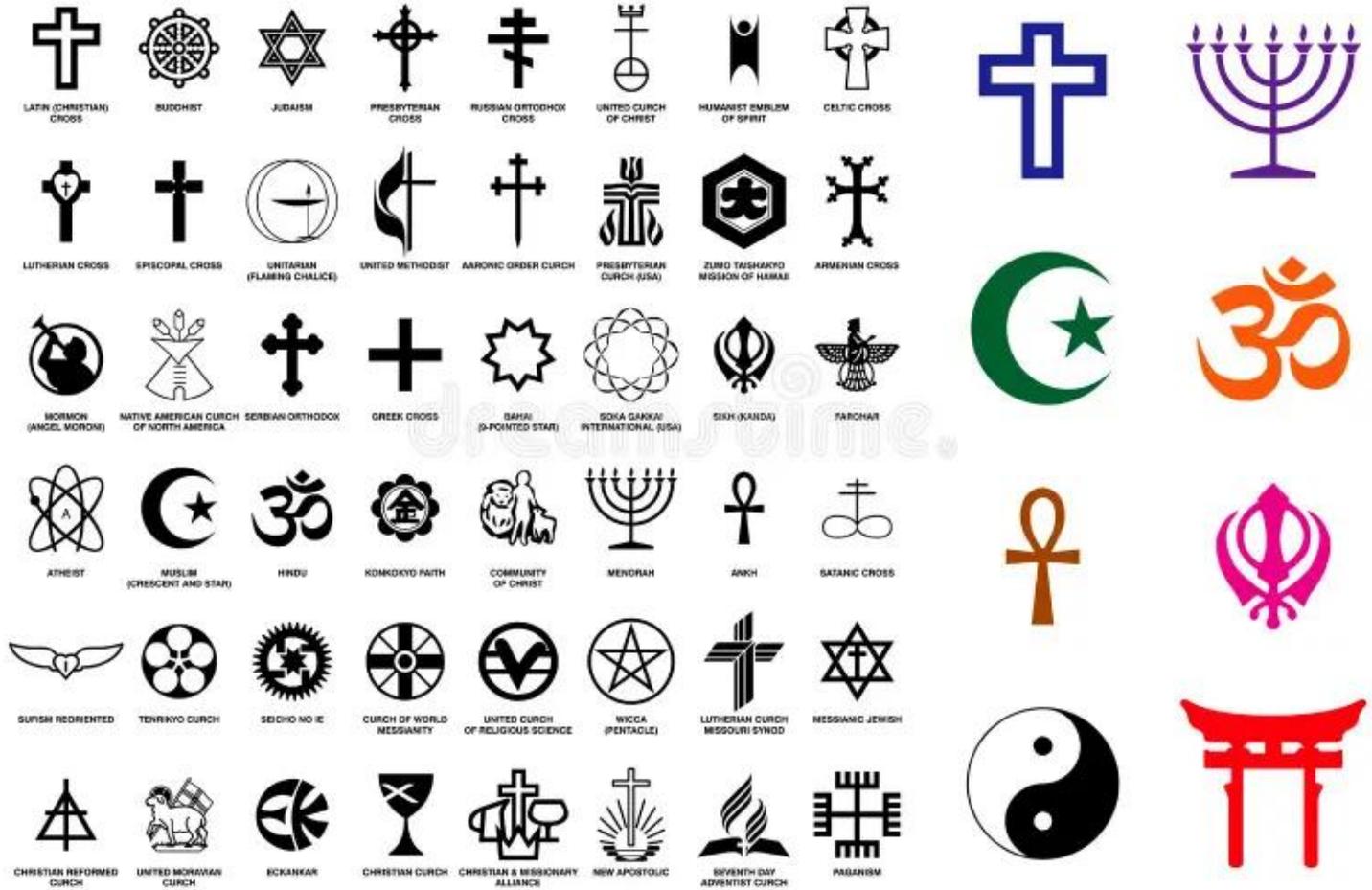


# Fundamentals of Religion

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## World Religion Symbols- Eps 10



# The Key Questions of Life



WHY DOES  
ANYTHING EXIST?



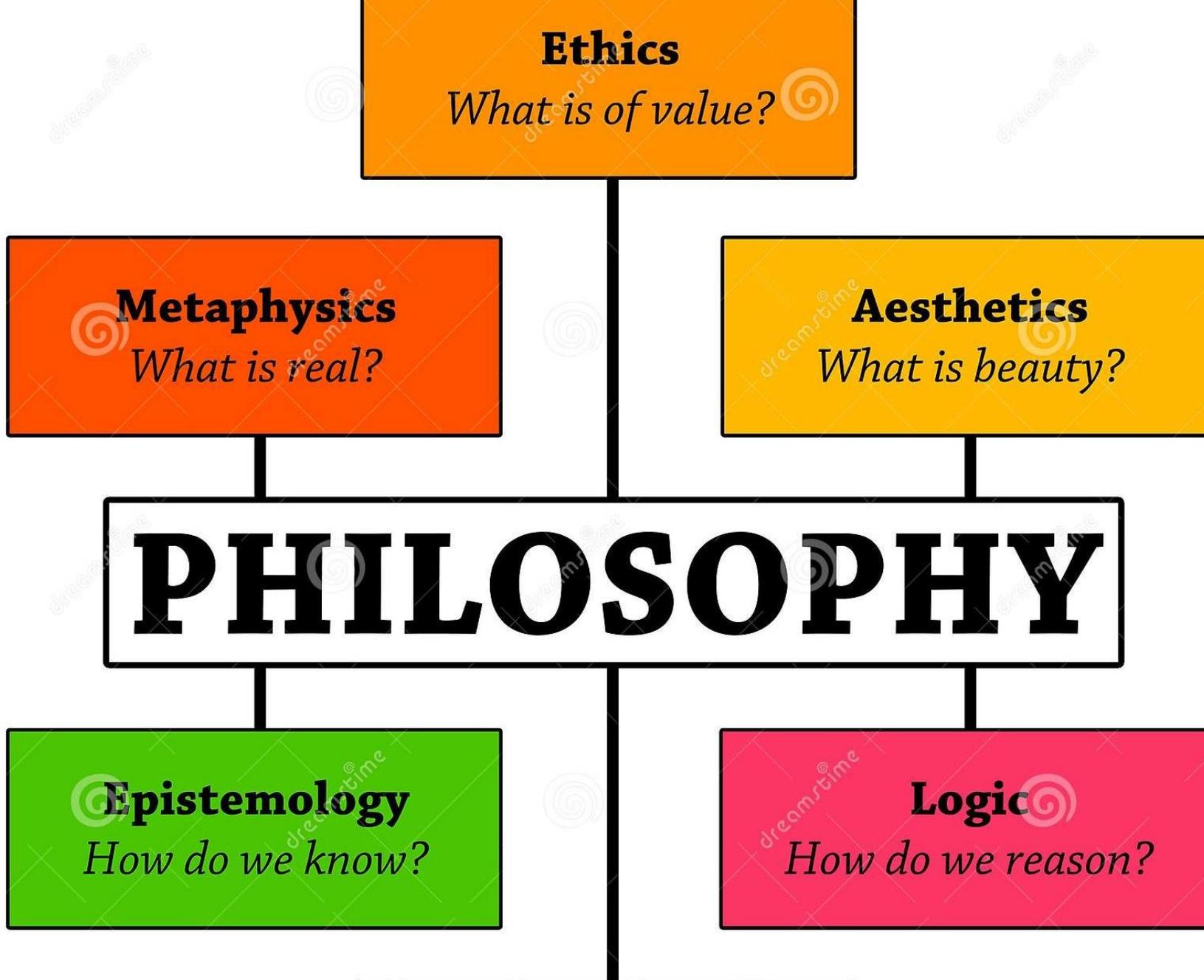
WHO AM I?



WHAT IS WRONG  
WITH THE WORLD?

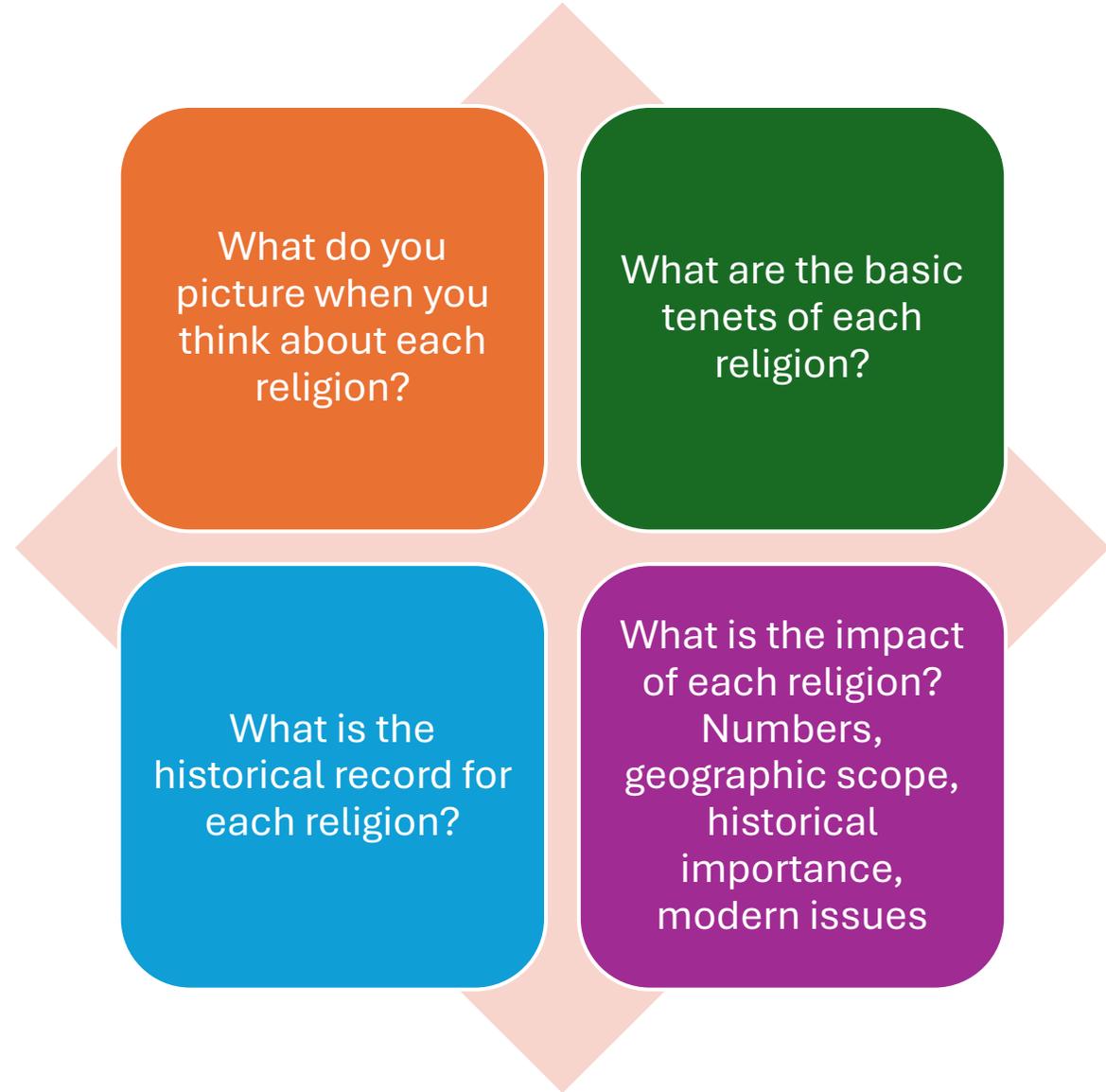


HOW DO WE FIX  
IT?



Key  
Questions

# Identifying Presuppositions and Prejudices



# What is Religion (1)?

- “Religion is the relationship between man and the superhuman power he believes in and feels himself to be dependent upon.” (Hans Joachim Schoeps, 1909-1980)
- “Religions are the expression of the eternal and indestructible metaphysical craving of human nature.” (Jacob Burckhardt, 1818-1897)
- The essence of religion consists in the feeling of absolute dependence (Friedrich Schleiermacher, 1768-1834)
- Religion is the belief in ... a Divine mind and will ruling the universe and holding moral relations with mankind (James Martineau, 1805-1900)
- Religion is ... that pure and reverential disposition or frame of mind which we call piety (C.P. Tiele, 1830-1902)
- Religion is ... the attempt to express the complete reality of goodness through every aspect of our being (F.H. Bradley, 1846-1924)

# What is Religion (2)?

- Religion is ... a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, (James Frazier, 1854-1941)
- Religion is ... a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things ... which unite into one single moral community. (Emile Durkheim, 1858-1917)
- Religion is that which grows out of, and gives expression to, the experience of the holy in various aspects. (Rudolph Otto, 1869-1937)
- Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life (Paul Tillich, 1886-1965)
- Religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problem of life (J. Milton Yinger, 1916-2011)
- Religion constitutes our varied human response to transcendent reality (John Hick, 1922-2012)



# What is Religion (3)?

- Six characteristics or dimensions of religion: ritual, mythological, doctrinal, ethical, social, and experiential (Ninian Smart, 1927-2001)
- Religion is ... the establishment through human activity of an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos (Peter Berger, 1929-2017)
- Religion is a system of activities and beliefs directed toward that which is perceived to be of sacred value and transforming power (James C. Livingston, 1930-2011)
- A religious belief is any belief in something or other as divine. Divine means having a status of not depending on anything else (Roy A. Clouser, 1937-)
- Religion pertains to a distinction between an empirical and a super-empirical, transcendent reality: the affairs of the empirical being subordinate in significance to the non-empirical (Roland Robertson, 1938-2022)

# Observations on these definitions of religion

- Man-focused, sometimes noting and sometimes excluding a personal God altogether
- Denies or minimizes the historical component of religion
- Does not address the benefits or harms that religions cause in day-to-day life.
- Often ignores group in favor of the individual perspectives
- Written from a secular, philosophical, Western point of view

# A Biblical Definition of Religion

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- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10)



# Functional modes of religion

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Existential – faith and religious experience

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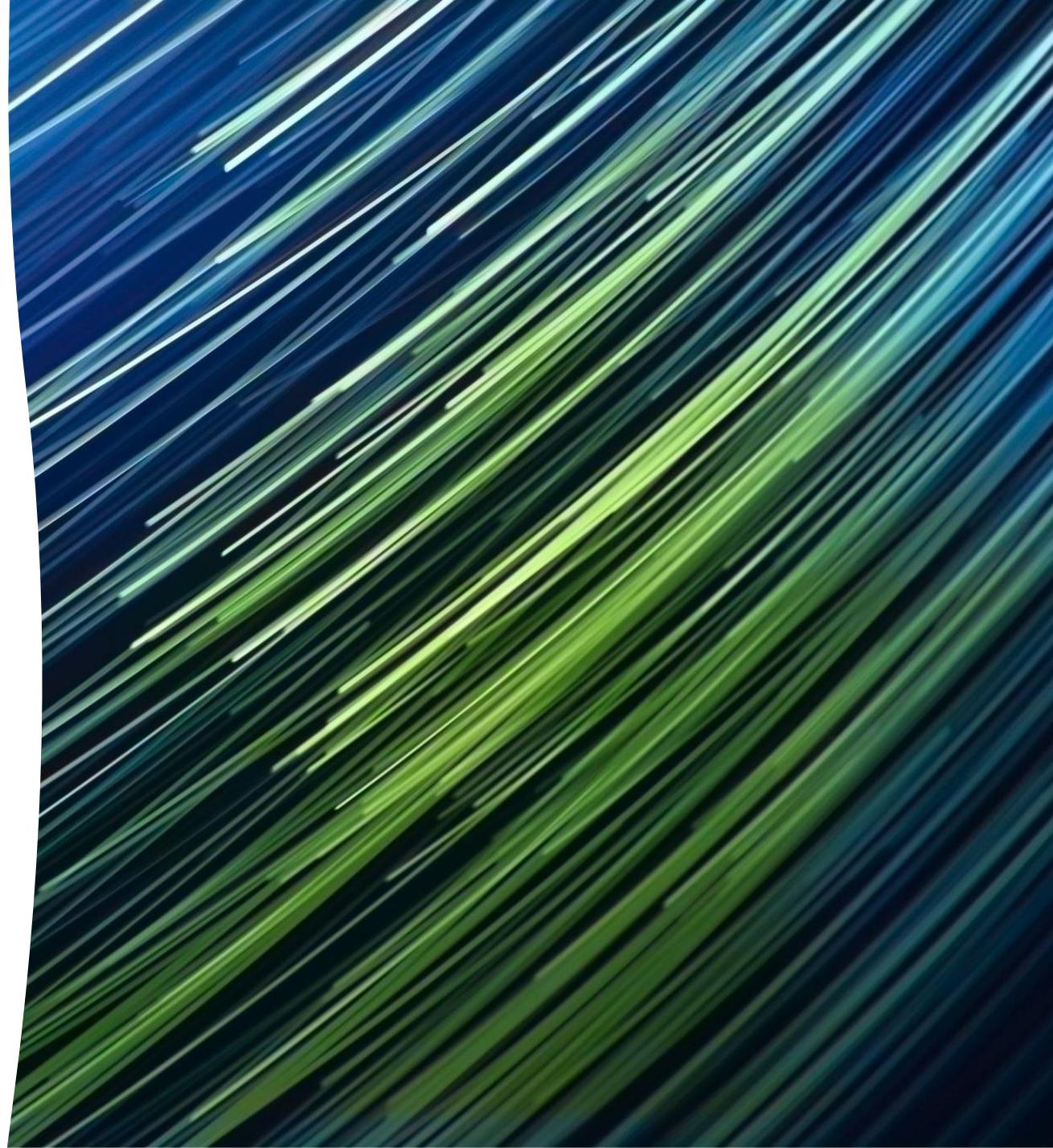
Intellectual – formal statements of belief

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Institutional - organizations advocating and transmitting beliefs

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Ethical – teachings and beliefs that relate to moral conduct



# Faith and Reason

Strong rationalism – for a religious belief to be accepted, conclusive evidence must be provided that it is true.

Fideism – religion ought not and cannot be subjected to rational evaluation

Critical rationalism – religious systems can and should be rationally criticized though conclusive proof is impossible

What will each person accept as conclusive proof?

# Should we compare Religions? Arguments against

- Religions can be highly different between regions, localities, and even individual practitioners. It is difficult, if not impossible, to account for such differences.
- Assuming that each adherent believes the same thing and will do the same (or even similar) things is dangerous.
- Modern comparative religious study came out of colonial Europe and was used as a way to prove the superiority of Christianity. Therefore, it should not be used.

# Should we compare Religions? Arguments for

- Variations between localities and even individuals exist, but each religion has fundamentals which can be compared
  - If a man who says he is a Muslim does not believe in Allah, in what sense is he really a Muslim?
  - If a woman who claims to be a Hindu does not believe in moksha and samsara, in what sense is she really a Hindu?
  - Do Muslims or Hindus simply take these individuals' word for it?
  - Should they invite them into their religious community?
- Beliefs impact actions, and actions impact others. Those who mock Jesus sleep for a night, while those who mock Mohammad too often sleep for an eternity.
- Do the historical origins of comparative religious studies eliminate their usefulness?

# Do all religions lead to God?

- Religious exclusivism – only one religion provides salvation
  - Religious inclusivism – God reveals Himself in various ways and places. However, religious claims are objectively true or false
  - Religious pluralism – most religions can lead to salvation, liberation, or self-fulfillment.
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- The real question is, does a religion lead to an eternal relationship with a loving God, or does it lead to eternal judgment separated from the One who embodies everything good in existence?

# Foundational Religious Worldviews - Atheism

No God/gods exist

Example – secular humanism, Buddhism, Jainism

Universe – self-sustaining, multiverse

Miracles (defined as breaking natural laws) are impossible

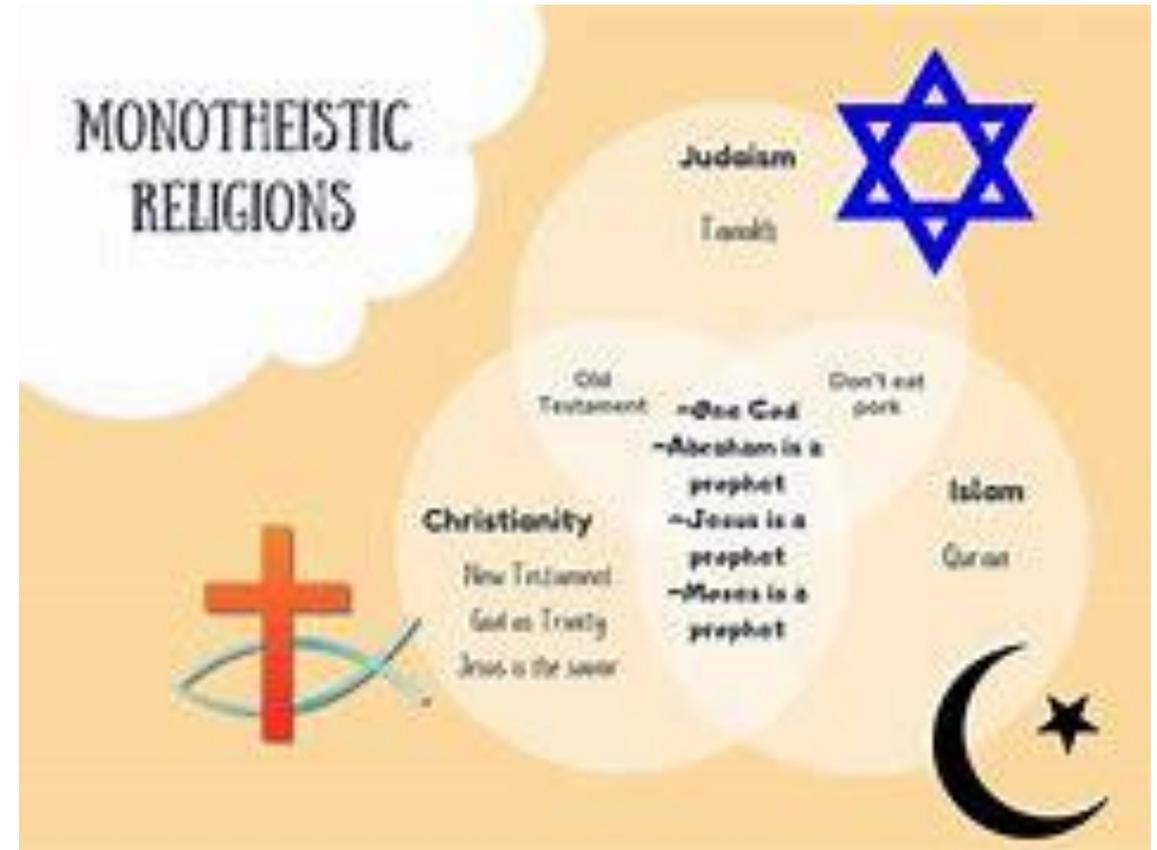
Agnosticism – we cannot know if anything outside the material world, including god, exists

Skepticism – always question all perceptions and reason.

- The problem with this, of course, is that you can't know anything, and it is hard to live that way.

# Foundational Religious Worldviews - Monotheism

- Only one God
- Examples – Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Bahai
- The Ancient Hebrew Religion is the root of monotheism (Deut 6)
- The Christian belief in the Trinity (one God, three persons) does not violate monotheism
- Hinduism can be monotheistic or polytheistic



# Foundational Religious Worldviews - Pantheism

- God is all and all is God. God is everything in the universe, and everything in the universe is God.
- Examples – some types of Buddhism and Hinduism
- God is a self-existent, impersonal essence



## Foundational Religious Worldviews - Polytheism

- More than one but a finite number of deities exist
- Examples – Hinduism, Taoism, most ancient religions
- The most prevalent form of religion in the Bible (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome)



# Where Did Religion Come From?

- Animism – everything has a material and immaterial part. Trees, rocks, animals, water, and humans have spirits. These spirits live forever and impact day to day human life.
- Preanimism – An impersonal power (like the Force) manifests itself in unusual phenomena. People saw this and developed religion.
- Original monotheism – the root belief of all religious systems is one God.

# Fundamental Ideas of All Religions (1)

- Holiness – In most religions, God exists, and He is holy. Beyond the divine, some people and some things are set apart to God. Holy things are attracting and repelling, delighting and frightening, mysterious and awe-inspiring. Holiness is powerful. Holiness is uniquely “other.” Holiness is never quite understandable, but a word often used as a synonym is “numinous.”

# Fundamental Ideas of All Religions (2) - *Mana*

- *Mana* (Polynesian term)
- *Mana* is a power linked with certain people, other beings, events, or actions.
- *Mana* is a supernatural, invisible force possessed by the “strong man” (chief or medicine man). It is potential energy, like an electric charge (cf. Luke 8:45-46). George Lucas may have been thinking of mana when he directed Star Wars.
- *Mana* can be stored in objects. Amulets, talismans, and mascots have *mana*.
- In many ancient and some modern cultures, *mana* is similar to magic.



# Fundamental Ideas of All Religions (3) - Taboo

- *Taboo* is “negative mana” which accrues after doing something forbidden by the deity.
- *Taboos* are related to things causing repugnance, such as dead bodies, human excrement, and bodily fluids.
- Women are *taboo* when menstruating, during pregnancy, and during childbirth.
- Fiancés are *taboo* to each other until married.
- *Taboos* surround certain leaders, but men in general are not *taboo* like women are.
- Places such as graveyards can be *taboo*, as can times such as the Jewish Sabbath.



## Fundamental Ideas of All Religions (4)

- Sacred kingship – Sacred kings were venerated as having high, and sometimes even divine, concentrations of *mana*. *Taboos* surrounded the king to prevent his power from ebbing and to prevent his subjects from being harmed by his power. If a king's *mana* was exhausted, he would be put to death (*sacral regicide*).

# Magical Thought (1)

- A part is equivalent to the whole. A connection exists between living beings and inanimate items that belong to it. For example, in 2002, a lock of Elvis Presley's hair sold at auction for \$115,000.[\[2\]](#)
- The name encompasses the whole being. Consider the old Rumpelstiltskin story, in which knowing and using the name provides power over the person. In Exodus 3:13-14, God tells Moses His name. In Leviticus 24:16, the Hebrews are not permitted to speak the name of God. To know one's name is to have power over them. Jews would not speak the name YHWH.
- All creation is filled with spiritual forces. The soul is equally in all parts of the body. If a girl has a lock of her beloved's hair, and she burns it, he will die.

# Magical Thought (2)

The substance of one's soul or life force can be transmitted by the spoken word. That explains why Isaac could not rescind his blessing to Jacob, though Esau should have had it. Part of Isaac's very soul went out to Jacob. Blessings and curses work because of this.

Similarity produces effects. Pouring water makes rain fall (1 Kings 18:33-35), to inflict injuries on a doll or a picture resembling someone is to inflict pain on them (voodoo).

# Magic and Religion

- In religion, God has the power, and He is the master.
- In magic, man manipulates impersonal forces (or weak deities) and he is the master.
- Religion is humility, obedience, and trust.
- Magic is self-glorification. In the modern day, technology has become magic. Self-glorification is why God forbids sorcery and all other forms of witchcraft.
- Magic can mix with religion through ritual. For example, in pre-Hindu Brahmanism, priests used spells and chants to force Agni and Indra to do what the priests wanted them to do.

# Shamanism

- Shamanism is an early form of religious expression.
- Typically, a tribe member comes to the shaman with a problem, perhaps a sickness.
- The shaman, a wise old man with high *mana*, whips himself into ecstasy (Epileptic? Drug induced? Physical (hypoxia)?). He often uses a magic drum marked with symbols from heaven and earth, as well as medicinal herbs.
- In his ecstasy he travels to other worlds to gain information, discover healing elements, and fight spirits (divine, demonic, ancestors) on behalf of his people.
- The shaman comes out of the trance, the patient feels better, and he pays the shaman.
- As the religion develops, the institution of shaman morphs into the institution of priest or seer (diviner).

# Totemism

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- Usually found in hunting and herding societies.
- Posits a close link between all living things. A totem is an object representing the protecting spirits of the individual, clan, or tribe. Natives of the clan or tribe would not kill or eat the animal represented on their totem.
- Totemism is a social phenomenon that represents an alliance between a group of people and a certain species of animal.
- Totemism affects societies that practice it on a routine basis. For example, exogamy is often required in tribes that practice totemism. Marriage with a woman of the same totem is prohibited.



# How Man Communes with God - Offering

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- In many religions, especially ritualistic ones, the deity needs the gift that the person is offering and will protect that person in return. The offering encompasses part of the person's soul and so forms a connection with the god. The idea is that physical contact with the elements produces unity between god(s) and man.
- Christianity and Islam reject this idea, arguing that God needs nothing (cf. Psalm 50:1-15).



# How Man Communes with God - Prayer

- **Naïve prayer** – In this type of prayer, the penitent reveals his wishes to the deity.
- **Prophetic prayer** – In this type, the prophet longs for spiritual and temporal perfection in himself and his people. Since such perfection is impossible, the prophet bemoans his and his people's inability to achieve such perfection.
- **Mystic prayer** – The praying person strives for total immersion of the soul in the deity. In Catholic mysticism, the stages are purification, illumination, and total union with God.
- **Liturgical prayer** – This type of prayer may be part of a religious ceremony or found in a prayer book. Despite its written, fixed character, such a prayer may be a genuine if formalized request to God. Alternatively, it could be a spell to try to coerce God.

# How Man Communes with God - Ritual

- A ritual is an event, usually incorporating offering and prayer but also including scripture reading, music, dance, processions, speaking in tongues, a special location (like a church or temple) and special items (clothes, candles, food, etc.). Such rituals are designed to appeal to intellect and emotions and can induce ecstasy (like a shaman). Rituals often include silence, which is a time when men listen best to God. Nearly anything can be ritual, and rituals often go unrecognized.



# Key Factors in All Religious Movements - Leaders

- The **Founder** receives and transmits a message from the divine.
- The **Prophet** “forthtells” the message of God and “foretells” the future.
- The **Mystic** seeks a spiritual union between himself and the divine. While ordinary thinking sees a distinction between subject (god) and object (man), mystical thinking sees a union.
- The **Priest** is a religious functionary overseeing public worship and the activities of the congregation. Sacrifices without priests are unknown in the history of religion. Priests often serve in judiciary and medical roles. Special garb is common.
- The **Reformer** is an innovator who combats old conventions in favor of older truth.

# Key Factors in All Religious Movements - Type

Nature religions can be polytheistic or sometimes demonic.

Folk religions are the organized religions of nations, whose deities include natural phenomena (sun, moon), historical figures (Abraham), and functions (Ares/Mars god of war, Demeter/Ceres goddess of fertility).

World religions are less geographically based and appeal to broad swathe of people. Religions can also be dead, with few or no living followers, or alive, with thousands or millions of followers.

# Key Factors in All Religious Movements - Adherents

- Christianity – 2.4 billion
- Islam – 1.9 billion (fastest growing, due to birth rates)
- Hindus – 1.2 billion
- Buddhists – 490 million (shrinking)
- African Traditional Religions – 75 million
- Taoists – 55 million
- Sikhs – 30 million
- Jews – 16 million
- Mormons – 16 million
- Jehovah's Witnesses – 8 million
- Jains – 5 million
- Zoroastrians – 2.5 million

# Conclusion

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- Discussion
- How can we influence people in all these faiths towards obedience to Christ?

