

Origin of Religion

Human Existence and Religious Sentiments

From the moment humans stood upon the earth as humans, they departed from being integrated into the world and instead came to stand outside of it while still within it. Thus, humans came to perceive the world as something external to themselves, while simultaneously recognizing themselves as external to the world. As humans opened themselves up to the world, the world also opened itself up to humans.

The idea that the world is open and that we are open to the world has brought significant anxiety to humans. When humans stood on the earth as humans, what loomed foremost was their own powerlessness and anxiety in the face of the forces of nature. Humans who were open to the world remained in a state of instability. At that time, humans became aware of the uncertainty of the basis of their own existence. The division between the world and the self rather exposed the instability of human existence.

Thus, people ask: How did the world come into being? Where do humans come from and where are they going? Humans exist within the world yet also outside it, questioning the world. As humans become aware of the world, they also become aware of themselves within that world. At this point, the world and the self present themselves as boundless mysteries to humans. The world is an awe-inspiring wonder beyond human grasp, while the self is left adrift without a foundation. Consequently, humans harbor deep feelings of reverence towards the vast entity called the world, alongside profound unease about themselves. It is in such moments that religious sentiments arise. When humans become aware of their own situation within the world, religion is born. The consciousness of the world by humans and the awareness of themselves within it form the starting point of religion.

Religious sentiment arises from the primal emotion of awe towards the great unknown. It is believed that humans, in awe of the vast powers of the universe beyond their own capabilities, developed religion. This sense of awe was strongest in early humans. They particularly feared things that were abnormal, mysterious, or believed to bring disaster, rooted in an infinite awe of the great powers inherent in the cosmos. Nature, with its immense power, bestowed many blessings upon humans but also brought calamities. People revered this incomprehensible force of nature as something mystical. Religious feelings emerged directly from this profound awe towards the vast unknown.

The religious sentiment concludes with the feeling that humans belong to the vast universe possessing great power. It is the sentiment of being sustained by the immense power of nature, of being permeated by a great universal life where the self and all things are alive together within something greater. Religion begins with a sense of awe towards the great unknown and culminates in a feeling of unity with the great unknown.

In the sentiment of returning to the Great One, humans can once again unite with the world. When humans stand outside the world, having separated themselves from it, feelings of awe towards the Great One and anxiety towards oneself arise. However, in the emotion of returning to the Great One, the world and the self can again come together, allowing the self to find a stable place. Religion lies in reconnecting the external world and the self within the Great One, seeking the fundamental foundation to support the self. At this moment, one can transcend the instability of the world and the self, and once again find a stable foundation for both. Beyond the awareness of the uncertainty of existence's foundation, one can discover a deeper, more certain basis of existence. Religion seeks precisely such a certain foundation.

The definition of religion

The original meaning of the Latin word "religio," which signifies "religion," is said to encompass a sense of awe that strikes a person upon encountering supernatural

events, and further, the rituals performed to deal with such encounters. Simultaneously, one interpretation of its etymology suggests that "religio" also means "rebinding" or "reconnecting." This interpretation effectively captures the essence of religion. Religion begins with a sense of awe arising from the separation of self and the world, and aims to reconnect this isolated self and world with something greater. Moreover, religion expresses this through rituals.

In the 4th and 5th centuries, the last philosopher of ancient Rome, Augustine, adopted Lactantius' interpretation of religio, taking it to mean religare, "to bind again." According to Augustine, religion involves advancing in the pursuit of God and binding one's own soul to the one true God. This also must be said to demonstrate a profound understanding of the essence of religion.

Religion is the feeling of awe and unity towards the great unknown. Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German philosopher of religion from the 18th to 19th century, believed that religion is an emotion that seeks to intuit the universe, a devout sense that listens within the universe, and a completely receptive attitude to the direct influence of the universe, driven by a desire to be fulfilled. This insight into the essence of religion is profound. When humans encounter something greater than themselves, they become aware of their own powerlessness and experience fear and trembling. They also realize that they belong to this greater entity and are entirely dependent on it, which brings them deep reassurance. Schleiermacher particularly emphasized these cosmic emotions and the unwavering sense of dependence on the cosmic entity.

Tyler pioneered the study of primitive religions, thoroughly investigating animistic beliefs. He defined religion as faith in spiritual beings, a simple definition imbued with profound significance. Tyler's concept of spiritual beings encompassed spirits, souls, and divine entities residing within all things, deeply intertwined with the belief that all things possess life. The life inherent in all things connects to the grand life of the universe. Tyler's exploration of animistic beliefs in primitive religions thus underlined a faith in the great life force pervasive in all living beings. His religious concept of faith in spiritual beings was grounded in a belief transcending all things, while dwelling within them. What Tyler saw in primitive religions mirrored nothing but the essence of reverence and unity towards the grandeur and cosmic life.

the great and the sacred

The great essence, as captured by Otto and Eliade, also manifests as sacred. When humans, within the world, become aware of the world, the world and its source first appear as something immense, separated from the secular world where humans dwell. Therefore, it is perceived as something transcendent from the secular world, as something sacred. And the sacred, isolated from the profane, becomes an object of awe, something not to be touched. This appears within the taboos of primal religions and in the divine images of ancient and sophisticated religions alike.

When people encounter something sacred, they not only approach it with reverence but also, conversely, experience being drawn towards and enveloped by that sacred entity. The sacred transcends the mundane and departs from everyday experience. Yet, when confronted with it, people cannot remain within the confines of the secular everyday; they depart from the mundane, shed their selves, and become captured by and belong to the sacred. This experience of being seized by the sacred is fundamental to religious experience. It resonates through rites of passage in primitive religions, initiatory experiences in ancient religions, and mystical experiences in sophisticated religions alike.

Religion was nothing other than the emotion of awe towards the great and the feeling of unity with the great. It also manifests in the form of reverence towards the sacred and the union with the sacred. Without grasping such religious sentiments, one cannot understand the essence of religion. Certainly, religion has significant sociological functions, but these derive from its essence. The essence of religion itself cannot be reduced solely to sociological functions.

Otto coined the term "Numinose" from the Latin word "numen," which signifies "divinity," in order to capture this sacred entity in its pure form. He used this term to encapsulate the essence of religion. Numinose is something that cannot be fully grasped through concepts or logic, indescribable and beyond definition, mysterious, and an absolute Other transcending humanity. It is solemn, powerful, sublime, awe-inspiring, monstrous, and eerie. Above all, it evokes trembling and awe in humans. It is the "tremendous mystery." Confronting it, humans become aware of their own smallness in existence and are overwhelmed with a sense of creature-feeling. Yet,

precisely because this mystery is mysterious, it is also enchanting. It draws humans with a mysterious power, leading them to desire communion and unity with it. It is also the "fascinating mystery".

The experience of numinose involves simultaneous feelings of awe and fascination, which are contradictory in nature. Awe instills a sense of fear and retreat in people, while fascination draws them closer and evokes desire. Numinose integrates opposing elements such as terror and enchantment, repulsion and attraction, and separation and unity in a harmonious yet conflicting manner. It is within this tension of conflicting forces harmonizing that the essence and structure of the sacred reside. The concept of Otto's Numinose emerges against the backdrop of Judeo-Christian transcendent faith, with aspects of religions including Buddhism that are not fully comprehensible. Nevertheless, it can be said that recognizing the unified structure of conflicting elements—awe and enchantment, repulsion and attraction, separation and unity—in the sacred reveals a profound understanding of the essence of religion. Whether apprehending religion as emotions of awe towards the divine and feelings of unity with it, conflicting forces of separation from awe and unity from the feeling of oneness coexist in a tense relationship.

The Manifestation of the Sacred

While inheriting Otto's ideas, Mircea Eliade, on the contrary, saw the manifestation of the sacred into the profane as essential to all religions. The sacred transcends and separates from the profane precisely because it is sacred. Yet, at the same time, it must manifest itself in the profane. Eliade termed this paradoxical phenomenon in religion "hierophany," and he observed it everywhere: in primitive religions, undeveloped religions, ancient religions, and sophisticated religions alike.

The sacred and the profane are qualitatively different, yet the sacred also manifests everywhere in the profane world. At such times, things of the profane world are sanctified through the manifestation of the sacred. This can take the form of incarnations of gods, embodiments, or divine images. Moreover, it can appear in the form of sacred stones, sacred trees, and other natural elements. The sacred

emerges within the profane, spirit within matter, eternity within generation, absolute within relative, manifesting itself in limited form. Mircea Eliade witnessed this dialectic of the sacred.

Humans, while existing within the world, also stand outside it and become aware of the world. At this moment, the world appears as a great entity to humans, and they respond to it with a feeling of awe. However, this great entity is not sufficient if seen solely as something isolated from humans. Humans also express this great entity through things within the world: sacred stones and trees, religious images and paintings, temples and shrines, scriptures and saints—these are symbols of the great entity. Through these symbols, humans connect with the great entity and achieve unity with it. Mircea Eliade understood this as the manifestation of the sacred.

In primitive religions, ancient religions, and sophisticated religions alike, various religious rituals were universally practiced as expressions and symbols of the religious sentiment that humans hold towards the awe and unity with the greater existence. Even the simplest act of animal sacrifice, practiced in uncivilized, primitive, and ancient societies, symbolized and expressed emotions directed towards something greater than humanity. Humans, within the world and questioning the world, restore their connection with the world through understanding it. Religious practices symbolically express both the awe and unity towards the greater existence, and serve as expressions of understanding and connection with the world. Through rituals, humans find connection with the greater existence.