

Society's Religion: Does God Create Us, Or Do We Create God?

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Abstract

Society has always molded itself into a form of a belief system. Within a belief system there are, values, morals, and laws that help govern each society as it is what works for them. There are many diverse societies in the world, and each society has its own belief system known as religion. It was necessary that each society created divisions from one another to enhance their diversity from each other and practice their religious beliefs. At the same time, these societies would expand to communicate their belief system with other societies. The questions that arise with various religions are; How can each religion be true? How do people develop their own religion? To address these questions, the following readings; *Magic, Science and Religion* by Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth and Meaning* by Claude Levi-Strauss, and *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* by Emile Durkheim will be referenced to. There is no absolute knowledge and certainty when it comes to these questions, but there is knowledge that can help give a greater understanding. The focus of this paper is to gain a better idea of how society needs religion and so it creates it, and how science is limited in answering questions regarding religion.

Introduction to society and religion

Society has a way of developing religion which holds a set of beliefs. This includes practices and teachings involving the morals, values, and rules they live by. There are many diverse religions in the real world, and many diverse cultures. These cultures create divisions amongst each other to strengthen their own religion and become more diverse in their own culture. At the same time, individuals' who claim to be religious, desire to expand and spread their own religion around the world by teaching others of it. As old religions die, new ones are later born. There are so many religions and variations within some religions that are spread across the world from culture to culture. This brings into controversy between humankind's society, religion, and science. Not every religion can hold all truth, yet every culture claims that their religion is the true religion. Science on the other hand, is not advanced enough to provide all the answers that religion provides. The question then arises, does god create us, or do we create god?

Religion is essential to society, throughout history, religion has been key in many societies. On page fifty-four of the reading *Magic, Science, and Religion* it claims, "Religion needs the community . . . society needs religion for the maintenance of moral law and order." (Malinowski, 1995). The reading also refers to society as the substance of god. There are many reasons why a social being needs religion. The theory explains the nature of a small religious group, many religions beginning small and thus they are called a cult. The nature of a cult provides inspiration and comfort to the social being. Within each religious group, there are similarities like; the formation of a congregation, expressed intolerance for certain behaviors and other beliefs, and having clear, logical morals (Malinowski, 1995). What the reading has found

within religion is, the strongest religious moments are often found in solitude. It seems strange that a social being could find, what could seem like a revelation increasing their faith of their religion in solitude versus society when religion is based upon society itself. Since the strong religious moments are most felt in solitude, it is impossible to say that what an individual experienced happen. Even within a society, religion is another language in which science cannot provide answers for. On the other hand, science may say that the solitude experience of religion cannot be explained and therefore did not happen. The religious experience however, was experienced by an individual, and many individuals claim to have religious experiences. Science may not agree with religion, but just as they are two different languages, they are also similar and play a part with society. The individual who has a religious experience, they become validated by their experience. To that person, the experience was real and therefore, it had truth to it.

A person's conscience enforces morals. In a gathering for many social beings, the collective conscience will enforce the morals of that group. Social science uses "collective" versus "individual forces" to explain the morals of one individual intergraded in a society. This gives everyone a sense of increased power when they are included in a religious gathering (Malinowski, 1995). However, the reading also rejects the sociological theory when it addresses the primitive man's rational knowledge of nature. This is because there is no exact religion, but spirituality through connection with one's surroundings, abilities, and traditions. The primitive society is based on individual sources, whereas, the social being is based on the religious gatherings and practices (Malinowski, 1995).

In all religion, there is symbolism for both good and evil. Common idols include God, as the pure and almighty, and Satan (the anti-god), as the evil forces (Durkheim, 1912). This helps a

religious community to develop their morals and values and they identify what is good and evil.

There are many roles that religion plays in society, one of them is it helps maintain order within the community. Religion will guide society by rules and guidelines and present them ideals of another world, where there is salvation and immortality. A human being, being a social creature, will experience many conflicting emotions as they have a conscience. Religion provides people with spiritual enlightenment from the teachings. An example as given in the reading, includes the idea of, "continuity after death . . .the dead body becomes an object of sacred duties."

(Malinowski, 1995). It is unknown if a religious belief of an ideal world exists, or if it is just the mental experience through the human conscience that religion provides, giving social beings a piece of mind.

Science for many years has attempted to find evidence against religion. The reading, *Myth and Meaning* by Claude Levi-Strauss, explains the reasoning of creating science to provide the evidence through factual knowledge. ". . . science could only exist by turning its back upon the world we see, smell, taste, and perceive; the sensory was a delusive world . . ." (Levi-Strauss, 1978). The reading says there is an experience versus the mind. In the example given, as a boy, Levi-Strauss told his mother that he could read. The fact was, he could not read, but he could identify the words of shop names meaning, he recognized the word and associated it with the shop they were going to. Because he could recognize a word, and then associate it with the shop he and his mother were going to, he believed he could read (Levi-Strauss, 1978). This example shows, that there are two different experiences, one that can be recognized on another level, and the other where it is a learned skill in communication. In society, there are different ways to express language, it is difficult to try and express a language in another language. This is

excluding the language given by tongue, but referred to as language like different ideals such as science and religion. A way to understand this, is to view language as an expression. Music is an expression through sound and rhythm and can even use speech to tell an experience attached to a feeling. However, you wouldn't use the language of music to express the language of painting. Relating back to religion, the reading explains how something that seems so absurd, must not be so absurd if it continually reappears. This is reflecting on how religion holds constant in society throughout time. Religion seems absurd, because of its variations, and lack of evidence, yet it continuously is formed throughout societies, so it must not be so absurd. It may raise thoughts such as, religion is created by society, humans are social beings, and as a social being they need the order religion gives. Other thoughts include; religion gives people a sense of security in believing in another world or afterlife, it gives the security of belonging to a group of the same faith. These thoughts are all valid reasons as to why society would create religion. People need faith in a religion that provides answers to what is unknown of their purpose and what becomes of them after death. Death is a painful experience for the people who lose those close to them; it raises awareness and questions as to what happened after to their loved one when they died, and what is to happen to themselves when they die? These are the unknowns in which science cannot give an answer. "The superiority of scientific explanation lies not only in the practical and intellectual achievement of science, but in the fact . . ." (Levi-Strauss, 1978).

Religion and science give society different strengths. Science is based on what we know, it attempts to learn more, understand, and achieve mastery over our world. Science provides what religion can't through fact. When science disproves some aspects of religion, the society will not change their faith in the religious belief. There is weakness in addition to the strengths in

both religion and science, therefore they are two separate languages that coexist within society, but should not be mixed. "If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion. Religious forces are therefore human forces, moral forces." (Durkheim, 1912). Durkheim has provided today's society with religious background that has been part of society since there has been society. The background, helps us understand where religion came from, how it formed, and why it is still important in society now. Durkheim states that religion develops a refuge, of a shield and of guardian support. Society works to create order within a civilization. Part of human nature, is to identify and form relation with other humans like themselves. People form groups to have not just physical, but also emotional and mental security. The reasoning is because we are social creatures and depend on each other, when we form societies, it makes sense to create order for a group. It is easy to see that there are many ways other groups can be diverse from each other when they are separated. Just the same, the society has the same basic human needs, but the way the religion and culture develop depends on those people and there doesn't seem to be only one right way to do so. A short way to describe society and religion is, "These aspirations have their roots in us." (Durkheim, 1912). This is a way to say, that religion is of human nature.

Durkheim claims that, ". . . nearly all the great social institutions have been born in religion." (Durkheim, 1912). Based upon Durkheim's claim, religion is the most important part in a society, so it would be of importance for anthropologists to focus most of their attention on the religion of the diverse cultures they study. Religion is the base in society, and to better understand society, and the social being that live by religious customs which influences their culture. Society equals the collective consciousness, which is needed to achieve the highest form

of the psychic life and society needs religion (Durkheim, 1912).

In conclusion, there are many questions that cannot be answered, both through science and religion. What can be understood, is how both science and religion are separate languages created by humans. These languages speak to society on different levels, giving answers and aid to the social and physical aspect in each individual life. Science and religion are said that even though they are related, they should not be mixed because they are expressed differently. In addition, if there is a true God(s), higher being, and religion or not, science cannot prove that. The truth of idealized world remains unknown. Science will continue to advance, and more evidence of the human world will become known, but science will never be complete. There is however, the understanding of human anatomy and physiology. Understanding this part of the human is scientific, we know that the human is a social being. As a social being, humans will form a society, in where they can create order and civilization through religion and connect to their environment. If religion is a reoccurring part of society, then it could be natural for the social being. Based upon the lack of evidence that we are created by God, there is enough evidence to support that we, as social beings create our own God(s)/higher being of power in society.

References

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