

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-PHILOSOPHY

SEMESTER –I

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

ELECTIVE-105

BLOCK-1

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

Postal Address:

The Registrar,

University of North Bengal,

Raja Rammohunpur,

P.O.-N.B.U., Dist-Darjeeling,

West Bengal, Pin-734013,

India.

Phone: (O) +91 0353-2776331/2699008

Fax: (0353) 2776313, 2699001

Email: regnbu@sancharnet.in ; regnbu@nbu.ac.in

Website: www.nbu.ac.in

First Published in 2019



All rights reserved. No Part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from University of North Bengal. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this book may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

This book is meant for educational and learning purpose. The authors of the book has/have taken all reasonable care to ensure that the contents of the book do not violate any existing copyright or other intellectual property rights of any person in any manner whatsoever. In the even the Authors has/ have been unable to track any source and if any copyright has been inadvertently infringed, please notify the publisher in writing for corrective action.

FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavors.



PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

BLOCK-1

| | |
|---|-----|
| Unit 1: Theories Of The Origin Of Religion -I..... | 7 |
| Unit 2: Theories Of The Origin Of Religion -Ii..... | 28 |
| Unit 3: Problems Of Defining Religion | 54 |
| Unit 4: Meaning And Nature Of Religion..... | 76 |
| Unit 5: Nature And Attributes Of God | 98 |
| Unit 6: Traditional Arguments For God's Existence | 118 |
| Unit 7: Modern Arguments For The Existence Of God..... | 136 |

BLOCK-2

| | |
|--|--|
| Unit 8: THE CONCEPT OF AVATARA-CLASSICAL (BHAGABATAGITA, SRIMAD-BHAGAVATA, MAHABHARATA) | |
| Unit 9: THE CONCEPT OF AVATARA- CONTEMPORARY (GANDHI, AUROBINDO, TAGORE) | |
| Unit 10: THE CONCEPT OF PRAYER – CLASSICAL (ADVAITA VEDANTA, BHAGAVATAGITA ETC.) AND CONTEMPORARY (GANDHI, VIVEKANANDA, AUROBINDO) | |
| Unit 11: THE CONCEPT OF BHAKTI | |
| Unit 12: THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE | |
| Unit 13: RELIGIOUS TRENDS OF POSTMODERNISM | |
| Unit 14: COMPARATIVE RELIGION | |

BLOCK 1 : PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Introduction to the Block

Unit 1 deals with the different theories the origin of Religion from a non-faith perspective.

Unit 2 deals with the main features of the religious consciousness as found in the experience of the religious persons

Unit 3 deals with multi-ethnic and philosophically diverse global culture not only religion is undergoing radical changes but also its very meanings and definitions

Unit 4 deals with the very meaning of religion leaving the discussions on definitions and the theories of the origin of religion since those are the topics of the subsequent units

Unit 5 deals study about the nature and attributes of God. Nature and attributes of God are very important features of all religious traditions.

Unit 6 deals with the knowledge to student some of the traditional arguments about the Existence of God

Unit 7 deals with synthesized answers to the question of God-talk in the Modern philosophers.

UNIT 1: THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION -I

STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Naturalistic Origin of Religion
- 1.3 Anthropological Origin of Religion
- 1.4 Psychological Origin of Religion
- 1.5 Criticism
- 1.6 Social Origin of Religion
- 1.7 Sociopolitical Origin of Religion
- 1.8 Let us sum up
- 1.9 Key Words
- 1.10 Questions for Review
- 1.11 Suggested readings and references
- 1.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to see the different theories the origin of Religion from a non-faith perspective. They all accept that people in almost all societies seem to believe in the existence of invisible supernatural beings or God. These beings/being may influence human life for good or ill and the people were advised to pray to these supernatural beings/being. Some of the thinkers come to the conclusion that religion or God is the result of human fear or were created to give people a feeling of security in an insecure world and the science has reached to a stage where it can explain everything. Once human beings become scientifically enlightened they no longer need a religion. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of the view of Ernst Haeckel;

Notes

- to have an understanding of the anthropological origin of religion of Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer and Salomon Reinach;
- to have an understanding of the views of Sigmund Freud and James Henry Leuba on religion;
- to have an understanding of the theory of the sociopolitical origin of religion;
- to have an understanding of the theory of Emile Durkheim.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the secular-based theories of the origin of religion the thinkers consider religion as an empirical entity that can be traced historically and mapped geographically. All the religions are human creations whose history is part of the wider history of human culture. They trace the development of the concept of a religion as a clear and bounded historical phenomenon. There is speculation that the first religions were a response to human fear. They were created to give people a feeling of security in an insecure world, and a feeling of control over the environment where there was little control. Here we shall deal with naturalistic, anthropological, psychological, sociological and sociopolitical theories of the origin of religion.

1.2 NATURALISTIC ORIGIN OF RELIGION

From the Enlightenment onwards there have been attempts by skeptics to account for religion naturalistically. Why do people in almost all societies seem to believe in the existence of invisible supernatural beings that may influence human life for good or ill and whom it is advisable to pray to or propitiate? And why have almost all societies developed rituals, sometimes very elaborate and demanding in nature, in connection with such beliefs? In spite of much speculation no generally agreed answers to such questions have emerged. The pioneer of naturalistic theory of the origin of religion is Ernst Haeckel (1834 – 1919), a scientist turned philosopher. He expressed his conviction that the discoveries of

nineteenth century science bring the solution of the enigmas which have perplexed mankind through the centuries. He calls his system “monism” in opposition to all dualisms which differentiates God and nature, soul and body, spirit and matter. There is only a single substance and it manifests itself both as matter and energy or body and spirit. Every material atom has a rudimentary soul which is far below the level of consciousness. In the course of evolution, the rudimentary psychical character of substance gradually advances to consciousness, which according to him is a purely natural phenomenon. Monism implies that there is no matter without spirit or energy, and no spirit without matter. This monism is founded on the demonstrable results of science and it solves the riddles of existence. It gives negative answers to the traditional problems of God, freedom and immortality. The ideas of God, freedom and immortality are based on a mistaken dualism. There can be no God apart from the universe. An invisible God who thinks, speaks, and acts is an impossible conception. In the monistic deterministic cosmos there is no room for the immortality of the soul or the freedom of the will.

1.3 ANTHROPOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

The naturalistic interpretation of religion gained support from the developing science of anthropology. The ideas of Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 – 1917), inspired other thinkers like James George Frazer (1854 – 1941) and Salomon Reinach (1858 – 1932) to formulate the anthropological theory of the origin of religion. Tylor makes two assumptions. (1) human culture – including knowledge, art, religion, customs and the like – has its laws which can be studied scientifically. Like in nature, in culture too we can find the uniform action of uniform causes. (2) the various grades of culture found in the human race can be exhibited as stages in a process of development or evolution. Another idea to which he draws our attention is the phenomenon of ‘survival’. An idea or a custom, once it has got established, tends to persist, and it may continue on into later stages of culture where it has become meaningless. His main contribution was his theory of “animism” i.e. the belief in spiritual beings. Confronted with the phenomena such as death, sleep,

Notes

dreams etc., primitive man accounted for them in terms of a spirit separable from the body. He believed in other spirits throughout all nature, some of these spirits having the rank of powerful deities. Since these spirits were supposed to control events and to affect human lives, it was natural that men should revere them and seek to propitiate them. According to him here we have the beginnings of religion, with the belief in spiritual beings as its minimal condition. The higher religions have developed out of the matrix of primitive animism. The superiority of the higher religions consists in their moral ideas, which are almost entirely lacking in primitive religion and these moral ideas have turned out to be the abiding fruit of animism. According to James George Frazer we can distinguish three stages in the mental development of mankind magic, religion and science and each of these do not follow one another in a clear-cut succession. At the magical level man depends on his own strength to overcome the difficulties that trouble him in his attempt to gain the ends. He believes that there exists a certain order of nature which he thinks he can learn and manipulate by occult means. But experience teaches him that he is mistaken and there he turns to religion. In religion man no longer relies on himself but seeks the help of invisible beings. He believes that these beings possess that power to control natural events which magic failed to gain. The religious attitude supposes that there is some elasticity in the course of nature, but experience teaches man that man is mistaken again. The rigid uniformity of nature is discovered, and religion, regarded as an explanation of nature, is displaced by science. In science man reverts to the self-reliance but not through occult means but by through the rational methods. Salomon Reinach, who was an archaeologist and an anthropologist largely devoted to the investigation of religion. For him this is the apt time for a science of religion.

Every where, even in religion, secular reason must exercise its right to investigate. He wanted to show religion as a natural phenomenon. He defines religion as a sum of scruples which hinder the free exercise of our faculties. With this definition he wanted to eliminate from religion the concept of God, spiritual beings, and the infinite. These scruples have

arisen from the irrational taboos of primitive societies where they were associated with an animistic view of the world. Those scruples which have proved useful have persisted, and have tended to be transformed into rational rules of conduct and those which have shown no such usefulness have sunk into the background. Thus human progress has taken place through the gradual secularizing of elements which were originally all enveloped in the sphere of animistic beliefs. This process has taken place not only in the transformation of taboos into moral rules but also in the development of science out of magic. Religion was the very life of nascent societies, and out of it has come our civilizations. He visualizes further progress in the direction of education and the extension of the rational outlook.

Check your progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Explain about the naturalistic theory of the origin of religion according to Ernst Haeckel

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What are the three stages described by George Frazer in the mental development of mankind?

.....
.....
.....
.....

1.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Notes

The naturalistic interpretation of religion received further stimulus from the development of the psychology of religion. The main proponent of this theory is Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939). But we shall also study the view of James Henry Leuba (1867 – 1946) since he is considered as the pioneer of this theory. According to Leuba the reason for the existence of religion is not the objective truth of its conceptions, but its biological value. He clarifies this idea with the example of the belief in a personal God. Earlier time theologians had put forward metaphysical arguments for the existence of such a God for example the argument from design. The progress of the physical sciences has destroyed the strength of such arguments. Now the theologians have changed their arguments: they appeal to inner experience. Here, thinks Leuba, they have to agree with psychology, which applies the scientific method into the inmost experiences of the soul. The inner experience instead of establishing the existence of a personal God show how belief in such a God has arisen from the gratification it provides for affective and moral needs. He pays special attention to mystical experience which is considered as the pinnacle of religious experience of God. He tries to explain it in psychological and physiological terms. It is like a sublimation of sexual passion in the ascetical life: it is a state of consciousness induced by certain drugs. It has affinity with such pathological conditions as hysteria and epilepsy. For the psychologist who remains within the province of science, religious mysticism is not the revelation of God but of man. Human being can no longer endorse with intellectual honesty to a religion with its transcendent beliefs. Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychoanalysis, regarded religious beliefs as illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest, and most insistent wishes of mankind. He considered religion as a mental defense against the more threatening aspects of nature – earthquake, flood storm, disease and inevitable death. With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable. However, human imagination transforms these forces into mysterious personal powers. Impersonal forces remain eternally remote. But if the elements have passions that rage as they do in our souls, if everywhere in nature there are beings around us of a kind that we know in our own society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny and

can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety. We are still defenseless but we are no longer helplessly paralyzed. We can at least react. We can apply the same methods against these violent supermen outside that we employ in our own society. We can try to adjure them, to appease them to bribe them, and, by so influencing them, we may rob them of part of their power.

Freud divides the mind into three provinces; Id, Ego and Superego. Id is the unconscious region in which the basic instincts of our nature crowd together with no sense of order or value. Ego is the region in which contact with the external world is maintained and it aims at self-preservation, selecting some of the Id's demands for satisfaction and rejecting others, according to circumstances. Superego is the deposit of the parental influences of childhood, exercises a further control by banning those activities which are socially undesirable. We come to know about the consciousness through the analysis of its disguised manifestations. It contains primal instincts or drives and repressed experiences. These repressed still live on in the unconscious and they manifest in many varied ways. These manifestations are neuroses and Freud thinks that religion is the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity which may be left behind when at last men learn to face the world relying no longer upon illusions but upon scientifically authenticated knowledge. Freud applies the idea of Oedipus complex (the Greek tragic hero who murdered his father and married his mother) to the origin of religion. He supposes that the primitive times human beings lived in small groups, each under the domination of a father who possessed all the females. The sons were driven out or killed as they excited the father's jealousy. But they grouped together and killed the father, and partook of his flesh so as to share in his power. This was the primal crime, the parricide that has set up tensions within the human psyche out of which have developed moral inhibitions, totemism, and the other phenomena of religion. Having slain their father, the brothers are struck with remorse, at least of a prudential kind. They also find that they cannot all succeed to his position and that there is a continuing need for restraint. The dead father's prohibition accordingly takes on a new

(moral) authority as a taboo against incest. This association of religion with the Oedipus complex, which is renewed in each individual, is held to account for the mysterious authority of God in the human mind and the powerful guilt feelings which make men submit to such a phantasy. Religion is thus the return of the repressed. The idea of God is the magnified version of the image of the human father. The transformation of the father into God takes place both in the history of the race and in the history of individuals. Individuals in adult life project upon the world the infantile memory of the father, and raise this image to the rank of a Father God. The father who gave them life, projected them, and demanded their obedience, becomes the God who is similarly creator, preserver, and lawgiver. Through this what he wants to emphasize is that a religious belief is determined by the psychological history of the person who holds it, and that such a belief is essentially infantile and neurotic. It is a projection of the nursery upon the world, and is thus a flight from reality. In the real world which is rigidly determined atheistic cosmos there is no Father God who reigns over it.

1.5 CRITICISM

The naturalists, anthropologists and psychologists whom we have considered do have something to suggest in their interpretation of religion. The strength of their claim rests on the claim that it is based on verifiable facts brought to light by scientific investigation. However a thorough examination of this claim shows to us that these claims are extremely shaky one. The facts must be interpreted and that almost all the thinkers whom we have considered were scientists of one kind or another by training. In so far as they move from the findings of their particular sciences into the sphere of philosophical interpretation introduced presuppositions, speculations and even prejudices which need to be brought into the open and examined. The major criticism of naturalism is that it involves us in a gigantic one-sided abstraction. It takes a segment of reality and represents it as the entire reality. Just as they isolate the cognitive aspect of our experience of the world, so they concentrate on the element of belief in religion. They too seem to think of religious beliefs as offering an explanation of the world but these

beliefs can be understood only in the setting on the whole religious life, which involves conative and affective elements as well. Some of the thinkers' idea of God illustrates their own misunderstanding of the idea of God. The abstract idea presented by the naturalists as the whole reality ignores some facts and exaggerates others, so giving a distorted picture. We must remember that the origin of particular belief or practice does not determine the question of its validity in its present form. Any human activity goes back to humble beginnings. But this point is not remembered in the case of religion. We must judge things by what they are today, not by what they have grown out of it. Something derived from a cruder origin may have acquired quite a new status and meaning. The psychology is a most valuable study, but it does not and indeed cannot be determinative for the validity of religion. We tend to believe what we want to believe. Yet psychological criticism of belief can be carried only so far or it ends up in skepticism which engulfs the psychologists himself, and makes rational arguments impossible. Freud by tracing the history of the idea of God in the projecting of the father figure, he discredits belief in God. But his theory is not applicable to religion in general. But only to those religions which recognize some kind of 'Father God'. Even if men think of God in terms of father figure, they use it in the analogical language. The question whether this analogue stands for any reality, or if it does so, worthily represents it, is one which the psychoanalysis fails to give an answer. Freud's ideas of religion never had any considerable degree of acceptance. Usually neurosis is defined as a condition leading to difficulty in adjusting satisfactorily to one's environment. Thus neurosis brings negative outcome. Jung says that religion is a healthy outcome as an alternative to neurosis. Religious practices seem to be a desirable, justifiable or realistic mode of activity. Freud says religion is a form of neurosis. It means there can be good neurosis and bad neurosis. The fact that religion relieves individual from unconscious conflict is not a sufficient reason to label religion as the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind. No one has shown that in general religious believers are less able to establish satisfying personal relations and less able to get ahead in their work than non-believers. Freud commits the fallacy of psycho-mechanistic

parallelism. This is the fallacy of assuming that because two behavior patterns are observed to exhibit that same constituents or are reducible to the same component elements, they are to be attributed to the same psychological mechanism. Religious beliefs display some marks of infantile regression. From this one cannot conclude that religion is reducible to infantile regression similarity is not sameness.

There is no sure proof for Oedipus complex. There is no evidence that children before puberty have sexual desires. The word “illusion” does not mean absence of an objective reality. Illusion is only a perceptual error. Illusion is resulted from a presence not from an absence. It cannot amount to mean that God does not exist.

1.6 SOCIAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

In the work of Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) the theory of the origin of religion gets a sociological slant. His views make not just a sociological theory but it is a complete philosophy, known as ‘sociological positivism’. In his philosophy the idea of society occupies the centre position and functions as the key for understanding philosophical problems. Truth and falsehood are objective in so far as they express collective and not individual thought. Even the laws of logic reflect the needs of civilized society. Society is not just the sum of the individuals included in it, but a peculiar kind of entity which is the source of constraints governing the thought and behavior of its members. In his social philosophy Durkheim devoted special attention to the subject of religion. According to him the character of primitive religion is best seen not in animism but totemism, which he considers as more fundamental and primitive form of religion. The totem stands in a peculiar relationship to a particular social group, normally a tribe or clan. The totem is for this group the type of the sacred and the basis for the distinction of sacred and profane and this he takes to be essence of religion. Taking totemism as the type of religion he concludes that religion is to be understood as a social phenomenon. Religion serves the needs of the society in which it is practiced, and the object of its cult, concealed under the figures of its particular mythology, is the society

itself. He points out that the earlier theories of primitive religion suffered from the defect of a one-sided concentration upon religious belief; where as his own theory regards religion primarily from the point of view of action. So he can claim that there is something eternal in religion, for although particular beliefs become outworn, any society must from time to time reaffirm itself, and such reaffirmation is essentially religious. Religion and society are so closely interwoven that religion is regarded as the matrix out of which other human activities, including science, have grown. Religion is by no means discredited by science, but it must always be looking for more adequate symbols in order to express its realities. In modern times we have come to understand that the ideas of divinity and of society are at bottom the same. So far no new religion of humanity has displaced the traditional religion, but this may happen in due course. There are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How does Freud apply the idea of Oedipus complex to explain the origin of religion?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Explain the sociological positivism of Emile Durkheim

.....
.....
.....
.....

1.7 SOCIO-POLITICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Here we shall see mainly the thoughts of Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx.

God was Feuerbach's first thought: the young Feuerbach was a theologian. He was studying theology to become a protestant pastor but from the standpoint of a rational religiosity. Reason was his second thought: the theologian became a Hegelian. Oscillating between philosophy and theology and inwardly torn apart, longing for truth he came to Hegel's lectures. Hegel put him right in head and heart and made him see in a unique way what a teacher is. Feuerbach said "I knew what I ought to do and wanted to do: not theology but philosophy. Not to believe, but to think". Man was Feuerbach's third and last thought. The Hegelian becomes an atheist. He wants to follow Hegel's path consistently to the very end. The old split between here and hereafter must be removed, not only as with Hegel-in thought but in reality, so that humanity can again concentrate wholeheartedly on itself, on its world and on the present time. In his "Essence of Christianity" he enthroned materialism and dethroned God. He said that apart from nature and man nothing exists and the higher beings produced by our religious imaginations are merely the weird reflections of our own nature. He was against the idea of a personal God and selfish belief in immortality.

To Feuerbah, consciousness of God is self-consciousness and knowledge of God is self-knowledge. Religion is man's earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge. The universal man, the community and unity of man with man-the human species is the Supreme Being and the measure of all things. The consciousness of the infinite is nothing else than the consciousness of the infinity of consciousness. In the consciousness of the infinite, the conscious subject has for his object the infinity of his own nature. Thus the notion of God merges. Man sets up his human nature out of himself. He sees it as something existing outside himself and separated from him. He projects it. In short the notion of God is nothing but a projection of man. The absolute to man is his own nature.

The power of the object over his is therefore, the power of his own nature. God appears as a projected, hypostatized reflection of man, behind which nothing exists in reality. The divine is the universality of the human, projected into the hereafter. The attributes of God are –love, wisdom, justice etc., in reality these are the attributes of man – of the human species.

The personal God of Christianity, independent and existing outside man, is nothing other than the specific notion of man given independent existence-the personified nature of man. Man contemplates his nature as eternal to himself. The attributes of God are really the attributes of objectified nature of man. It is not that God created man in his own image, but man created God in his own image. Man is a great projector and God is the great projection. God as intellectual being is a projection of human understanding.

Here God is nothing but the objectified universal nature of human intelligence. God is love also is a projection of human heart. God is nothing but the objectified universal nature of human love. God is not love but love is God. Human love is supreme, absolute power and truth. In prayer man worships his own nature, venerates the omnipotence of feelings. My own interest is declared as God's interest. My own will is God's will. My own ultimate purpose is God's purpose. Marx maintained a negative attitude towards religion. The basis of it was not speculative arguments for the non-existence of god. He found religion incompatible with his theory of action. Therefore he rejected religion. Marx inherited speculative atheism from Feuerbach. Marx was an atheist, even before he developed his theory of action. Feuerbach's atheism was rooted in a speculative theory of man. According to him all the predicates attributed to god are purely human. Therefore he said that the subject of these predicates should also be human. Thus man is his own god. Man simply projects his own infinite powers on to a transcendent being. God is an alienation of man. It is a self-estrangement. Feuerbach did not explain satisfactorily the origin of this alienation. The reasons he said are

Notes

individual's love of ease, sloth vanity and egoism. These are not very serious reasons to account for alienation.

According to Marx man exists as an alienated being. Marx points to the social and economic conditions of modern life as the cause of his alienation. Religion is only its expression. As a result of the division of labor, the means of production have become the private property of individuals; the workers in the modern industrialized and technicized process of production have nothing but their sheer labor – a commodity – to offer. In the process of exchange, the product of their own labor becomes for wage earners an alienated, commodity; something separated from them. As man is frustrated in his earthly existence, he takes refuge in the phantasy world of the beyond. The culprit of maintaining these frustrating conditions is not religion, but the political structure which legalizes and protects the social status quo. Yet neither the state nor the religion reveals the root of alienation. State and religion lie in the economic conditions of a society determined by private property. Religious alienation will be abolished only when relations between human beings again become intelligible and reasonable as a result of new modes of production. Marx's former friend Bruno Bauer proposed that the emancipation of man requires a secular state which recognizes no religion. Existence of religion always indicates an incomplete emancipation. However Marx saw that even though America state is entirely separated from the church, instead of fully emancipated, America is a religious country par excellence. Religion is not only an expression of alienation, but also a protest against it. Religion is an inverted world consciousness; inverted, unjust, inhuman society produces man's religious consciousness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed. It is the heart of the heartless people. It is the spirit of the spiritless situation. Religion is the opium of the people. Religion offers illusory happiness. For real happiness the abolition of religion is a must. Religion is a symptom of social disease. Atheism alone is insufficient to cure the ills of the human situation. It only attempts to cure the symptoms without eradicating the disease. The disease is man's social-economic condition in capital society. The social structure of private

property produces the need for God. So it has to be eradicated. To the orthodox Marxism, atheism is very important. Atheism is the annulment of God. It is the theoretical humanism. Annulment of private property is communism. It vindicates real human life. It is practical humanism. Atheism and communism re-establishes true relationship between man and nature. This relationship is an active one - praxis. To be human is not to be something, but to do something work and material production constitutes man's fulfillment, not leisure. Re-establishing the true relationship between, man and nature is attained through praxis. Praxis relates nature and consciousness - the two poles of human reality. The only true philosophy is a theory of action.

The truth of man is in what he does, not in what he knows or claims to know without his active relation to nature. From a Marxist point of view religious belief always conflicts with a truly humanistic attitude because religion always projects beyond the human. Man becomes independent only, if he is his mater. Man is his master when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the favour of another considers himself a dependent being. Marx's atheism is humanism, mediated with itself through the suppression of religion and communism is humanism mediated with itself through the suppression of private property. Humanism does not consist of abstract postulates. It is to be realized historically in a human society; truly human conditions are to be created. There must be no longer a society where great mass of human beings are degraded, despised and exploited. Marx remained an atheist because he thought the myth of the deity was an obstacle to the rehabilitation of the poor and an impediment to complete happiness by stressing the joy of the beyond diverting attention from the suffering here on earth. Thus religious beliefs are totally incompatible with the philosophy of Marx.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1) Why are the religious beliefs totally incompatible with the philosophy of Marx?

.....
.....
.....
.....

1.8 LET US SUM UP

It is evident from these theories that religion is always deeply intertwined with numerous social factors, and that no account of religion which omitted the sociological aspect could be complete. But apart from this rather obvious truth, we get no clear guidance, for there are many serious conflicts among the views we have seen. We have not been given any single convincing answer to the question of what precisely is the relation of a religion to the society in which it is practised. Can religious beliefs play a major part in giving rise to an economic system? Does the economic system give rise to religion as a kind of by-product? Durkheim recognizes religion as a social activity. In doing so he supplements a deficiency in some of the earlier anthropological accounts, which had concentrated on religious beliefs. But his general thesis derives its plausibility from the key place which he gives to totemism as the type of religion, and totemism simply will not fulfill this role. The reasons are:

- (1) totemism is not really primitive – it has, as Freud recognized, a history of more primitive ideas behind it.
- (2) Totemism is much less universal than religion, and cannot serve as the type of all religion. It is significant that it is precisely among some of the most backward people that totemism is absent.
- (3) Most researchers now recognize totemism as being primarily not a religious phenomenon but a social one. When the foundation stone of totemism is withdrawn, Durkheim’s argument for the identity of the ideas of divinity and society collapses. Feuerbach says that religion is consciousness of the infinite.

Thus it is and can be nothing else than the consciousness which man has of his own not finite and limited but infinite nature. Here he implies something about the non-existence of an infinite, independent of our consciousness. Feuerbach continually asserted it but never proved it. Here he presents only our orientation of human consciousness toward an infinite. It does not provide any evidence of the existence or on existence of an infinite reality, independent of consciousness. His universal human being is itself a projection. It is an abstraction. He projects something out of his existence that does not exist in reality.

It is true that nothing exists merely because we wish it. But it is not true that something cannot exist, if we wish it. Marx's praxis has only economic character. For Max, man is autonomous only in his material life process. Thus Marx's praxis is restricted. Is religion opium of the people? We have to verify it in practice. We have to probe the history of communism to see whether religion or communism is the opium of the people. If religion emerges out to social conditions in which man is a wretched and enslaved being, then religion must die out automatically, when the ideal conditions are created, in which all man can be happy. In this case the communist states need to go against any religion.

1.9 KEY WORDS

Praxis: Praxis is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is practiced. It is a practical and applied knowledge to one's actions.

Totemism: Totemism is a religious belief that is frequently associated with shamanistic religions. The totem is usually an animal or other natural figure that spiritually represents a group of related people such as a clan.

1.10 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Explain about the naturalistic theory of the origin of religion according to Ernst Haeckel

- 2) What are the three stages described by George Frazer in the mental development of mankind?
- 3) How does Freud apply the idea of Oedipus complex to explain the origin of religion?
- 4) Explain the sociological positivism of Emile Durkheim

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Allen N.J., Pickering W.S.F. & Miller Watts, eds. *Watts On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought, 10. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Gay, Peter, ed. *The Freud: Reader*. United States of America. W. W. Norton & com. 1989.
- Hick, John. *Philosophy of Religion*. Second edition. New Jersey: Prentice-hall, 1973.
- James, Henry Leuba. *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its Origin, Function and Future*. Norwood, Mass: Berwick & Smith, 1912.
- Lodge, Oliver, Sir. *Life and Matter: A Criticism of Prof. Haeckel's Riddle of the Universe*. New York: The Knickerbockers Press, 2006.
- Stark, Rodney. *Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007

1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1). A scientist turned philosopher Ernst Haeckel expressed his conviction that the discoveries of nineteenth century science bring the solution of the enigmas which have perplexed mankind through the centuries. He calls his system "monism" in opposition to all dualisms which

differentiates God and nature, soul and body, spirit and matter. There is only a single substance and it manifests itself both as matter and energy or body and spirit. Every material atom has a rudimentary soul which is far below the level of consciousness. In the course of evolution, the rudimentary psychical character of substance gradually advances to consciousness, which according to him is a purely natural phenomenon. Monism implies that there is no matter without spirit or energy, and no spirit without matter. This monism is founded on the demonstrable results of science and it solves the riddles of existence. It gives negative answers to the traditional problems of God, freedom and immortality. The ideas of God, freedom and immortality are based on a mistaken dualism. There can be no God apart from the universe. An invisible God who thinks, speaks, and acts is an impossible conception. In the monistic deterministic cosmos there is no room for the immortality of the soul or the freedom of the will

2). The three stages in the mental development of mankind magic, religion and science and each of these do not follow one another in a clear-cut succession. At the magical level man depends on his own strength to overcome the difficulties that trouble him in his attempt to gain the ends. He believes that there exists a certain order of nature which he thinks he can learn and manipulate by occult means. But experience teaches him that he is mistaken and there he turns to religion. In religion man no longer relies on himself but seeks the help of invisible beings. He believes that these beings possess that power to control natural events which magic failed to gain. The religious attitude supposes that there is some elasticity in the course of nature, but experience teaches man that man is mistaken again. The rigid uniformity of nature is discovered, and religion, regarded as an explanation of nature, is displaced by science. In science man reverts to the self-reliance but not through occult means but by through the rational methods.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

Notes

1) Freud applies the idea of Oedipus complex to the origin of religion. He supposes that the primitive times human beings lived in small groups, each under the domination of a father who possessed all the females. The sons were driven out or killed as they excited the father's jealousy. But they grouped together and killed the father, and partook of his flesh so as to share in his power. This was the primal crime, the parricide that has set up tensions within the human psyche out of which have developed moral inhibitions, totemism, and the other phenomena of religion. Having slain their father, the brothers are struck with remorse, at least of a prudential kind. They also find that they cannot all succeed to his position and that there is a continuing need for restraint. The dead father's prohibition accordingly takes on a new (moral) authority as a taboo against incest. This association of religion with the Oedipus complex, which is renewed in each individual, is held to account for the mysterious authority of God in the human mind and the powerful guilt feelings which make men submit to such a phantasy. Religion is thus the return of the repressed. The idea of God is the magnified version of the image of the human father. The transformation of the father into God takes place both in the history of the race and in the history of individuals. Individuals in adult life project upon the world the infantile memory of the father, and raise this image to the rank of a Father God. The father who gave them life, projected them, and demanded their obedience, becomes the God who is similarly creator, preserver, and lawgiver.

2) In his philosophy the idea of society occupies the centre position and functions as the key for understanding philosophical problems. Truth and falsehood are objective in so far as they express collective and not individual thought. Even the laws of logic reflect the needs of civilized society. Society is not just the sum of the individuals included in it, but a peculiar kind of entity which is the source of constraints governing the thought and behavior of its members. In his social philosophy Durkheim devoted special attention to the subject of religion. According to him the character of primitive religion is best seen not in animism but totemism, which he considers as more fundamental and primitive form of religion.

The totem stands in a peculiar relationship to a particular social group, normally a tribe or clan. The totem is for this group the type of the sacred and the basis for the distinction of sacred and profane and this he takes to be essence of religion.

Answers to Check Your Progress 3

1) For Marx religion is an inverted world consciousness; inverted, unjust, inhuman society produces man's religious consciousness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed. It is the heart of the heartless people. It is the spirit of the spiritless situation. Religion is the opium of the people. Religion offers illusory happiness. For real happiness the abolition of religion is a must. Religion is a symptom of social disease. From a Marxist point of view religious belief always conflicts with a truly humanistic attitude because religion always projects beyond the human. Man becomes independent only, if he is his master. Man is his master when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the favour of another considers himself a dependent being. Marx's atheism is humanism, mediated with itself through the suppression of religion and communism is humanism mediated with itself through the suppression of private property. Humanism does not consist of abstract postulates. It is to be realized historically in a human society; truly human conditions are to be created. There must be no longer a society where great mass of human beings are degraded, despised and exploited. Marx remained an atheist because he thought the myth of the deity was an obstacle to the rehabilitation of the poor and an impediment to complete happiness by stressing the joy of the beyond diverting attention from the suffering here on earth. Thus religious beliefs are totally incompatible with the philosophy of Marx.

UNIT 2: THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION -II

STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Primitive Religious Consciousness
- 2.3 The Experience of the Holy
- 2.4 Critical Remarks
- 2.5 Let us sum up
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Questions for Review
- 2.8 Suggested readings and references
- 2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to describe the main features of the religious consciousness as found in the experience of the religious persons. In spite of the secularism that has influenced so many, religious thought continues to be vigorous. It gives every sign that it will not cease to be so. Very many thinkers consider man as an unfinished product. As an unfinished product continuously he is going out beyond himself. He is a being who carries within himself some clues to the meaning of transcendence and mystery. Here we will study about the primitive religious consciousness as found in the theory of Robert Ranulph Marett and the description of the experience of holy found in the thought of Schleiermacher and Otto. And finally, a critical evaluation of their thinking. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of philosophy of Marett;
- to have an understanding of the phenomenological description of human beings' experience of holy according to the thought of Schleiermacher;

- to have an understanding of the theory of numinous feeling and its relation of the experience of holy.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The group of thinkers that we are going to see in this unit try to explore and describe the main features of the religious consciousness as found in the experience of the religious persons. It may look to be similar to the psychologies of religion we have already seen in the previous unit but it differs itself from them in leaving aside their naturalistic presuppositions and in interesting itself more in the description of religious attitudes than in the genesis of religious belief. This approach is differentiated by its contemplative attitude from the pragmatic and activist account of religion. We shall begin by examining the description of the primitive religious consciousness as explained by R.R. Marett and then we shall turn to Rudolf Otto's classic exposition of man's experience of holy.

Underlying all the forms, functions, rituals, personages, and symbols in primitive religion is the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The sacred defines the world of reality, which is the basis for all meaningful forms and behaviors in the society. The profane is the opposite of the sacred. Although it has a mode of existence and a quasi-reality, reality is not based on a divine model, nor does it serve as an ordering principle for activities or meanings. For example, the manner in which a primitive village is laid out in space imitates a divine model and thus participates in sacred reality. The space outside of the organized space of the village is considered profane space, because it is not ordered and therefore does not participate in the meaning imparted by the divine model.

This characteristic distinction between the sacred and the profane is present at almost every level of primitive society. The tendency to perceive reality in the terms provided by the sacred marks a fundamental difference between primitive and modern Western societies, where this distinction has been destroyed. The openness to the world as a sacred reality is probably the most pervasive and common meaning in all forms

of primitive religion and is present in definitions of time, space, behaviors, and activities.

The sacred is able to serve as a principle of order because it possesses the power to order. The power of the sacred is both positive and negative. It is necessary to have the proper regard for the sacred; it must be approached and dealt with in very specific ways.

A kind of ritual behavior defines the proper mode of contact with the sacred. Failure to act properly with respect to the sacred opens the door to the negative experience and effects of sacred power. The specific term for this negative power among the Melanesians is Taboo. This word has become a general term in Western languages expressing the range of meanings implied by the force and effects of a power that is both negative and positive and that attracts as well as repels.

2.2 THE PRIMITIVE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

Primitive religion is a name given to the religious beliefs and practices of those traditional, often isolated, preliterate cultures which have not developed urban and technologically sophisticated forms of society. The term is misleading in suggesting that the religions of those peoples are somehow less complex than the religions of "advanced" societies. In fact, research carried out among the indigenous peoples of Oceania, the Americas, and sub Saharan Africa have revealed rich and very complex religions, which organize the smallest details of the people's lives.

The religions of archaic cultures - the cultures of the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic ages - are also referred to as primitive. The available evidence for prehistoric religions is so limited as to render any reconstruction highly speculative. Scholars such as Mircea Eliade, however, have emphasized the importance of contemporary fieldwork in recapturing a sense of the religious life of early humankind.

Since the 17th century in the Western world scholars have speculated on the problem of the beginnings of human culture by making use of the empirical data collected about religious belief and practice among the non European cultures of the New World, Africa, Australia, the South Pacific, and elsewhere. Religion thus became one of the areas of study that shaped current ideas about the origins of human consciousness and institutions. Religion, both as a human experience and as an expression of that experience, was viewed as a primitive model of human consciousness, most clearly seen in primitive cultures. It is significant that the first systematic treatise in the discipline of Anthropology, Edward B Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), had "Religion in Primitive Culture" as its subtitle, and that the first person to be appointed to a professorial chair of social anthropology in Britain was Sir James Frazer, author of the monumental study of comparative folklore, magic, and religion, *The Golden Bough*.

Theories of Primitive Religion

Theories of the nature of primitive religion have moved between two poles: one intellectualistic and rational, the other psychological and irrational. Tylor and Frazer, both of whom saw primitive religion as characterized preeminently by a belief in magic and unseen forces or powers, represent the intellectual - rational position. Tylor based his interpretation of primitive religion on the idea that primitive people make a mistaken logical inference - an intellectual error. He thought that they confuse subjective and objective reality in their belief that the vital force (soul) present in living organisms is detachable and capable of independent existence in its own mode. Dreams, he thought, might be a basis for this error. Tylor's definition of primitive religion as Animism, a belief in spiritual beings, expresses his interpretation that the basis of primitive religion is the belief that detached and detachable vital forces make up a suprahuman realm of reality that is just as real as the physical world of rocks, trees, and plants.

Notes

An opposing interpretation of primitive religion comes from an experimental and psychological approach to the data. R H Codrington's study *The Melanesians* (1891), in which he described the meaning of Mana as a supernatural power or influence experienced by the Melanesians, has provided a basis for other scholars to explain the origin and interpretation of primitive religion as rooted in the experience by primitive peoples of the dynamic power of nature. The most prominent interpreter of this point of view was the English anthropologist Robert R Marett. Variations of this theory may be seen in the works of Lucien Levy - Bruhl, who distinguished between a logical and prelogical mentality in analyzing the kind of thinking that takes place through this mode of experience, and the writings of Rudolf Otto, who described the specific religious meaning of this mode of human consciousness.

Another intellectual - rationalist approach to primitive religion is exemplified by Emile Durkheim, who saw religion as the deification of society and its structures. The symbols of religion arise as "collective representations" of the social sphere, and rituals function to unite the individual with society. Claude Levi - Strauss moved beyond Durkheim in an attempt to articulate the way in which the structures of society are exemplified in myths and symbols. Starting from the structural ideas of contemporary linguistics, he argued that there is one universal form of human logic and that the difference between the thinking of primitive and modern people cannot be based on different modes of thought or logic but rather on differences in the data on which logic operates.

Religious Experience and Expression

Whichever approach - psychological or intellectual - is accepted, it is clear that primitives experience the world differently than do persons in modern cultures. Few would hold that that difference can be explained by a different level of intelligence. Levi - Strauss, as has been indicated, believes that the intellectual powers of primitive peoples are equal to those of humans in all cultures and that differences between the two modes of thought may be attributed to the things thought upon. He refers

to primitive thought as concrete thought. By this he means that such thought expresses a different way of relating to the objects and experiences of the everyday world. This form of thinking, he says, expresses itself in myth, rituals, and kinship systems, but all of these expressions embody an underlying rational order.

Mircea Eliade expressed a similar position. For him, primitive cultures are more open to the world of natural forms. This openness allows them to experience the world as a sacred reality. Anything in the world can reveal some aspect and dimension of sacredness to the person in primitive cultures. This mode of revelation is called a hierophany. In Eliade's theory, the revealing of the sacred is a total experience. It cannot be reduced to the rational, the irrational, or the psychological; the experience of the sacred includes them all. It is the way in which these experiences are integrated and received that characterizes the sacred. The integration of many seemingly disparate and often opposed meanings into a unity is what Eliade means by the religious symbol.

A myth is the integration of religious symbols into a narrative form. Myths not only provide a comprehensive view of the world, but they also provide the tools for deciphering the world. Although myths may have a counterpart in ritual patterns, they are autonomous modes of the expression of the sacredness of the world for primitive peoples.

Rituals

One of the most pervasive forms of religious behavior in primitive cultures is expressed by rituals and ritualistic actions. The forms and functions of rituals are diverse. They may be performed to ensure the favor of the divine, to ward off evil, or to mark a change in cultural status. In most, but not all, cases an etiological myth provides the basis for the ritual in a divine act or injunction.

Generally, rituals express the great transitions in human life: birth (coming into being); puberty (the recognition and expression of sexual status); marriage (the acceptance of an adult role in the society); and

Notes

death (the return to the world of the ancestors). These passage rites vary in form, importance, and intensity from one culture to another for they are tied to several other meanings and rituals in the culture. For example, the primitive cultures of south New Guinea and Indonesia place a great emphasis on rituals of death and funerary rites. They have elaborate myths describing the geography of the place of the dead and the journey of the dead to that place. Hardly any ritual meaning is given to birth. The Polynesians, on the other hand, have elaborate birth rituals and place much less emphasis on funerary rituals.

Almost all primitive cultures pay attention to puberty and marriage rituals, although there is a general tendency to pay more attention to the puberty rites of males than of females. Because puberty and marriage symbolize the fact that children are acquiring adult roles in the kinship system in particular, and in the culture in general, most primitive cultures consider the rituals surrounding these events very important. Puberty rituals are often accompanied with ceremonial circumcision or some other operation on the male genitals. Female circumcision is less common, although it occurs in several cultures. Female puberty rites are more often related to the commencement of the menstrual cycle in young girls.

In addition to these life cycle rituals, rituals are associated with the beginning of the new year and with planting and harvest times in agricultural societies. Numerous other rituals are found in hunting - and - gathering societies; these are supposed to increase the game and to give the hunter greater prowess.

Another class of rituals is related to occasional events, such as war, droughts, catastrophes, or extraordinary events. Rituals performed at such times are usually intended to appease supernatural forces or divine beings who might be the cause of the event, or to discover what divine power is causing the event and why.

Rituals are highly structured actions. Each person or class of persons has particular stylized roles to play in them. While some rituals call for communal participation, others are restricted by sex, age, and type of activity. Thus initiation rites for males and females are separate, and only hunters participate in hunting rituals. There are also rituals limited to warriors, blacksmiths, magicians, and diviners. Among the Dogon of the western Sudan, the ritual system integrates life cycle rituals with vocational cults; these in turn are related to a complex cosmological myth.

Divine Beings

Divine beings are usually known through the mode of their manifestation. Creator - gods are usually deities of the sky. The sky as a primordial expression of transcendence is one of the exemplary forms of sacred power. Deities of the sky are often considered to possess an ultimate power.

The apparent similarity in form between the supreme sky deities of primitive cultures and the single godheads of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism has led some Western students of religion to speak of a "primitive monotheism." By this they were suggesting a devolution of religion rather than the more rationalistic evolution of religion from Polytheism, through henotheism (the presence of several gods, but with one dominant), to Monotheism. The most avid proponent of the primitive monotheism was Wilhelm Schmidt, an Austrian Roman Catholic priest who was also an ethnologist. In his view the original sacred form was a creator - god of the sky. This original and first revelation of deity was lost or obscured by the attention evoked by other lesser sacred beings, and throughout the history of human culture this original creator - sky - god has been rediscovered or remembered in the monotheistic religions. This position has been largely rejected by contemporary scholars.

Notes

Allied to and existing within the same sphere as the sky - god are the manifestations of divine presence in the sun and the moon. The symbolism of the sun, while sharing the transcendent power of the sky, is more intimately related to the destiny of the human community and to the revelation of the rational power necessary to order the world. Sun - deities are creators by virtue of their growth - producing powers, whereas the sky - god creators often create *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"); they do not require human agency in their creative capacities, and in many instances they withdraw and have little to do with humankind.

The manifestation and presence of the deity in the moon is different from that of the sun. Moon - deities are associated with a more rhythmic structure; they wax and wane, seem more vulnerable and more capable of loss and gain. Moon - deities are often female in form and associated with feminine characteristics. The moon - goddess is the revelation of the vulnerability and fragility of life, and unlike solar gods, her destiny is not the historical destiny of powerful rulers and empires, but the destiny of the human life cycle of birth, life, and death. Other places where deities show themselves are in the natural forms of water, vegetation, agriculture, stones, human sexuality, and so on.

The pattern of deities, of course, varies markedly among different types of societies. Hunting - and - gathering cultures, for example, not only have language and rituals related to hunting, but also often have a Lord, Master, or Mistress of Animals - a divine being who not only created the world of humans and animals but who also cares for, protects, and supplies the animals to the hunters. Religious cultures of this kind still exist among the Mbuti pygmies, the San of the Kalahari desert in Africa, Australian Aborigines, and Eskimo.

A somewhat more complex religious culture is found in early agricultural societies. It is commonly accepted that the earliest form of agriculture was both a feminine rite and a female right. This means that the gift and power of agriculture provided a means by which the sacredness of the world could be expressed in the femininity of the human species.

Agricultural rituals became a powerful symbolic language that spoke of gestation, birth, nurture, and death. This development does not imply an early Matriarchy nor the dominance of society by females. In agricultural societies males dominate in the conventional sense of the term, but the power of women is nevertheless potent and real.

In some cultures of West Africa three layers of cultural religious meaning may be discerned. One refers to an earlier agriculture, in which the feminine symbolism and power predominated. In the second the theft of the ritual and rights of agriculture is portrayed in masculine symbolism and language. By contrast, the equal cooperation of masculine and feminine in the power and meaning of cultural life is symbolized in the third level. In present cultures of this area the older layer can be seen in the Queen Mother, who is "owner of the land"; the second layer in the kingship system; and the third layer in the myths associated with egg symbolism, which on the cosmological level are a means of transmuting sexual tensions into practical harmonies.

Sacred Personages

Just as sacredness tends to be localized in the natural forms of the world in primitive religious cultures, sacred meaning is also defined by specific kinds of persons. On the one hand, sacredness may be located in and defined by office and status in a society. In such cases the role and function of the chief or king carries a sacred meaning because it is seen as an imitation of a divine model, which is generally narrated in a cultural myth; it may also be thought to possess divine power. Offices and functions of this kind are usually hereditary and are not dependent on any specific or unique personality structure in the individual.

On the other hand, forms of individual sacredness exist that do depend on specific types of personality structures and the calling to a particular religious vocation. Persons such as shamans fall into this category. Shamans are recruited from among young persons who tend to exhibit particular psychological traits that indicate their openness to a more profound and complex world of sacred meanings than is available to the

Notes

society at large. Once chosen, shamans undergo a special shamanistic initiation and are taught by older shamans the peculiar forms of healing and behavior that identify their sacred work. Given the nature of their sacred work, they must undergo long periods of training before they are capable practitioners of the sacred and healing arts. The same is true of medicine men and diviners, although these often inherit their status.

Each person in a primitive society may also bear an ordinary form of sacred meaning. Such meaning can be discerned in the elements of the person's psychological structure. For example, among the Ashanti of Ghana, an individual's blood is said to be derived from the goddess of the earth through that individual's mother, an individual's destiny from the high - god, and personality and temperament from the tutelary deity of the individual's father. On the cosmological level of myths and rituals all of these divine forms have a primordial meaning that acquires individual and existential significance when it is expressed in persons.

Robert Ranulph Marett (1866 – 1943), an English anthropologist gives a new direction to the study of primitive religion. He declared his opposition to naturalism and speculative idealism. Hence what he offers us is neither naturalistic nor metaphysical explanation of the origin of religion. He tires not so much to explain but to describe. He concentrated his attention on the psychological analysis or rudimentary religion. His aim is to translate a type of religious experience remote from our own into such terms of our consciousness. The idea of Mana is the central theme of his description. This word takes its origin in the Pacific region. But the idea for which it stands is said to be wide spread among primitive peoples. Generally this word has come to be applied to a certain type of religious experience. What do we mean by Mana? To explain the meaning of this word Marett obtains the help of an English Missionary, Bishop R.H. Codrington and he describes Mana as a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil. It is a kind of occult power. This occult force is supposed to attach to a wide range of natural objects and persons. To this force is attributed the success in war, prosperity in agriculture, powers in hunting

etc. Mana negatively seen is taboo. That which possesses mana is taboo. This means mana is not to be lightly approached or else its power break forth in a harmful and destructive manner. He next searches into the mentality of the people among whom Mana is found. What lies behind mana is not so much an idea but an emotional attitude. It is true that such an attitude contain elements which may become eventually conceptualized. "Savage religion" is not always so much rationalized but always danced out. It develops under conditions which favour emotional and motor processes and the process of making it into ideas remains relatively in absence. It is on this point that Marett takes the issue with primitive animism. According to him the problems with some of the religious philosophers are, that they when interpreting primitive religion, gives too much emphasis to the intellectual matter. They treat primitive religion as if it were primarily a matter of belief. They set out to examine the intellectual side of primitive religion. But the belief aspect of the primitive religion is very closely associated with powerful affective states. This may be because there is a phase in which feeling predominates over thought or thought and reflection have not yet emerged from feeling. Marett thinks that of all English words "awe" is the one that expresses the fundamental religious feelings most nearly. What constitutes the core of the primitive religious consciousness is nothing other than awe. He describes awe as human being's reaction to the hidden mysterious forces of its environment. It cannot be merely interpreted as fear of the unknown. It is much more than fear. Viewing from this point we can say that religion does not originate just in fear of the unknown. The essential constituents of awe are wonder, admiration, respect, even love. Mana is in itself non-moral but it can act for good and evil. It is a kind of undifferentiated magico-religious matrix, from which both religion and magic take their rise. The religious development takes place in the moralizing and spiritualizing of the primitive experience which already contains in itself the seeds of more refined feelings, reverence, love, humility and the like. It also includes the possibility for intellectual development through reflection. Religion is a permanent possibility of the human spirit. The religion in all its variations will retain as its basic structure something similar to that attitude of awe.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What does Marett mean by Mana?

.....
.....
.....

2) What constitutes the core of primitive religious consciousness?

.....
.....
.....

2.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY

In this section we are going to deal with thought of Rudolf Otto (1869 – 1937) who gives a masterly phenomenological analysis of the religious consciousness. Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, himself praised Otto for applying phenomenological method in the analysis of the religious consciousness. He was a great admirer of Schleiermacher (1768 –1834) for the rediscovery of religion.

2.3.1 Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher and the Theory of Consciousness

He is considered as the greatest theologian/philosopher of the nineteenth century and found the essence of religion in a sense and taste for the infinite or in the feeling of the absolute dependence. The words like feeling, sense, and taste should not be understood in the sense of a just a blind stirring. But it is an emotionally coloured attitude or state of mind which carries in it some kind of implicit understanding. He makes a distinction between doctrine and religion. Doctrine is not the same as the

religion. Through the doctrine what is implicit in the religious affections is made explicit through reflection. His theory is often called as the theory of consciousness. A human person is composed of mind and body and individuated by time and space. But according to him the person as the subject of the activities of thinking/knowing and of willing/doing is more than a being composed of mind and body. A person is differentiated from others by nature and history. He inwardly differentiates himself and acknowledges such an inward differentiation in all other human beings. That by virtue of which the human person makes this inward differentiation is the particular property of the person. It is this property in each man that equips him with a life unity, an inalienable identity. He describes this property as the peculiar organization that reason assumes for itself in each man. But the life unity, or identity, of the individual person can never come to direct and full expression either in thinking/knowing or in willing/doing, although it accompanies and informs each of these rational activities. The self-consciousness that this sense of identity requires is a self-consciousness to be distinguished from the forms of self-consciousness in which the subject is responding to or acting upon external objects. He appropriates the word feeling for this form of self-consciousness. The content of which is the given identity and unity of the self. Feeling, thinking, and doing make up the three forms of consciousness that constitute the self-consciousness which distinguishes persons. Every person must be seen as a participant in the life of society in both his practical and theoretical functions but at the same time he is also one whose particular property is wholly original. A person in whom feeling of self-consciousness remains latent, personal identity is deficient and personal consciousness is confused or immature. Such a person fails to contribute to the common or highest good. He is a person in the formal sense but is destitute of spiritual life. For him religion is the most highly and fully developed mode of the feeling form of self-consciousness. For him religion is a determination of feeling. It is a feeling of being absolutely dependent. This feeling is one and the same thing with consciousness of being in relation with God. To understand his point of view, we need to distinguish the following elements.

Notes

1. The feeling of being absolutely dependent is also the feeling of identity through which the individual is conscious of his inner uniqueness. In describing this feeling as one of being absolutely dependent he was calling attention to the fact that the identity, or life unity of the individual is an endowment which cannot be derived from any of the intellectual or volitional relations in which the self stands to other persons and forces either alone or together. In this sense the individual is utterly dependent for the particular constitution of his existence on a “power” that cannot be fully explained conceptually. The feeling of absolute dependence is not because of any felt deficiency.

2. The feeling of being absolutely dependent or God consciousness, as he calls it, is discernible only because self-consciousness also involves thinking and willing, which are forms of rational relation between the person and his world, forms involving consciousness of relative dependence and relative freedom. He distinguishes the feeling of being absolutely dependent from the feeling of relative dependence. In the latter a person stands in the relations of community and reciprocity with nature and society while in the former there is no reciprocity present. Therefore there can be no consciousness of being in relation to God apart from consciousness of being in relation to the world.

3. The original meaning of the word “God” is not a concept of perfect being but the felt relation of absolute dependence. Therefore religion arises not in ideas, in willing, but in the immediate consciousness of an immediate existence-relationship. Religion is more than a determination of feeling. It is the name given to the personal self-consciousness in which the feeling of absolute dependence and consciousness of the world coexist and must achieve a living, stable order.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1) What is the source of religion according to the philosophy of Schleiermacher?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.3.2 Rudolf Otto and the Experience of Holy

Otto in his book *The Idea of Holy* gives a classical exposition of the experience of Holy. In this exposition he makes use of the phenomenological method which is developed by Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Husserl praises Otto for having made a masterly phenomenological analysis of the religious consciousness. Though he and Husserl were colleagues at Gottingen, Otto seems to have worked independently, and makes no explicit reference to Husserl's method. Hence Otto is in his own right a religious thinker of first-class importance and he is stated to be the most illuminating religious thinker of modern times.

2.3.3 Religious Feeling and Religious Knowledge

His most significant contribution is to be found in his discussion of religious feeling and religious knowledge. He discusses the relation of religion to a naturalism which demands that everything be explained on the basis of mathematical-mechanical laws. But when explained on the basis of mathematical-mechanical laws the beyond, purpose and mystery which are essential to religion will be excluded. Religion makes certain claims such as that the world is conditioned and dependent, that there is a providence, that there is a side other than which appears to us. These claims are proposed not as poetry or mystical statements but as truths. At the same time these cannot be justified by, or derived from a consideration of nature in any straightforward sense. What the reason can do is just to show that science does not conflict with these claims. The reason faces the inability to consider the truth value of the religious

Notes

claims. The reason may point out hints in nature which suggest that these claims are true. But reason cannot justify them.

These truths differ in kind from those of science and common sense and have their own grounds such as heart and conscience, feeling and intuition. It is possible to make, on the one hand, correlations between various feelings, and religious claims on the other. Corresponding to the claim that the world is conditioned and dependent there is the feeling of the dependence and conditionality of all things. The claim that there is a providence, or teleological order, in things implies that certain value judgments are true and these value judgments rest on feeling and intuition. Corresponding to the claim that there is a beyond is piety, that is, a feeling and intuition, which is bound up with our experience of the beautiful and the mysterious, that there is a reality behind appearances. However when applied to religion there is an ambiguity with regard to the full meaning and sense of feeling and intuition. In the beginning stages of his philosophical thinking Otto talks of them at least in three ways. He sometimes talks of them as if they were feelings in a straightforward sense. At other times he talks of them as if they were half-formulated judgments which carry with them an inescapable sense of conviction and still other times he talks of them as if they were cognitive experiences in somewhat the same way that visual experiences are cognitive. But later on the notion of religious feelings and intuitions receive a more complete treatment. We have an immediate knowledge of reality, the noumenal world which shows itself in feelings of truth. These feelings can be brought to full consciousness as ideas. An idea is a concept which can be applied to reality. When temporally schematized the categories of theoretical reason can be applied to appearances and can also, when schematized by the principle of completeness be applied to reality itself. A category thus schematized is an idea. These ideas are essentially negative. They exclude certain characteristics such as temporality, contingency from reality. He very clearly makes a distinction between the feeling of beauty and of the sublime on the one hand and religious feeling on the other hand and all the three of these feelings either directly or indirectly disclose the reality.

2.3.4 Religious Feeling and the Feeling of the Sublime

In his book *The Idea of Holy* he tries to make a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back of one's neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses no value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object. His attempt to conceptualize and describe the various feelings must be clearly distinguished from his theory about numinous. According to him numinous feelings are, first of all, unique and it cannot be analyzed as a complex of non-numinous feeling such as love, fear, horror, a feeling of sublimity, and so on. Secondly the capacity for numinous feeling is unexplainable. Although the capacity may appear in the world only when certain conditions are fulfilled, the conditions do not constitute an adequate explanation of the capacity in question. Thirdly numinous feelings are also cognitive. The feelings are the source of the concept of the numinous – the concept of something which is both a value and an objective reality. It is cognitive in the sense that they are like visual experiences. They have immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self i.e., the numinous quality or object, which is an object of numinous feelings in somewhat the same way that visible objects and qualities might be said to be the object of visual experiences. However the relation between these two is not clear. There could be two interpretations. In the first interpretation it is claimed that numinous feelings disclose the numinous object. The encounter with the numinous object through numinous experiences gives rise to the concept of the numinous in much the same way that encounters with objects and qualities through visual experiences are thought to give rise to the

concepts of those objects and qualities. The concept of the numinous is both a priori and a posteriori. It is a posteriori since it is not derived from the experience of an object or quality and it is a priori because it is not derived from any sense experience. The feeling is the source of the concept only in the sense that it discloses the object of the concept. It is the encounter with the object that produces the concept of the object. According to the second interpretation the feeling gives rise to both the concept and the disclosure of the numinous object. However it is not the encounter with the numinous which gives rise to the concept of the numinous rather it is feeling that furnishes the concept. The feeling which furnishes the concept also discloses the object to which the concept applies. Now the problem is how are these two functions of numinous feelings related, since neither the concept nor the object is given in isolation. The two are given together although one is not derived from the other. In both these interpretations he claims that feeling puts us in contact with, discloses, something outside of ourselves. Feeling becomes like visual and auditory experiences. It has an objective referent whether this is structured by an a priori concept or whether it simply gives rise to a concept. The object of numinous feeling, according to him, is numen. Numen is both value and object and can be only indirectly characterized. For example the encounter with the numen evokes religious dread. This is analogous to fear. So it is the property of the numen which arouses religious dread. However, we can schematize the numen by means of such rational concepts as goodness, completeness, necessity and substantiality. It means that concepts of this kind can be predicated of the numen.

2.3.5 The Category of the Holy

When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought together we have the complex category of the holy itself. His analysis of the structure of the religious consciousness is based on a clarification of the key-word of all religions namely 'Holy'. The word holy can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought

conceptually. Thus for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.

From this preliminary examination we can say religion is compounded of rational and nonrational elements. We think of God in terms of goodness, personality, purpose, and so on. These ideas are applied to God analogically. They are rational characteristics in the sense that we have definite concepts of them. This rational side of religion is something that cannot be dispensed with in religion. But sometimes it neglects the deeper non-rational core of religion. God is not exhausted in his rational attributes. He is the holy God and the adjective points to his deeper, inconceivable, super rational nature. Otto wishes to stress this non-rational side of religion since traditional philosophy and theology has lost sight of it and has given an excessively intellectualistic interpretation. But the problem is if the numinous core of religion is inconceivable, how can we talk about it or explain it? According to him although it is inconceivable, it is somehow within our grasp. We apprehend it in feeling, in the *sensus numinus* and by feeling. The feeling is not mere an emotion but an affective state of mind which involves some kind of valuation and pre-conceptual cognition. The most valuable contribution of Otto consists of his careful analysis of the feelingstates which constitute the numinous experience. There is on the one side what is called 'creature-feeling' that is the feeling of nothingness of finite being. On the other side is the feeling of the presence of an overwhelming Being that is the numinous Being which strikes dumb with amazement. It is summarized in the expression "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*" *Mysterium* points to what is called the 'wholly other' character of the numinous Being, which, as *supra rational*, utterly transcends the grasp of conceptual thought. The element of *tremendum* points to the awe or even the dread experience in face of the majesty, overpoweringness and

Notes

dynamic energy of the numinous presence. The element of fascinans points to the captivating attraction of the numinous Being, evoking rapture and love. The feeling revealed in the analysis of the numinous experience, while analogous to natural feelings, have a unique quality. The *sensus numinis* is something *sui generis*. It cannot be compounded out of merely natural feelings. It cannot even be regarded as evolved from natural feelings. For Otto it is connected with faculty of divination that is a faculty of genuinely cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearance.

These speculations prepare the way for Otto's assertion that the holy is an a priori category. Its non-rational or numinous element is said to arise from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses. The idea of a non-rational category may surprise us. Whatever we may think of the more speculative elements in Otto's thought we must acknowledge that in his analysis of the numinous he has led us into the innermost sanctuary of religion and has described it with extraordinary power.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is the difference between religious feelings and the feeling of the sublime?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Explain about the category of Holy?

.....
.....
.....

2.4 CRITICAL REMARKS

A descriptive approach to religion seems to have much to acclaim it. It plainly places before us what the basic elements in religious experience are, without distorting the picture by introducing doubtful speculations about the possible genesis or ultimate significance of such experience. One can aim at presenting the essence of the phenomenon which appears in the religious consciousness. These thinkers whom we have seen seem to get the essence of the phenomenon, that which is genuinely religion. These thinkers have penetrated to the affective states of mind which lie at the heart of religion which are so often overlooked both in intellectualist accounts and in pragmatic accounts. The intellectualist accounts understand religion as a kind of worldview and pragmatic accounts tries to assimilate religion to morality. An accurate description of the typical experiences of the religious person would seem to provide at least a firm starting-point for an investigation into religion. But the question is, is it enough? Do we need something more? The answer to this question depends on whether or not the religious experience can be regarded as *sui generis*, qualitatively unique and irreducible. Some thinkers take this view but Marett is more cautious. He suggests that the awe which he considers basic to religion may be compounded of natural feelings like fear, love, reverence and the like. Otto and other thinkers think that it is important to maintain the unique quality of the religious experience. But when they try to do this by talking of a faculty of divination or of the theomorphic structure in man, they seem to have left the relatively firm ground of description and receded into a more speculative realm. For example Otto adopts Kantian terminology and speaks of the numinous as an a priori category which undergoes schematization into the idea of the holy. However accurate the descriptions of religious experience that are offered to us may be, it seems that they cannot establish the validity of such experience. Yet on the other hand a clear description of religious experience must be the first step towards its assessment. Perhaps there is

no way at all in which the validity of religious experience can be established. One can only be pointed to the kind of experience which Otto and the others describe and be left to decide about it in the light of the most honest discrimination of one's experience that can be made.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Human not only lives but seeks power for one's life. Religion arises at the point where human's own power is met by another power, such as the mana of primitive religion. It is a strange, wholly other power extends into life. The phenomenology cannot grasp this power in itself but only in the appearance in which it is experienced. It is possible to describe the types of religion in which man is encountered by this wholly other power. Though an unprejudiced or neutral attitude is the ideal, very often it is found as some thing impossible. Religions cannot be laid out on the table and examined like so many natural objects.

2.6 KEY WORDS

Matrix = A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained.

Taboo = A prohibition, especially in Polynesia and other South Pacific islands, excluding something from use, approach, or mention because of its sacred and inviolable nature.

Phenomenology = It is a philosophical approach concentrating on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience. It is the description or study of appearances. This term was introduced by Lambert in 1764. It is philosophical method restricted to the careful analysis of the intellectual processes which we are introspectively aware of. Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are some the important philosophers who used this method in their philosophy.

Sui Generis = is a Latin expression, literally meaning of its own kind/genus or unique in its characteristics. The expression is often used in analytic philosophy to indicate an idea, an entity, or a reality which cannot be included in a wider concept.

2.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What does Marett mean by Mana?
2. What constitutes the core of primitive religious consciousness?
3. What is the difference between religious feelings and the feeling of the sublime?
4. Explain about the category of Holy?

2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Davison, R.F. *Rudolf Otto's Interpretation of Religion*. Princeton, New Jersey, 1947
- Gerrish, Brian A. *A Prince of the Church. Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology*. London / Philadelphia, 1984.
- Marett, Robert R. *Faith, Hope, and Charity in Primitive Religion*. Macmillan Company, 1932.
- Marett, Robert R. *The Threshold of Religion*. Kessinger: 2004,
- Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Tr. J. W. Harvey. New York: 1958.
- Pratt, Bissett James. *The Religious Consciousness*. New York: 2005.

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. The idea of Mana is the central theme of his description. This word takes its origin in the Pacific region. But the idea for which it stands is said to be wide spread among primitive peoples. Generally this word has come to be applied to a certain type of religious experience. Mana as a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of

Notes

ways for good and evil. It is a kind of occult power. This occult force is supposed to attach to a wide range of natural objects and persons. To this force is attributed the success in war, prosperity in agriculture, powers in hunting etc. Mana negatively seen is taboo. That which possesses mana is taboo. This means mana is not to be lightly approached or else its power break forth in a harmful and destructive manner.

2. What constitutes the core of the primitive religious consciousness is nothing other than awe. He describes awe as human being's reaction to the hidden mysterious forces of its environment. It cannot be merely interpreted as fear of the unknown. It is much more than fear. Viewing from this point we can say that religion does not originate just in fear of the unknown. The essential constituents of awe are wonder, admiration, respect, even love.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. Religion is a determination of feeling, a feeling of being absolutely dependent. This feeling is one and the same thing with consciousness of being in relation with God. The original meaning of the word "God" is not a concept of perfect being but the felt relation of absolute dependence. Therefore religion arises not in ideas, in willing, but in the immediate consciousness of an immediate existence-relationship. Religion is more than a determination of feeling. It is the name given to the personal selfconsciousness in which the feeling of absolute dependence and consciousness of the world coexist and must achieve a living, stable order. The feeling of being absolutely dependent is also the feeling of identity through which the individual is conscious of his inner uniqueness. The feeling of absolute dependence is not because of any felt deficiency. The feeling of being absolutely dependent or God consciousness, as he calls it, is discernible only because self-consciousness also involves thinking and willing, which are forms of rational relation between the person and his world, forms involving consciousness of relative dependence and relative freedom. He distinguishes the feeling of being absolutely dependent from the feeling

of relative dependence. In the latter a person stands in the relations of community and reciprocity with nature and society while in the former there is no reciprocity present. Therefore there can be no consciousness of being in relation to God apart from consciousness of being in relation to the world.

Answers to Check Your Progress 3

1. In his book *The Idea of Holy* he tries to make a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back of one's neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses no value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object.

2. When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought together we have the complex category of the holy itself. The word holy can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought conceptually. Thus for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.

UNIT 3: PROBLEMS OF DEFINING RELIGION

STRUCTURE

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Etymology
- 3.3 Definitions of the word Religion
- 3.4 Problems of Defining Religion
- 3.5 Complexities in the Definitions of Religion
- 3.6 Let us sum up
- 3.7 Key Words
- 3.8 Questions for Review
- 3.9 Suggested readings and references
- 3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In a multi-ethnic and philosophically diverse global culture not only religion is undergoing radical changes but also its very meanings and definitions. Therefore the main objective of this unit is to show to students the series of problems that are present in defining religion. In order to do that we will first look at what religion is its etymological meanings and scholarly definitions of theologians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologist and psychologist. Then we will also briefly discuss the various problems and complexities that are present in these definitions and finally with a comprehensive conclusion. Thus it will enable a student

- To know the essence of religion
- To understand its evolutions in the Branches of philosophy
- To see the various paradoxes, complexities or problems that are involved in the definitions

- To have comprehensive outlook towards meaning and definition of religion

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion has continued to play a vital role in the lives of individuals worldwide. Its hold remains as strong as ever among both the under-privileged, as well as the economically and intellectually advanced people. We do well remember that the last but previous American presidential election was also fought on religion, more precisely on Christian religious sentiments and convictions. In Japan in spite of the apparent materialistic culture with the bullet trains, camera cell-phones and pocket-sized supercomputers, it is recognizable that there coexists a thoroughly deified conception of nature. In America, for example, church attendance has remained relatively stable in the past 40 years. In Africa the emergence of Christianity has occurred at a startling rate. While Africa could claim roughly 10 million Christians in 1900, recent estimates put that number closer to 200 million. The rise of Islam as a major world religion, especially its new-found influence in the West, is another significant development. The day-by-day additions of commoners and the celebrities to Buddhism, the increasing influence of the ‘gurus’ and yoga-centres, speak of the vitality of Buddhism and Hinduism beyond Asia. Unfortunately, the only exception to the renewed religious vitality seems to be the Western Europe. (For in Europe 13% of the people declare that they have no religion, 5% are militantly anti-religious, and a much larger percentage than the mentioned here are indifferent to religion although officially said to be belonging to the church). But it cannot refute the spirit of the vitality of religion that is seen today. The question of our discussion here is not over the religious vitality but over the very concept or definition of religion. Does the definition of religion bring us to the whole truth of what religion is? Or what are the problems and complexities that are seriously concerned in defining religion? It would be impossible for one to enter into this realm without going to the etymological meanings and the various scholarly definitions of religion.

3.2 ETYMOLOGY

The etymology of the English word ‘religion’ is said to have possibly emerged from its root ‘religio’ in Latin; ‘Religio’ literally means obligation, bond or reverence. It is also said to be connected with the other following Latin terms: religare, relegere, relinquere. The original ‘religare’ would mean - to bind back, to tie tight/again and it indicates “a bond between man and the gods”; ‘re-legere’ - to read again, or to remove/reduce, (say for example doubts) may express “the scrupulous attention to all the signs and manifestations (omens) of invisible powers shown in the early Roman religion”; and ‘re-linquere’ (to leave again/fully, to give up fully) might mean the monastic life or the aspect of surrender, dependence, and faith expressed in religious worship/life. But it is to the term (religare) that the etymology of the word religion is often connected with perhaps to emphasize the ritualistic nature of religion. Some scholars like Jonathan Z. Smith argue that religion doesn’t really exist — there is only culture. He in his book *Imagining Religion* writes: “while there is a staggering amount of data, phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religion — there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy.” It is true that many societies do not draw a clear line between their culture and what scholars would call “religion.” This does not mean that religion doesn’t exist. Religion does exist, for it is claimed that no human society has ever existed without religion, and would probably never exist without it, and that the aesthetic experience in modernity is nothing but “the secularized rest of and substitute for” an original religious experience. Rudolf Brandner also implies that religion, being fundamental to human existence, will always exist in the human society in spite of all the scientific-technological progress. But in defining the word religion/what religion is one may be fraught with difficulty. Why there are difficulties in defining religion. What are problems and complexities that are involved in defining them should be our serious

concern. To enter into this reality one needs to study the various definitions and descriptions of religion.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is the etymology of the word religion?

.....
.....
.....

2) Existence of religion becomes important why?

.....
.....
.....

3.3 DEFINITIONS OF THE WORD RELIGION

"Religion" is a difficult word to define. This commonly used word seems to have arrived at entire ambiguity in modern times, apparently reflecting the multi-ethnic and philosophically diverse global culture that we currently find ourselves in. Therefore the task of definition finds itself in troubled times, having feet planted firmly in mid-air. Yet this word is not without reference or meaning, and is employed quite often in every day conversation. When we speak of "a Religion", we are using the term to classify something, and when we speak of "the Religious", we are seeking to capture those with some distinguishable characteristics. So what do we actually mean when we use the word "Religion"? Or better put: "How do we define Religion?" This leads us to back to where we started: the task of definition.

DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS

Notes

Dictionaries have made many attempts to define the word religion: The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990): defines religion as “Human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience”

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: "Religion - belief in the existence of god or gods who has / have created the universe and given man a spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body... particular, system of faith and worship based on such a belief...controlling influence on one life; something one is devoted or committed to."

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary: “a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith."

Webster's New World Dictionary (Third College Edition): says "any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy” is religion. This definition would exclude religions that do not engage in worship. It implies that there are two important components to religion. One’s belief and worship in a deity or deities. One’s ethical behavior towards other persons. This dual nature of religion is expressed clearly in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) in Matthew 22:36-39: "Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Wikipedia defines religion as: "... a system of social coherence based on a common group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, traditions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought."

The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: lists the traits of religions as:

- Belief in supernatural beings (gods).
- A distinction between sacred and profane objects.
- Ritual acts focused on sacred objects.
- A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods.
- Characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual, and which are connected in idea with the gods.
- Prayer and other forms of communication with gods.
- A worldview or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it.
- A more or less total organization of one's life based on the worldview.
- A social group bound together by the above.

This definition captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures.

SOME SCHOLARLY DEFINITIONS THEOLOGIANS ON RELIGION

The famous author William James in his book "Religious Experience" gives a famous tentative definition of personal religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine". Through this he gives prime emphasis to the personal dimension of religion. He further states "... the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves there to." For Schleiermacher the sine qua non of religion was experience; a vibrant, deep, and transcendent feeling of the divine which caused him to define religion as "absolute dependence". This feeling of dependence is what Schleiermacher sees in all of the world religions as the tremendous

Notes

sensation invoked at the thought of standing before what is Supreme in the universe. This experiential definition finds a central place in Schleiermacher's religion. The most appealing thought about his definition is that it captures the meaning and purpose conveyed through religious experience. To stand beneath and up against the Ultimate is to find one's self shadowed by its presence, and this experience creates an ardent sense of meaning in discovering where it is that you stand and who it is that you are. Apart from this pragmatic and existential ways of defining religion some prominent theologians' have defined religion in terms of God's mystery, power, transcendence, majesty, and wonder, and religion as the response to these concepts. Such prominent theologians are Augustine, John Calvin, Karl Barth Rudolf Otto etc. But I would like to state the most famous and often quoted definition of religion of Rudolf Otto. He defines religion in terms of "the Holy" (heilige), that is, the mysterious dread and wonder conveyed by the idea of the Ultimate. "The Holy" to Otto is a way in which we understand the aesthetic elements within religion, which emphasize beauty, truth, and goodness. This category of interpretation stresses the great wonder and awe brought about through religion, as well as the earnest moral desire to know and do the good. The another word that Otto coined to categorize and understand religion is called the numinous. The numinous, refers to an intangible, unseen, but compelling reality that inspires both fascination and dread". For Otto, the numinous is a lens through which we can understand the irrational aspects of religion, for the tremendous mystery (mysterium tremendum) of reality is beyond us and therefore cannot be truly understood in rational categories of thought. The another great historian, novelist, theologian and philosopher Mircea Eliade in his "The Sacred and the Profane" partially builds on Otto's The Idea of the Holy to show how religion emerges from the experience of the sacred, and myths of time and nature. His understanding of religion centers on his concept of hierophany (manifestation of the Sacred) —a concept that includes, but is not limited to, the older and more restrictive concept of theophany (manifestation of a God). From the perspective of religious thought, Eliade argues, hierophanies give structure and orientation to the world, establishing a sacred order. The "profane" space of nonreligious

experience can only be divided up geometrically: it has no "qualitative differentiation and, hence, no orientation [is] given by virtue of its inherent structure".

Thus, profane space gives man no pattern for his behavior. In contrast to profane space, the site of a hierophany has a sacred structure to which religious man conforms himself. A hierophany amounts to a "revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding expanse". As an example of "sacred space" demanding a certain response from man, Eliade gives the story of Moses halting before Yahweh's manifestation at the burning bush (Exodus 3: 5) and taking off his shoes. He says religious behavior is not only an imitation of, but also a participation in, sacred events, and thus restores the mythical time of origins. Eliade argues that religious thought in general rests on a sharp distinction between the Sacred and the profane; whether it takes the form of God, gods, or mythical Ancestors, the Sacred contains all "reality", or value, and other things acquire "reality" only to the extent that they participate in the sacred. Paul Connelly another theologian defines religion in terms of the sacred and the spiritual. He says, "Religion originates in an attempt to represent and order beliefs, feelings, imaginings and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual. As this attempt expands in its formulation and elaboration, it becomes a process that creates meaning for itself on a sustaining basis, in terms of both its originating experiences and its own continuing responses."

He defines the sacred as: "The sacred as a mysterious manifestation of power and presence that is experienced as both primordial and transformative, inspiring awe and rapt attention. And the spiritual as" a perception of the commonality of mindfulness in the world that shifts the boundaries between self and other, producing a sense of the union of purposes of self and other in confronting the existential questions of life, and providing a mediation of the challenge-response interaction between self and other, one and many, that underlies existential questions." Another famous protestant theologian Paul Tillich says - Religion is not

Notes

a special function of human spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions... Religion is ultimate concern." God, he says, is human's ultimate concern. The divine is a matter of passion and interest for human being, avoidable only by being completely indifferent. What follows in this definition of religion is that worldviews such as Atheism, Agnosticism, Secular Humanism, Scientism, and Buddhism can be thoroughly held to be religions. This broad definition focuses more on the subject, or the one who believes, than on the actual content or propositional doctrine that is adhered to.

PHILOSOPHERS ON RELIGION

Kant who brought in a Copernican revolution in the modern philosophy, while discussing on concept of God do not focus primarily upon on what religious content and function this concept may have for humans and their activity — e.g., how God may be an object of worship etc., Their focus is more upon properly locating the concept of God within a systematically ordered set of basic philosophical principles that account for the order and structure of world. External ritual, superstition and hierarchical church order he sees all of these as efforts to make oneself pleasing to God in ways other than conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions. The idea of God for Kant is totally immanent within human moral consciousness .For him religion is more intimately affiliated to the social moral order. Religion is well knit within the ethical common world. This linking of morality and religious belief will have positive value for a believer's reflective appropriation and practice of faith.

J. S. Mill, the English philosopher and economist says: "The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the conditions and desires towards an ideal object recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightly paramount over all selfish objects of desire." Hegel defined religion as "the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind." Alfred North whitehead, the English mathematician and process philosopher defines "Religion is what the individual does with

his own solitude. If you are never solitary, you are never religious." Thomas Paine, American political philosopher at the last moment of his life said: "The world is my country, mankind is my brotherhood and to do good is my religion."

SOCIOLOGIST'S ON RELIGION

The classical, seminal sociological theorists of the late 19th and early 20th century were greatly interested in religion and its effects on society. They attempt to explain the dialectical relationship i.e. The effects of society on religion and the effects of religion on society. Karl Marx: For, "Marx did not believe in science for science's sake...he believed that he was also advancing a theory that would...be a useful tool...[in] effecting a revolutionary upheaval of the capitalist system in favor of socialism". As such, the crux of his arguments was that humans are best guided by reason. Religion, Marx held, was a significant hindrance to reason, inherently masking the truth and misguiding followers. He said, "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." It soothes them and dulls their senses to the pain of oppression than for a reform. But later when he proposed an antithesis (freedom as response) to alienation he never suggested that religion ought to be prohibited. Émile Durkheim: Durkheim, a Frenchman, placed himself in the positivist tradition, meaning that he thought of his study of society as dispassionate and scientific. Religion, he argued, was an expression of social cohesion. In his book 'Elementary Forms Of Religious Life' while studying the anthropological data of indigenous Australians especially the totems the aborigines venerate he said they are actually expressions of their own conceptions of society itself. This is true not only for the aborigines, he argues, but for all societies. Therefore Religion, for Durkheim, is not "imaginary, Religion is very real; it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion. We perceive as individuals a force greater than ourselves, which is our social life, and give that perception a supernatural face. Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness, which is the fusion of all of

Notes

our individual consciousnesses which then creates a reality of its own. Durkheim's definition of religion, from *Elementary Forms*, is as follows: "A religion is 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 into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." This is a functional definition of religion, meaning that it explains what religion does in social life: essentially, it unites societies. Max Weber: Weber differed from Marx and Emile Durkheim in that he focused his work on the effects of religious action and inaction. Instead of discussing religion as a kind of misapprehension (an "opiate of the people,") or as social cohesion, Weber did not attempt to reduce religion to its essence. Instead, he examines how religious ideas and groups interacted with other aspects of social life. In doing so, Weber gives religion credit for shaping a person's image of the world, and this image of the world can affect their view of their interests, and ultimately how they decide to take action. For Weber, religion is best understood as it responds to the human need for theodicy and soteriology. Human beings are troubled, he says, with the question of theodicy – the question of how the extraordinary power of a divine God may be reconciled with the imperfection of the world that he has created and rules over. People need to know, for example, why there is undeserved good fortune and suffering in the world. Religion offers people soteriological answers, or answers that provide opportunities for salvation– relief from suffering, and reassuring meaning. Friedrich Engels, the German socialist "Religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their early life."

David Barrett, in *The New Believers*, defines religion as 'a social construct encompassing beliefs and practices which enable people, individually and collectively, to make some sense of the Great Questions of life and death'. B. Malinowski says religion "relieves anxiety and enhances social integration."

ANTHROPOLOGISTS ON RELIGION

Anthropologists tend to see religion as an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences developed as part of a cultural matrix. For example, in Lindbeck's *Nature of Doctrine*, religion does not refer to belief in "God" or a transcendent Absolute. Instead, Lindbeck defines religion as, "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought... it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments." According to this definition, religion refers to one's primary worldview, and how this dictates one's thoughts and actions. Thus religion is considered by some sources to extend to causes, principles, or activities believed in with zeal or conscientious devotion concerning points or matters of ethics or conscience, and not necessarily including belief in the supernatural.

PSYCHOLOGISTS ON RELIGION

With the dawn of psychology religion or defining of religion took a different strand. The psychologists like Freud, Feuerbach, and Carl Jung started to perceive religion as something psychologically produced within human beings and transferred or projected as something outside of themselves. For instance Jung defines religion as "a peculiar attitude of the mind which could be formulated in accordance with the original use of the word *religio*, which means a careful consideration and observation of certain dynamic factors that are conceived as "powers": spirits, demons, gods, laws, ideas, ideals, or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous, or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration, or grand, beautiful, and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshiped and loved.

For Jung religion has its origination in the mind of man. Religion is that mental process by which we adapt ourselves to our concepts of external "powers" and seek to please them by ritual action and contemplation. The mind must play a central role in religious phenomenology and must be given its due place as the determining factor. This will find a very

Notes

naïve interaction between human and divine. Clifford Geertz defined religion as a cultural system: "A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." In short religion is the belief in and worship of an ultimate reality. A particular system of faith and worship based on such a belief; and an interest or pursuit followed with devotion and attachment, and which has a controlling influence on one's life. It is a multifarious phenomenon, which includes various distinct dimensions such as ritual, mythological or narrative, doctrinal, ethical, social or institutional, experiential, and material dimensions. In other words, a religion includes distinctive worldviews, kinds of experience, social patterns, and material forms such as buildings, sacred sites, works of art, and so on. But what actually are the problems these definitions of religion have.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1) Which among the dictionary definitions captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures?

.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) How do you understand the term 'Holy' used by Rudolf Otto in defining religion?

.....
.....
.....
.....

3) What is the idea of God/Religion according Immanuel Kant?

.....
.....
.....
.....

4) Why does Karl Marx call religion as the ‘opium of the people’?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5) How does Max Weber differ from Durkheim and Marx on the concept of religion?

.....
.....
.....
.....

3.4 PROBLEMS OF DEFINING RELIGION

Though we have studied definition given by various dictionaries, academic scholars, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and others still none of the definition is totally satisfying. For either they are intellectual, affective or functional definitions. Taking one and leaving out the other. The various authors keep redefining religion in the light of their own thus making the meaning of ‘religion’ ambiguous and problematic. Mariasusai Dhavamony, speaking of the complications with regard to the concept of religion, says, the term ‘religion’ brings to mind different ideas for different people. Some consider it belief in God or the act of praying or of participating in the ritual. Others understand it to be the act of meditating on something divine, sacred, spiritual. Still others think that it has to do with emotional and individual attitude to something beyond this world. There are some who simply identify religion with morality. The way of studying the religious life of humanity depends to a large extent on one’s experience with what one calls religious. Therefore

it does not seem possible to define religion comprehensively in a precise logical way. Concerning the enormous diversity relating to the concept of religion, Winston L. King says: “So many definitions of religion have been framed in the West over the years that even a partial listing would be impractical.” So let us now turn towards the problems and complexities that are present in the definitions that we have discussed.

3.5 COMPLEXITIES IN THE DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

One of the primary causes for the problem of defining religion is its very complexity of nature. No moment a person can say that he has attained the whole truth of religion or defined the unique essence of religion. This is reason no particular distinctive essence of religion is possible all that one can look for is some common characteristics that would enable one to identify religion. As a result today many scholars of philosophy of religion see the definitions of religion tend to suffer from one of two problems: they are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree as religious, or they are too vague, wide, generic and ambiguous, suggesting that just about any and everything is a religion. A good example of a narrow definition is the common attempt to define “religion” as “belief in God /supernatural. It is effectively excluding polytheistic religions and atheistic religions while including theists who have no religious belief system. Some religion doesn’t accept the idea of the supernatural. For these traditions, religion is entirely natural for example the old religion of Europe and the Scandinavian Myth don't have a supernatural aspect. Their gods and giants are as much a part of the natural world as humans, they are just other races that exist along with us. Another obvious exception to our definitions is Buddhism. It has no central deity and is not even superficially similar to any Western or mid-Eastern-religion. Therefore members of these religions will be rather offended by our claims that what they practice is not religion at all. A good example of a vague definition is the tendency to define religion as a “worldview” — but how can every worldview qualifies as a religion? For instance Edward Caird’s definition of religion as “the expression of man’s ultimate attitude to the universe” or of Vergilius Ferm’s “To be

religious is to effect in some way and in some measure a vital adjustment to whatever is reacted to or regarded implicitly or explicitly as worthy of serious and ulterior concern” are below the sufficient mark as they are too wide definitions to let in even non-religious ideologies within the class of religion. Some of the definitions we have discussed for instance, the definition of William James though he emphasizes on personal spiritual solitude and the term "divine” still we see that he deemphasizes ritual and communal aspects of religion. Etymologically, the word itself, 'religion' comes from the Latin term 'religares', meaning binding together. Community, social groupings of people with similar ideas are important for religion. The Actions, patterns, and practices that are done as a result of individual’s beliefs about what is most crucial in life. This could be going to Church, partaking of the Eucharist, going to Synagogue, practicing group meditation, or participating in religious and philosophical group discussion; all of these construct a framework and therefore cannot be underestimated in the role it plays within religion. Similarly, when James uses the term "divine", this excludes Atheists and Dialectic Materialists from being under the banner of religion, which I find problematic in many ways. The definition of Schleiermacher though broad and experiential definition finds itself as one of the central elements in religion, but like all definitions does not exhaust religion’s entirety. It tends to deemphasize corporate religious experience and relegates his definition to individual existential interaction with the divine. Likewise Schleiermacher’s definition leaves out the ritual cultic actions of religious persons and their impact. Schleiermacher needed to dialogue with Durkheim and Weber to find more of a balance between the personal and social elements, which make up religion.

The definitions of the prominent theologian like Rudolf Otto are not without deficiency. What we see in Otto’s thought is the Kantian abandonment of the reaches and use of logic in understanding theology. All of the concepts that Otto uses are employed to understand and systematize some rational process in the minds of religious devotees, and so to deny the uses of logic and rationality as a way of understanding religion is to miss one side of the coin. But at the same time the Kant-

Notes

Hegelian understanding of God keeping it too rational, beyond and a kind of principle of order is also one sided. The definitions of the psychologists like Jungian though we see a psychological processes within religion still some of his presuppositions and reductive conclusions about the genesis of religion is not much satisfactory.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Why does defining religion become a problem?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) According to scholars of philosophy of religion what are the two problems from which definitions of religion suffer from?

.....
.....
.....
.....

3) What should be our outlook towards religion in our contemporary times?

.....
.....
.....
.....

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Therefore where is the wrong? Is it in the very defining of religion itself or in its reality? Is it possible for any student of philosophy of religion to grasp the essence and characteristics of religion without focusing in the

paradigms of its definitions? So the conclusion that I would draw is that, we have seen both the immense difficulty in defining religion as well as the intense efforts of various scholars to do so. Although the task may seem to be in disarray, under further investigation we come to discover the richness of understanding, the enormous amount of religious vitality brought about through this task of definition. Though Religious scholars have a keen way of disagreeing with definitions other than their own; they forget that the disagreement lies within emphasis not within substance. Each definition is a piece of the whole, limited by individual's presuppositions and perspective fields of study. Yet when we analyze the definitions throughout religious studies we can come to some sort of consensus of what religion truly is about. It is apparent that religion can be seen as a theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological phenomenon of human kind. To limit religion to only one of these categories is to miss its multifaceted nature and lose out on the complete definition.

3.7 KEY WORDS

Numinous - refers to an intangible, unseen, but compelling reality that inspires both fascination and dread.

Mysterium Tremendum - Tremendous Mystery

Worldview - A worldview is a set of basic, foundational beliefs concerning deity, humanity and the rest of the universe.

Religion/ Religious - When we speak of "a Religion", we are using the term to classify something, and when we speak of "the Religious", we are seeking to capture those with some distinguishable characteristics.

3.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) What is the etymology of the word religion?
- 2) Existence of religion becomes important why?
- 3) Which among the dictionary definitions captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures?
- 4) How do you understand the term 'Holy' used by Rudolf Otto in defining religion?

- 5) What is the idea of God/Religion according Immanuel Kant?
- 6) Why does Karl Marx call religion as the ‘opium of the people’?
- 7) How does Max Weber differ from Durkheim and Marx on the concept of religion?
- 8) Why does defining religion become a problem?
- 9) According to scholars of philosophy of religion what are the two problems from which definitions of religion suffer from? .

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Ambrosio, J. Introduction: Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Dhammananda, K. Why Religion? Kuala Lumpur: The Buddhist Missionary Society, 1966.
- Geertz, Clifford. Interpretation of Cultures. London: Fontana Press, 1844.
- Harrison, Victoria S. “The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World”. International Journal for Philosophy and Religion. Vol. 59, No. 3 June 2006.
- Kevin J. Christiano, et al. Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments. 2nd ed. New York Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008
- Marx, Karl. Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. New York: Fordham University Press, 1817.
- Walsh, W. H. “Kant, Immanuel: Philosophy of Religion.” In: The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. IV. Paul Edwards, ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. & The Free Press, 1967.
- Weber, Max. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Los Angeles: Roxbury Company, 2002.

3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. The etymology of the English word 'religion' is said to have possibly emerged from its root 'religio' in Latin; 'Religio' literally means obligation, bond or reverence. It is also said to be connected with the other following Latin terms: religare, relegere, relinquere. The original 'religare' would mean - to bind back, to tie tight/again and it indicates "a bond between man and the gods"; 're-legere' - to read again, or to remove/reduce, (say for example doubts) may express "the scrupulous attention to all the signs and manifestations (omens) of invisible powers shown in the early Roman religion"; and 're-linquare' (to leave again/fully, to give up fully) might mean the monastic life or the aspect of surrender, dependence, and faith expressed in religious worship/life. But it is to the term (religare) that the etymology of the word religion is often connected with perhaps to emphasize the ritualistic nature of religion.

2. It is true that many societies do not draw a clear line between their culture and what scholars would call "religion." This does not mean that religion doesn't exist. Religion does exist, for it is claimed that no human society has ever existed without religion, and would probably never exist without it, and that the aesthetic experience in modernity is nothing but "the secularized rest of and substitute for" an original religious experience.

Answers to Check your Progress 2

1. The definition given in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures of the its comprehensive traits such as: Belief in supernatural beings (gods) - A distinction between sacred and profane objects - Ritual acts focused on sacred objects - A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods - Characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual, and which are connected in idea with the gods - Prayer

Notes

and other forms of communication with gods - A worldview or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it - A more or less total organization of one's life based on the worldview - A social group bound together by the above.

2. He defines religion in terms of "the Holy" (heilige), that is, the mysterious dread and wonder conveyed by the idea of the Ultimate. "The Holy" to Otto is a way in which we understand the aesthetic elements within religion, which emphasize beauty, truth, and goodness. This category of interpretation stresses the great wonder and awe brought about through religion, as well as the earnest moral desire to know and do the good.

3. For Kant, God does not focus primarily upon on what religious content and function this concept may have for humans and their activity — e.g., how God may be an object of worship etc., Their focus is more upon properly locating the concept of God within a systematically ordered set of basic philosophical principles that account for the order and structure of world. External ritual, superstition and hierarchical church order he sees all of these as efforts to make oneself pleasing to God in ways other than conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions. The idea of God for Kant is totally immanent within human moral consciousness .For him religion is more intimately affiliated to the social moral order.

4. Marx said, "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." Because it soothes them and dulls their senses to the pain of oppression than for a reform.

5. Weber differed from Marx and Emile Durkheim in that he focused his work on the effects of religious action and inaction. Instead of discussing religion as a kind of misapprehension (an "opiate of the people,") or as

social cohesion, Weber did not attempt to reduce religion to its essence. Instead, he examines how religious ideas and groups interacted with other aspects of social life. In doing so, Weber gives religion credit for shaping a person's image of the world, and this image of the world can affect their view of their interests, and ultimately how they decide to take action.

Answers to Check Your Progress 3

1. The term 'religion' brings to mind different ideas for different people. Some consider it belief in God or the act of praying or of participating in the ritual. Others understand it to be the act of meditating on something divine, sacred, spiritual. Still others think that it has to do with emotional and individual attitude to something beyond this world. There are some who simply identify religion with morality. The way of studying the religious life of humanity depends to a large extent on one's experience with what one calls religious. Therefore it does not seem possible to define religion comprehensively in a precise logical way.

2. The scholars of philosophy of religion see the definitions of religion tend to suffer from one of two problems: they are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree as religious, or they are too vague, wide, generic and ambiguous, suggesting that just about any and everything is a religion.

3. Our outlook needs to be total and comprehensive for it is apparent that religion can be seen as a theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological phenomenon of human kind. But to limit religion to only one of these categories is to miss its multifaceted nature and lose out on the complete definition.

UNIT 4: MEANING AND NATURE OF RELIGION

STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Meaning of Religion
- 4.3 Nature of Religion
- 4.4 Developmental Stages of Religion
- 4.5 Let us sum up
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Questions for Review
- 4.8 Suggested readings and references
- 4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we try to understand:

- The very meaning of religion leaving the discussions on definitions and the theories of the origin of religion since those are the topics of the subsequent units.
- However, meaning and nature cannot be dealt-with without touching both those topics as well.
- So, we will refer to them without going into the details of them. After going through the etymological meaning of the word, we will make a search into the different meanings of religion from the background of various disciplines like phenomenology, sociology, psychology etc.
- Thereafter, we will look into the nature and developing stages of religions.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

What is religion? It is a very complicated question to have an appropriate answer. We know religion and we live religion. But, how do we explain or define religion? Religion is one of the most sensitive and vulnerable aspects of human life from the very beginning. Though it looks simple, it is not a simple reality to be easily defined or explained. There are many theories proposed regarding the origin of religion as a result of the development of speculative, intellectual and scientific mind. However, in spite of the differences in the understanding of this important element, it is confirmed that it is purely a human activity and it has become an inevitable aspect of human life. In the West, under the influence of the inherited tradition of Judeo-Christian tradition, religion was understood more theistically while in the East, it was mostly a response to the experience of the natural powers that are beyond human control and also to the inner urge for an ethical and moral reference.

Religion is a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements. However, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion.

Different religions may or may not contain various elements ranging from the divine, sacred things, faith, a supernatural being or supernatural beings or "some sort of intimacy and transcendence that will provide norms and power for the rest of life". Religious practices may include rituals, sermons, commemoration or veneration (of deities), sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trances, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, prayer, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture. Religions have sacred histories and narratives, which may be preserved in sacred scriptures, and symbols and holy places that aim mostly to give a meaning to life. Religions may contain symbolic stories, which are sometimes said by followers to be true, that have the side purpose of explaining the origin of life, the universe, and

Notes

other things. Traditionally, faith, in addition to reason, has been considered a source of religious beliefs.

There are an estimated 10,000 distinct religions worldwide, but about 84% of the world's population is affiliated with one of the five largest religion groups, namely Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or forms of folk religion. The religiously unaffiliated demographic includes those who do not identify with any particular religion, atheists, and agnostics. While the religiously unaffiliated have grown globally, many of the religiously unaffiliated still have various religious beliefs.

The study of religion encompasses a wide variety of academic disciplines, including theology, comparative religion and social scientific studies. Theories of religion offer various explanations for the origins and workings of religion, including the ontological foundations of religious being and belief.

Religion (from O.Fr. religion religious community, from L. religionem (nom. religio) "respect for what is sacred, reverence for the gods, sense of right, moral obligation, sanctity", "obligation, the bond between man and the gods") is derived from the Latin religiō, the ultimate origins of which are obscure. One possible interpretation traced to Cicero, connects lego read, i.e. re (again) with lego in the sense of choose, go over again or consider carefully. The definition of religion by Cicero is cultum deorum, "the proper performance of rites in veneration of the gods." Julius Caesar used religio to mean "obligation of an oath" when discussing captured soldiers making an oath to their captors. The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder used the term religio on elephants in that they venerate the sun and the moon. Modern scholars such as Tom Harpur and Joseph Campbell favor the derivation from ligare bind, connect, probably from a prefixed re-ligare, i.e. re (again) + ligare or to reconnect, which was made prominent by St. Augustine, following the interpretation given by Lactantius in *Divinae institutiones*, IV, 28. The medieval usage alternates with order in designating bonded communities

like those of monastic orders: "we hear of the 'religion' of the Golden Fleece, of a knight 'of the religion of Avys'".

In classic antiquity, 'religio' broadly meant conscientiousness, sense of right, moral obligation, or duty to anything. In the ancient and medieval world, the etymological Latin root *religio* was understood as an individual virtue of worship in mundane contexts; never as doctrine, practice, or actual source of knowledge. In general, *religio* referred to broad social obligations towards anything including family, neighbors, rulers, and even towards God. *Religio* was most often used by the ancient Romans not in the context of a relation towards gods, but as a range of general emotions such as hesitation, caution, anxiety, fear; feelings of being bound, restricted, inhibited; which arose from heightened attention in any mundane context. The term was also closely related to other terms like *scrupulus* which meant "very precisely" and some Roman authors related the term *superstitio*, which meant too much fear or anxiety or shame, to *religio* at times. When *religio* came into English around the 1200s as religion, it took the meaning of "life bound by monastic vows" or monastic orders. The compartmentalized concept of religion, where religious things were separated from worldly things, was not used before the 1500s. The concept of religion was first used in the 1500s to distinguish the domain of the church and the domain of civil authorities.

In the ancient Greece, the Greek term *threskeia* was loosely translated into Latin as *religio* in late antiquity. The term was sparsely used in classical Greece but became more frequently used in the writings of Josephus in the first century CE. It was used in mundane contexts and could mean multiple things from respectful fear to excessive or harmfully distracting practices of others; to cultic practices. It was often contrasted with the Greek word *deisidaimonia* which meant too much fear.

The modern concept of religion, as an abstraction that entails distinct sets of beliefs or doctrines, is a recent invention in the English language. Such usage began with texts from the 17th century due to events such the

Notes

splitting of Christendom during the Protestant Reformation and globalization in the age of exploration, which involved contact with numerous foreign cultures with non-European languages. Some argue that regardless of its definition, it is not appropriate to apply the term religion to non-Western cultures. Others argue that using religion on non-Western cultures distorts what people do and believe.

The concept of religion was formed in the 16th and 17th centuries, despite the fact that ancient sacred texts like the Bible, the Quran, and others did not have a word or even a concept of religion in the original languages and neither did the people or the cultures in which these sacred texts were written. For example, there is no precise equivalent of religion in Hebrew, and Judaism does not distinguish clearly between religious, national, racial, or ethnic identities. One of its central concepts is halakha, meaning the walk or path sometimes translated as law, which guides religious practice and belief and many aspects of daily life. Even though the beliefs and traditions of Judaism are found in the ancient world, ancient Jews saw Jewish identity as being about an ethnic or national identity and did not entail a compulsory belief system or regulated rituals. Even in the 1st century CE, Josephus had used the Greek term *ioudaismos*, which some translate as Judaism today, even though he used it as an ethnic term, not one linked to modern abstract concepts of religion as a set of beliefs. It was in the 19th century that Jews began to see their ancestral culture as a religion analogous to Christianity. The Greek word *theskeia*, which was used by Greek writers such as Herodotus and Josephus, is found in the New Testament. *Theskeia* is sometimes translated as religion in today's translations; however, the term was understood as worship well into the medieval period. In the Quran, the Arabic word *din* is often translated as religion in modern translations, but up to the mid-1600s translators expressed *din* as law.

The Sanskrit word *dharma*, sometimes translated as religion, also means law. Throughout classical South Asia, the study of law consisted of concepts such as penance through piety and ceremonial as well as

practical traditions. Medieval Japan at first had a similar union between imperial law and universal or Buddha law, but these later became independent sources of power.

Throughout the Americas, Native Americans never had a concept of "religion" and any suggestion otherwise is a colonial imposition by Christians.

Though traditions, sacred texts, and practices have existed throughout time, most cultures did not align with Western conceptions of religion since they did not separate everyday life from the sacred. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the terms Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, and world religions first entered the English language. No one self-identified as a Hindu or Buddhist or other similar terms before the 1800s. "Hindu" has historically been used as a geographical, cultural, and later religious identifier for people indigenous to the Indian subcontinent. Throughout its long history, Japan had no concept of religion since there was no corresponding Japanese word, nor anything close to its meaning, but when American warships appeared off the coast of Japan in 1853 and forced the Japanese government to sign treaties demanding, among other things, freedom of religion, the country had to contend with this Western idea.

According to the philologist Max Müller in the 19th century, the root of the English word religion, the Latin *religio*, was originally used to mean only reverence for God or the gods, careful pondering of divine things, piety (which Cicero further derived to mean diligence). Max Müller characterized many other cultures around the world, including Egypt, Persia, and India, as having a similar power structure at this point in history. What is called ancient religion today, they would have only called law

4.2 MEANING OF RELIGION

Etymologically, the word 'religion' is derived from the Latin root *religare* and it means 'to bind fast'. Then 'religion' has certainly a strong

Notes

emphasis on community aspect. It is something that binds fast the members of it together. When we start thinking seriously on religion, naturally we fall upon thoughts of the definition of religion. There are numberless definitions of religion. The meaning and definition of religion differs according to the socio-cultural and psychological background of the person who reflects upon it. Even the political settings insert its influence on the understanding of the meaning of religion. Some of the definitions are phenomenological and try to expose the common elements that we see in the acknowledged world religions. For example, the human recognition of a superhuman power entitled to obedience and worship. Some others are interpretative definitions. Under this we may group the psychological definitions – the feelings, acts and experiences of the individual men in so far as they consider themselves to stand in relations to what they may call the divine; sociological definitions – a set of beliefs, practices and institutions which men have evolved in various societies; naturalistic definitions – a body of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties; and religious definitions – religion is the recognition that everything in the world is the manifestation of a power that is beyond human intellect. None of these definitions, nevertheless, are complete and exhaustive. The word religion is not an exclusive word rather it is inclusive. It includes manifold elements and aspects of life like beliefs, feelings, experiences, values, symbols, worship, rituals, festivals, cult and cultures, myth and mythology. Studying the primitive religion, the anthropologist Sir E.B. Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* gives a short definition of religion where he understands religion as “the belief in spiritual beings.” There are many objections raised against such understanding of religion on the basis of its incompleteness. The critics argue that ‘besides belief, practice also must be emphasised.

Another objection is that the faith and believes and the practices are not always towards spiritual beings. Or else, our scope of belief must be extended and widened to include even ‘nothing’. However, there are also positive side in looking at religion from that perspective. It makes very clear about the religious attitude of the believers and also the object to

which the believers refer to. According to another anthropologist Sir J.G. Frazer, as presented in his book the Golden Bough, 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. This shows that powers referred to in this context are always of superior nature (superior to man). To cope with these supra-human powers, ancient religion made use of magic, sorcery, taboos, myth and mythological stories and so on.

Religion is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, and involve devotional and ritual observances. They also often contain a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Ever since the world began, man has demonstrated a natural inclination towards faith and worship of anything he considered superior/difficult to understand. His religion consisted of trying to appease and get favors from the supreme being he feared. This resulted in performing rituals (some of them barbaric) and keeping traditions or laws to earn goodness and/or everlasting life.

Christianity has always stressed a personal relationship with God as the touchstone of religion. When God created Adam and Eve, He walked with them in the Garden of Eden, in the cool of the day, and enjoyed their fellowship. Religion was, and still is, a close, personal, and satisfying relationship with the creator God.

Down through the ages men have devoted their entire life to enjoying this personal relationship with a God who loves the fellowship of human beings. Abraham was called the 'friend of God' in 2 Chronicles 20:7 and James 2:23. Genesis 18:17 -- "Then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?'" Exodus 33:11 says, "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend." David is

Notes

called a man after God's own heart in 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22. The list is endless.

Blaise Pascal (French Mathematician, Philosopher, and Physicist 1623-1662) said, "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the creator, made known through Jesus."

Christianity is more than a religion; it is a relationship with Jesus Christ. John 15:9 says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now continue in my love." John 15:15, "I have called you friends." John 17:24, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am." John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends." In John 10, Jesus makes several statements demonstrating His deep love for us -- "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I know my sheep and my sheep know me -- and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Jesus summarized the true meaning of religion in Matthew 22:37-40, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself."

The academic study of religions started in the Western world in the early 19th century due to the history of thought inspired by philosophers of the enlightenment period of 18th century Europe. When new information collected by explorers and missionaries about ancient religious traditions (the philosophies in India and the Far East in particular) reached the scholarly circles in Europe, it became necessary to redefine the very definition of religion.

The concept, which to that point had meant only Christianity and Judaism- sometimes also Islam- began to cover such Eastern religious philosophies as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, etc. The new discipline, called "history of religions" or

“comparative religion,” became general and comparative in its approaches.

Phenomenology of religion, as one of its main branches, indicated such a variety in the field that it has been difficult for scholars of religions to present a concise definition- that at the same time would include the most essentials about religiosity itself and be valid for whatever literate and illiterate religion in the world is concerned. One of the many efforts to define religion was based on the criterion of the concept of “God” or “deity,” until scholars found that Buddhism as one of the so- called world religions- at least in theory- tried to emphasize its special label as an “atheistic” religion.

The narrow concept of religion, more often pressed by government officials than scholars of religion, needs reconsideration in the contemporary world. The word “religion” found in one form or another in most European, i.e., Germanic, Romanic and Slavic, languages, comes from a Latin word “religio.” This concept in particular includes the idea of being dependent upon something “divine.” The principle “cuius regio eius religio” in Latin, accordingly, meant that the emperor or a duke had the power since the 16th century to decide in what way his countrymen should believe and behave in post- Reformation Europe. The whole problem of the existence of divine or social “ties” of this kind is very Western, however, and the idea itself in fact is completely absent in many cultures in the world.

So this kind of Western assumption of religion can only be applied by force into ancient Eastern religio- philosophical traditions. Such a statement has even been made that the three main variants of Chinese world views- Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism- are not at all religions in the Western meaning of the word but rather “three Taos” or “roads” to one destination, which is the principle of the harmony between Yang and Yin.

Notes

In other words, there are many cultures in the world which seem to be very religious in spite of the fact that they have gotten along without “religio”-related concepts in their respective languages. This particularly concerns the Northern cultures in the old and new worlds among which we have done field work: people practice animistic and shamanic rituals without calling them religions. A statement made to us in 1994 by a Nanay shamaness at the Lower Amur region in southeastern Siberia may be quoted as a typical example of this: “Christianity- it is Russian. We have our shamans only.”

Another current problem concerns the role of the many contemporary functional alternatives of religions. Recent world history shows that such efforts as Communism, Marxism and Maoism to make up a “non- religious” state and society have been quite unsuccessful. The human mind has clearly shown itself to be more interested in religious affairs than it had been thought in these and other materialistic and anthropocentric ideologies born during the previous as well as this century.

4.3 NATURE OF RELIGION

The Primitive Forms of Religions The religion is often spoken in relation to something sacred. There is no religion without having such a notion. Now the various aspects/concepts used to express the general characteristics of this ‘sacred’ in the primitive religion were very simple. The notions like ‘unseen’, ‘unknown’, ‘infinite’ ‘immanence and transcendence’ etc. are notions of advanced theology. The ancient notions used are rather quasi-negative. Scholars trace the following general characteristics of the ‘sacred’ which may explain the nature of it in the primitive thought.

- i) The sacred as the forbidden: Polynesian term taboo in the primitive religion could be one that comes close and conveys the sense of ‘sacred’ – scer and sanctus. This point to the idea that something is ‘marked off’ as to be shunned. Thus

enforced a sense of mystic sanction or penalty if avoided. Because of this aspect of sanction and punishment added, taboo comes to stand for un-cleanliness and sin on the one hand, and while it can also be interpreted as means of self protection on the part of the sacred against defying contact on the other hand.

- ii) The sacred as the mysterious: This is another quasi-negative notion regarding the sacred. What was strange and new was treated in the primitive time as sacred having non-normal nature. We cannot say it as abnormal rather it was non-normal nature. It was indeed a mystery, something beyond the human grasp, human understanding and control.
- iii) The sacred as the secret: The sacred was understood having a mystic and mysterious power and therefore, it was something secret. This sense of secret was emphasised and projected strongly through the insistence of exoticism, initiation, exclusion of women etc. from the religious moments of rites and rituals.
- iv) The sacred as potent: Perhaps one of the positive and most fundamental conception of the sacred is that the efficacy of the sacredness is identified with the magical and mystical power attributed to it. Everything is understood as having an indwelling potency, but whatever is sacred manifests this potency in an extra-ordinary degree.
- v) The sacred as the animate: There are lots of evidences to show that the primitive gods were conceived as personified anthropomorphic characters dwelling somewhere apart.
- vi) The sacred as ancient: another element found in the primitive religion is the practice of ancestor worship – the organized cult of ancestors marking a stage of development in the primitive way of thinking. The ancestor worship is found even in religions that are purely ethical like the Chinese primitive religions.

Notes

Higher Forms of Religion The higher forms of religions have developed on a pre-existing basis through a process of selection and development. Certainly it must have been in response to the demands of modern advanced thinking, need of better expressions, harmony between past and present experiences; and also to reach a position which shall satisfy the demands of feeling and reflexion and give confidence for facing the future challenges. The motive forces that urged for a better presentation of religion could be:-

- i) The rapid progress on scientific knowledge and thought;
- ii) Changes in the Social order of man;
- iii) The enriched forms of ideas and expressions;
- iv) The deeper intellectual interest in the subject; and
- v) The modern tendencies to avoid superstitions and to substitute it with more rational and scientific thoughts

The higher forms of religions discuss reality in terms of transcendence, oneness, supremacy and absoluteness, and also about the ethical schemes in relation to social unity and harmony, justice, human destiny, human freedom, etc. Ethical element is of fundamental importance in determining the quality of a religion. It is a powerful factor in elevating the object of worship, the religious relation, and the religious life. Another important aspect that the religion is concerned is the problem of eschatology. It is related to the ultimate destiny of man and the world. Eschatological motives may powerfully affect the working of religion. In the primitive religions, the eschatological ideas gather round the fate of the dead, and are unleavened by ethical elements while in the higher religions, it was accelerated by the quickened moral consciousness and the sense of the value of the individual. The very often accepted world religions are Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism. In history we see that there were different approaches to God and religion. From the negative perspective, we see the trend of atheism. It is the belief that there is no God of any kind. Another trend is agnosticism which literally means 'not-knowism'. That means, we

are not able to affirm or deny the existence of God. This trend argues that our intellect is incapable of knowing God and making any kind of judgement on God. Still another stand is scepticism. This approach simply means doubting. That means, we cannot have certainty about anything, not even on material things. Then, of course, we cannot speak with surety about metaphysical and abstract realities. There is still another perspective, that is, naturalism. According to this theory, every aspect of human existence and experience including moral and religious life could be properly and adequately explained in terms of nature. Coming to the positive approaches to God and religion, deism can refer to the trend of thought according to which this universe was created and set on motion by a God and left it alone to operate. The deists teach that natural theology is enough to explain the religious matters. Finally, perhaps not the last, the common stand, that is theism. Theism refers to a particular doctrine concerning the nature of a God and his relationship to the universe. It conceives of a God as personal and active in the governance and organization of the world and the universe.

Besides the family, religion is one of the largest social institutions that sociologists study. Throughout history, religion has been a central part of all known human societies. Sociologists study religion to understand religious experiences around the world and how religion is tied to other social institutions. They study religion objectively, and their purpose is not to judge. They do not attempt to say whether any religion is right or wrong. Instead, sociologists try to determine why religions take a particular form and how religious activities affect society as a whole.

Religion: Profane vs. Sacred

Religion can be defined as a social institution involving beliefs and practices based on the sacred. To better understand this definition, let's also define two other terms: profane and sacred. We define most objects or experiences as profane, which is an ordinary element of everyday life. Objects, like beds, computers, and phones, are profane,

Notes

as are experiences, like going to work or brushing our teeth. Beyond the profane, most of us also consider some things sacred, which is set apart as extraordinary or holy and worthy of honor. Objects, like the Bible and the cross, and experiences, like taking communion, are sacred to some people.

Examples of things we may find sacred and profane in our daily lives

Profane and Sacred Examples

The dichotomy between the profane and the sacred is at the heart of religion. However, the objects or experiences that are considered profane and sacred aren't universal. For example, although most people regard most books as profane, there are others that certain religions consider sacred: Muslims venerate the Qur'an, and Christians revere the Holy Bible. Regarding experiences, Muslims remove their shoes before entering a mosque to avoid defiling a sacred place with shoes that have touched the profane ground outside. Christians do not use the sacred name of God while cursing, which is actually where the term 'profanity' originated - to profane the name of God.

Faith: Rituals and Totems

Sociology, even as a science, does not attempt to prove or disprove religious doctrine. Religion is a matter of faith, which can be defined as belief based on conviction rather than scientific evidence. Faith is frequently portrayed through the use of rituals and totems.

Rituals are formal, ceremonial behaviors that represent religious meanings. Rituals rely on symbols to convey their meaning and to reinforce that meaning for participants. Reading from the Torah during a bar mitzvah and touching the mezuzah when going through a doorway are examples of rituals in Judaism.

A totem is an object that is collectively sacred. Totems frequently symbolize both a group of people and that which the group considers sacred. For example, the image of the Buddha often serves as an icon

representing the Buddhist tradition and community. To practicing Buddhists, it also represents the teachings and enlightenment of the Buddha.

Religious Organizations

Sociologists categorize the hundreds of different religious organizations by comparing them to churches and sects. It's important to note that every religion doesn't necessarily conform 100% to one or the other. Churches and sects merely represent ideal types, which help sociologists to make comparisons.

A church can be defined as a type of religious organization that is well integrated into the larger society. Churches have well-established rules and expect their leaders to be formally trained, educated, and/or ordained. Churches are integrated into the larger society in that they exist within neighborhoods and communities. It is commonplace for people to be members of churches and to treat the church as an ordinary aspect of life, just like work or school. Although most people associate the word 'church' with the building, with this sociological definition, churches would not only include the organizations that are based in Christian and Catholic worship centers but also those based in Muslim mosques, Jewish synagogues, and more.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is the meaning of religion?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What are the various ways of defining religion?

.....
.....
.....
.....

4.4 DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF RELIGION

As we discuss on religion and its stages of development, certainly it is necessary to look at the beginnings of the thought. As it is mentioned already, transition to higher forms of religion was inevitable in the rapidly changing social situations. There was urgency for man to reconsider current and inherited beliefs and practices to gain some harmony between past and the present experiences. As a result we see the developments from the very basic worship patterns of the primitive man to that of the present age. The developmental stages of the evolution of religion could be enumerated as Totemism, Animism, Pantheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, Monism.

The terms of totemism and animism are used to explain the set of religious beliefs of the lower caste. The essential feature of totemism is the belief in a supernatural connection between a group of people and a group of objects like certain animal species, sometimes plants, or more rarely other objects. Usually there is a taboo on killing or eating an animal totem. In totemism we find that plant species may be totems just as animal species or rocks are. Animism denotes the collection of beliefs possessed by the Dravidian tribes who have not even nominally been admitted to the caste system. The general nature of animism may perhaps be explained as the belief that everything which has life or motion has also a soul or spirit, and all natural phenomena are caused by direct personal agency. The theistic tradition recognizes and accepts the existence of God, more specifically a personal God. Therefore, theism is often understood as synonym for monotheism. It is a belief in a personal god. Pantheism is ‘God-is-all-ism’. According to this view all is God and

God is all. God is identical with the world and nature. In other words, God and universe are one. God is not a reality separate from the world and remote from it. The particular individual objects have no absolute existence of their own, rather they are either the different modes of the universal substance or parts of the divine whole. Polytheism, according to the German Sociologist Max Müller, was the form of worship of God during the ancient times. Polytheism is the stage of development in the religious thought when the belief in and worship of many individual Gods existed. Indeed, it was the result of the anthropomorphic personification of the natural powers that was beyond the control of human. In other words, such natural powers were personified and attributed to them of the human powers and qualities but with maximum nature. The sociopolitical and cultural conditions and circumstances affected the forms assumed by the beliefs and worships of these many Gods. Monotheism is the beginning of believing in one Supreme God even in the polytheistic situation. In the monotheistic tradition we see that there is a demand to abandon many older beliefs, hopes, fears and customs relating to many gods. Even though they have the concept of many gods, they believe in one Supreme God and other gods are only subordinate. Or they believed, as Max Müller observes, that the multiple gods are only the manifestations of the one supreme. Monism is the belief in one reality. The word was coined by Christian Wolf in the west though it was existed from the ancient times.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Religion being an undeniable aspect of human life, any study on human life will remain half done if this particular aspect is not taken into consideration. Religion is being studied from different perspectives and it could be investigated from Sociological, Anthropological, Phenomenological, Philosophical, Ethical and Aesthetical perspectives. Today there is an added scope, that is, the field of comparative religion. It is an urgent need and demand of the present world community to promote mutual, mature and unprejudiced understanding of others and their religiousness. We are living in a postmodern world. And our world is becoming a global village in every aspect. So, none can live in an

isolated world of one's own. This postmodern existential predicament in a way compels every person to learn more about oneself and also about others. It will certainly enhance one's life and it will certainly facilitate the peaceful co-existence of human as a whole, promote mature and unprejudiced relations, and without doubt, it will help everyone develop an integral vision of life and to work for the welfare of the whole world.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Which are the developmental stages of the evolution of religion?

2) Why is the study of religion, especially the comparative study of religion relevant and urgently needed today?

.....
.....
.....

4.6 KEY WORDS

Atheism – it is the belief that there is no God of any kind.

Agnosticism – it means ‘not-knowism’ which implies that we are not able to affirm or deny the existence of God.

Skepticism – it means doubting. That means, we cannot have certainty about anything, either of material or of spiritual things.

Naturalism – it means every aspect of human existence and experience including moral and religious life could be properly and adequately explained in terms of nature.

Deism – it means this universe was created and set on motion by a God and left it alone to operate.

Totemism – it is the belief in a supernatural connection between a group of people and a group of objects like certain animal species, sometimes plants, or more rarely other objects.

Animism – it the belief that everything which has life or motion has also a soul or spirit, and all natural phenomena are caused by direct personal agency.

Pantheism – it is ‘God-is-all-ism’, which all is God and God is all and God is not a reality separate from the world and remote from it.

Polytheism – it is the belief in and worship of many individual Gods.

Monotheism - it is belief in one Supreme God and considers other gods as subordinate.

Monism – it is the belief in the existence of only one reality.

4.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) What is the meaning of religion?
- 2) What are the various ways of defining religion?
- 3) Which are the developmental stages of the evolution of religion?

- 4) Why is the study of religion, especially the comparative study of religion relevant and urgently needed today?

4.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Charlesworth, Max. *Philosophy and Religion: from Plato to Postmodernism*. England: One World Pub., 2006.
- Hastings, James. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. Vols. 12. New York: T 7 T Clark, 1980.
- Hick, John H. *Philosophy of Religion*. 4th Edition. Delhi: Pearson Education Pte. Ltd., 1990.
- Nayak, G.C. *Understanding Religious Phenomenon*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Pub., 1997.
- Schleiermacher, Friederich. *On Religion*. London: Harper Tochbook, 1958.
- Smith, Huston. *The Religions of Man*. New York: Harper and Row Pub., 1958.

Notes

- Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *The Meaning and End of Religions: a Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions*. London: SPCK, 1978.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *A Concise Encyclopaedia of the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: One World Pub., 2006.
- Morreall, John; Sonn, Tamara (2013). "Myth 1: All Societies Have Religions". *50 Great Myths of Religion*. Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 12–17. ISBN 978-0-470-67350-8.
- Nongbri, Brent (2013). *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0-300-15416-0.
- James 1902, p. 31.
- Durkheim 1915.
- Tillich, P. (1957) *Dynamics of faith*. Harper Perennial; (p. 1).
- Vergote, A. (1996) *Religion, Belief and Unbelief. A Psychological Study*, Leuven University Press. (p. 16)
- James, Paul & Mandaville, Peter (2010). *Globalization and Culture, Vol. 2: Globalizing Religions*. London: Sage Publications.
- Faith and Reason by James Swindal, in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
- African Studies Association; University of Michigan (2005). *History in Africa*. 32. p. 119.
- "The Global Religious Landscape". 18 December 2012. Retrieved 18 December 2012.

4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. The word 'religion' is derived from the Latin root *religare* and it means 'to bind fast'. Then 'religion' has certainly a strong emphasis on community aspect. It is something that binds fast the members of it together. What we call religion is very complex and inclusive. It includes manifold elements and aspects of life like beliefs, feelings, experiences,

values, symbols, worship, rituals, festivals, cult and cultures, myth and mythology.

2. The different ways of defining religion are phenomenological, psychological, sociological, naturalistic, and religious.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. The developmental stages of the evolution of religion are - Totemism, Animism, Pantheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, Monism.
2. The postmodern world in which we live is becoming a global village in every aspect. At the same time we encounter elements of social unrest and atrocities on the basis of religion in every part of the world. It is due to the fanatic thoughts that creep into the mind of people due to sheer ignorance about the true teachings of both one's own religion and of other religions. This compels every person to learn more about oneself and also about others. And the study of religions both of one's own and of others will certainly enhance one's life and it will certainly facilitate the peaceful co-existence of human as a whole, promote mature and unprejudiced relations, and without doubt, it will help everyone develop an integral vision of life and to work for the welfare of the whole world. Hence it is relevant and much needed in the modern world.

UNIT 5: NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

STRUCTURE

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 God as Creator
- 5.3 God is Eternal
- 5.4 God is Omnipotent
- 5.5 God's Omniscience
- 5.6 God is Simple
- 5.7 God's Necessity
- 5.8 Let us sum up
- 5.9 Key Words
- 5.10 Questions for Review
- 5.11 Suggested readings and references
- 5.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we are going to study about the nature and attributes of God. Nature and attributes of God are very important features of all religious traditions. These serve as keys to faith in God for the believers. Here we will discuss the main nature and attributes of God as commonly accepted by the scholars of religious thoughts. We critically examine the theories of different religious thinkers on the nature and attributes of God. By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Have an over-all glance of the nature and attributes of God.
- Rationally distinguish between the Infinite Being (God) and finite beings.
- Appreciate the teachings of various great religious thinkers on this topic.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

What is God? What do we mean when we use the word 'God'? Do all who use the word God mean the same thing by it? Can we assume that there is just one concept of God? Over the years we know people have thought of God radically different ways. It is perhaps natural to assume that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a common concept of God. Their followers profess agreement on some issues such as God is creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. Today many philosophical and religious problems about 'God' arise from misunderstandings about exactly what that word is taken to mean in different religious traditions. For example, within Western religious traditions, to speak of God as literally existing in a particular place, a being 'out there' in some way, external to the world, is to limit him. And a being so limited cannot be God. So we need to be clear that any argument about an external, separate entity is not the understanding of God in Semitic religious tradition. We know ordinary things exist because we can define them, set boundaries to them, know what they are. In other words, things are known to exist because they are limited. We can stand outside them and point to them. But if God is infinite and eternal, he is everywhere all the time. It would not be possible to point to him as we can with the finite objects, because it would not be possible to point away from him. It is, therefore, clear that God is not part of the universe. God is not outside the universe either; for, if he is infinite, he cannot be outside anything. That does not mean that we cannot employ symbolic and poetic language to express belief in God. But such language needs to be recognized for what it is, and not taken literally. Once taken literally, the God it refers to becomes a useless or dangerous idol. For the purpose of our discussions about the existence of God, we need to have some basic definition of what the term 'God' means. R Swinburne in *The Coherence of Theism* offers the following definition that includes the nature and attributes of God: God is a person, without a body (i.e. a spirit), present everywhere (Omnipresent), the creator and sustainer of the universe, a free agent, able to do everything (i.e. omnipotent), knowing all things (Omniscient), perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, immutable, eternal, a necessary being, holy, and worthy of worship. Similarly, many thinkers of Religions describe God

with many attributes such as: God is – Omnipotent, Omniscient, Eternal, Simple, Necessity, Good, One, Changeless, Love, and Perfect. God cannot be either male or female, but for convenience he will be referred to as male. We shall deal with a few of these attributes of God.

5.2 GOD AS CREATOR

According to traditional theism, God is said to be the creator of the universe, and he is said to have created it out of nothing (ex nihilo). This is an important feature of theistic belief, for it implies that God is not an external force working with matter or coming in to animate it, nor is he an agent over against other agents. Rather, he is the absolute origin of everything in the universe. There is no external material object, no ‘nothingness’ out of which things we have in the world can be made. Everything that comes into existence does so as a creative act of God. This is the implication of the idea of God as creator. Now there is another side to this argument. If there is no matter external to God through which he creates, then God cannot be separate from creation. For example we cannot say ‘There is something of beauty’, and then point to something else and say ‘There is its creator.’ In other words, to say that God is creator ex nihilo implies that everything is alive with his life. According to the eternalist thinkers, temporality is an essential feature of creatures. They hold that the universe was created with time and not in time. It implies that the creation is the product of a divine timeless decree. God is before creation not by virtue of existing at a time when the universe was not yet in existence, but by virtue of his necessity and the creation’s contingency. It implies that everything created is necessarily in time, mutable and so they are corruptible. On the other hand, anything not created is necessarily eternal, immutable and incorruptible.

5.3 GOD IS ETERNAL

What does it mean to call God eternal? Two main answers have been given to this question. According to the first, ‘God is eternal’ means that God is non-temporal or timeless. In other words, He is in no way limited or conditioned by time. According to the second, it means that God had

no beginning and that He can have no end that he is interminable. God has always existed and will continue to exist forever. God's mode of being involves no 'before' or 'after' and no 'earlier than' or 'later than'. In other words, in God past, present and future are all given at once as a single now. It is completely without successiveness. God does not comprise of anything that we could recognize as a history or biography. This view is called 'the classical view of divine eternity.' The second view says that God is temporal, according to which it is incoherent to suppose that God is outside time. But it is coherent to suppose that God has always existed and always will. Those who say that God is timeless are committed to the view that God is both changeless and impassible. But divine immutability and impassibility is not entailed by the temporal view of divine eternity. According to its defenders a timeless God must be vastly different from people. Such a God can, for example, have no thoughts which succeed each other. And such a God can have no memories, expectations or emotions. But if God exists in time, then he might be thoroughly mutable. And, like people, he might have thoughts which come after each other. God might also have memories, expectations and emotions. He might be much like us, as defenders of the temporal view often seem to take him to be. Arguments in Defence of Classical View of Divine Eternity

- God is cause of all change. But change and time are inseparably connected. So God cannot be something existing in time.
- God is the creator who accounts for the existence of the universe. But one can only make sense of things existing in time in so far as one thinks of them as parts of the universe. So God cannot be something existing in time.
- God is perfect and unlimited. But nothing in time can be this. Among other things temporal existence always implies loss. Things in time lose what they once had because things in time are subject to change. And they are always vulnerable to what the future might bring. But something

Notes

which is perfect and unlimited cannot lose what it has or be vulnerable to what might come.

- God exists is necessarily true. So something about God is his necessary existence. God is all that he can be, for any reality he lacks but could possess would need grounding in something else than himself. So God must be changeless and unchangeable. And if God is this, then God must be timeless.

- Things in time occupy space. But God does not. So God is outside of time.

- If God exists necessarily, and if God is essentially temporal, then time exists necessarily. But temporal things do not exist of necessity. So God should not be thought of as a temporal thing. God's eternity has been the constant affirmation of monotheistic religious traditions. It follows from divine necessity. For, if God exists necessarily, it is impossible that He does not exist.

Therefore, He can never go out or come into being. God just exists without beginning or end. In other words, Eternity of God has been used in four different senses:

1. Timelessly logical and mathematical truth.

2. Enduring through all times.

3. Time is retained and yet transcended as total simultaneity. And,

4. As the fulfillment of all values in the best way. Hence it has been maintained by some thinkers that God is changeless with regard to his essence, but has change in so far as his accidents are concerned. God sees events as taking place in time, but from all eternity those events have been the same to Him as after they have taken place.

God’s eternity could be described as follows: Eternity is not, as men believe, before and after us, an endless line. No, it is a circle, infinitely great—all the circumference with creation thronged; God at the center dwells, beholding all. And as we move in this eternal round, the finite portion which alone we see, behind us is the past; what lies before we call the future. But to Him who dwells far at the center, equally remote from every point of the circumference, both are alike, the future and the past. Within the tradition of classical theism which originated from ideas in Greek philosophy and is found developed in the Christian tradition by Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, God is definitely eternal rather than everlasting. He is not simply an ongoing part of the universe, but is beyond the whole process of change. The Philosophers who regard God as eternal generally see him as embodying the structure of reality, out of which emerges space and time and the world which we encounter with the senses. This is highlighted by the idea of creation out of nothing ex nihilo– not at some point in the past, but as a bringing into reality everything that exists here and now.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1. What does the traditional theism say about God as creator?

.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2. What are the arguments in defense of Classical view of Divine eternity?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5.4 GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

The word Omnipotence is composed of two Latin words: Omnis (all) and potens (powerful). It means the ability to do all things or to have absolute power. God is supposed to be a power to do all things. What can God do? In the Bible, according to the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary, “with God nothing will be impossible.” God possesses all power. In the book of Genesis 17:1 God declares: "I am God Almighty." The title "Almighty" is applied to Him over and over in the Bible. This title signifies that He possesses all might or power. Again we read in the gospel of Mathew 19:26: "With God all things are possible." Similarly, many other passages in the Bible and scriptures of other religions declare God's omnipotence.

The Biblical authors typically speak of God's power as a mastery over nature. God has power chiefly as the orderer and ruler of the created world. God is the Lord of the world and it is subject to him. He has power over it. But should it not also be said that God must have power in a somewhat stronger sense – not just power over things, but power of an unlimited or infinite kind? Many thinkers arrive at a conclusion that God possesses power of this kind which is intrinsic to him and therefore he is called Omnipotent. What does one mean by calling God omnipotent? According to some thinkers, God is omnipotent since he can do even what seems logically impossible. Still others are of the opinion that the omnipotence of God does not mean, that He can do things that are logically absurd or things that are against his will. For example, he cannot lie, because the holiness of His character prevents Him from willing to lie. And He cannot create a rock larger than He can lift; nor both an irresistible power and an immovable object; nor can He draw a line between two points shorter than a straight one; nor put two mountains adjacent to one another without creating a valley between them. He cannot do any of these things because they are not objects of power. They are self-contradictory and logically absurd. Some scholars think that God's omnipotence means his ability to bring about the existence of any conceivable thing, events or state of affairs. Distinguishing between passive power (as 'I can be shot') and active

power (as 'I can sing'), Thomas Aquinas argues that God is omnipotent since he can make (active power) anything to exist which can be thought of as (absolutely speaking) able to be. God is omnipotent in the sense that there is no definite limited range of possibilities in what he can bring about. On the contrary, the beings belonging to a distinct genus and species are limited in they can bring about, for they can only produce effects which are characteristics of things in that genus and species. According to Thomas, however, God is not limited in anyway. If God creates out of nothing, his power is not limited. If his act of creation is not something that took place in the past, but an ongoing feature of life, it implies that God brings everything about, without being limited by the material that he uses to do so. In this sense, the idea that God is omnipotent is implied in the doctrine of creation. It would be illogical to call God the 'creator' in this absolute sense and then to say that there are things he cannot do.

5.5 GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

God's omniscience means that he is all-knowing. Since God is not a bodily being he does not possess sense organs and therefore does not have sensations and emotions. It is argued that if God is eternal in the sense that his existence is not extended in time, then he is changeless or immutable then there can be no process in God like he coming to know something or reasoning something out. And if God is not in time then his knowledge can not be located at any moment in time. He must have possessed all knowledge from the beginning; for otherwise He would be learning all the while, and that would of itself constitute a change in Him and would necessarily lead to even more manifest changes. And if God does not depend on creatures for anything, then his knowledge can not in any respect be produced by creatures. It must belong to God as he is in himself. He is omniscient. According to theism, from all eternity God has possessed all knowledge and wisdom. In the Bible, the evangelist John in his epistle declares that God "knoweth all things" (1 John 3:20).

God's omniscience may also be argued from His infinity. In the scriptures God is pictured as an infinite being. Thus His knowledge must

Notes

be infinite. Moreover, the necessity of omniscience on the part of God may be seen from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians 1:11 in the Bible, which says that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Only an omniscient being could work all things after the counsel of his own will. Some thinkers also argue that God's omniscience includes perfect foreknowledge. From eternity God has known all things that have come to pass and all things that are yet come to pass. He has ever known exactly what things would have come to pass if His immutable purpose had been different from what it is at any point. The basis of God's foreknowledge of all things that come to pass is His own purpose. God could not have known that a thing would come to pass unless it had been certain to come to pass. God's eternal, immutable purpose is the only scriptural basis for the certainty of future events. The difference between the intelligence of God and human beings can be stated as follows: God and human beings are intelligent; but in what manner? Man is intelligent by the act of reasoning, but the supreme intelligence lies under no necessity to reason. He requires neither premise nor consequences; nor even the simple form of a proposition. His knowledge is purely intuitive. He beholds equally what is and what will be. All truths are to Him as one idea, as all places are but one point, and all times one moment.

Those who hold that God is all-knowing give the following reasons:

- God is wholly perfect. He can not be this if he lacks knowledge. Therefore, God is all knowing.
- The Order in the world can be accounted for in terms of a God which has knowledge.
- God is the creator of the universe. But creating is an act of intelligence. So God has knowledge.
- Knowledge is something which exists in the world. Since God accounts for all that exists in the world and since this must reflect that God is, knowledge is something we can ascribe to God.

These arguments prove that God is omniscient or all-knowing. If God is omniscient, he knows everything. There can be two ways of looking at this argument:

1. If he is eternal, existing outside time altogether, then his omniscience is timeless. His knowledge of past, present and future is simultaneous. It is not that he correctly guesses what will happen in the future, but that – for him – there is no future. His knowledge is eternally present.

2. If he is everlasting, then he will know everything that has happened in the past, and everything that is happening in the present. He will also be aware now of those things in the present which will determine what happens in the future. In this sense, God might be said to ‘know’ the future, even though he has not been there yet!

The central problem with this argument for theists concerns human freedom and responsibility. If God knows what we think we freely choose to do, is not our freedom an illusion? Once someone knows that something is going to happen, then that thing is not a matter of chance, but inevitable. If it’s not inevitable, then God cannot know it. In other words, if God knows what is to come, how can the future be anything but predestined or unpreventable?

In Short

- If God is omniscient, he knows everything.
- He therefore knows that I will do X.
- Therefore, I am not free to choose not to do X.

Can we then argue that God’s omniscience and contingency are compatible notions? Many philosophers have suggested that we can.

Notes

Most famous argument is that of Boethius. According to him God is eternal, meaning ‘the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life.’ According to Boethius, therefore, God’s knowledge is not best thought of as foreknowledge. It should rather be thought of as ‘knowledge of a never passing instant.’ In that God sees future things present to him. For Boethius, God does not foreknow, God simply knows. This argument suggests therefore, that God might know that at some point in the future I will freely choose to do X. In this case, my freedom is part of what God knows – therefore I remain free to choose. But this argument seems to create a logical problem as follows:

- I am free to choose if, and only if, there are at least two possible options at the moment of choosing.
- If God knows that I am free to choose, he must allow two possible outcomes.
- Therefore he cannot know which of those outcomes I will choose without denying me my freedom to make that decision. An example might be: ‘You can choose any colour you like, as long as it’s red!’ (No freedom) or ‘You can choose any colour you like.’ (Freedom, but I cannot insist that you choose red.) One way out of this dilemma could be to say that we freely make choices based on many factors, both conscious and unconscious. We do not fully understand these, and therefore do not fully appreciate why we make the choices we do. On the other hand, an omniscient God would understand all about us, and would therefore know exactly those factors, including our desire not to be predictable, which lead to our apparently ‘free’ choice.

Check Your progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. State in short the argument of Thomas Aquinas on God's omnipotence.

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. What are reasons given by those who hold the view that God is all-knowing?

.....

.....

.....

.....

5.6 GOD IS SIMPLE

The claim that God is simple is an ancient one. But what do we mean to say that God is simple? A famous account of divine simplicity comes in Augustine of Hippo's *The City of God*. Here he says, There is one sole Good, which is simple and therefore unchangeable; and that is God. By this Good all good things were created but they are not simple, and for that reason they are changeable. The term 'simple' applies to things which are in the fullest and truest sense divine, because in them there is no difference between substance and quality. According to Augustine, God is simple because he is immutable. But Augustine also thinks that God is simple as not possessing different properties or attributes. He says that the expressions such as, 'the knowledge of God' or 'the goodness of God' are not distinct realities in the divine substance. According to Anselm of Canterbury, 'The supreme nature is simple, thus all things which can be said of its essence are simple one and the same thing in it.' Anselm acknowledges that those who believe in God use different statements when speaking of God's nature. They say, for example,

'God is good', 'God is just', 'God is wise.' But these expressions do not imply that God is something with really distinct attributes. According to Anselm, there is no distinction between God and anything we might want to call 'the attributes of God.' Therefore, both for Augustine and Anselm,

Notes

the various attributes the believer ascribe to God in sentences such as, 'God is X', 'God is Y', and so on, are not distinct realities in God. They are God. Some defenders of divine simplicity however, have said more than this. For they add that God is simple in the sense that there is no real distinction between God's nature (or essence) and God's existence. According to their account, God is simple since he is immutable and since he has no attributes really distinct from himself. They also argue that God is simple since existence belongs to God by nature. God is simple since God is Being or existence without qualification. Thomas Aquinas famously puts it, God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* (Subsisting Being itself). According to Aquinas, God is simple since he is immutable and since he is not a being with different attributes. For Aquinas however, God is simple since he is not a 'composite' of essence and existence. The following arguments have been put forward in support of divine simplicity:

- God can not be thought of as having changeable properties, distinct from himself, since God is the source of all changes.
- God can not be thought of as having distinct temporal properties; since God as creator of the universe, must transcend time.
- God is not a material object. So he can not be thought of as having parts in the way that material objects have parts.
- Something with different properties depends for its existence on the existence and conjunction of those properties. But God can not be something which depends for existence on anything. God is the reason why anything exists at all.
- One can not distinguish between God and God's existence or between God's nature and God's existence, since to do so would imply that existence is something which God receives from another. But the being of God is wholly underived.

These lines of argument are insisting that there must be a dramatic difference between God and creatures or contingent beings. Compositeness or lack of simplicity is very much a feature of things in the world. These are material, temporal and dependent. How shall we preserve God's transcendence in relation to the created order? For defenders of belief in divine simplicity, one way of doing so is to teach that God is simple.

5.7 GOD'S NECESSITY

Since Aristotle, in western philosophical theology God has been conceived as a necessary existent being. Probably, for Aristotle God's necessary existence meant simply his immunity to generation and corruption. This conception is connected with the contemporary notion of God's 'factual necessity' which is stated as follows: given that God exists, it is impossible that he ever came into or will go out of existence. He is uncaused, eternal, incorruptible and indestructible. During the Middle Ages, Islamic Philosophers such as al-Farabi began to enunciate an even more powerful conception of God's necessity. According to them, God's non-existence is logically impossible. This conception of God's necessary existence lay at the heart of Anselm's Ontological argument. It states: if God's non-existence is logically impossible, it follows that he must exist. God is logically necessary being. Powerful theological and philosophical reasons are given for taking God's existence to be logically necessary. Philosophically, the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being implies his necessary existence in this sense, since logically contingent existence is not as great as necessary existence. If God is by definition God is necessary being, in the sense of logical necessity, cosmological questions simply do arise with respect to God. His existence is selfexplanatory in a way that the existence of no other being is. The existence of necessary being answers the question, "why is there something rather than nothing?" The conceptualist argument also entails the existence of a logically necessary being in order to ground the realm of abstract objects. The moral argument leads naturally to such a being, since moral values and principles are not plausibly logically contingent. The motivation for

Notes

claiming that God is logically necessary being stems from the conviction that God is necessarily the ultimate being in the universe. Traditionally, the arguments were given for necessary being for two reasons: The first is to halt the regress of causes. Of necessary being no further questions can be asked. The second function is to provide a sense of ultimacy to the explanation. It eliminates any vagueness or ambiguity in the answer to the question ‘why is there something rather than nothing at all?’ If God is personal, then we can speak of him as the cause of the universe. There is no mystery about the ultimate foundation of existence, for causal questions and ultimacy questions come together in the one logically necessary person: God.

Check Your progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the arguments put forward in support of divine simplicity?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Traditionally, what are the reasons given for God as necessary being?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5.8 LET US SUM UP

The discussion on the nature and attributes of God helps us to understand what people mean by God. In the course of our analysis we discovered that God is the creator or the ultimate cause of all the finite beings of the

universe. Therefore, he is logically an uncaused cause. He is simple and therefore is not limited in his being and knowledge. The critical and analytical survey of the nature and attributes of God leads us to comprehend the implications this has for religious belief. By definition God is the locus and source of all values. Such a being is absolute goodness and worthy of worship.

5.9 KEY WORDS

- **Theism:** Belief in the existence of God.
- **Atheism:** The conviction that there is no such being called God.
- **Agnosticism:** The view that there is no conclusive evidence to decide whether God exists or not.
- **Pantheism:** An identification of God with the physical universe.
- **Panentheism:** The belief that God is within everything.
- **Deism:** The idea of an external designer God who created the world, but it is not immanent within it.
- **Idolatry:** The literal identification of God with any individual thing or concept.

5.10 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What does the traditional theism say about God as creator?
2. What are the arguments in defense of Classical view of Divine eternity?
3. State in short the argument of Thomas Aquinas on God's omnipotence.
4. What are reasons given by those who hold the view that God is all-knowing?
5. What are the arguments put forward in support of divine simplicity?
6. Traditionally, what are the reasons given for God as necessary being?

5.11 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Craig, William Lane., ed. *Philosophy of Religion*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Masih, Y. *Introduction to Religious Philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, 1998.
- ----- . *A Comparative Study of Religions*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, 1990.
- Thompson, Mel. *Philosophy of Religion*. Chicago: Contemporary Publishing, 1997.
- Wainrghite, William J., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: University Press, 2005.
- Hick, John. *Philosophy of Religion*. Prentice Hall: New Jersey, 1973.
- Pals, Daniel L. *Seven Theories of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

5.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. According to traditional theism, God is said to be the creator of the universe, and he is said to have created it out of nothing (ex nihilo). This is an important feature of theistic belief, for it implies that God is not an external force working with matter or coming in to animate it, nor is he an agent over against other agents. Rather, he is the absolute origin of everything in the universe. There is no external material object, no 'nothingness' out of which things we have in the world can be made. Everything that comes into existence does so as a creative act of God. This is the implication of the idea of God as creator.

2. Arguments in Defence of Classical View of Divine Eternity

- i. God is cause of all change. But change and time are inseparably connected. So God can not be something existing in time.

- ii. God is the creator who accounts for the existence of the universe. But one can only make sense of things existing in time in so far as one thinks of them as parts of the universe. So God can not be something existing in time.
- iii. God is perfect and unlimited. But nothing in time can be this. Among other things temporal existence always implies loss. Things in time lose what they once had because things in time are subject to change. And they are always vulnerable to what the future might bring. But something which is perfect and unlimited can not lose what it has or be vulnerable to what might come.
- iv. God exists is necessarily true. So something about God is his necessary existence. God is all that he can be, for any reality he lacks but could possess would need grounding in something else than himself. So God must be changeless and unchangeable. And if God is this, then God must be timeless.
- v. Things in time occupy space. But God does not. So God is outside of time.
- vi. If God exists necessarily, and if God is essentially temporal, then time exists necessarily. But temporal things do not exist of necessity. So God should not be thought of as a temporal thing.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. Some scholars think that God's omnipotence means his ability to bring about the existence of any conceivable thing, events or state of affairs. Distinguishing between passive power (as 'I can be shot') and active power (as 'I can sing'), Thomas Aquinas argues that God is omnipotent since he can make (active power) anything to exist which can be thought of as (absolutely speaking) able to be. God is omnipotence in the sense that there is no definite limited range of possibilities in what he can bring about. On the contrary, the beings belonging to a distinct genus and species are limited in they can bring about, for they can only produce effects which are characteristics of things in that genus and species. According to Thomas, however, God is not limited in anyway. If God creates out of nothing, his power is not limited. If his act of creation is

Notes

not something that took place in the past, but an ongoing feature of life, it implies that God brings everything about, without being limited by the material that he uses to do so. In this sense, the idea that God is omnipotent is implied in the doctrine of creation. It would be illogical to call God the 'creator' in this absolute sense and then to say that there are things he cannot

2. Those who hold that God is all-knowing give the following reasons:

- God is wholly perfect. He can not be this if he lacks knowledge. Therefore, God is all knowing.
- The Order in the world can be accounted for in terms of a God which has knowledge.
- God is the creator of the universe. But creating is an act of intelligence. So God has knowledge.
- Knowledge is something which exists in the world. Since God accounts for all that exists in the world and since this must reflect that God is, knowledge is something we can ascribe to God. These arguments prove that God is omniscient or all-knowing

Answers to Check Your Progress 3

1. The following arguments have been put forward in support of divine simplicity:

- God cannot be thought of as having changeable properties, distinct from himself, since God is the source of all changes.
- God can not be thought of as having distinct temporal properties; since God as creator of the universe, must transcend time.

- God is not a material object. So he can not be thought of as having parts in the way that material objects have parts.

- Something with different properties depends for its existence on the existence and conjunction of those properties. But God can not be something which depends for existence on anything. God is the reason why anything exists at all.

- One can not distinguish between God and God's existence or between God nature and God's existence, since to do so would imply that existence is something which God receives from another. But the being of God is wholly underived.

2. Traditionally, the arguments were given for necessary being for two reasons: The first is to halt the regress of causes. Of necessary being no further questions can be asked. The second function is to provide a sense of ultimacy to the explanation. It eliminates any vagueness or ambiguity in the answer to the question 'why is there something rather than nothing at all?' If God is personal, then we can speak of him as the cause of the universe. There is no mystery about the ultimate foundation of existence, for causal questions and ultimacy questions come together in the one logically necessary person: God.

UNIT 6: TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

STRUCTURE

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Augustine on the Existence of God
- 6.3 Ontological Argument
- 6.4 Cosmological Argument (Aquinas)
- 6.5 Bonaventure on the Existence of God
- 6.6 John Duns Scotus
- 6.7 Teleological Argument
- 6.8 Moral Argument
- 6.9 Argument from Religious Experience
- 6.10 Let us sum up
- 6.11 Key Words
- 6.12 Questions for Review
- 6.13 Suggested readings and references
- 6.14 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to provide knowledge to student some of the traditional arguments about the Existence of God. While it gives some arguments, there is no attempt made to formulate a universal proof for the existence of God. What we are trying to do is to examine some of the traditional arguments about God's existence. The basis for these arguments is reason, but then we realize and have to accept that the topic we are studying, namely, the Existence of God, is such that we cannot come to any universal conclusion, given the topic of our study. Hence we shall examine the place that proofs hold in such a context and the significance of some of these arguments. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of some proofs for the existence of God;
- to differentiate the ontological, cosmological, teleological and moral arguments;
- to relate it to the positions of Augustine, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus
- to understand the character of an argument for the existence of God.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Most believers do not need proofs for the existence of God, even so we feel the need to speak of arguments in favour of the existence of God. On the other hand most non-believers or atheists would not feel the need of proving their non-belief or non-acceptance of God, because they see this as most natural. The responsibility then seems to be on the believers to give some arguments to prove the existence of God. While we agree that there can never be a universal proof for the existence of God, even so we can definitely speak of arguments in favour of the existence of God. This chapter will speak of “TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS FOR GOD’S EXISTENCE.” The aim of this chapter is to examine certain arguments that have traditionally been used to prove or demonstrate the existence of God. We shall examine different types of arguments and we shall also look at some individual philosophers who had significant arguments to prove the existence of God. We need to look into the actual demonstration of God’s existence, that is, the ways to show that the proposition “God exists” is true. We need to ask the question, “Is this proposition evident or not?” Evident is that which shows itself to us directly, so that it does not need any demonstration. For a proposition to be evident, at least as far as we are concerned, both the subject and the predicate must be known to us. If they are not, the proposition is not evident. Does this then mean that it is not true? No. It may not be evident but it may be true, although the truth of this proposition may have to be

demonstrated. If the proposition ‘God exists’ were evident, then there would not be any atheists. But there are atheists, because this is not an evident proposition, although it is true and certain but it needs to be demonstrated. This is necessary because the terms of the proposition are not known to us directly. Since we do not see God directly, we have to prove that he exists. But is a universal proof for the existence of God possible?

6.2 AUGUSTINE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

In the teachings of St. Augustine there is a vast difference between God and the world. God is eternal, is transcendent, all good, all wise, absolute in every way. He is the cause of everything, the creator of the universe out of nothing. He also taught that God in the beginning, predetermined everything so that he knew from the first what would happen to all his creatures through-out eternity. The God of Augustine is the idealization of everything that man considers good and worthy. He is absolute power, perfect goodness, the source and creator of everything. He knows everything and has so controlled the universe that everything is determined by him forever. St. Augustine’s central proof of God’s existence is from thought, the proof from within. It begins from the apprehension of the mind of necessary and changeless truths which is present to all. This truth is superior to the mind which cannot change it or amend it. The mind varies in its apprehension of truth, but truth remains ever the same. Eternal truths must be founded on being and reflect the Ground of all truth. They reflect the necessity and immutability of God who is the Ground of eternal and necessary truth. St. Augustine also seeks to prove the existence of God from the external and corporeal world but these are more like hints, or reminders. He was keen to show that all creation proclaims God who is recognized in the dynamic attitude of the soul towards God. The soul seeks happiness, and some seek it outside themselves. St. Augustine tries to show that creation cannot give the soul the perfect happiness it seeks, but points upwards to the living God who must be sought within. He seeks to demonstrate the existence of God from his effects. He views the rational knowledge of God in close

connection with the search of the soul for the Truth which is a kind of self revelation of God to the soul.

6.3 ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The first type of argument that is used to show the existence of God is the ontological argument, and it is so called because it attempts to show that the very concept of the idea of God implies his existence in reality. That is to say, if a person is able to clearly conceive the idea of God then he or she ought to be able to understand and accept that God must exist. It was St. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury who first gave a serious formulation of this argument. His argument was as follows.

God is the greatest possible being. He is “That than which nothing greater can be thought”. God exists at least in the mind or understanding. A being who exists only in the mind is not so great as a being who exists in reality as well as in the mind. If God existed only in the mind, he would not be the greatest possible being. So “that than which nothing greater can be thought” must exist in the mind as well as in reality. Hence, God must exist in reality. (as well as in the mind.) This argument met with many objections because of its claim that the existence of something can be inferred merely from its definition. Gaunilo a contemporary of Anselm produced a parallel argument, substituting the concept of God with that of the “most perfect island”. Following this argument, logically the ‘most perfect island’ must exist in reality. But it was not the case, thus proving the argument wrong. But Anselm replied that this argument applied only to God, because the concept of God is unique in the sense that God is the only necessary being. All other beings, as the ‘island’ are finite objects and hence not necessary. Hence we can always conceive a more perfect island, but God is already the greatest possible being, and nothing greater can be thought of. We cannot think of a merely perfect God, while we can always think of a more perfect island. Immanuel Kant also objected to this argument, because he said, that one cannot legitimately think of ‘existence’ as a property which an entity may or may not have, or have to varying degrees. When we say

of something that it exists, we are talking of it as already actualized. Existence is not a 'property' of a thing as for instance its being red or blue or yellow. So it cannot be a property that adds something to the greatness of God. From Anselm's argument it appears as if existence in reality adds something to the greatness of God.

6.4 COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (AQUINAS)

Another argument that strives to prove the existence of God is the so called Cosmological argument. This argument strives to proceed from the fact of the existence of the world to a transcendent creator. These arguments originate in the thinking of Aristotle and have been presented by Thomas Aquinas who used Aristotle's ideas as the intellectual medium to put down his own religious philosophy. These are commonly referred to as the Five Ways of St. Thomas. His arguments could be presented as follows.

First Way (from motion)

- Everything that moves is moved by something.
- That mover is in turn moved by something else again.
- But this chain of movers cannot be infinite or movement would not have started in the first place.
- Therefore, there must be an unmoved mover. (whom we call God.)

Second Way (from the nature of the efficient cause)

- Everything has a cause.
- Every cause itself has a cause.
- But you cannot have an infinite number of causes.
- Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause, which causes everything to happen without itself
- being caused by anything else.
- Such an uncaused cause is what people understand by 'God.'

Third Way (from possibility and necessity)

- Individual things come into existence and later cease to exist.
- Therefore at one time none of them was in existence.
- But something comes into existence only as a result of something else that already exists.
- Not all things can be ONLY possible. There must be one that is of itself Necessary
- Therefore, there must be a being whose existence is necessary, 'God'.

Another form of the Cosmological Argument is the KALAM ARGUMENT. It was spelt out by the Muslim philosophers Al-Kindi and Al-Ghazali in the ninth and tenth century.

KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Kalam Argument for the existence of God originated and became highly developed in Islamic theology during the late Middle Ages. It gets its name from the word "kalam", which refers to Arabic philosophy or theology. It is an Arabic term that literally means 'argue' or 'discuss', though it has also been translated as 'theology' or 'dialectical theology'. Traditionally the argument was used to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual infinite existing in the real world, as well as an argument from temporal regress, thus showing that the universe cannot be eternal. In recent years these philosophical arguments have been confirmed by scientific discoveries, viz., the Big Bang theory. The most thorough and articulate proponent of the argument today is Dr. William Lane Craig.

Statement of the (modern) deductive Kalam Cosmological Argument:

Notes

Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence. (Causal principle.) The universe (space, time, and matter) began to exist. (Evidenced by two philosophical arguments, the Big Bang, and the second law of thermodynamics.) Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence. Sub-argument: As the cause of the universe (space, time, and matter), the cause must be outside of space, time and matter, and therefore be spaceless, timeless, and immaterial. Moreover, the cause must be a personal agent, otherwise a timeless cause could not give rise to a temporal effect like the universe. (Argument expanded.) This is an accurate picture of God. Therefore, God exists. The first premise of the argument is the claim that everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence. In order to infer from this that the universe has a cause of its existence the proponent of the kalam cosmological argument must prove that the past is finite, that the universe began to exist at a certain point in time. The crucial premise of the kalam cosmological argument, then, is the second: “The universe has a beginning of its existence”. How do we know that the universe has a beginning of its existence? Might not the universe stretch back in time into infinity, always having existed? The proponent of the kalam cosmological argument must show that this cannot be the case if his argument is to be successful.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1) What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the Ontological Argument

.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) What are the different types of Cosmological Arguments?

6.5 BONAVENTURE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

While Bonaventure supported the relation of philosophy and theology, he did formulate arguments for the existence of God. He philosophizes in the light of what he already believes in. His arguments are rational and he makes no reference to dogma in them. Yet he pursues his arguments in the light of the faith which he possesses. His ideal is of Christian wisdom, in which the light of the Word is shed not only on theological but also on philosophical truths, and without which those truths would not be attained. He was mainly interested in the relation of the soul to God and so his proofs for the existence of God were about stages in the soul's ascent to God. This God is not just an abstract principle of intelligibility but is rather the God of the Christian consciousness. St. Bonaventure does not deny that God's existence can be proved from creatures but rather he affirms it. He says that God can be known through creatures as Cause through effect. This mode of cognition according to him is natural because for us sensible things are the means by which we arrive at knowledge of the objects transcending sense. In *De Mysterio Trinitatis* (5,29) Bonaventure gives a series of brief arguments for the existence of God. He says if there is a being from another, there must exist a being which is not from any other, because nothing can bring itself out of a state of non-being into a state of being, and finally there must be a first Being which is self-existent. Again, if there is possible being, being which can exist and being which can not exist, there must be a being which is Necessary, that is a being which has no possibility of non-existence, since this is necessary in order to explain the reduction of possible being into a state of existence. If there is a being, a potency, there must be a being in act, since no potency is reducible to act except through the agency of what is itself in act. Ultimately there must be a being which is pure act, without any potentiality, God. Every human

being has a natural desire for happiness which consists in the possession of the supreme Good which is God. Therefore every human being desires God. But there can be no desire without some knowledge of the object. Therefore the knowledge that God or the supreme Good exists is naturally implanted in the soul. The human will is naturally orientated towards the supreme Good, which is God, and this orientation of the will is inexplicable unless the supreme Good, God, really exists.

6.6 JOHN DUNS SCOTUS

According to Duns Scotus God is not properly speaking an object of metaphysical science even though Metaphysics is the Science of Being and God is the first being. Scientific truths are known apriori while the metaphysician knows truths about God only aposteriori. The philosopher comes to know God only in and through his effects. He holds that man has no intuitive knowledge of God in this life since the intuition of God is precisely that form of knowledge which places a man outside the state of life. Our knowledge starts from things of sense and our natural conceptual knowledge of god is arrived at through reflection on the objects of experience and is imperfect. Scotus is not so attracted to the argument from motion, but inclines towards the argument from the fact of contingency to the existence of a first cause and a necessary being. Contingent beings can neither cause themselves nor be caused by nothing. Scouts distinguishes between the series of essentially ordered beings and the series of accidentally ordered beings. He does not deny the possibility of an unending regress of successive contingent causes, but rather he denies the possibility of an unending vertical series of simultaneous total causes. Even if we grant the possibility of an infinite series of successive causes the whole chain requires an explanation which must be outside the chain itself since each member of the chain is caused and so contingent. It is necessary to postulate a transcendent cause. The totality of ordered effects is itself caused by some cause which does not belong to that totality. Scotus shows that the first cause in the essential order of dependence must exist actually and cannot be merely possible, that it is necessary being, that is, that it cannot not exist and that it is one. There cannot be more than one necessary being. In his

commentary on the Sentences, Scotus argues as follows. We have to proceed from creatures to God by considering the causal relation of either efficient or final causality. Contingent being, is caused by nothing, or by itself, or by another. As it is not possible for it to be caused by nothing or by itself, it must be caused by another. If that other is the first cause, then we have found what we are looking for. If not, then we need to proceed further. But in the vertical order we cannot proceed forever searching for this dependence. Nor can we suppose that contingent being cause one another because then we shall proceed in a circle without arriving at any ultimate explanation of contingency. We cannot escape by saying that the world is eternal, since the eternal series of contingent beings itself requires a cause. Similarly in the order of final causality there must be a final cause which is not directed to any more ultimate final cause. The first efficient cause acts with a view to the final end. But nothing other than the first being itself can be its final end. So the first efficient cause cannot be of the same nature as the effect, but must transcend all its effects. And as first cause it must be the most eminent being.

6.7 TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

This argument is related to the sense of the word ‘telos’ which signifies the meaning, end or purpose. Here we are speaking of the telos, of the world. In a way this argument also argues that the sense of purposeful design that we see in nature suggests that the world has a designer, namely God. That is why this argument is also referred to as the Way of Design or the Fourth Way of Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas links the idea of causation to that of purpose. He says that causation gives things their perfection. And then he links this to the idea of purpose. He holds that goal directed behavior is in all beings, even if they lack awareness. Such beings that lack awareness are directed to their goal by someone who has the awareness and understanding that they themselves lack. Everything in nature is directed to its goal. While this is one of the traditional arguments, it was best explained by William Paley (1743 – 1805). He gave the example saying that if one was to find a watch lying on the ground, one would assume that it had a maker and had been designed by

a watch maker. This would be natural because one can see immediately that it is made up of different parts which work together. They work in harmony to tell us the time. The world too he says is like a machine, with different parts designed so that they have a part to play in the whole. The intricate design of the world in which, like the watch, different parts worked together in such a way that suggested a complex design and planning. The design is such that when looked at as a whole one cannot but think of the designer of the world, who is God. Religious common sense tends to look at the intricacy of nature as pointing to a God who is the designer and provides a purpose to creation. There is no evidence to sustain an analogy between human creativity and the idea of a divine creator. It is difficult to sustain the teleological approach as a logical argument. At the best we can only say that the world appears to have some order and purpose. For the believer, it supports his or her belief. But to the atheist, it is logically inconclusive.

6.8 MORAL ARGUMENT

This line of argument examines those aspects of human experience which relate to religion. It asks whether there is anything in the way in which people respond to the idea of God which can be used to prove that God exists. One possibility is the experience of morality, namely that we have a sense of what we ought to do and also a sense of guilt when one realizes that one has done what is believed to be wrong. The second possibility is the religious experience itself. Moral rules arise as God's commands, from an objective look at human nature and the structures of the world or as the product of human society and human choice. We look at the second possibility. Aristotle related morality to his idea of a final cause. He held that we ought to do that which leads to our maximum self fulfillment. Once we discover our true nature we will want to act accordingly. By this approach we could say that morality is rational and objective. If one experiences moral obligation, it implies that one is free to act and that one will experience happiness as a result of virtue. For this to be possible there has to be some overall ordering principle which will reward virtue with happiness, and this might be called God. This was the argument of Kant. He seemed to be saying that you cannot prove the

existence of God, but one's sense of morality implies that the world is ordered in a moral way, and that this in turn implies belief in God. If one believes that there is an objective moral order, it may be used either to suggest that the world is created by a moral being, God, or to show that morality is well established on objective rational grounds and no God is needed. On the other hand, if morality is a human product, no God is required to account for moral experience. Hence the moral argument cannot prove the existence of God. Atmost it can illustrate the way in which the idea of God is used in situations where there is a moral choice to be made. This is the Fifth Way of St. Thomas.

6.9 ARGUMENT FROM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

There is in every person the capability of self-transcendence in every experience. That is to say, a very ordinary this-worldly experience seems to point beyond itself and reveals something about the meaning of life as a whole. It reveals to us the religious and the transcendent dimension. Some people do use this as an argument for the existence of God.

For those who have had a religious experience it is impossible to prove the non existence of God. One cannot argue against their experience. But then the issue is that there are various ways of interpreting what has been experienced. What one person calls God may have a perfectly rational explanation to someone else. While we could be mistaken about an experience, it is also possible that we might have a correct experience and have truly experienced God. This is true also of our religious experience. But this requires a previous knowledge of what God is so that we can say whether the experience is correct or not. The problem is that such knowledge is not possible of God. Because if there was such knowledge then there would be no discussion on the existence of God, because if God exists then his existence would be evident to all and there would be no such debate. Hence if religious experience is a source of knowledge of God, it remains convincing only to those who accept or share this experience. But to the philosopher, the proposition 'God exists' can be either correct, incorrect or meaningless. Religious

Notes

experience can thus become the basis for the argument for the existence of God only when all people accept one definition of the word 'God'. If religious experience according to different cultures can be found to have a common core, then there is hope of coming to a common understanding of the term 'God'. But if we do not arrive at a common core then most will be unconvinced by the argument from religious experience. This argument may be enlightening and persuasive, but it is not logically compelling. That is why this argument is not much liked by philosophers. However for people with a religious mind, it is the most persuasive of all arguments.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1) Christian Western Philosophers like Augustine, Bonaventure and John Scotus have valid arguments for the Existence of God. Spell out these arguments.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

6.10 LET US SUM UP

The Ontological Argument follows the apriori approach. While the cosmological, teleological, moral and religious experience approaches are aposteriori. While considering the arguments about the existence of God it is good to remember that God is not something which might or might not happen to exist. We have to understand the concept of necessary existence. God does not merely happen to exist. Neither can he come into existence or pass out of existence since such a being would not be God. For God, his existence is necessary. If he does not exist then his existence is impossible. But if God's existence is possible then it is

necessary. It is his essence to exist, he is being itself, and not 'a' being. Hence when we try to give arguments about the existence of God, we do not try to show the existence of God as the existence of one entity alongside others, but we are speaking about a fundamental way of regarding the whole universe. It is about the structure of being itself and not merely about the possible existence of 'a' being. All in all, the ontological argument has made us aware of the logical problems in speaking about God as "that than which no greater can be thought". It has also made us aware of the distinction between a conceptual perfection and an existential perfection. The claim that the existence of something can be inferred from its definition does not seem possible for most people. Anselm made an illegal leap from a conceptual existence, to existence in reality. The cosmological arguments and the argument from design suggest that there are features of this world which enable the mind to go beyond experience. We try to understand the cause of everything and we also try to understand why the world is as it is. The moral argument suggests that together with freedom and immortality, we have an intuition of God. This is more evident every time we have or experience a moral obligation.

The argument from religious experience cannot be conclusive because experience is always open to various interpretations. Yet religious experience keeps us focused on the fact that at the heart of religion there is in man a struggle to express our belief in God. Religious experience is a context in which we try to understand the existence of God. Finally, these arguments may not be conclusive but they are significant because they indicate the thought process of a religiously inclined person. It indicates in a special way what they understand by the word 'God' and how they use that word. For a believer these arguments reinforce their faith. For the agnostic or the atheist they are unlikely to convince. But all in all at least they show us the real differences in various perspectives that the belief in God implies. As it is said, "For him who believes, no proof is needed. For him who does not believe, no proof will ever be sufficient."

6.11 KEY WORDS

Act: the perfection of a being, or the existence of a being.

Argument: offering reasons and causes in support of a conclusion.

Atheist: a person who denies the existence of God.

Being: whatever exists or may exist; something existing in its own way.

Causation: the principle by virtue of which anything is produced

Concept: abstract, universal idea; the intellectual representation of an object.

Contingent: uncertain, non-necessary, non-essential; a being which exists, but which may not exist.

Cosmological Argument: reasons offered in proof of God's existence, taken from the order that exists in the world.

Existence: that which makes a thing to be.

Experience: sense awareness, an immediate and direct perception of reality.

God: the Supreme Being, creator of all things, the first cause, the most perfect of all beings.

Immutability: the inability to change or be changed.

Moral Argument: based on man's consciousness of universal and absolute binding character of the moral law.

Necessary: that which needs to be there by all means if a certain end is to be achieved.

Ontological: related to the study of being.

Potency: a tendency to actuality; a dormant capacity or faculty.

Proposition: a judgement symbolised in words and so arranged as to convey a complete thought.

Reality: anything that exists, independent of man. (could be actual or existent.)

Soul: a spirit or entity that is supposed to be only in all living things. (Greek psyche, or Latin anima.)

Teleological: related to the end, purpose or final cause.

Telos: end.

6.12 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the Ontological Argument
- 2) What are the different types of Cosmological Arguments?
- 3) Christian Western Philosophers like Augustine, Bonaventure and John Scotus have valid arguments for the Existence of God. Spell out these arguments.

6.13 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Copleston, Frederick. A History of Philosophy. Vol 2. Medieval Philosophy. London: Continuum, 1950.
- Thompson, Mel. Philosophy. London: Hodder Education, 1995.
- Thompson, Mel. Philosophy of Religion. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1997.

6.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. It attempts to show that the very concept of the idea of God implies his existence in reality. That is to say, if a person is able to clearly conceive the idea of God then he or she ought to be able to understand and accept that God must exist. It was St. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury who first gave a serious formulation of this argument. This argument is considered weak since it can be applied only to God, because the concept of God is unique in the sense that God is the only necessary being. All other beings, as the 'island' are finite objects and hence not necessary. Hence we can always conceive a more perfect island, but God is already the greatest possible being, and nothing greater can be thought of. We cannot think of a merely perfect God, while we can always think of a more perfect island.

Notes

2. The Cosmological argument consists of the Five ways of St. Thomas. This argument strives to proceed from the fact of the existence of the world to a transcendent creator. These arguments originate in the thinking of Aristotle and have been presented by Thomas Aquinas who used Aristotle's ideas as the intellectual medium to put down his own religious philosophy. These are commonly referred to as the Five Ways of St. Thomas. The first three ways are part of the Cosmological Argument. First Way. (from motion.) Second Way. (from the nature of the efficient cause.) Third Way. (from possibility and necessity.) Another form of the Cosmological Argument is the KALAM ARGUMENT. It was spelt out by the Muslim philosophers Al-Kindi and Al-Ghazali in the ninth and tenth century. The Kalam Argument was used to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual infinite existing in the real world, as well as an argument from temporal regress, thus showing that the universe cannot be eternal. In recent years these philosophical arguments have been confirmed by scientific discoveries, viz., the Big Bang theory

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. In the teachings of Augustine there is a vast difference between God and the world. God is eternal, is transcendent, all good, all wise, absolute in every way. He is the cause of everything, the creator of the universe out of nothing. He also taught that God in the beginning predetermined everything so that he knew from the first what would happen to all his creatures throughout eternity. The God of Augustine is the idealization of everything that man considers good and worthy. He is absolute power, perfect goodness, the source and creator of everything. He knows everything and has so controlled the universe that everything is determined by him forever. Augustine's central proof of God's existence is from the apprehension of the mind of necessary and changeless truths which is present to all. This truth is superior to the mind which cannot change it or amend it. Eternal truths must be founded on being and reflect the ground of all truth. They reflect the necessity and immutability of God who is the ground of eternal and necessary truth.

Bonaventure supported the relation of philosophy and theology, so his proofs for the existence of God were about stages in the soul's ascent to God. This God is not just an abstract principle of intelligibility but is rather the God of the Christian consciousness. St. Bonaventure does not deny that God's existence can be proved from creatures but rather he affirms it. He says that God can be known through creatures as Cause through effect. This mode of cognition according to him is natural because for us sensible things are the means by which we arrive at knowledge of the objects transcending sense. Every human being has a natural desire for happiness which consists in the possession of the supreme Good which is God. Therefore every human being desires God. But there can be no desire without some knowledge of the object. Therefore the knowledge that God or the supreme Good exists is naturally implanted in the soul. The human will is naturally orientated towards the supreme Good, which is God, and this orientation of the will is inexplicable unless the supreme Good, God, really exists. According to Duns Scotus God is not properly speaking an object of metaphysical science even though Metaphysics is the Science of Being and God is the first being. Scotus inclines towards the argument from the fact of contingency to the existence of a first cause and a necessary being. Contingent beings can neither cause themselves nor be caused by nothing. Scotus distinguishes between the series of essentially ordered beings and the series of accidentally ordered beings. He does not deny the possibility of an unending regress of successive contingent causes, but rather he denies the possibility of an unending vertical series of simultaneous total causes. Even if we grant the possibility of an infinite series of successive causes the whole chain requires an explanation which must be outside the chain itself since each member of the chain is caused and so contingent. It is necessary to postulate a transcendent cause. The totality of ordered effects is itself caused by some cause which does not belong to that totality. Scotus shows that the first cause in the essential order of dependence must exist actually and cannot be merely possible, that it is necessary being, that is, that it cannot not exist and that it is one. There cannot be more than one necessary being.

UNIT 7: MODERN ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

STRUCTURE

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Rationalism
- 7.3 Empiricism
- 7.4 Idealism
- 7.5 Let us sum up
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Questions for Review
- 7.8 Suggested readings and references
- 7.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we tried to give synthesized answers to the question of God-talk in the Modern philosophers. How did the rationalists, empiricists and idealists apprehend the reality of God? And what are the basic premises through which the inference with regard to existence of God is reached? These are the ultimate questions, worth the effort of probing in this unit. By the end of this unit one should be able

- To have a basic understanding of modern philosophers' assumptions, the content, the avowal in disproving the earlier attempts and proving one's own thesis as truth bearing.
- To evolve a critical appraisal of the philosophers with the hints given for discussions.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Theodicy provides us with the sufficient material with proofs for and against the existence of God. Here we deal with the modern

philosophers' arguments either proving it directly or in an in-direct way. We start with the rationalists, proceeding to empiricists and culminating our study with the idealists. Only selected few philosophers are taken for our study for leaving the rest is due to time and space constraints.

Moral arguments for God's existence form a diverse family of arguments that reason from some feature of morality or the moral life to the existence of God, usually understood as a morally good creator of the universe. Moral arguments are both important and interesting. They are interesting because evaluating their soundness requires attention to practically every important philosophical issue dealt with in metaethics. They are important because of their prominence in popular apologetic arguments for religious belief. Evidence for this can be found in the amazing popularity of C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* (1952), which is almost certainly the best-selling book of apologetics in the twentieth century, and which begins with a moral argument for God's existence. Many ordinary people regard religion as in some way providing a basis or foundation for morality. This fact might seem to favor religious arguments for morality rather than moral arguments for religious belief, but if someone believes that morality is in some way "objective" or "real," and that this moral reality requires explanation, moral arguments for God's reality naturally suggest themselves. The apparent connection between morality and religion appears to many people to support the claim that moral truths require a religious foundation, or can best be explained by God's existence, or some qualities or actions of God.

After some general comments about theistic arguments and a brief history of moral arguments, this essay will discuss several different forms of the moral argument. A major distinction is that between moral arguments that are theoretical in nature and practical or pragmatic arguments. The former are best thought of as arguments that begin with alleged moral facts and argue that God is necessary to explain those facts, or at least that God provides a better explanation of them than secular accounts can offer. The latter typically begin with claims about some good or end that morality requires and argue that this end is not

Notes

attainable unless God exists. Whether this distinction is hard and fast will be one of the questions to be discussed, as some argue that practical arguments by themselves cannot be the basis of rational belief. To meet such concerns practical arguments may have to include a theoretical dimension as well.

A plausible interpretation of this scenario is that ordinarily claims such as the one I made, based on memory, are justified, and count as knowledge. However, in this situation, the stakes are raised because my life is at risk, and my knowledge is lost because the pragmatic situation has “encroached” on the normal truth-oriented conditions for knowledge. Pragmatic encroachment is controversial and the idea of such encroachment is rejected by some epistemologists. However, defenders hold that it is reasonable to consider the pragmatic stakes in considering evidence for a belief that underlies significant action (see Fantl and McGrath 2007). If this is correct, then it seems reasonable to consider the pragmatic situation in determining how much evidence is sufficient to justify religious beliefs. In theory the adjustment could go in either direction, depending on what costs are associated with a mistake and on which side those costs lie.

In any case it is not clear that practical moral arguments can always be clearly distinguished from theoretical moral arguments. The reason this is so is that in many cases the practical situation described seems itself to be or involve a kind of evidence for the truth of the belief being justified. Take, for example, Kant’s classic argument. One thing Kant’s argument does is call to our attention that it would be enormously odd to believe that human beings are moral creatures subject to an objective moral law, but also to believe that the universe that humans inhabit is indifferent to morality. In other words, the existence of human persons understood as moral beings can itself be understood as a piece of evidence about the character of the universe humans find themselves in. Peter Byrne (2013, 1998) has criticized practical arguments on the grounds that they presuppose something like the following proposition: “The world is likely to be organized so as to meet our deepest human needs.” Byrne

objects that this premise is likely to be false if there is no God and thus arguments that assume it appear circular. However, it is not clear that only those who already believe in God will find this premise attractive. The reason for this is that humans are themselves part of the natural universe, and it seems a desirable feature of a metaphysical view that it explain (rather than explain away) features of human existence that seem real and important.

It seems likely therefore that any appeal to a practical argument will include some theoretical component as well, even if that component is not always made explicit. Nevertheless, this does not mean that practical arguments do not have some important and distinctive features. For Kant it was important that religious beliefs stem from practical reason. For if religious belief were grounded solely in theoretical reason, then such belief would have to conform to “extrinsic and arbitrary legislation” (Kant 1790, 131). Kant thinks such a religion would be one grounded in “fear and submission,” and thus it is good that religious belief is motivated mainly by a free moral act by which the “final end of our being” is presented to us (1790, 159). For any practical argument makes religious belief existential; the issue is not merely what I believe to be true about the universe but how I shall live my life in that universe.

The Goals of Theistic Arguments

Before attempting to explain and assess moral arguments for the existence of God, it would be helpful to have some perspective on the goals of arguments for God’s existence. (I shall generically term arguments for God’s existence “theistic arguments.”) Of course views about this are diverse, but most contemporary proponents of such arguments do not see theistic arguments as attempted “proofs,” in the sense that they are supposed to provide valid arguments with premises that no reasonable person could deny. Such a standard of achievement would clearly be setting the bar for success very high, and proponents of theistic arguments rightly note that philosophical arguments for interesting conclusions in any field outside of formal logic hardly ever

Notes

reach such a standard. More reasonable questions to ask about theistic arguments would seem to be the following: Are there valid arguments for the conclusion that God exists that have premises that are known or reasonably believed by some people? Are the premises of such arguments more reasonable than their denials, at least for some reasonable people? Arguments that met these standards could have value in making belief in God reasonable for some people, or even giving some people knowledge of God's existence, even if it turns out that some of the premises of the arguments can be reasonably denied by other people, and thus that the arguments fail as proofs.

It is of course possible that an argument for God's existence could provide some evidence for God's existence, in the sense that the argument increases the probability or plausibility of the claim that God exists, even if the argument does not provide enough support by itself for full-fledged belief that God exists. A proponent of the moral argument who viewed the argument in this way might in that case regard the argument as part of a cumulative case for theism, and hold that the moral argument must be supplemented by other possible arguments, such as the "fine-tuning" argument from the physical constants of the universe, or an argument from religious experience. A non-believer might even concede some version of a theistic argument has some evidential force, but claim that the overall balance of evidence does not support belief.

A major issue that cannot be settled here concerns the question of where the burden of proof lies with respect to theistic arguments. Many secular philosophers follow Antony Flew (1976) in holding that there is a "presumption of atheism." Believing in God is like believing in the Loch Ness Monster or leprechauns, something that reasonable people do not do without sufficient evidence. If such evidence is lacking, the proper stance is atheism rather than agnosticism.

This "presumption of atheism" has been challenged in a number of ways. Alvin Plantinga (2000) has argued that reasonable belief in God does not have to be based on propositional evidence, but can be "properly basic."

On this view, reasonable belief in God can be the outcome of a basic faculty (called the *sensus divinitatis* by theologian John Calvin) and thus needs no support from arguments at all. In response some would argue that even if theistic belief is not grounded in propositional evidence, it still might require non-propositional evidence (such as experience), so it is not clear that Plantinga's view by itself removes the burden of proof challenge.

A second way to challenge the presumption of atheism is to question an implicit assumption made by those who defend such a presumption, which is that belief in God is epistemologically more risky than unbelief. The assumption might be defended in the following way: One might think that theists and atheists share a belief in many entities: atoms, middle-sized physical objects, animals, and stars, for example. Someone, however, who believes in leprechauns or sea monsters in addition to these commonly accepted objects thereby incurs a burden of proof. Such a person believes in "one additional thing" and thus seems to incur additional epistemological risk. One might think that belief in God is relevantly like belief in a leprechaun or sea monster, and thus that the theist also bears an additional burden of proof. Without good evidence in favor of belief in God the safe option is to refrain from belief.

However, the theist may hold that this account does not accurately represent the situation. Instead, the theist may argue that the debate between atheism and theism is not simply an argument about whether "one more thing" exists in the world. In fact, God is not to be understood as an entity in the world at all; any such entity would by definition not be God. The debate is rather a debate about the character of the universe. The theist believes that every object in the natural world exists because God creates and conserves that object; every finite thing has the character of being dependent on God. The atheist denies this and affirms that the basic entities in the natural world have the character of existing "on their own." If this is the right way to think about the debate, then it is not obvious that atheism is safer than theism. The debate is not about the existence of one object, but the character of the universe as a whole. Both

parties are making claims about the character of everything in the natural world, and both claims seem risky. This point is especially important in dealing with moral arguments for theism, since one of the questions raised by such arguments is the adequacy of a naturalistic worldview in explaining morality. Evidentialists may properly ask about the evidence for theism, but it also seems proper to ask about the evidence for atheism if the atheist is committed to a rival metaphysic such as naturalism.

7.2 RATIONALISM

Descartes

Descartes begins his philosophy by Doubting- himself and God. The former is resolved through the inference “Cogito Ergo Sum” ‘I think therefore I am.’ He proceeds to say that God’s existence is firmly grounded than ours moreover God is not a deceiver hence the task to prove God’s existence is undertaken. Substance is the primary determination- accident adds quality to it- is a secondary determination. ‘Substance is one, which requires nothing else other than itself in order to exist.’ God is the substance which is infinite, independent, all knowing, all powerful and by which man and all that exist have been created. God is the pure subject- Other creatures too can be called substance in as much as they depend on god. The idea of god is At Intra - from within. By nature we have innate potentiality from birth, to form the idea of God. The idea of infinite substance should have proceeded from an existing infinite substance. We see that there is more reality in infinite than in finite substance. Atheist detests from activating such innate idea of God. The Innate ideas go along with the external world. God bridges these entities. I realize my limitation and imperfection only with the comparison with the unlimited and infinite being .., that being is God upon whom Man’s existence relies.., from whom Man derives his existence, for man can not be the ultimate cause of himself and the world – we require a being different from himself who cannot be less than God. Mountain and valley need one another and so man and god. Animals and plants are considered as mere sophisticated machines for men. Through the process of abstraction we get the idea of perfect being from a limited

and imperfect being. God – means who has all perfections in an unlimited way. Existence is perfection- so He should have existence. Perfection is further divided into ESSENTIAL and EXISTENCE. The former adds to what one is and the latter makes our very being-not adding something and not becoming a part of what we are. Hence there is a need to assert God as substance and the inevitability of his Existence, which is thus proved.

Discussion

- Proofs -reproducing the old.
- Clumsy definition of Substance.
- Devaluing animal world and plants
- Branding atheists as fools.
- Dependency of the creature - devaluing-unwarranted supposition?

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Define the key concepts in Descartes; substance, accidents and innate ideas.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Spinoza

Notes

He is a God Intoxicated man as Germans brand him. He comes out with the philosophy of ONENESS or UNIFICATION. Every thing is basically one. A tailored definition of substance from Descartes is vividly seen; Substance is that which can be understood without the help of any other thing. The Substance is God or Nature. Under the aspect of TIME it is NATURE. Under the aspect of INTUITION it is GOD. God and nature are inter-changeable. They are not like cause and effect- as though god is the immaterial cause and the world as material effect He speaks of EMANATION –which would mean Flow out of. It is not creation-as if God making something out of nothing. Emanation is God makes something out of itself. E.g. Spider emanates its web itself. God or Nature evolves into two directions. They are spirit and matter. They are infinite and eternal. The characteristic of spirit is thought and that of matter is existence. The ‘Good’ must be shared- so God wants to share-emanate. Thus emanation happens necessarily and eternally yet freely because compulsion is within. The greatest virtue of mind is to know God as the universal cause- logically inter-connected infinite system- and to perceive the knowledge of union which the mind has with the whole nature.

Discussion

- If god does not fall under the primary datum of experience can HE be the starting point of philosophy?
- Pantheism- identifying world with God.
- Freedom is absence of compulsion from without, but from within, accepted by its very nature-God.(presumption)
- Abstract Monism- the finite objects and things are illusory modes having no existence of their own? Man, his thoughts too share the same fate?

Leibniz

He is the first one to give us a word 'theodicy'. His indeterminism, many realities were all opposed to the one reality and determinism of Spinoza. He brings in the concept of Monad and further proceeds to expound the theory of pre-established Harmony. Monad signifies unity, the One simple substance that lives, forms the soul and spirit of the entities. They are unextended, shapeless, size-less, being not a mathematical or physical point..., but truly are the metaphysically existent point. Every Monad is active and alive- certain variation in degree is admitted. Each Monad is a summary of the entire world. There is no interaction between the monads. They have within themselves the source of their activity. Man is the colony of monads, a contingent being and God is said to be the uncreated monad.

The substance is re-worked, explained in terms of monads ..., having the capacity of action..., conversely compound substance is a sort of collection of monads. Though isolated, having separate purpose, monads behave in accordance with its created purpose; monads form a unity of the ordered universe, thus there is a large single harmony. Each monad mirrors the whole universe. Such a harmony is the result of God's activity. This preestablished harmony is the sufficient proof of God's existence. On proving God's existence: From sufficient cause, arrive at that substance which is invariable and self-dependent, which is God. From a-priori arrive at a Being in whom there is no distinction between existence and possibility. From the law of continuity view perfection and extend it to the One who is the perfection of all qualities. For cause of the world existing outside of it, is the rational and eternal cause, an eternal mind behind the eternal and inevitable truths and a creator- God is being confirmed.

Discussion

- Every thing is already preset in the mind of God- strivings towards perfection –Useless- a sort of fatalism?

- Man's freedom curtailed- considered as mere puppet of God?
- Mystery of evil and suffering?

7.3 EMPIRICISM

Lock

For Lock knowledge is restricted to ideas resulting from the objects we experience ..., that takes two forms. One is sensation and another reflection. We have the experience of sensation then only we have experience of reflection. Our mind is 'tabula rasa' empty sheet and experience writes knowledge on it. There is no innate ideas..., through senses we receive the distinctive perception of objects thus ideas of qualities we get. Reflection is the activity of the mind –produces ideas-involves perception, thinking, willing, believing, reasoning and knowing.

Simple ideas originate from sensation. Mind sorts out differences. Mind works to separate them then begins to abstract culminating in forming complex ideas. Quality is the power to produce any idea in our mind. Primary quality is found in the object such as solidity, extension figure etc., and secondary qualities produce ideas such as color, sounds, taste and odor in our mind. Substance causes sensation, and is the object of sensitive knowledge- gives power that helps for regularity and consistency to our ideas. But the idea of God is not clear and distinct as the idea of substance inferred from simple ideas. It is the product of demonstrative reason. We have intuitive knowledge which is clear and certain e.g. knowledge of our own existence ..., sure. Demonstrative idea is that mind progress from simple ones to other ideas in which mind engages in agreement or disagreement. Demonstration is the mode of perception that leads the mind to knowledge of some form of existing reality. Every thing begins and end in time..., a non-entity cannot produce any real being, it is an evident demonstration that from eternity there has been something- that eternal being is most knowing, powerful and it is plain to admit the truth of the knowledge of God though senses haven't

immediately discovered it to us. Thus demonstrative knowledge ensures us the certainty of reality of God's existence. Intuitive knowledge gives certainty that we exist and Demonstrative knowledge, certainty of reality of God's existence and sense knowledge assures that other selves and things exist when we experience them.

Discussion

For Lock sovereignty is placed under the human hands—a legislature, though supreme not absolute. It is held as trust- only as a judiciary power- and if found contrary to trust reposed in them then rebellion is justified.., and not only external but also internal throwing out.., altering them is permitted. Opposed to Hobbes- held to be absolute.

Berkley

He gives a new theory of vision. His famous dictum is 'to be is to be perceived'. Knowledge depends on actual vision or other sensory experience. Quality of material objects are seen to the measure of the faculty of our vision is capable of seeing. We perceive objects- contemplating our own ideas and no abstraction is involved in it. There is no other reality other than sensible world. Matter and corporal substance do not exist. Substance is a misleading inference of the philosophers. Gravity, causality is nothing but cluster of ideas our mind derives from sensation. The sensible world neither gives substance nor causality. Things external to our minds exists and achieve their order even when we do not perceive them. Experience of material things is external to our mind, out of our mind (not only mine but all); then if it is independent of my mind then there should be some other mind wherein they exist ..., thus an inevitable omni-potent, omnipresent, eternal mind which knows and comprehends all things should exist. Things depend on God for its existence- he is the cause of orderliness of things in nature. I realize that the other minds too have ideas like that of mine. There is a greater mind between the finite minds that co-ordinates all experience of finite minds –whose ideas constitute the regular order of nature. Our ideas come from

Notes

God and His orderly arrangement of ideas is communicated to us. Objects are not caused by matter or substance but by Him- who is the ultimate reality. Even when we do not perceive, objects continue to exist due to His continuous perception. There is special interpretation of causation- insight into it- for; causal connections are explained in terms of mental operations- which produce imagery ideas- through the mental power- thus every thing is nothing but the product of human minds. The real perceived ideas are created and caused to be in us by an infinite mind.

Discussion

- His response to materialism and skepticism?
- Arguments for the reality of God and of spiritual beings –sufficient?

Hume

His rigorous premise that our ideas reach no further than our experience makes him skeptical about the traditionally held proofs especially those having recourse to Causality. Being an empiricist he held that the existence of God not be proved on the basis of experience neither he is the subject of belief or faith. Human reason is incapable of apprehending the reality of God. Proofs are misleading and futile.

Teleological argument;

There is system and organization, beauty and goodness and so god's existence, intelligence and goodness is thus proved. A. Argument from analogy is futile. Things such as heat, cold and gravitation etc., cannot be explained on the basis of thought or reason. Laws of human life differ from that of animal life and the purpose one discovers in human life cannot be imposed upon other forms of existenceso better not to deduce the fact of the existence of God from the fact of universal existence. B. Whole- not the basis of part; Thought, reason and purpose are only part

of creation- don't use it to analyze the entire creation. Human world and natural world are different and one cannot be used to deduce the other. C. God doesn't resemble Human mind. Man's mind is subject to incessant change and to conceive of God as being similar to the human mind is rather fallacious. D. Nature of God derived from nature of creation. Creation is not perfect and so logical conclusion would be that God too is imperfect. Nature as the basis of comparison would lead us to conceive of God who cannot satisfy us.

Refutation of God as the author of the universe

We cannot prove the accuracy of beliefs on the basis of our experience because it is limited and imperfect. Better to detest from conceiving god as the creator of mechanical instrument. God as the soul of the universe would better suffice us.

Moral arguments revised

God as the cause of all morality not assumed since it is not out of experience. Our experience does not vouch for any moral order in the universe. It is wrong to assume that God is moral even though man's reason is incapable of realizing this fact.

Ontological argument revised

When we do not know the nature of god, we can not argue about his existence on the basis of this nature. The belief in God arises rather out of man's physical and psychological needs- not to be based on human reason or on experience but on the requirement of human life- on human emotion and will.. It should be analyzed not from the rational standpoint but from the historic and genetic viewpoints-considering evolutionary aspects.

Discussion

- Inconsistency in believing in the existence of God.
- Daringly believing in the 'purpose in everything', and in nature
- Having recourse to faith...in the philosophical circle
- His influence on Feurbach who develops new findings such as 'theogenic wish' and 'contrast-effect' [God-man relationship] is seen.

7.4 IDEALISM

Kant's Idea of God

An idealist, profounder of critical philosophy Kant argues that all types of proofs are fallacious. The ontological arguments fail because it treats existence as if it were a 'real predicate'- not as a concept but certain determinations in them accounts for certainty- and need of a perfect being, that accounts for the possibility of any thing to exist. Causal argument fails for just to avoid an actually an infinite causal series in the world we posit a first cause- necessary being - God. God is the highest idea, the idea of highest unity, of the one absolute whole including and encompassing every thing. This idea transcends experience, and it is one of the results of reason which brings under one head all happenings. The impossibility of experience of whole universe makes this idea an entity of this whole, personified as God. Along with this idea over reason and God, Kant places thought over religion and nature, i.e. the idea of religion being natural or naturalistic. Kant saw reason as natural, and as some part of Christianity is based on reason and morality, he concludes that Christianity is 'natural'. However, it is not 'naturalistic' in the sense that religion does include supernatural or transcendent belief.

Yes we can not experience God through reason yet reason can bring God back as a necessary unknown. Using the name of god one must live a good moral life-for bad life will bring evil. Kant found the practical necessity for a belief in God. It's relation of happiness with morality as

the "ideal of the supreme good" is clear. The foundation of this connection is an intelligible moral world, and "is necessary from the practical point of view". He says that only the idea of freedom accounts for the condition of the moral law, whose reality is an axiom. Thus the categorical imperative, authenticates God's role- also an immediately experienced moral situation requires Him, serving as foundation for our ethical principles. Voltaire's contention "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him" becomes true in Kant's statement. Religion does counterfeit service to God- encouraging external ritual, superstition and hierarchy. Conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions is to be the goal. Rejection of the possibility of theoretical proofs and his philosophical re-interpretation makes Kant as thoroughly hostile to religion in general and Christianity in particular.

Discussion

- The neutrality in the God-talk and over-emphasis of practicality of morality!
- Philosophical speculation lacking in his discourse on Evil.
- Un-due optimism on 'the good-will' of man and the unrealistic refuge sought in the so called 'categorical imperatives'.

Hegel

Philosophy has to do with 'Ideas' not mere concepts as Hegel proposed, finds its way throughout his doctrine. Religion for him is the attainment of this 'Absolute Idea'. The emphasis is more on Christianity which synthesises the divine and human in the God-man Jesus Christ. Definition of spirit and light referring to God; Spirit- the absolute being, self-consciousness, the all truth and knows all reality as itself in contrast to the reality- is compared to the darkness and night- as the pure ego. This object is for the ego, the fusion of all thought and all reality-the

Notes

mode is the pure all-containing, all suffusing light as it rises. Its counterpart is the equally simple negative, darkness. The state of mere being has an unreal by-play on this substance. Its determinations are merely attributes, which do not succeed in attaining independence. This one is clothed with the manifold powers of existence with the shapes of reality. Pure light scatters its simplicity as infinity of separate forms and presents itself as an offering to self-existence that the individual may be sustained in its substance.

Plants and Animals as objects of Religion:

Self-conscious spirit, passing away from abstract, formless essence and going into itself, makes its simple unity assume the character of the manifold of entities existing by themselves; - divides into plurality of weaker and stronger, richer and poorer spirits. The innocence, characterizes the flower and plant- and as a sort of anti- thesis, negative quality causes dispersion of passive plant forms into manifold entities- and antipathetic fold spirits fight and hate each other to the death and consciously accept certain specific forms of animals as their essential reality.

The Representation of God

Artistic spirit achieves consciousness which is immediate in character. The environment and habitation abstains its pure form, the form belonging to spirit, by the whole being raised into the sphere of the pure conceptions. Ends are not merely posited but constitute the individuality, first of the Gods and then of men. Religion assures man that his God is the universal end, who is present to his consciousness as a form of representation of his own. The ancient Gods, earth, ocean and sun, picturized as earlier titans, are the spirits reflecting ethical life of self-conscious nation. The restless, endless individuality is destroyed causing isolation- imposed grandeur on the Gods, the substance being relegated. The supposed reality ensures gladness; it is worshiped and endured. Each

marble God stands for the ethical life of a particular people, in worshipping its God, the community achieves self-consciousness.

Discussion

- Christianized the ideas of spirit, nature and freedom
- Pantheistic world-view, identifying nature with God.
- Forcing man to adhere to the universal end.

Check your progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Define the terminologies ‘spirit’ and ‘light’ in Hegel.

.....
.....
.....

2. Explain God’s manifold manifestation in plants and animals.

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. The representation of God in individual consciousness, anthropomorphized in ancient gods partially alienates yet serves in achieving self-consciousness – how?

.....
.....
.....
.....

7.5 LET US SUM UP

The dualism of Descartes, the monism of Spinoza and a different kind of pluralism in Leibniz believing in one substance but accepting different kinds of monads are covered. The emphasis is on the capacity of human mind on innate ideas or on self evident truths. Stress on human experience supported with demonstrative reason in Lock, the greater mind coordinating our experience in Berkley, and historic and genetic roots revealing the belief in God arising out of physical and psychological needs in Hume are analyzed. ‘The idea of God’ in Kant serving as the foundation of our ethical principles, stemming from moral situation and Hegel seeing God as absolute spirit, manifesting in plants and animals- his representation seen in individual consciousness portrayed in ancient Gods mirroring ethical life and facilitating the process of attaining self-consciousness are also seen.

It seems clear that no version of the moral argument constitutes a “proof” of God’s existence. Each version contains premises that many reasonable thinkers reject. However, this does not mean the arguments have no force. One might think of each version of the argument as attempting to spell out the “cost” of rejecting the conclusion. Some philosophers will certainly be willing to pay the cost, and indeed have independent reasons for doing so. However, it would certainly be interesting and important if one became convinced that atheism required one to reject moral realism altogether, or to embrace an implausible account of how moral knowledge is acquired. For those who think that some version or versions of the arguments have force, the cumulative case for theistic belief may be raised by such arguments.

7.6 KEY WORDS

Innate idea of God: by nature man has inborn potency to form the idea of god with in – while activating this one is led to belief in him.

Emanation: Something flows out of something – God makes something out of Himself.

Demonstrative reason: something more than intuitive knowledge- mind progresses from simple ideas to greater and higher ones and has agreement or disagreement of it. This is the mode of perceiving the eternal being.

Teleological: theory which explains that everything has some purpose, goal or end.

Historical and genetic view point: the need of God arising from man's physical and psychological needs- since religion too involves evolution.

Representation: something becoming available to man on behalf of some other reality- God presents himself to man's consciousness, indeed a replica of His own.

Categorical Imperatives: the basic ethical principle present in man a-priory, which accounts for the 'good will' – motivates man to will and act so as to posit a 'maxim' form his acts.

7.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Define the key concepts in Descartes; substance, accidents and innate ideas.
2. Define the terminologies 'spirit' and 'light' in Hegel.
3. Explain God's manifold manifestation in plants and animals.
4. The representation of God in individual consciousness, anthropomorphized in ancient gods partially alienates yet serves in achieving self-consciousness – how?

7.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Adams, R., 1987, "Moral Arguments for Theism," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 144–163.
- Baggett, D., and Walls, J., 2011, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dennett, D., 2006, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, New York: Penguin

Notes

- Devine, P., 1989, *Relativism, Nihilism, and God*, Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press.
- Enoch, D., *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, C. S., 2010, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Darrel E. Christensen. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. I, 1970.
- J.N. Findlay. *Hegel a Re-examination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.
- Roy Archana. *Western Philosophy*. New Delhi: Gitanjali publishing house, 1985.
- Copleston Fredric.S.J. *A History of Philosophy*. New York: Image Books, 1960.
- Britannica Great books 31, 33 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Descartes Books No. 15, 4, 25, 26 and 3.
- Edward, Paul. Ed. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol 4. 1967; Rpt. New York: Macmillan Publishing co., Inc., 1972.
- Hunnex, Milton.D. *Chronological and Thematic charts of Philosophies and philosophers*. Oxford: Chandler Publishing Co., 1968.
- Popkin, Richard H, *Avrum Stroll. Philosophy*. Oxford: Butterworth- Heinemann Ltd.,1993.
- Vatsayan. *History of Western Philosophy*. Meerut: Kedarnath Ramnath, 1970.

7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. Substance is the primary determination. 'Substance is one, which requires nothing else other than itself in order to exist.' God is the substance which is infinite, independent, all knowing, all powerful, creatures too can be called substance in as much as they depend on god. Accident adds quality to the primary substance which is a secondary

determination. For e.g. I am fat or intelligent man which adds quality to me as a man. Innate ideas: By nature we have innate potentiality from birth, to form the idea of God. The idea of infinite substance should have proceeded from an existing infinite substance. We see that there is more reality in infinite than in finite substance. God is defined as substance. The idea of god is thus At Intra - from within. The Innate ideas go along with the external world. Defining the innate ideas vindication for the proof of God's existence is sought in Descartes.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. Spirit- the absolute being, self-consciousness, the all truth and knows all reality as itself-in contrast to the reality- is compared to the darkness and night- as the pure ego. This object is for the ego, the fusion of all thought and all reality-the mode is the pure all-containing, all suffusing light as it rises. Its counterpart is the equally simple negative, darkness. This one is clothed with the manifold powers of existence with the shapes of reality. Pure light scatters its simplicity as infinity of separate forms and presents itself as an offering to self-existence that the individual may be sustained in its substance.

2. Self-conscious spirit, passing away from abstract, formless essence and going into itself, makes its simple unity, assumes the character of the manifold nature of entities existing by themselves- divides into plurality of weaker and stronger, richer and poorer spirits. The innocence, characterizes the flower and plant- and as a sort of anti- thesis, negative quality causes dispersion of passive plant forms into manifold entities- and antipathetic fold spirits fight and hate each other to the death and consciously accept certain specific forms of animals as their essential reality.

3. Artistic spirit achieves consciousness which is immediate in character. The environment and habitation abstains its pure form, the form belonging to spirit, by the whole being raised into the sphere of the pure conceptions. Ends are not merely posited but constitute the individuality,

Notes

first of the Gods and then of men. Religion assures man that his God is the universal end, who is present to his consciousness as a form of representation of his own. The ancient Gods, earth, ocean and sun, picturerized as earlier titans, are the spirits reflecting ethical life of self conscious nation. The restless, endless individuality is destroyed causing isolation- imposed grandeur on the Gods, the substance being relegated. The supposed reality ensures gladness; it is worshiped and endured. Each marble God stands for the ethical life of a particular people, in worshiping its God, the community achieves self-consciousness.