interested in the historical origins of religion in "primitive society." Religion was not based on erroneous belief, but responded to the human need for meaning. It was not individualistic but social and collective. It was about symbol and ritual rather than belief and knowledge. The growth of scientific knowledge was therefore irrelevant to the social functions of religion.

Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) is the classical statement of this sociological perspective. He defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite people into one single moral community, e.g., the church.

By "elementary forms" Durkheim meant the basic structures of religious activity; he rejected as unscientific any inquiry into the primitive origins of religion, but concentrated on the social functions of religious practices. He rejected the rationalist critique of belief. His approach has remained fundamental to a sociological understanding of religion.

There are two generally contrasted traditions in the sociology of religion; those of Durkheim and Max Weber. Durkheim was interested in the social functions of religion in general, in relation to social integration. Max Weber was primarily concerned with the problem of theodicy (any explanation of the fundamental moral problems of death, suffering and evil), and the comparative study of salvation divine.

Weber identified two major religious orientations towards the world — mysticism and asceticism — in his *The Sociology of*

Religion (1922). He was especially interested in religious attitudes towards economics and eroticism.

Some sociologists have claimed that in modern societies there has been a profound process of secularization (or religious decline) as a consequence of urbanization, cultural pluralism and the spread of the scientific understanding of the world. This view has been challenged by sociologists who argue that religion has been transformed rather than undermined.

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