

Religion can be explained as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. Philosophy & Religion Ancient Religions & Mythology Baltic religion, religious beliefs and practices of the Balts, ancient inhabitants of the Baltic region of eastern Europe who spoke languages. The study of Baltic religion has developed as an offshoot of the study of Baltic languagesOld Prussian, Latvian, and Lithuanian (see Baltic languages). These form a separate groupthe oldest oneof the Indo-European languages, which are closely related to the ancient Indian languages, which are closely related to the study of Baltic religion has not assumed a similar level of importance in the study of comparative religion. In 1875 it was shown that the religious concepts of the Balts, when compared with those of other European peoples, are found to be marked by many older features that agree with Vedic (ancient Indian) and Iranian ideas. At least one scholarly reconstruction of ancient Indo-European religion depended mainly on Baltic religious traditions. International research in Baltic religion has, however, been greatly hindered by the fact that the languages of these small Baltic countries (Latvia and Lithuania) are but little known and because Baltic scholars have been able to work in this field only relatively recently. understanding that many findings are only hypothetical and require further research. But, as will be seen below, even under these circumstances Baltic religious concepts help greatly in understanding the formation and structure of the oldest phases of Indo-European religion. requiring its own specific methodology: archaeological material, historical documents, linguistics, including toponymy (the study of the place-names of a region or language), and folklore. Since the last half of the 19th century, archaeological material has furnished much information about burial and sacrificial rites. have also been found. This material is of special interest in that it corroborates old reliability to both of these sources. But archaeological material can at best furnish only a partial and incomplete picture, even though it is meaningful in some respects. Historical documents, already partially compiled and published, could be expected to yield much more information. Their value, however, is made problematic by the fact that all such documents were written by foreigners, mainly Germans who, in the course of their centuries-long eastward expansion, subjugated the Baltic peoples and exterminated some of them. not understand the Baltic languages, many documents contain the names of gods and other divinities that are without basis in fact. Baltic religion was viewed dogmatically and negatively in the light of Christian interpretations. Linguistic source material, also compiled by foreigners, shows fewer signs of interpretation, especially in regard to toponymy. Baltic folkloreone of the most extensive folklores of all European peoplescontains the greatest amount of material, especially valuable because it contains many concepts that elsewhere have been lost under the influence of Christianity. Old religious beliefs have persisted because the Germans, after conquering the Baltic lands in the 13th and 14th centuries, made practically no attempt at Christianization and contented themselves with only economic gains. The positive result of this policy is the preservation of old traditions and religious beliefs; some researchers have also noted the similarity between the metrical structure of the dainas and that of the Old Indian short verses in the Rigveda (a Hindu sacred scripture). The student of Baltic religion still encounters two difficulties. First, as has been noted, since written documents were established in Christian times, Christian time difficulties and make a critical approach mandatory. Second, after the establishment of political independence of the Baltic countries following World War I, there arose a certain national romanticism that has attempted to identify Baltic culture with that of the ancient Indo-Europeans. Thus, an uncritical approach has led even to the introduction of gods that are actually only etymological derivations from the names of Christian saints. On the other hand, those western European scholars who are unfamiliar with the special historical and social circumstances of the Balts have underestimated its importance. Share copy and redistribute the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the license as the original. No additional restrictions You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation. No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Philosophy & Religion Ancient Religions & Mythology Hellenistic religion, any of the various systems of beliefs and practices of eastern Mediterranean peoples from 300 bc to ad 300. The period of Hellenistic influence, when taken as a whole, constitutes one of the most creative periods in the history of religions. It was a time of spiritual revolution in the Greek and Roman empires, when old cults died or were fundamentally transformed and when new religious movements came into being. The historical Hellenistic Age is defined as the period from the death of the Greco-Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great (323 bc) to the conquest of Egypt by Rome (30 bc), but the influence of the Hellenistic religions are confined to those that were active within the Mediterranean world. The empire of Alexander and his successors created a great world community which, whether in Macedonian, Greco-Roman, or its later Christian form, established a cultural unity that was destined to be broken only 1,000 years later with the advent of Muslim imperialism (beginning in 7th century ad). This empire was so vast as truly to stagger the imagination. Extending from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Indus River, from the forests of Germany and the steppes of Russia to the Sahara Desert and the Indian Ocean, it took in an area of some 1.5 million square miles (3.9 milli borderlands of India) and had a total population of more than 54 million. The study of Hellenistic religious persistence and change in this period occurred in both its homeland and in diasporic centresthe foreign cities in which its adherents lived as minority groups. For example, Isis (Egypt), Baal (Syria), the Great Mother (Phrygia), Yahweh (Palestine), and Mithra (Kurdistan) were worshiped in their native lands as well as in Rome and other cosmopolitan centres. With few exceptions, each of these religions, originally tied to a specific geographic area and people, had traditions extending back centuries before the Hellenistic period. In their homeland they were inextricably tied to local loyalties and ambitions. Each persisted in its native land with little perceptible change save for its becoming linked to nationalistic or messianic movements (centring on a deliverer figure) seeking to overthrow Greco-Roman political and cultural domination. Indeed, many of these native religions underwent a conscious archaism during this period, attempting to recover earlier forms and practices. Old texts in native languages (especially those related to relevant themes such as kingship) were recopied, national temples were restored, and old, mythic traditions were revived. From Palestine to Persia one may trace the rise of Wisdom literature (the teachings of a sage concerning the hidden purposes of the deity) and apocalyptic traditions (referring to a belief in the dramatic intervention of a god in human and natural events) that represent these central concernsi.e., national destiny, the importance of traditional lore, the saving power of kingship, and the revival of mythic images. Each of these native traditions likewise underwent hellenization (modifications based on Greek cultural ideas), but in a manner frequently different from their diasporic counterparts. Each of these native religions also had diasporic centres that exhibited marked change during the Hellenistic period. There was a noticeable lessening of concern on the part of the members of the dispersed religious group for the destiny and fortunes of the native land also a relative severing of the traditional ties between religious group for the destiny and the land. Certain cult centres remained sites of pilgrimage or objects of sentimental attachment; but the old beliefs in national deities and the inextricable relationship of the deity to certain sacred places was weakened. Rather than a god who dwelt in his temple, the diasporic traditions of a god), or heavenly journeys to a transcendent god. This led to a change from concern for a religion of national prosperity to one for individual salvation, from focus on a particular ethnic group to concern for every human. The prophet or saviour replaced the priest and king as the chief religious figure. In the diasporic centres, as is generally characteristic of immigrant groups, there were two circles. The first (or inner circle) was composed of devout, full-time adherents of the cult for whom the deity retained a separate and decisive identity (e.g., those of Yahweh, Zeus Serapis, and Isis). Its membership was drawn from the ethnic group for whom the deity was indigenous, and third-generation immigrants or converts from groups for whom the religion was not native. These individuals tended to speak Greek, and this began the lengthy process of reinterpretation of the archaic religion. Ancient sacred books were translated or paraphrased into Greeke.g., the 4th3rd-century-bc Babylonian materials, the 4th3rd-century-bc Egyptian priest Manethos Egyptian accounts, the Jewish Septuagint (Greek version of the 1st-century-bc Greek writer Alexander Polyhistor. In each case the material was reinterpreted both in light of common Hellenistic ideals and in accord with the special traditions and needs of the diasporic community. Both the inner and outer circles fostered esotericism (secrets to be known only by initiates) the former by its use of allegory and other similar methods to radically reinterpret the sacred texts. The difference between these groups was responsible for many shifts in the characteristic of native religion. Most notable was the shift from elements characteristic of native religion. Most notable was the shift from elements characteristic of native religion. creeds, law codes, and rules for conversion and admission that were characteristic of diasporic religions. It was a shift from birthright to convinced religions. Rather it is best understood as the study of archaic Mediterranean religions in their Hellenistic phase within both their native and diasporic settings. It is usually by concentrating on the diaspora that the Hellenistic character of a cult has been described. Atheists are frequently challenged to explain why they are so critical of religious and theistic beliefs. Why do we care what others believe? Why don't we just leave people alone to believe what they want? Why do we try to "impose" our beliefs on theirs? Such questions frequently misunderstand the nature of beliefs are challenged. We need more challenged. We need more challenges to beliefs, not less. A belief is a mental attitude that some proposition is true. For every given proposition, every person either has or lacks the mental attitude that it is truethere is no middle ground between the presence or absence of a belief. In the case of gods, everyone either has a that that at least one god of some sort exists or they lack any such belief. involves arriving at a conclusion about a proposition (and thus usually creating a belief). Whereas belief is the mental attitude that some proposition is true rather than false, judgment is the evaluation of a proposition as reasonable, fair, misleading, etc. Because it is a type of disposition, it isn't necessary for a belief to be constantly and consciously manifested. We all have many beliefs of which we are not consciously aware. There may even be beliefs which a person hasn't consciously considered. Although some people treat them as almost synonymous, belief and knowledge are very distinct. The most widely accepted definition of knowledge is that something is "known" only when it is a "justified, true belief." This means that if Joe "knows" some proposition X, then all of the following must be the case: Joe believes XX is trueJoe has good reasons to believe X If the first is absent, then Joe has made a mistake for believing it, but Joe has made a mistake for believing something. This distinction between belief and knowledge is why atheism and agnosticism are not mutually exclusive. While atheists can't typically deny that a person believers have sufficient justification for their belief. Atheists may go further and deny that it is true that something warranting the label "god" is out there, none of the reasons offered by theists justifies accepting their claims as true. Brought together, beliefs and knowledge form a mental attitude that the world is structured in some way rather than another. This means that beliefs are necessarily the foundation for action: whatever actions you take in the world around you, they are based on your mental representation includes supernatural realms and entities. As a consequence, if you believe something is true, you must be willing to act as if it were true. If you are unwilling to act as though it is true, you can't really claim to believe it. This is why actions can matter much more than words. We can't know the contents of a person's mind, but we can know if their actions are consistent with what they say they believe. A religious believe it. This is why actions can matter much more than words. We can't know the contents of a person's mind, but we can know if their actions are consistent with what they say they believe. A religious believe it. reflect such love? Beliefs are important because behavior is important and your behavior depends on your beliefs. Everything you do can be traced back to beliefs also help determine your reactions to others' behavior for example, their refusal to brush their teeth or their own career choices. All this means that beliefs are not an entirely private matter. Even beliefs you try to keep to yourself may influence your actions enough to become a matter of legitimate concern for others. Believers are frequently seen arguing that their religion is critical for the development of correct behavior. The more important the behavior in questioning, and challenges. Given the link between belief and behavior, to what extent must beliefs be tolerated and to what extent is intolerance justified? It would be legally difficult (not to mention impossible on a practical level) to suppressed, but most moral, sensible adults refuse to tolerate racism in their presence. We are intolerant: we don't stay silent while racists talk about their ideology, we don't stay in their presence, and we don't stay in their presence, and we don't stay in their presence, and we don't stay in their presence. We are intolerant to think that anyone but a racist would object to such intolerance of racism. Yet, if it's legitimate to be intolerant of racism, then we should be willing to consider intolerance of other beliefs as well. The real question is how much harm the beliefs can cause harm indirectly by promoting false representations of the world as knowledge while preventing believers from subjecting those representations to critical, skeptical scrutiny. The famed psychology recognizes that religion can play an important role in an individual's life and experiences and can even improve health and well-being. In fact, studies have shown that religion can help people develop healthy habits, regulate their behaviors, and understand their emotionsall factors that can affect your mental health. According to an estimate by the Pew Research Center, 84% of the world's population has some type of religious affiliation. There are many different types of religions, including the major world religious traditions that are widely known as well as much lesser-known belief in a single god, while others are examples of polytheism, or the belief in multiple gods. Some of the types of religions include but are certainly not limited to: Baha'iBuddhismChristianityConfucianismHinduismIndigenous American religionsIslamJainismJudaismRastafarianismIndigenous American religionsIslamJainismIndigenous American religions between humans and the natural world. On the other end of the religious spectrum is atheism, which involves a belief in no god or gods, and agnosticism, which holds that the existence of god or gods is unknown or unknowable. While religion and spirituality are related, there are differences between the two. Spirituality is an individual practice and belief, whereas religion is centered on a set of organized practices that a larger group shares. It is possible to be spiritual without being religious. The reasons why people believe in religion are not fully understood, but researchers have suggested a number of possible explanations. According to the most recent Gallup poll, 47% of adults in the U.S. have some type of religious membership. As to why people believe in religion, psychologists have proposed several theories. Researchers have proposed that how the human brain works often predisposes people to believe. The human mind looks for patterns, purpose, and meaning, which may influence why people turn to religion to guide their belief systems. Parenting and cultural influences also play an important role since people tend to belong, combined with the desire to be part of something larger than oneself. Religion can serve a wide range of purposes. Religion can be a source of comfort and guidance. It can provide a basis for moral beliefs and behaviors. It can also provide a sense of community and connection to tradition. Some research even suggests that it may affect health. The impact of religion on health and life expectancy has always been a tricky area of research. It seems (to some) that religious peopledefined here as people who attend religious services regularlyseem to be healthier than those who don't attend. This has led to a line of research looking into the impact of religion on health to determine what, if any, positive benefit religion could have on life expectancy. This research is tricky, however, because of several factors that are difficult to control for, including: People who attend religious services may simply be healthier than those who cannot attend. The benefits may have more to do with social contact than religions may encourage healthy behaviors. As researchers look into the impact of religion, all these factors must be considered along with the possibility that religion itself influences health. Religion can contribute to a sense of community, provide support, and offer guidance. It has also been shown to impact both physical and mental health. One series of studies found that participants who were either religious or spiritual had a decreased risk of coronary heart disease (CHD), lower blood pressure (BP), better immune function, and longer lifespans when compared to people who were not religious or spiritual. In these studies, people who were religious were also less likely to smoke, which put them at a lower risk of smoking-related illnesses such as all cancers, cardiovascular disease. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is linked with a better quality of life as well as a greater lifespan. Religion can also influence mental health in both positive and negative ways. Religion can serve as a source of comfort and strength when people are under stress. At other times, this connection may be less helpfulor even harmfulif it creates stress or acts as a barrier to treatment. Studies suggest that religion has both the potential to help and harm mental health and well-being. On the positive side, religious coping, miscommunication, and harmful negative beliefs that actually be detrimental to mental health. Some mental health benefits of religion include: Giving people structure Building a community with a group Creating a sense of belonging Helping people cope with mental health conditions. People often turn to their religious beliefs in order to cope with symptoms of mental illness and to help manage stress. Research has also shown that religious clergy when they need treatment for mental health conditions. Religious and pastoral counseling can be an important resource for people of faith who want to incorporate their religious and spiritual beliefs into their treatment. Twelve-step addiction treatment programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) also sometimes take a faith-based approach to treatment. Pastoral counseling is provided by religious clergy who have been psychologically trained to provide therapy services. These counselors integrate modern psychological practices with theological teaching to address problems that their clients are experiencing. There's no doubt that religion has a complex influence on the lives of individuals and societies. Religion has a complex influence on the lives of individuals and societies. discrimination within religious communities, such as people who hold differing beliefs from the rest of the group. Research has also found that people who struggle with their religious beliefs can also play a part in the potential benefits or drawbacks. People who believe in a merciful God are more likely to forgive themselves and treat their mistakes with self-compassion. In contrast, those who believe in a punishing or judgemental God may experience worsened health effects. religious. While studies suggest that religion may have health benefits, you don't need to ascribe to a set of organized religious beliefs to reap these rewards. If need to ascribe to a set of organized religion often provides. If you are concerned about religion's impact on your life, discussing your concerns with a mental health professional may be helpful. Research suggests that religion can play a positive and supported or even excluded from religious practice, it is important to weigh the potential good with the potential harm. Because these studies are observational (researchers watch what happens in the real world without actively controlling any of the conditions or randomizing the participants), it cannot be said with certainty that religious attendance increases life expectancy or that it doesn't. We can only conclude that there is an association between religious attendance and increased life expectancy. They are linked, but we don't know why. There could be a different reason to explain the life expectancy outcome in the study. In fact, other studies have shown that people who regularly attend religious services: May be more likely to be employed Tend to have larger social networksTend to be more positiveAre more likely to live in intact familiesAre less likely to be experiencing disabling illness Any of these factors could explain the difference in life expectancy observed in these studies. Another study suggested that religious involvement on its own should not be automatically assumed to improve health. People who share religious beliefs also usually share other characteristics including ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Research also suggests that religious attitudes toward mental health treatment can play a role in whether people seek help when they are experiencing symptoms. Some religious traditions instill the idea that problems are moral or spiritual failings rather than mental health issues. According to this, people from such backgrounds may simply be less likely to seek professional help and support when they are having mental health problems. If you are interested in exploring some of the potential benefits of religion or spiritual traditions, there are some things that may help: Find a community that you connect with. beneficial.Explore practices often utilized by religion. Meditation and mindfulness have been shown to have a number of wellness benefits.Search for things that inspirational books, listening to beautiful music, or spending time enjoying nature, finding things that give you a sense of peace and inspiration can help improve your mental clarity and well-being. The observation is real: People who attend religious services tend to live longer and often experience better mental well-being. The tough question to answer is, why? It may simply be that people who attend religious services tend to have more social and financial resources than non-attendees, or it could be that something about attending religious services (like making connections with others, prayer, or spiritual reflection) helps people to live longer and feel better. You'll have to decide for yourself. Philosophy & Religion is not the same as Greek mythology, which is concerned with traditional tales, though the two are closely interlinked. Curiously, for a people so religiously minded, the Greeks had no word for religion in its developed (piety) and threskeia (cult). Although its origins may be traced to the remotest eras, Greek religion in its developed form lasted more than a thousand years, from the time of Homer (probably 9th or 8th century ce). During that period its influence spread as far west as Spain, east to the Indus River, and throughout the Mediterranean world. Its effect was most marked on the Romans, who identified their deities with those of the Greeks. Under Christianity, Greek heroes and even deities survived as saints, while the rival madonnas of southern European communities reflected the independence of local cults. The rediscovery of Greek literature during the Renaissance and, above all, the novel perfection of Classical sculpture produced a revolution in taste that had far-reaching effects on Christian religious art. The most-striking characteristic of Greek religion was the belief in a multiplicity of anthropomorphic deities under one supreme god. Priests simply looked after cults; they did not constitute a clergy, and there were no sacred books. The sole requirements for the Greeks were to believe that the gods existed and to perform ritual and sacrifice, through which the gods received their due. To deny the existence of a deity was to risk reprisals, from the deity or from other mortals. The list of avowed atheists is brief. But if a Greek went through the motions of piety, he risked little, since no attempt was made to enforce orthodoxy, a religious concept almost incomprehensible to the Greeks. The large corpus of myths concerned with gods, heroes, and rituals embodied the worldview of Greek religion and remains its legacy. (See Greek mythology.) It should be noted that the myths varied over time and that, within limits, a writere.g., a Greek tragediancould alter a myth by changing not only the role played by the gods in it but also the evaluation of the gods actions. From the later 6th century bce onward, myths and gods were subject to rational criticism on ethical or other grounds. In those circumstances it is easy to overlook the fact that most Greeks believed in their gods in roughly the modern sense of the term and that they prayed in a time of crisis not merely to the relevant deity but to any deity on whose aid they had established a claim by sacrifice. To that end, each Greek polis had a series of public festivals throughout the year that were intended to ensure the aid of all the gods who were thus honoured. They reminded the gods of services rendered and asked for a quid pro quo. Particularly during times of crises, the Greeks, like the Romans, were often willing to petition deities borrowed from other cultures. The study of the history includes the study of the history of those who espoused it, together with their spiritual, ethical, and intellectual experiences. Greek religion as it is currently understood probably resulted from the mingling of religious beliefs and practices between the incoming Greek-speaking peoples who arrived from the north during the 2nd millennium bce and the indigenous inhabitants whom they called Pelasgi. The incomers pantheon was headed by the Indo-European sky god variously known as Zeus (Greek), Dyaus (Indian), or Jupiter (Roman). But there was also a Cretan sky god, whose birth and death were celebrated in rituals and myths quite different from those of the incomers. The incomers applied the name of Zeus to his Cretan counterpart. In addition, there was a tendency, fostered but not necessarily originated by Homer and Hesiod, for major Greek deities to be given a home on Mount Olympus. Once established there in a conspicuous position, the Olympians came to be identified with local deities and to be assigned as consorts to the local god or goddess. HeraHead of Hera, sculpture from the votive group in the Heraeum at Olympia; in the Archaeological Museum, Olympia, Greece. An unintended consequence (since the Greeks were monogamous) was that Zeus in particular became markedly polygamous. (Zeus already had a consort when he arrived in the Greek world and took Hera, herself a major goddess in Argos, as another.) Hesiod usedor sometimes invented the family links among the deities, traced out over several generations, to explain the origin and present condition of the universe. At some date, Zeus and other deities were identified locally with heroes and heroines from the Homeric poems and called by such names as Zeus Agamemnon. The Pelasgian and the Greek strands of the religion of the rel related to fertility must be Pelasgian, on the grounds that the Pelasgi were agriculturalists and warriors, seems somewhat simplistic. Pastoralists and warriors, seems somewhat simplistic. Pastoralists and warriors certainly require fertility in their herdsnot to mention in their own number. beliefs and practices of the ancient Slavic peoples of eastern Europe. Slavs are usually subdivided into East Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians), West Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians), West Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians), West Slavs (Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Lusatians [Sorbs]), and South Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians), West Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Russians), West Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, Russians), West Slavs (Russians, Russians), West Slavs (Russians, Russians), West Slavs (Russians, Russians), West Slavs (Russians, Russians), Russ of the Indo-European family of peoples. The very late date at which they came into the light of recorded history (even their religious beliefs are all late and by Christian hands are all late and by Christian hands. Socially the Slavs were organized as exogamous clans (based on marriages outside blood relationship) or, more properly, as sibs (groups of lineages with common ancestry) since marriage did not have executive powers The world had been created, in the Slavic view, once and for all, and no new law ought to modify the way of life transmitted by their ancestors. Since the social group was not homogeneous, validity and executive power were attributed only to decisions taken unanimously in an assembly, and the deliberations in each instance concerned only the question of conformity to tradition. Ancient Slavic civilization was one of the most conservative known on earth. According to a primitive Slavic belief, a forest spirit, leshy, regulates and assigns prey to hunters. Its food-distributing function may be related to an archaic divinity. Though in early times the leshy was the protector of wild animals, in later ages it became the protector of flocks and herds. In early 20th-century Russia, if a cow or a herdsman did not come back from pasture, the spirit that enters buildings through the trunks of trees used in their construction. Every structure is thus inhabited by its particular spirit: the domovoy in the house, the ovinnik in the drying-house, the gumenik in the storehouse, and so on. The belief that either harmful or beneficial spirits dwell in the posts and beams of houses is still alive in the historic regions of Bosnia and Slovenia and the Pozna area of west central Poland. Old trees with fences around them are objects of veneration in Serbia and Russia and among the Slavs on the Elbe River. In 19th-century Russia a chicken was slaughtered in the sacred corner of the dwelling under the icon and venerated along with it, and also in noncultivated plant species that are kept in the house for propitiation or protection, such as branches of the birch tree and bunches of the auxiliary buildings of the auxiliary buildings of the auxiliary buildings of the auxiliary buildings of the spirit (vodyanoy). Akin to the leshy are the field spirit (polevoy), and, perhaps, the water spirit (vodyanoy). Akin to the leshy are the field spirit (vodyanoy). homestead. A myth known to all Slavs tells how God ordered a handful of sand to be brought up from the bottom of the sea and created the land from it. Usually, it is the Devil who brings up the sand; in only one case, in Slovenia, is it God himself. This earth-diver myth is diffused throughout practically all of Eurasia and is found in ancient India as well. The 12th-century German missionary Helmold of Bosau recorded in Chronica Slavorum (Chronicle of the Slavs) his surprise in encountering among the Slavs on the Baltic a belief in a single heavenly God, who ignored the affairs of this world, having delegated the governance of it to certain spirits begotten by him. This is the only instance in which the sources allude to a hierarchy of divinities, but its centre is empty. The divinity mentioned by Helmold is a deus otiosus; i.e., an inactive god, unique in the mythology of the Indo-European peoples. Such a deity is, however, also found among the Volga Finns, the Ugrians, and the Uralians. Common to this Eurasian area is another divinity, called by Helmold and in the Knytlinga saga (a Danish legend that recounts the conquest of Arkona through the efforts of King Valdemar I of Denmark against the pagan and pirate Slavs) Zcerneboch (or Chernobog), the Black God, and Tiarnoglofi, the Black Head (Mind or Brain). The Black God survives in numerous Slavic curses and in a White God, whose aid is sought to obtain protection or mercy in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Pomerania. This religious dualism of white and black gods is common to practically all the peoples of Eurasia. The Russian Primary Chronicle (Povest vremennykh let; Tale of Bygone Years) a 12th-century account of events and life in the Kievan stateenumerates seven Russian pagan divinities: Perun, Volos, Khors, Dazhbog, Stribog, Simargl, and Mokosh. A Russian glossary to the 6th-century Byzantine writer John Malalas Chronographia mentions a god named Svarog. Of all these figures only two, Perun and Svarog, are at all likely to have been common to all the Slavs. In Polish, piorun, the lightning, is derived from the name of Perun, and not vice versa. In the province of Wielkopolska the expression do pieronameaning go to the Devilhas been recorded. In the expression, pieron/piorun is no longer the lightning but the being who launches it. Uncertain or indirect traces of Perun are also encountered among the Carpathians and in Slovenia and Serbia. The lightning wielding Perun cannot be considered the supreme god of the Slavs but is rather a spirit to whom was given the governance of the lightning. In Estonia the prophet Elijah replaces Elwa in Georgia and Zeus in Greece. It is therefore probable that, among the Slavs also, Elijah is to be considered a successor of Perun. According to a popular Serbian tradition, God gave the lightning to Elijah when he decided to retire from governing the world. The Serbian story agrees with Helmolds description of the distribution of offices by an inactive God. Elijah is a severe and peevish saint. It is rare that his feast day passes without some ill fortune. Fireseven spontaneous combustionare blamed on him. A similar complex may be seen if the Slavic Perun is equated with Perknas, the lightning deity of the Lithuanians. In Latvia, creatures with black fur or plumage were sacrificed to Prkons, as they were to the fire god Agni in ancient India. Such deities are therefore generic deities of fire, not specifically celestial and even less to be regarded as supreme. Scholarly efforts to place Perun at the centre of Slavic religion and to create around him a pantheon of deities of the Greco-Roman type cannot yield appreciable results. Russian sources treat Svarog, present as Zuarasici among the Liutici of Rethra (an ancient locality in eastern Germany), as a god of the drying-house fire. But the Ukranians of Chernigov, when lighting the drying-house fire, invoke Perun and not Svarog, as if Svarog (apparently from svar, litigation or dispute, perhaps referring to the friction between the pieces of wood used to produce ignition) were an appellation of Perun Philosophy & Religion Ancient Religions & Mythology Celtic religion, religious beliefs and practices of the ancient Celts, an ancient Indo-European people, reached the apogee of their influence and territorial expansion during the 4th century bc, extending across the length of Europe from Britain to Asia Minor. From the 3rd century bc onward their history is one of decline and disintegration, and with Julius Caesars conquest of Gaul (5851 bc) Celtic independence came to an end on the European continent. In Britain and Ireland this decline moved more slowly, but traditional culture was gradually eroded through the pressures of political subjugation; today the Celtic languages are spoken only on the western periphery of Europe, in restricted areas of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany (in this last instance largely as a result of immigration from Britain from the 4th to the 7th century ad). It is not surprising, therefore, that the unsettled and uneven history of the Celts has affected the documentation of their culture and religion. Two main types of sources provide information on Celtic religion: the sculptural monuments associated with the Celts of continental Europe and of Roman Britain, and their accompanying inscriptions, belong to the Roman period and reflect a considerable degree of syncretism between Celtic and Roman gods; even where figures and motifs appear to derive from pre-Roman tradition, they are difficult to interpret in the absence of a preserved literature on mythology. Only after the lapse of many centuriesbeginning in the 7th century in Ireland, even later in Waleswas the mythological tradition consigned to writing, but by then Ireland and Wales had been Christianized and the scribes and redactors were monastic scholars. The resulting literature is abundant and varied, but it is much removed in both time and location from its epigraphic correlatives on the Continent and inevitably reflects the redactors selectivity and something of their Christian learning. Given these circumstances it is remarkable that there are so many points of agreement between the insular literatures and the continental evidence. This is particularly notable in the case of the Classical commentators from Poseidonius (c. 135c. 51) bc) onward who recorded their own or others observations on the Celts. First published Mon Mar 28, 2022 It is common today to take the concept religion as a taxonfor sets of social practices, a category-concept whose paradigmaticexamples are the so-called world religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism.[1] Perhaps equally paradigmatic, though somewhat trickier to label, areforms of life that have not been given a name, either by practitionersor by observers, but are common to a geographical area or a group ofpeoplefor example, the religion of China or that of ancientRome, the religion of the Yoruba or that of the Cherokee. In short, the concept is today used for a genus of social formations thatincludes several members, a type of which there are many tokens. The concept religion did not originally refer to a social genus, however. Its earliest references were not to social kinds and, over time, the extension of the concept has evolved in different directions, to the point that it threatens incoherence. As PaulGriffiths notes, listening to the discussions about the conceptreligion rapidly suggests the conclusion that hardly anyone has any idea whatthey are talking aboutor, perhaps more accurately, that thereare so many different ideas in play about what religion is thatconversations in which the term figures significantly make the difficulties in communication at the Tower of Babel seem minor andeasily dealt with. These difficulties are apparent, too, in theacademic study of religion, and they go far toward an explanation of why the discipline has no coherent or widely shared understanding of its central topic. (2000: 30) This entry therefore provides a brief history of the how the semanticrange of religion has grown and shifted over the years, andthen considers two philosophical issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested concept, issues that are likely to arise for the contested conc categoryraises a question of whether one can understand this social taxon interms of necessary and sufficient properties or whether instead oneshould instead treat it as a family resemblance concept. Here, thequestion is whether the concept religion can be said to have an essence. Second, the recognition that the concept has shifted itsmeanings that it arose at a particular time and place but was unknownelsewhere, and that it has so often been used to denigrate certaincultures, raises the question whether, instead, it is simply arhetorical device that should be retired. This entry therefore considers the rise of critical and skeptical analyses of the concept, including those that argue that the term refers to nothing. The concept religion did not originally refer to a socialgenus or cultural type. It was adapted from the Latin termreligio, a term roughly equivalent toscrupulousness. Religio also approximates conscientiousness, devotedness, orfelt obligation, since religio was an effect oftaboos, promises, curses, or transgressions, even when these wereunrelated to the gods. In western antiquity, and likely in many ormost cultures, there was a recognition that some people worshippeddifferent gods with commitments that were incompatible with each otherand that these people constituted social groups that could be rivals. In that context, one sometimes sees the use of nobis religioto mean our way of worship. Nevertheless, religio had a range of senses and so Augustine could considerbut reject it as the right abstract term for how oneworships God because the Latin term (like the Latin terms forcult and service) was used for the observance of duties in both ones divine and ones human relationships (Augustine City of God [1968: Book X, Chapter1, 251253]). In the Middle Ages, as Christians developed monastic orders in which one took vows to live under a specific rule, they called such an orderreligio (and religiones for the plural), though the term continued to beused, as it had been in antiquity, in adjective form to describe thosewho were devout and in noun form to refer to worship (Biller 1985:358; Nongbri 2013: ch. 2). The most significant shift in the history of the concept is whenpeople began to use religion as a genus of which Christianand non-Christian groups were species. One sees a clear example of this use in the writings of Edward Herbert (15831648). As the post-Reformation Christian community fractured into literalwarring camps, Herbert sought to remind the different protestinggroups of what they nevertheless had in common. Herbert identified five articles or elements that he proposed were found in every religion, which he called the Common Notions, namely: the beliefs that there is a supreme deity,[2] this deity should be worshipped, the most important part of religious practice is the cultivation of virtue, one should seek repentance for wrong-doing, and one is rewarded or punished in this life and the next. Ignoring rituals and group membership, this proposal takes anidealized Protestant monotheism as the model of religion as such. Herbert was aware of peoples who worshipped something other than asingle supreme deity. He noted that ancient Egyptians, for instance, worshipped celestial bodies or forces in nature. Herbert might have argued that, lacking a belief in a supreme deity, these practices were notreligions at all but belonged instead in some other category such assuperstition, heresy, or magic. But Herbert did include them, arguing that they were religions because the multiple gods were actually servants to or even aspects of the one supreme deity, and those whoworshipped the supreme deity in Hisworks. The concept religion understood as a social genus wasincreasingly put to use byto European Christians as they sought to categorize the variety of cultures they encountered as their empires moved into the Americas, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, andOceania. In this context, fed by reports from missionaries and colonial administrators, the extension of the generic concept wasexpanded. The most influential example is that of anthropologistEdward Burnett Tylor (18321917) who had a scholarly interest inpre-Columbian Mexico. Like Herbert, Tylor sought to identify thecommon denominator of all religions, what Tylor called aminimal definition of religion, and he proposed that thekey characteristic was belief in spiritual beings (1871[1970: 8]). This generic definition included the forms of lifepredicated on belief in a supreme deity that Herbert had classified asreligion. But it could also now include without Herbertsprocrustean assumption that these practices were really directed toone supreme being the practices used by Hindus, and the Navajo to connect to the gods they revere, the practices used by Malagasy people to connect to Bodhisattvas, and the practices used by Malagasy people to connect to the cult of the dead. The use of a unifying concept for such diverse practices used by Malagasy people to connect to the cult of the dead. ChristianEuropeespecially those despised ones, painted black on the missionary maps (1871 [1970: 4]) were not on the verysame spectrum as the religion of his readers. This opposition todividing European and non-European cultures into separate categories underlies Tylors insistence that all human beings are equivalent in terms of their intelligence He argued that so-calledprimitive peoples generate their religious ideas whenthey wrestle with the same questions that all people do, such as thebiological questions that all people do, such as thebiological questions in ways that are rational, consistent, and logical. Tylor repeatedly calls the Americans, Africans, and Asians he studies thinking men and philosophers. Tylor was conscious that the definition heproposed was part of a shift: though it was still common to describesome people as so primitive that they had no religion, Tylor complainsthat those who speak this way are guilty of the use of widewords in narrow senses because they are only willing todescribe as religion practices that resemble their own expectations (1871 [1970: 34]). In the twentieth century, one sees a third and last growth spurt in the extension of the concept. Here the concept religion practices that connect people to one ormore spirits, but also practices that connect people topowers or forces that lack minds, wills, and personalities. One sees this shift in the work of William James, for example, when he writes, Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadestand most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of thebelief that there is an unseen order, and our supreme good lies inharmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. (1902 [1985: 51]; cf. Proudfoot 2000)By an unseen order, James presumably means a structure that is non-empirical, though he is not clear about why the term wouldnot also include political, economic, or other invisible buthuman-created orders. The same problem plagues Jamessdescription of a MORE operating in the universe that issimilar to but outside oneself (1902 [1985: 400], capitalization in terms of anorder but specifying that he means practices tied toconceptions of a general order of existence, that is, as he also says, something whose existence isfundamental, all-pervading, orunconditioned (1973: 98, emphasis added). The practicesthat are distinctly religious for Geertz are those tied to acultures metaphysics or worldview, their conception of the overall shape of reality (1973: 104). Like James, then, Geertz would include as religions not only the forms of ifebased on the theistic and polytheistic (or, more broadly, animist orspiritualist) beliefs that Herbert and Tylor recognized, but alsothose based on belief in the involuntary, spontaneous, ornatural operations of the law of karma, the Dao inDaoism, the Principle in Neo-Confucianism, and the Logos in Stoicism. This expansion also includes Theravada Buddhism because dependentco-origination (prattyasamutpda) is a conception of the general order of existence and it includes Zen Buddhism, excluded by the Herbertsand Tylors definitions but today widely considered religions, can serve as a litmus test for definitions of the conceptreligion as analogous to three concentric circlesfroma theistic to a polytheistic and then to a cosmic (orcosmographic [Dubuisson 1998]) criterion. Given thenear-automatic way that Buddhism is taken as a religion today, the cosmic version now seems to be the dominant one. Some scholars resist this third expansion of the concept and retain aTylorean definition, and it is true that there is a marked difference between practices that do and practices that do not involve interacting with person-like beings. In the former, anthropomorphic cases, practitioners can ask for help, make offerings, and pray withan understanding that they are heard. In the latter, non-anthropomorphic cases, practitioners instead typically engage inactions that put themselves in accord with the order ofthings. The anthropologist Robert Marett marks this difference between the last two extensions of the concept religious by distinguishing between animism and animatism (1909), the philosopher John Hick by distinguishing between religious personae and religious personae (1989: ch. 1415). This difference animism and animatism (1909), the philosophical guestion: on what grounds can one place the practices based on these two kinds of realities in the same category?The many loa spirits, the creator Allah, and theall-pervading Dao are not available to the methods of the naturalsciences, and so they are often called supernatural. If that term works, then religions in all three concentric circles can be understood as sets of practices predicated on belief in the supernatural. However, supernatural suggests a two-levelview of reality that separates the empirically available natural worldfrom some other realm metaphorically above orbehind it. Many cultures lack or reject a distinction between natural and supernatural (Saler 1977, 2021). They believe that disembodied persons or powers are not in some other worldly realm but rather on the top of a certain mountain, in the depths of the forest, or everywhere. To avoid the assumption of a two-levelview of reality, then, some scholars have replaced supernatural withother terms, such as superhuman. Hick uses the termtranscendent: the putative reality which transcendes everything other than itself butis not transcended by anything other than itself. (1993) 164) In order to include loa, Allah, and the Dao but to excludenations and economies, Kevin Schilbrack (2013) proposes the neologism superempirical thing. Wouter Hanegraaff (1995), following J. G. Platvoet (1982: 30) uses meta-empirical. Whether a common element can be identified that will coherently ground a substantive definition of religion is not a settledquestion. Despite this murkiness, all three of these versions are substantive definitions of religion because they determine membership in the category in terms of the presence of a belief in a distinctive kind of reality. In the twentieth century, however, one sees the emergence of an importantly different approach: a definition that drops the substantive element and instead defines religion in terms of a distinctive role that aform of life can play in ones lifethat is, afunctional definition. One sees a functional definition. number of people into a single moral community (whether or not those practices involve belief in anyunusual realities). Durkheims definition turns on the social functional approachin Paul Tillich (1957), who defines religion as whatever dominant concern serves to organize a persons values (whether or not that concern involve belief in any unusual realities). Tillichs definition turns on the axiological function of providing orientation for a persons life. Substantive and functional approaches can produce non-overlappingextensions for the concept. Famously, a functional approaches can produce non-overlappingextensions for the concept. Marxismfunction as religions. The literature on these secular institutions asfunctionally religions is massive. As Trevor Ling says, the bulk of literature supporting the view that Marxism is a religion is massive. As Trevor Ling says, the bulk of literature supporting the view that Marxism is a religion section as religions. Springs (2013: ch. 2). One functionalist might count white supremacy as a religion (Weed 2019; Finley et al. 2020) and another might count anti-racism as a religious status and fandom can be ones religious superempiricalelement, these phenomena would not count as religious for Herbert, Tylor, James, or Geertz. Conversely, interactions with supernaturalbeings may be categorized on a functional approach as something other than religion. For example, the Thai villager who wears an apotropaicamulet and avoids the forest because of a belief that malevolentspirits live there, or the ancient Roman citizen who takes a bird tobe sacrificed in a temple before she goes on a journey are forDurkheim examples of magic rather than ultimate concerns. It is sometimes assumed that to define religion, and for Tillichquotidian rather than ultimate concerns. It is sometimes assumed that to define religion as a socialgenus is to treat it as something universal, as something that appears in every human culture. It is true that some scholars have treated religion as pan-human. For example, when a scholar defines religion functionally as the beliefs and practices that generate social cohesion or as the ones that provide orientation inlife, then religion names an inevitable feature of the human condition. The universality of religion that one then finds is not adiscovery but a product of ones definition. However, a socialgenus can be both present in all of them, and so one can define religion, either substantively or functionally, in ways that are not universal. As common as beliefs in disembodied spirits or cosmological ordershave been in human history, for instance, there were people in the present who have no views of anafterlife, supernatural beings, or explicit metaphysics. 2. Two Kinds of Analysis of the Concept The history of the concept religion above shows how itssenses have shifted over time. A concept used for scrupulous devotionwas retooled to refer to a particular type of social practice. But thequestionwhat type? is now convoluted. The cosmic version, and the functional definitionsshift the sense of the term into a completely different register. Whatis counted as religion by one definition is often not counted byothers. How might this disarray be understood? Does the concept have astructure? This section distinguishes between two kinds of answer to these questions. Most of the attempts to analyze the term have been monothetic in that they operate with the classical view that every instance that is accurately described by a concept willshare a defining property that puts them in that category. The lastseveral decades, however, have seen the emergence ofpolythetic approaches that abandon the classical theory and the prototypetheory of concepts, see Laurence and Margolis (1999). 2.1 Monothetic approaches use a single property (or a single setof properties) as the criterion that determines whether a conceptapplies. The key to a monothetic approaches use a single setof properties) as the criterion that determines whether a conceptapplies. approach claims that there is somecharacteristic, or set of them, found in every religion and that if aform of life is a religion. Most definitions of the concept religion, and this a substantive criterion that distinguishes religion from non-religion interms of what serves this particular role in ones life. These are single criterion monothetic definitions. There are also monothetic definitions that define religion in terms of a single set of criteria. Herberts five Common Notions are anearly example. More recently, Clifford Geertz (1973: ch. 4) proposes adefinition that he breaks down into five elements: a system of symbols about the nature of things, that inculcate dispositions for behavior through ritual and cultural performance,[3] so that the conceptions held by the group are taken as real. One can find each of these five elements separately, of course: notall symbols are religious form of life will have all five. Aware offunctional approaches like that of Tillich, Geertz is explicit thatsymbols and rituals that lack reference to a metaphysical entity or power is what is, those without the substantive element herequires as his (2)would be secular and not religious, nomatter how intense or important ones feelings about them are(1973: 98). Reference to a metaphysical entity or power is what marksthe other four elements as religious. Without it, Geertz writes, the empirical differentia of religious activity or religious experience would have, namely: a discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal, and contingent, and that claims for itself a similarly transcendentstatus, practices connected to that discourse, people who construct their identity with reference to thatdiscourse and institutional structures to manage those people. This definition is monothetic since, for Lincoln, religions alwayshave these four features at a minimum (2006: 5).[4] To be sure, people constantly engage in practices, communities, and managed by rules or authorities. However, when the practices, communities, and institutions lack the distinctive kind of discourse that claimstranscendent status for itself, they would not count for Lincoln as religions. It is worth noting that when a monothetic definition includes multiplecriteria, one does not have to choose between the substantive reality and also play a certain role in theparticipants lives. This double-sided approach avoids theresult of purely substantive definitions that might count as religiona feckless set of beliefs (for instance, something must havecreated the world) unconnected from the believers and behavior, while also avoiding the result of purely functional definitions that might count as religion some universalaspect of human existence (for instance, creating collectiveeffervescence or ranking of ones values). William Jamessdefinition of religion (the belief that there is an unseenorder, and our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselvesthereto) is double-sided in this way, combining a belief in the existence of a distinctive referent with the spiritual disciplines with which one seeks to embody that belief. Geertzs definition also required both substantive and ethos (1973: ch. 5). To treat religion as both/and in this way is to refuse to abstract one aspect of a complex social reality butinstead recognizes, as Geertz puts it, both the dispositionaland conceptual aspects of religious life (1973: 113).[5] These monothetic-set definitions treat the concept of religion as a complex. It may seem avant garde today to see religion described as aconstellation, assemblage, network, or system, but in fact to treatreligion as a complex. is not new. Christian theologians traditionallyanalyzed the anatomy of their way of life as simultaneouslyfides, fiducia, and fidelitas. Each of these terms might be translated into English as faith, but each actually corresponds to a certain proposition and takes it as true. It couldbe translated as belief or intellectual commitment. Beliefs or intellectual commitments distinctive toparticipation in the group will be present whether or not a religiousform of life has developed any authoritative doctrines. In contrast, fiducia refers to an affective state in which a person ismoved by a feeling or experience that is so positive that it bonds therecipient to its source. It could be translated as trustor emotional commitment. Trust or emotional commitment, or salvation. And fidelitas refersto a conative state in which a person commits themselves to a path that typically involves emulating certain role modelsand inculcating the dispositions that the group considers virtuous. It could be translated as loyalty or submission. Loyalty or submission will be presentwhether or not a religious form of life is theistic or teaches moralrules. By the time of Martin Luther, Christian catechisms organized these aspects of religious life in terms of the threeCs: the creed one believed, the cult or worship oneoffered, and the code one followed. When Tillich (1957: ch. 2) arguesthat religious faith is distorted when one treats it not as a complex but instead as a function of the intellect alone, emotion alone, orthe will alone, he is speaking from within this tradition. These threedimensions of religious practicessymbolically, the head, theheart, and the handare not necessarily Christian. In fact, until one adds a delimiting criterion like those discussed above, these dimensions are not even distinctively religious. Creed, cult, and code correspond to any pursuit of what a people considers true, beautiful, and good, respectively, and they will be found in anycollective movement or cultural tradition. As Melford Spiro 1966: 98). Many have complained that arguments about how religion should be defined seem unresolvable. To a great extent, however, this is because these arguments have not simply been about the structure of human subjectivity. There is deep agreement among therival positions insofar as they presuppose the cognitive-affective-conative model of being human. However, what we might call a Cartesian cohort argues that cognition is the root of religious emotions. This cohort includes the intellectualists whose influence stretches from Edward Tylor and James Frazer to E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Robin Horton, JackGoody, Melford Spiro, Stewart Guthrie, and J. Z. Smith, and it shapesmuch of the emerging field of cognitive science of religion (e.g., Boyer 2001).[6] A Humean cohort disagrees, arguing that affect is whatdrives human behavior and that cognition serves merely to justify the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto, and with the traditioncalled phenomenology of religion, but it has had a place inanthropology of religion, but it has had a place inanthropology of religion since Robert Marett (Tylors student), and it is alive and well in the work of moral intuitionists (e.g., Haidt 2012) and affect theory (e.g., Schaefer 2015). AKantian cohort treats beliefs and emotions regardingsupernatural realities as relatively unimportant and argues insteadthat for religion the will is basic.[7] This approach treats a religion as at root a set of required actions(e.g., Vsquez 2011; C. Smith 2017). These different approaches disagree about the essence of religion, but all three camps operatewithin a shared account of the human. Thus, when William Jamesdescribes religion as the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual [people] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation towhatever they may consider the divine. (1902 [1985: 34])he is foregrounding an affective view and playing down (though notdenying) the cognitive. When Jamess Harvard colleague AlfredNorth Whitehead corrects him, saying that [r]eligion is what aperson does with their solitariness (1926: 3, emphasisadded), Whitehead also insiststhat feelings always play a role. These are primarily disagreements of human subjectivity. Therehave

been some attempts to leave this three-part framework. Forexample, some in the Humean camp have suggested that religion isessentially a particular feeling (Proudfoot 1985) Although the three-sided model of the true, the beautiful, and thegood is a classic account of what any social group explicitly and implicitly teaches, one aspect is still missing. To recognize thealways-presupposed material reality of the people who constitute these is still missing. one should also include the contributions of their bodies, habits, physical culture, and social structures. Toinclude this dimension mnemonically, one can add a fourthC, for community. Catherine Albanese (1981) may have been thefirst to propose the idea of adding this materialist dimension. NinianSmarts famous anatomy of religion (1996) has seven dimensions, not four, but the two models are actually very similar. Smart callsthe affective dimension the experiential and emotional, and then divides the cognitive dimension into two (social and institutional and material). In an attempt to dislodge the focus on human subjectivity found in thethree Cs, some have argued that the material dimension is the source of the members of a social group arenot the causes but rather the effects of the groups structured practices. (e.g., Asad 1993: ch. 14; Lopez 1998). Some arguethat to understand religion in terms of beliefs, or even in terms of any subjective states, reflects a Protestant bias and that scholars of beliefs, or even in terms of beliefs, and that scholars of beliefs, or even in terms of beliefs, even in terms of belief live in the social sciences, it is unlikely that one can give a coherent account of religion in terms of institutions or disciplinary practices without reintroducing mentalstates such as judgements, decisions, and dispositions (Schilbrack2021). Whether a monothetic approach focuses on one essential property or aset, and whether that essence is the substance or the function of thereligion, those using this approach ask a Yes/No question regarding asingle criterion. This approach therefore typically produces relatively clear lines between what is and is not religion; a form of lifelacking this property would not be a religion, even if it included belief in a general order of existence that participants took as theirultimate concern, and even if that form of life included rituals, ethics, and scriptures. In a famous discussion, Melford Spiro (1966) works with a Tylorean definition and argues exactly this: lacking abelief in superhuman beings, Theravada Buddhism, for instance, issomething other than a religion.[8] For Spiro, there is nothing pejorative about this classification. Having combatted the notion that we have religion as we have defined the term? (1966: 88) 2.2 Polythetic approaches That a concept always corresponds to something possessing a defining property is a very old idea. This assumption undergirds PlatosEuthyphro and other dialogues in which Socrates pushes hisinterlocutors to make that hidden, defining property explicit, and this pursuit has provided a model for much not only of philosophy, but of the theorizing in all fields. The traditional assumption is that every entity has some essence that makes it the thing it is, and every instance that is accurately described by a concept of that entity willhave that essence. and sufficientcriteria for its applicationhas been called a conceptualrevolution (Needham 1975: 351), one of the greatest andmost valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in therepublic of letters (Bambrough 19601: 207). In discussions of the concept religion, thisanti-essentialist approach is usually traced to Ludwig Wittgenstein(1953, posthumous). Wittgenstein argues that, in some cases, when oneconsiders the variety of instances described with a given concept, onesees that among them there are multiple features that crop upand disappear, the result being a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing (Wittgenstein 1953,68). The instances falling under some concepts lack a singledefining property but instead have a family resemblance to each otherin that each one resembles some of the others in different kinds operating with different logics. Here are three. The most basic kind of polythetic approach holds that membership in agiven class is not determined by the presence of a single crucial characteristic. Instead, the concept maps a cluster of characteristics and, to count as a member of that class, a particular case has to have a certain number of them, no particular one of which is required. Toillustrate, imagine that there are five characteristics typical ofreligions (call this the properties set) and that, to be religion, a form of life has to have a minimum of three of them(call this first kind a bounded polytheticapproach. For example, the five religion-making characteristics couldbe these: belief in superempirical beings or powers, ethical norms, worship rituals, participate in this form of life see themselves as adjustinct community. Understanding the concept religion in this polythetic wayproduces a graded hierarchy of instances.[9] A form of life that has all five of these characteristics would be aprototypical examples of the concept are likely to be they to be they are also likely to be a prototypical example of a religion. example that comes to mind first to thosewho use the concept. For instance, robins and finches are prototypical examples of a bird, and when one is prompted to name a robin or a finch than an ostrich or apenguin. A form of life that has only four of these characteristics would nevertheless still be a clear example of a religion.[10] If a form of life has only two of these characteristics would not be included in the category, though such cases might be considered quasi-religions and they might be that only two of these characteristics would not be included in the category, though such cases might be considered quasi-religions and they might be that only two of these characteristics would not be included in the category. had one of the fivecharacteristics would be unremarkable. The forms of life that hadthree, four, or five of these characteristics would not be anunrelated set but rather a family with multiple sharedfeatures, but no one characteristics would not be anunrelated set but rather a family with multiple sharedfeatures, but no one characteristics would not be an one characteristics would not be religion has no essence, and a member of this family that only lacked one of the fivecharacteristics no matter which onewould stillclearly be a religion.[11] As Benson Saler (1993) points out, one can use this non-essentialistapproach not only for the concept religion but also for theelements within a religion (sacrifice, scripture, and so on) and toindividual religions (Christianity, Hinduism, and so on). Some have claimed that, lacking an essence, polythetic approaches toreligion make the concept so vague that it becomes useless(e.g., Fitzgerald 2000: 723; Martin 2009: 167). Given thefocused example of a bounded approach in the previous paragraph and the widespread adoption of polythetic approaches in thebiological sciences, this seems clearly false. However, it is truethat one must pay attention to the parameters at work in a polytheticapproach. Using a properties set with only five elements produces avery focused class, and sincethe class of religions might have hundreds of members, one couldeasily create a properties set that is much bigger. Not long afterWittgensteins death, a bounded polytheticapproach was applied to the concept religion-making characteristics.[12] Southwold (1978) has twelve; Rem Edwards (1972) has fourteen andleaves room for more. But there is no reason why one might not workwith a properties set for religion with dozens or evenhundreds of shared properties. Half a century ago, Rodney Needham(1975: 361) mentions a computer program that sorted 1500 different bacterial strains according to 200 different properties. As J. Z.Smith (1982: ch. 1) argues, treating the concept religion inthis way can lead to surprising discoveries of patterns within the class has to the the humber. Alston does not stipulate the number of characteristics a member of the class has to have, saying simply, When enough of these characteristics are present to asufficient degree, we have a religion (1967: 142). Needham(1975) discusses the sensible idea that each member has amajority of the properties, but this is not a requirement of polythetic approaches. The critics are right that as one increases thesize of the properties set and decreases the threshold number, theresulting category becomes more and more diffuse. This can produce aclass that is so sprawling that it is difficult to use for empirical study. Scholars of religion who have used a polythetic approach have typically worked with a bounded approach (that is, with a properties set that is fixed), but this is not actually the view forwhich Wittgenstein himself argues. Wittgensteins goal is todraw attention to the fact that the actual use of concepts istypically not bound: the extension of the concept isnot closed by a frontier (Wittgenstein 1953, 67). We cancall this an open polythetic approach. To grasp the openapproach, consider a group of people who have a concept they apply toa certain range of instances. In time, a member of the groupencounters something new that resembles the other instances enough inher eyes that she application, the extension of the concept to it. When the linguisticcommunity adopts this novel application, the extension of the concept grows. If their use of the concept to it. new member to the category named by aconcept, properties of that new member that had not been part of theearlier uses can be added to the properties set and thereby increase the range of legitimate applications of the concept in the future. We might say that a bounded polythetic approach produces concepts that are fuzzy, and an open polythetic approach produces concepts that arefuzzy and evolving. Timothy Williamson calls this thedynamic quality of family resemblance concepts (1994: 86). Onecould symbolize the shift of properties over time this way: Religion 1: A B C D E F G H I Religion 5: E F G H I Religion 6: F G H I J Wittgenstein famously illustrated this open polythetic approach with the concept game, and he also applied it to the concept as Wittgensteinsexample, however, his treatment fits religion just aswell: Why do we call something a religion? Well, perhaps because it has a direct relationship with several things that havehither to been called religion; and this can be said to give an open polythetic approach, a concept evolves in the light of the precedents that speakers recognize, although, over time, what people come to label with the concept can become very different from the original use. In the academic study of religions, discussions of monothetic andpolythetic approaches have primarily been in service of developing adefinition of the term.[13] How can alternate definitions of religions because of developing adefinition of the term.[13] How can alternate definition of term.[13] How can alternate definit definition means in common usage, as with a dictionary definition), then the definition one offers could be shown to be wrong. In common usage, for example, Buddhism typically is not. On this point, some believe erroneously that one can correct a definition by pointing to some fact about thereferents of the term One sees this assumption, for example, in thosewho argue that the western discovery of Buddhism shows that theisticdefinitions of religion are wrong (e.g., Southwold 1978:367). One can correct a real or lexical definition in this way, butnot a stipulative definition in this way. stipulative definition, that definition cannot be wrong. Stipulative definitions of religion for this reason, arguing that one cannot critique them and that assessment will be purpose-relative (cf. Berger1967: 175). De Muckadell (2014) rejects stipulative definitions of religion for this reason, arguing that one cannot critique them and that they force scholars simply to accept whatever definition is offered. She gives the example of a problematic stipulative definition of religion that shows the ice-skating definition to be false. However, even without knowing the real essence of religion, she argues, can only be rejected by using a real definition of religion that shows the ice-skating definition of religion that shows the ice-s one can critique a stipulative definition, either forbeing less adequate or appropriate for a particular purpose (such asstudying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it isadequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it isadequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it isadequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it is adequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it is adequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it is adequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it is adequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as with the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it is adequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as well across cultures of the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it is adequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures) or, as well across cultures of the ice-skatingexample, for being so far from a lexical definition that it is adequate or appropriate for a more studying forms of life across cultures of the ice-skatingexample, for a more studying forms of life across cultures of the ice-skatingexample, for a more studying forms of life across cultures of the ice-skatingexample, for a more studyinge seekto avoid the claim that an evolving social category has an ahistorical essence.[14] However, the difference between these two approaches is not thatmonothetic definitions fasten on a single property whereas polytheticdefinitions fasten on a sin manyproperties that are common or even typical religions, without being essential. The difference is also not that polythetic identification of a prototypical religion is equally ethnocentric. The difference between them, rather, is that amonothetic definition sorts instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances that all possess the one defining property asequally religion, whereas a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for instances with a Yes/No mechanism and istherefore digital, and a polythetic definition produces agray area for i that are more prototypical or less so. Thismakes a monothetic definition superior for cases (for example, legalcases) in which one seeks a Yes/No answer. Even if an open polythetic account that limits the therefore, onemight, for purposes of focus or clarity, prefer to work with a closed polythetic account that limits the therefore. properties set, or even with amonothetic approach that limits the properties set to one. That is, one might judge that it is valuable to treat the conceptreligion as structurally fuzzy or temporally fluid, but nevertheless place boundaries on the forms of life one willcompare. This strategy gives rise to a third kind of polythetic approach, onethat stipulates that one property (or one set of properties) isrequired. Call this an anchored polythetic definition. Consistently treating concepts as tools, Wittgenstein suggests thisanchored idea when he writes that when we look at thehistory of a concept, what we see is something constantly fluctuating [but we might nevertheless] set over against this fluctuation something more fixed, just as one paints a stationary picture of the constantly alteringface of the landscape. (1974: 77) Given a stipulated anchor, a concept will then possess anecessary property, and this property is not sufficient to makesomething a religion. To illustrate this strategy, one might stipulatethat the only forms of life one will consider a religion. To illustrate this property does not suffice to count this form of lifeas a religion. Consider the properties set introduced above that also includes (B)ethical norms, (C)worship rituals, (D)participate in this form of life see themselves as adistinct community. If the threshold number is still three, then to be a religion, a form of life would have to have three of these properties, one of whichmust be (A). An anchored definition of religion like this would have the benefits of the other polythetic definitions. For example, it would insteadarticulate gradations between religion but would insteadarticulate gradations between religion but would insteadarticulate gradations between the benefits of the other polythetic definitions. For example, it would not produce clear line between religion but would insteadarticulate gradations between religions and provide gradations between religions are less or moreprototypically religious. However, given its anchor, it would produce more focused range of cases.[15] In this way, the use of an anchor might both reflect the concept religion and also address the criticism that polythetic approaches make a concept too vague. 3. Reflexivity, Reference, and Skepticism Over the past forty years or so, there has been a reflexive turn in the social sciences and humanities as scholars have pulled the cameraback, so to speak, to examine the constructed nature of the objects previously taken for granted as unproblematically there. Reflexive turn in the social sciences and humanities as scholars have pulled the cameraback, so to speak, to examine the constructed nature of the objects previously taken for granted as unproblematically there. Reflexive turn in the social sciences and humanities as scholars have pulled the cameraback, so to speak, to examine the constructed nature of the objects previously taken for granted as unproblematically there. Reflexive turn in the social sciences and humanities as scholars have pulled the cameraback as unproblematically the scholars have pulled the cameraback. according to ones definition reflects anarbitrariness in the use of the term. They argue that the fact that religion is not a concept found in all cultures but rather atool invented at a certain time and place, by certain people for theirown purposes, and then imposed on others, reveals its political character. The perception that religion is a politicallymotivated conceptual invention has therefore led some to skepticismabout whether the concept picks out something real in the world. As with instrumentalism in philosophy of science, then, reflection on religion has raised doubts about the ontological status of the reflexive turn. regarding the conceptreligion is Jonathan Z. Smiths ImaginingReligion (1982). Smith engages simultaneously in comparingreligions and in analyzing the scholarly practice of comparison. Acentral theme of his essays is that the concept religion (and subcategories such as world religions, Abrahamicfaiths, or nonliterate traditions) are not scientificterms but often reflect the unrecognized biases of those who use theseconcepts to sort their world into those who are or are not like us.[16] Smith shows that, again and again, the concept religion wasshaped by implicit Protestant assumptions, if not explicit Protestant assumptions are not like us.[16] Smith shows that, again and again, the concept religion wasshaped by implicit Protestant assumptions, if not explicit Protestant assumptions, if not explicit Protestant assumptions are not like us.[16] Smith shows that again and again, the concept religion wasshaped by implicit Protestant assumptions are not like us.[16] Smith shows that again and again and again and again and again. is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholars study. It is created for thescholars analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy. (1982: xi, italics in original) This dramatic statement has sometimes been taken as Smithsassertion that the concept religion has no referent. However, in his actual practice of comparing societies, Smith is not anonrealist about religion. In the first place, he did notthink that the constructed nature of religion was somethingparticular to this concept: any judgement that two thingswere similar or different in some respect presupposed a process of selection, juxtaposition, and categorization by the observer. This is the process of imagination in his books title. Second, Smithdid not think that the fact that concepts were human products undermined the possibility that they successfully corresponded to entities in the world: an invented concept for social structures canhelp one discover religionnot inventiteven in societies whose members did not know the conceptual) territory (J. Z. Smith did not think that scholars should be tested and rectified by the (non-conceptual) territory (J. Z. Smith did not think that scholars should cease to use religion as a redescriptive or second-ordercategory to study people in history who lacked a comparable concept. On the contrary, he chastised scholars of religion for resting withintradition-specific studies, avoiding cross-cultural comparisons, and the generic concept. He writes that scholars of religion should be prepared to insist, in some explicit and coherent fashion, on the priority of some generic category of religion. (1995: 412; cf. 1998:2812)Smith himself repeatedly uses religion and related technicalterms he invented, such as locative religion, toilluminate social structures that exist, as his 1982 subtitle says, from Babylon toJonestown. The second most influential book in the reflexive turn in religiousstudies is Talal Asads Genealogies of Religion (1993). Adopting Michel Foucaults genealogical approach, Asad seeks to show that the concept religion operating incontemporary anthropology has been shaped by assumptions that areChristian (insofar as one takes belief as a mental statecharacteristic of all religions) and modern (insofar as one treatsreligion as essentially distinct from politics). AsadsFoucauldian point is that though people may have all kinds ofreligious beliefs, experiences, moods, or motivations, the mechanismthat inculcates them will be the disciplining techniques of someauthorizing power and for this reason one cannot treat religion assimply inner states. Like Smith, then, Asad asks scholars to shiftheir attention to the concept religion and to recognize that assumptions baked into the concept religion names a real thing that would operate in the world even had the concept not been invented, namely, acoherent existential complex (2001: 217). Asads criticalaim is not to undermine the idea that religion exists qua social power. He points out that anthropologists like Clifford Geertz adopt a hermeneutic approach toculture that treats actions as if they are texts that say something, and this approach has reinforced the attention given to the meaning of religious symbols, deracinated from their social and historical context. Asad seeks to balance this bias for the subjective with adisciplinary approach that sees human subjectivity as also the productof social structures. Smith and Asad are therefore examples of scholars who critique the concept religion without denying that the window providesa perspective on things outside. Other critics have gone farther. They build upon the claims that theconcept religion is an invented category and that its modernsemantic expansion went hand in hand with European colonialism, and they argue that people should cease treating religion as ifit corresponds to something that exists outside the sphere of modernEuropean influence. It is common today to hear the slogan that there is no such thing as religion. In some cases, the point of rejecting thing-hood is to deny that religion names acategory, all the instances of which focus on belief in the same kindof object that is, the slogan is a rejection of substantive definitions of the concept (e.g., Possamai 2018: ch. 5). In this case, the objection bolsters a functional definition and does not deny that religion corresponds to a functionally distinct kind of form of life. Here, the no such thing claim reflects the unsettled question, mentioned above, about the grounds of substantive definitions of religion. In other cases, the point of this objection is to deny that religion names a definingcharacteristic of any kindthat is, the slogan is a rejection of all monothetic definitions of the concept. Perhaps religion (or a religion, like Judaism) should always be referred to in theplural (Judaisms) rather than the singular. In thiscase, the objection bolsters a polythetic definition and does not denythat religion corresponds to a distinct family of forms oflife. Here, the no such thing claim rejects theassumption that religion has an essence. Despite their negativity, these two objections to the concept are still realist in that they donot deny that the phrase a religion can correspond to aform of life operating in the world. More radically, one sees a denial of this realism, for example, in thecritique offered by Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962). Smithsthesis is that in many different cultures, people developed a concept for a generic social entity, a system of beliefs and practices related to superempirical realities. Before modernity, there is no such entity [as religion and] the use of a plural, or withan article, is false (1962: 326, 194; cf. 144). Smithrecommends dropping religion. Not only did those so describedlack the concept, but the use of the concept also treatspeoples behavior as if the phrase a religionnames something in addition to that behavior. A methodologicalindividualist, Smith denies that groups have any reality not explained by the individuals who constitute them. What one finds in history then, is religious people, and so the adjective is useful but there are no religious people, and so the religious people. itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of inquiry or ofconcern either for the scholar or for the [person] of faith. (1962:12)More radical still are the nonrealists who argue that the conceptsreligions, and religious are allchimerical. Often drawing on post-structuralist arguments, these critics propose that the notion that religions exist is simply anillusion generated by the discourse about them (e.g., McCutcheon 1997;2018; Fitzgerald 2000; 2007; 2017; Dubuisson 1998; 2019). As TimothyFitzgerald writes, the concept religion picks out nothing and it clarifies nothing the word has nogenuine analytical work to do and its continued use merely contributes to the general illusion that it has a genuine referent .(2000: 17, 14; also 4)Advocates of this position sometimes call their approach the Critical Study of Religion or simply Critical Religion names entities in theworld and to a focus on who invented the concept, the shiftingcontrast terms it has had, and the uses to which it has been put.[19] Like the concept of witches or the concept of biological races (e.g.,Nye 2020), religion is a fiction (Fitzgerald 2015) or afabrication (McCutcheon 2018), a concept invented and deployed not torespond to some reality in the world but rather to sort and controlpeople. The classification of something as religion isnot neutral but a political activity, and one particularly related to the colonial andimperial situation of a foreign power rendering newly encountered societies digestible and manipulable in terms congenial to its ownculture and agenda. (McCutcheon & Arnal 2012: 107)As part of European colonial projects, the concept has been imposed onpeople who lacked it and did not consider anything in their societytheir religion. In fact, the concept was for centuriesthe central tool used to rank societies on a scale from primitive tocivilized. To avoid this conceptual violence orepistemic imperialism (Dubuisson 2019: 137), scholarsneed to cease naturalizing this term invented in modern Europe and instead historicize it, uncovering the conditions that gave rise tothe concept and the interests it serves. The study of religionsoutside Europe should be the object, not the tool, ofanalysis (2000: 106; also 2017: 125; cf. McCutcheon 2018:18). Inspired by the post-structuralist critiques that religiondoes not apply to cultures that lack the concept, some historians haveargued that the term should no longer be used to describe anypremodern societies, even in Europe. For example, Brent Nongbri (2013), citing McCutcheon, argues that though it is common to speak ofreligions existing in the past, human history until the conceptemerged in modernity is more accurately understood as a timebefore religion. His aim is to dispel thecommonly held idea that there is such a thing as ancientreligion (2013: 8). Citing Nongbri, Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin (2016) argue that the Latin religio and the Greek through the commonly held idea that there is such a thing as ancientreligion (2013: 8). antiquity shouldcease translating them with that concept. There was no Romanreligious reality, they say (2016: 19). These historianssuggest that if a culture does not exist for that culture. Boyarin calls this position nominalism, arguing that religion is not in any possible way a real object, an object that is historical or ontological, before the term comes to be used. (2017:25)These critics are right to draw attention to the fact that in the mindof most contemporary people, the concept religion does implyfeatures that did not exist in ancient societies, but the argument that religion did not exist in antiquity involves a sleight of hand. None of these historians argues that people in antiquity did not believe in gods or other spiritual beings, did not seek to interactwith them with sacrifices and other rituals, did not create temples or scriptures, and so on. If one uses Tylors definition of religion as belief in spiritual beings or Jamessdefinition of religion as adjusting ones life to an unseen orderor any of the other definitions considered in this entrythen religion did exist in antiquity. What these historians are pointing out is that ancient proper reverence of the gods, but [t]he very idea of beingreligious requires a companion notion of what it would mean tobe not religious and this dichotomy was not part of theancient world; (2013: 4) there was no discrete sphere of religion existing prior to themodern period (2019: 1, typo corrected). And Barton and Boyarin: The point is not that there werent practices with respect to gods (of whatever sort) but that these practices were not divided off into separate spheres . (2016:4) Steve Mason also argues that religion did not exist in antiquity sincereligion is a voluntary sphere of activity, separate inprinciple from politics, work, entertainment, and military service (2019: 29). In short, what people later came to conceptualizeas religion was in antiquity not a freestanding entity. The nominalistargument, in other words, adds to the definition of the conceptreligion a distinctively modern feature (usually some version of this now-circumscribed concept did not exist inantiquity. Their argument is not that religion did not exist outsidemodernity, but that modern religion did not exist outsidemodernity. These post-structuralist and nominalist arguments that deny that religion is out there have a realist alternative, there is a world independent of human conceptualization, and something can be real and it can even affectones life, whether or not any human beings have identified it. This is true of things whose existence does not depend on collective agreement, like biochemical signaling cascades or radioactive betaparticles, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and it is equally true of things whose existence doesdepend on collective agreement, like kinship structures, linguisticrules, and like kinship structures, linguisticrules, an in a bilateral kinship system, can speak aUralic language, and can be a member of a religioneven if theylack these concepts. This realist claim that social structures have existed without being conceptualized raises the question: if human beings had different ways of practicing religion since prehistoric times, why and when didpeople finally create the taxon? Almost every scholarinvolved in the reflexive turn says that religion is a modern invention.[20] The critique of the concept religion to categorize certain cultures as godless and therefore backwardsthe significance of thecritique of religion for postcolonial and decolonialscholarship is undeniable. Nevertheless, it is not plausible that modern Europeans were the first to want a generic concept fordifferent ways of interacting with gods. It is easy to imagine that if the way that a people worship their gods permeates their work, art, and politics, and they do not know of alternative ways, then it wouldnot be likely that they would have created a concept for it. There islittle need for a generic concept that abstracts a particular aspectof ones culture as one option out of many until one is in asustained pluralistic situation. The actions that today arecategorized as religious practicesburial rites, the making ofofferings, the imitation of divinized ancestorsmay have existed for tens of thousands of years without the practitioners experiencing that adesire to compare the rules by which different people live in relation to their gods would have emerged in many parts of the world longbefore modernity. One would expect to find people developing suchsocial abstractions as cities and then empires emerged and their cultures came into contact with each other. From this realistperspective, it is no surprise that, according to the detailed and example-filled argument of Barton and Boyarin (2016), the first use offeligion as a generic social category, distinct from the concept of politics, for the ways that people interact withgods is not a product of the Renaissance, the Reformation, or moderncolonialism at all, but can be found in the writings of Josephus(37c. 100 CE) and Tertullian (c. 155c. 220 CE).[21] From the realist perspective, it is no surprise to see the development of analogous terms in medieval China, centuries before interaction with Europeans (Campany 2003, 2012, 2018) and in medievalIslam (Abbasi 2020, 2021). The emergence of social kinds is notonly a Western project. If this is right, then the development of aconcept forreligion as a social genus is at least two thousandyears old, though the social reality so labeled would be mucholder.

What is the meaning of belief in religion. What is your belief in religion. What is the belief in no religion. What religion is the belief in many gods. What is one central belief in your religion. What is a common belief in most african religions. What is the dominant religion belief system in bhutan. What is a religion based on belief in multiple deities. What religion is belief in one god. What is a core belief in religion. What is belief in religion belief in religion. What is the belief in religion. What is belief in religion belief in religion. What is the belief in religion. What is belief in religion. What is the belief in religion belief in religion. What is belief in religion. What is the belief in civ 6. What is the belief in god but not religion. What is the belief in all religions. What is one core belief in your religion.