

Philosophy and Religion:
My view on Religion - I

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1 Introduction

Here I will share my outlook on Religion. It will be dealt with as a single entity, much as if I was simply looking at 'belief'. I will barely scratch the surface of ideas within each religion, as I will not try to delve too deep into each one, since that is not my aim. I will however briefly look at comparing these main religions:

- Christianity
- Islam
- Judaism
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Shintoism
- Other Religions (typically Norse, Ancient Greek and Ancient Roman)

I do not pick these religions implying that these are the most important, but because they constitute the 'main' religions of the world and also are ones which I am familiar with, some more than others. If I am ignorant in any regard, lacking in any major knowledge of any religion I touch on, I can only offer my apologies.

I will also add that when I refer to one or any of the religions, I will without doubt do so in such a way that doesn't do justice to the weight and meaning within each religion. But it must be understood that I do this in order to make these religions easier to analyse.

2 Conceptualisation, Reality and Existence

Firstly I will start with a statement, that we all, by being human, have a subconscious drive to conceptualise everything in order to actually process these things mentally.

Although conceptualising Reality is the role of language, I would say that the role of Religion is to conceptualise Existence, Human Existence, into a mentally palatable 'parcel'. It is with this 'parcel' that we may be able to manipulate, measure and interpret human existence. I will further add, that I think it is not just 'believers' that hold a consistent conceptualisation of existence, but also 'non-believers' whereby their 'parcel' isn't of a standardised form that is outlined by any major religion. In essence, I think everyone holds a conceptual parcel that allows for the mental comprehension and interpretation of human existence.

Now will be a good time to point out the difference that I employ when I say 'Reality' and 'Existence'. Reality by my definition is, broadly, the external relative to the external. Existence by my definition is, broadly, the external and internal relative to the internal. So by my definition, the reason I say that religion conceptualises existence and not reality is because only existence is relative to the internal, id est existence is relative to the self.

Here I might as well add that I further think that Science as well as Language (maybe where science is a structured subset of language), is the conceptualisation of reality into consistent 'parcels', which I will like to expand on in some other series of entries in the future.

3 The common factor

I will now move onto what would be the ‘common factor’ of all religions. This is essentially in order to try and link the role of Religion that I have stated with the already established religions. I can say what I want about ‘religion’ but if I cannot link what I say to already established beliefs and religions then the implications would be extremely minimal. By ‘common factor’ what I mean is the single thing that all religions and beliefs share. After all, we look at all religions underneath the term of ‘religion’ yet the foundational definition is rarely clear. Thus I will try to make it clear as I can. There are 2 ways to do this:

- First is to look at the ideas within each religion and try and join them together and find the shared ideas between them.
- Second, as I see it, is not to look at the ideas within each religion, but the implications of those ideas in practice.

I will ultimately try to show the impossibility of the first and the effectiveness of the second in the subsequent subsections.

3.1 Foundation through Shared Ideas of Religions

To illustrate the main ideas within each of the main religions I listed in the introduction, I have made the table below. I have split the table into 3 broad sections for each religion to fall into with regards to its theology. The sections are broad and they are that way so that, if there is a common factor, that it will be able to be identified as easily as possible.

Religion	Monotheistic	Polytheistic	Unifying Law/Principle
Christianity	X		
Islam	X		
Judaism	X		
Hinduism	X	X	X
Buddhism			X
Shintoism		X	
Norse		X	
Ancient Greece		X	
Ancient Roman		X	

I hope that you can see, there is no single category, even though they are extremely broad, that the main ideas of each religion fall into. It is worthy to note that the entry for Hinduism may need revision, but it is my understanding that there are schools within Hinduism that say they are neither monotheistic nor polytheistic, and there are those that push more towards one or the other or even both. For this reason I have simply ticked all of the categories for Hinduism. Buddhism also is difficult to put into a category, but I have chosen to put it in the third one since it makes it clear at least that the practices of Buddhism are irrespective of Deities. The other religions should be relatively accurate in their evaluation.

Thus we can see quite clearly that there is not one single idea that is shared between all of these main religions. Even if some religions share qualities, like the three main Abrahamic Religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam), it is certainly not guaranteed that these qualities will be seen the same way. The way a Christian would see their Deity as being monotheistic may be different to the way a Muslim would see their Deity as being monotheistic, such as with the holy trinity in Christianity whereby that idea/theology is not a part of Islam. Likewise with a follower of Norse Religion and one of Ancient Greek Religion, the Deities of one would be seen much differently to the Deities of the other despite them both being polytheistic. The story between Ancient Greek Religion and Ancient Roman Religion is more intertwined from what I know, but I have already shown that even between other religions in the same category, the ideas are often, if not always, incompatible.

To provide a final push on this point, I would theorise that the reason we cannot draw a line through all of the ideas within all of the religions is because to compare the numerous ideas in each of the religions you would need to see each idea relative to, and so from within, each religion, which means you actually lose your 'third person' position which you need to compare all the religions from. Excuse the metaphor, but it is like being asked on TV to compare Manchester United and Liverpool all whilst wearing a Manchester United shirt.

I will end this subsection here and hope that I have explained the futility in finding a common factor between the ideas within each religion.

3.2 Foundation through Implication and Practice of Religions

In the previous subsection I have outlined why we cannot compare the content of each of the main ideas within each of the main religions in order to find a common factor. Here I will aim to find that common factor by looking at the implications of these ideas, not necessarily at the content of those ideas alone.

By practising any of the main religions I have listed, you would hold, in some broad sense, one or more of the 3 categories of ideas. In practising and knowing these ideas what does monotheism, polytheism and a unifying law/principle all bring to the table? The only answer that I can find is simply to say they all bring *something* to the table. Now of course you may think what sort of help that is, but I will expand further and say that the only thing linking all the practices of religions, with this in mind, is the fact that all of these religions imply that *something is missing from Human Existence*, whereby they try to fill that void/gap.

4 Conclusion

I hope by now that I have enough reason to be able to draw upon the foundation/common factor of Religions that I have found, and use it to support the idea that the role of religion is simply to conceptualise human existence into a mentally processable parcel, allowing us to interpret our existence and make sense of its complexities.

Thus there is one main finding of this entry: From a viewpoint relative to simple human life, the foundation of all religions/beliefs can be seen as the act of adding something that is missing in the experience of human existence. This could further be stretched in saying that all religions and beliefs imply that there is an innate sense of there being something missing in human existence, which in turn drives the purpose of those religions/beliefs to fill that void.

5 Final remarks

I hope that I have supplied enough explanation as to why I have come to the conclusion that I have come to. In writing this, your agreement, although welcomed, is secondary. What I hope I have given you is a way to understand my outlook, which is my primary aim. It is of course also desired that the conclusions and explanations I have offered might give way for further food for thought. Although I enjoy writing these things, it is neither my profession nor line of study to do so. Therefore, I hope you might give some lenience toward my structure and reasoning should it be exceptionally inadequate.

I do understand that my conclusion might seem rather subtle but I think as a standpoint for viewing religions and beliefs from, it does have quite a few implications. Therefore in the second entry in this series I will try to look at what my conclusion means for religions in terms of their theology and beliefs. Then in the third and final entry I will try and look at what my conclusion holds for the role of religion in society and the people within it.

Thank you for reading.

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