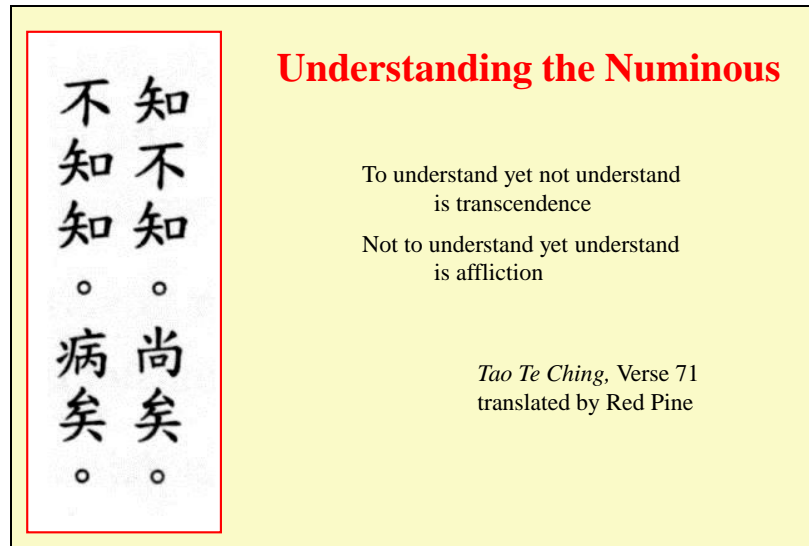


This is the last session of our course. We have examined how religion, art and science have contributed to our view of ourselves and the world we live in.

The illustration is a 1932 watercolor by Paul Klee entitled “Two Ways.” There are two paths into the painting one from the left and one from the right. They come close to getting tangled but they both exit to the right.

The abstract style of Klee and his colleagues did not sit well with fascism. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, they closed the Bauhaus, where Klee was a professor. In 1937, the Nazis produced an exhibition of “degenerate” art, which included fifteen of Klee’s pictures. For fascism there was only one way.

This session will tie up some ideas about religion and science. We shall deal first with our sense of the numinous. Then we shall consider theodicy – the justification for suffering in the universe – using the story of Job. The second half of the session will begin with the role of organized religion in human life. We shall end by discussing some of the implications of religious pluralism.



In a previous session we briefly considered the human experience of the “numinous:” the sensation that one is in the presence of something beyond comprehension or control. The scriptures of various world religions warn that understanding the numinous may not come easily. Scriptures are inherently cryptic. This verse from the *Tao Te Ching* (*dào dé jīng*, The Book of the Way of Virtue) claims that

To understand yet not understand
is transcendence

Not to understand yet understand
is affliction

zhī bù zhī shàng yǐ
bù zhī zhī bìng yǐ

Perhaps a simpler translation would be that we should try to understand what we do not know because not to do so leads to suffering. Yet perhaps I miss the meaning in the same way as I mar the pronunciation.

A looser translation by R. B. Blakeney is
To know that you are ignorant is best;
To know what you do not is a disease.

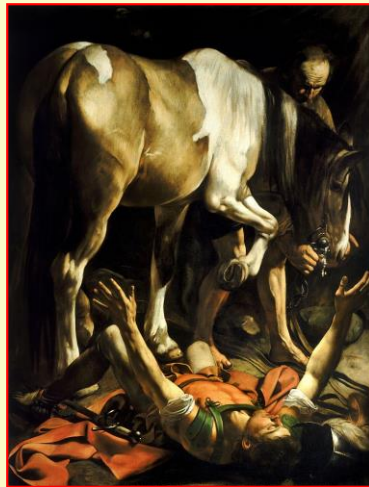
Characteristics of the Numinous

- (i) a sense of being in the presence of something beyond comprehension or control.
- (ii) an intense emotional arousal, combining fear and wonder, like being at the edge of an abyss.
- (iii) a state of uncertainty and a need to do something about it (“You must change your life” Rilke)

Sebastiano Delgado, 2009



The psychology of religions centers on the experience of the numinous. Mountains make it easier to feel the numinous. The photograph shows a view in the Brooks Mountains in the Gates of the Arctic National Park in Alaska.



Conversion

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

(Acts 22:6-7)

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio,
Conversion on the Way to Damascus
Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, 1601

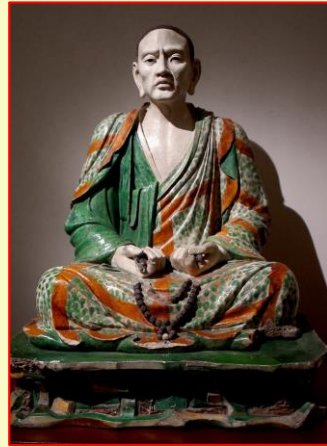
“You must change your life.” An intense experience of the numinous can lead to a complete re-thinking of one’s life. On the road to Damascus the persecutor Saul had a vision that led him to become the Apostle Paul. The nature of the vision is not known. Some have suggested that it might have been epileptic in origin. Yet the effect is perhaps more important than the cause.

Meditation

The birds have vanished down the sky.
Now the last cloud drains away.

We sit together, the mountain and me,
until only the mountain remains.

Li Bai, 8th Century CE
translated by Sam Hamill, 2002

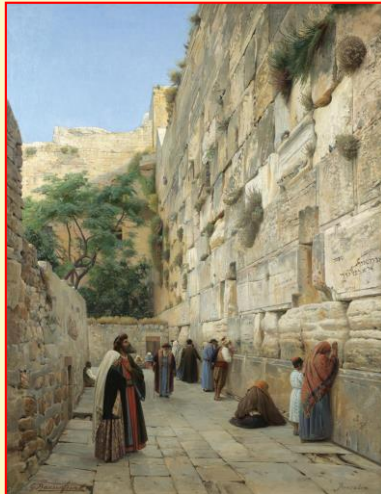


*Luohan, 11-12th Century
Musée Guimet, Paris*

Once a religion is founded, behaviors are promoted to maintain the link to the original numinous experience. The mainstay of the Eastern religions is the process of meditation. The goal is to lose the self, to dissolve into the great sea of being.

We have already seen a similar ceramic sculpture in a previous session. This is another. Eight of these statues were found in China in 1912. They are now scattered in various museums across the world. One is in the Royal Ontario Museum. None remain in China.

Prayer



And when ye see this, your heart
shall rejoice, and your bones shall
flourish like an herb: and the hand
of the LORD shall be known toward
his servants, and his indignation
toward his enemies.

*Isaiah 66:14 (Hebrew inscription
on the Isaiah Stone of the Western
Wall, 1798)*

Gustav Bauernfeind, 1890
Wailing Wall, Jerusalem

Western religions tend to prayer more than meditation. Communing with a personal God rather than dissolving in a Universal Force.



Gian-Lorenzo Bernini, 1652

Ecstasy

I saw in his hand a long spear of gold,
and at the iron's point there seemed to be
a little fire. He appeared to me to be
thrusting it at times into my heart, and to
pierce my very entrails; when he drew it
out, he seemed to draw them out also,
and to leave me all on fire with a great
love of God. The pain was so great, that
it made me moan; and yet so surpassing
was the sweetness of this excessive pain,
that I could not wish to be rid of it. The
soul is satisfied now with nothing less
than God.

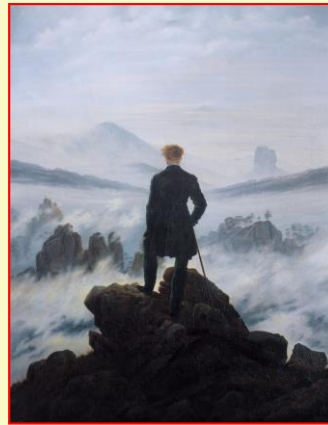
Saint Teresa of Avila, 1581

The sense of the numinous can be attained through prayer and meditation. Though mainly peaceful, the experience can become ecstatic. St Theresa's experience of the angel – "all on fire with a great love of God" – was both sexual and ascetic.

Sublime

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

*Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern
Abbey, William Wordsworth, 1798*



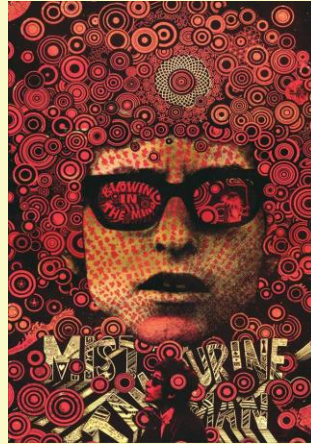
Caspar David Friedrich, 1818
Wanderer above the Sea of Fog

The numinous is not necessarily related to religion. The romantic revolution led to the search for the numinous in nature: "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused . . ." This carries on to the present in our search for "peak experiences."

Psychodelic

Take me on a trip upon your magic swirlin'
ship
My senses have been stripped, my hands
can't feel to grip
My toes too numb to step, wait only for my
boot heels
To be wanderin'
I'm ready to go anywhere, I'm ready for to
fade
Into my own parade, cast your dancing spell
my way
I promise to go under it.

Bob Dylan



Martin Sharp, 1967
Mr. Tambourine Man

The numinous can come from drugs as well as devotion. Wordsworth's friend Coleridge's visions of Kubla Khan were induced by opium. In the latter half of the twentieth century psychedelic experiences became the way to the numinous. The answer from the 1964 song *Mr. Tambourine Man* is blowing in the mind. "Take me on a trip upon you magic swirlin' ship . . ." Bob Dylan has insisted that the song has nothing to do with drugs but simply had to do with music and imagination. Most of his listeners disagreed.

Art



Torso from Miletus
480 BCE, Louvre

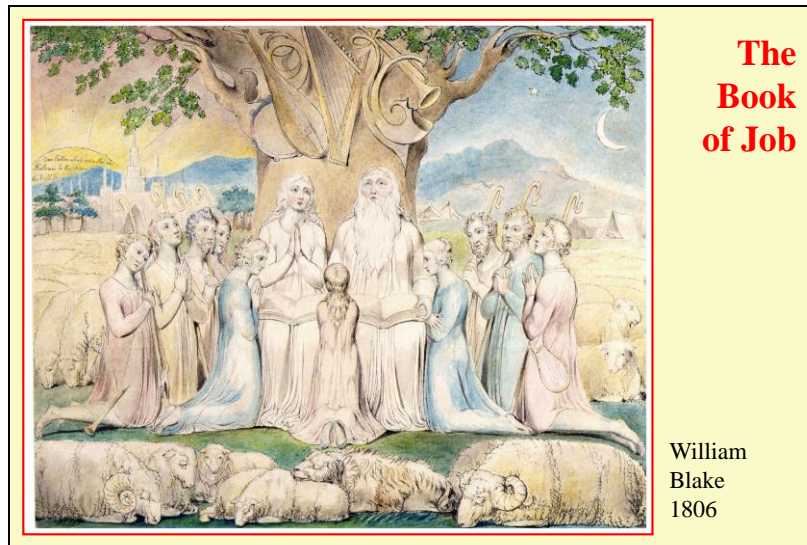
denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern

here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 1906

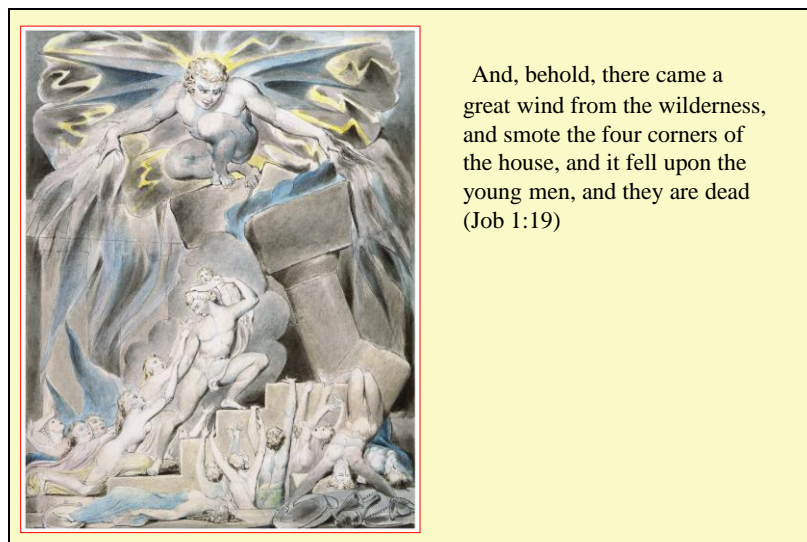
The numinous experience is the essence of scripture and the basis for religious belief. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote about his experience of the numinous while looking at an archaic torso of Apollo in the Louvre.

We have some understanding about the psychology that underlies the experience. Emotions of fear and wonder combine with a cognitive state of confusion and uncertainty. The outcome of the experience can be some accommodation of our understanding to a larger view of the world. We know very little about how the brain mediates the numinous experience. This is unfortunate since it is so important.



In this section we shall deal with theodicy ('justifying God' from the Greek *theos*, God, and *dike*, trial). Why does an omnipotent and benevolent God allow evil and suffering? In the beginning the idea was that evil and suffering were divine punishment for bad behavior. However, this is patently false. The story of Job is the great demonstration of the truth that bad things happen to good people.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.



God allows Satan to test his follower Job, to see whether Job remains faithful even when he is afflicted by unnecessary suffering.

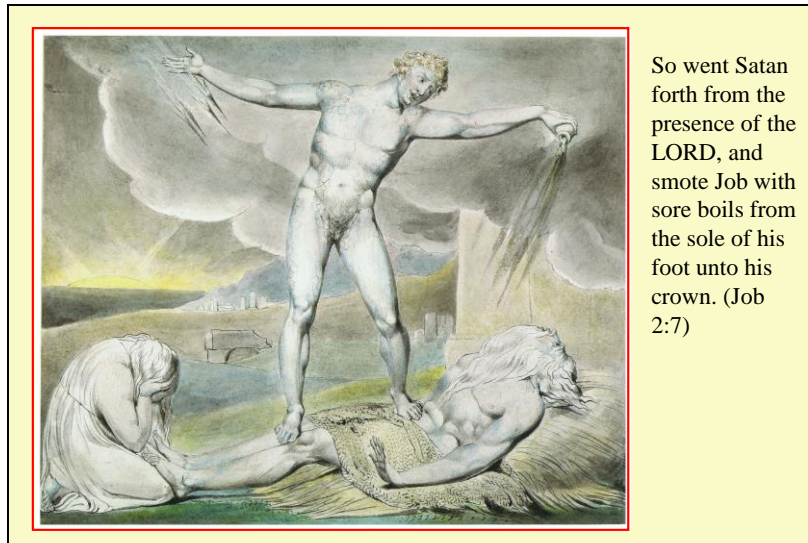
Job 1:18-22: While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.





Job finally gives up his defense of God and curses the day he was born

From the 1979 translation by Stephen Mitchell:

God damn the day I was born
and the night that forced me from the womb.
On that day—let there be darkness;
let it never have been created;
let it sink back into the void.
Let chaos overpower it;
let black clouds overwhelm it;
let the sun be plucked from its sky.
Let oblivion overshadow it;
let the other days disown it;
let the aeons swallow it up.
On that night—let no child be born,
no mother cry out with joy.
Let sorcerers wake the Serpent
to blast it with eternal blight.
Let its last stars be extinguished;
let it wait in terror for daylight;
let its dawn never arrive.
For it did not shut the womb's doors
to shelter me from this sorrow.



God appears to Job out of the whirlwind. He chastises Job for criticizing what he does not and cannot understand.

from Stephen Mitchell's translation:

Who is this whose ignorant words
...smear my design with darkness?
Stand up now like a man;
...I will question you: please, instruct me.

Where were you when I planned the earth?
...Tell me, if you are so wise.
Do you know who took its dimensions,
...measuring its length with a cord?
What were its pillars built on?
...Who laid down its cornerstone,
while the morning stars burst out singing
...and the angels shouted for joy!

Were you there when I stopped the waters,
...as they issued gushing from the womb?
when I wrapped the ocean in clouds
...and swaddled the sea in shadows?
when I closed it in with barriers
...and set its boundaries, saying,
"Here you may come, but no farther;
...here shall your proud waves break."

Have you ever commanded morning
...or guided dawn to its place—
to hold the corners of the sky

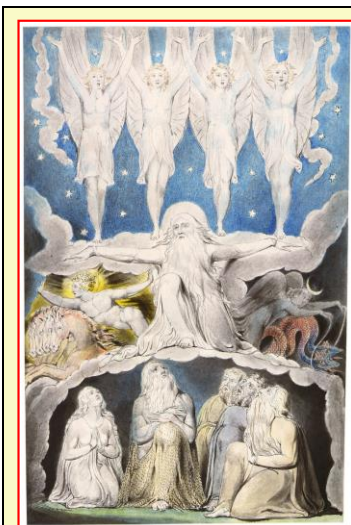
...and shake off the last few stars?
All things are touched with color;
...the whole world is changed.

Have you walked through the depths of the ocean
...or dived to the floor of the sea?
Have you stood at the gates of doom
...or looked through the gates of death?
Have you seen to the edge of the universe?
...Speak up, if you have such knowledge.

Where is the road to light?
...Where does darkness live?
(Perhaps you will guide them home
...or show them the way to their house.)
You know, since you have been there
...and are older than all creation.

Have you seen where the snow is stored
...or visited the storehouse of hail,
which I keep for the day of terror,
...the final hours of the world?
Where is the west wind released
...and the east wind sent down to earth?

Who cuts a path for the thunderstorm
...and carves a road for the rain—
to water the desolate wasteland,
...the land where no man lives;
to make the wilderness blossom
...and cover the desert with grass?



Where were you when I planned the earth?
...Tell me, if you are so wise.
Do you know who took its dimensions,
...measuring its length with a cord?
What were its pillars built on?
...Who laid down its cornerstone,
while the morning stars burst out singing
...and the angels shouted for joy!



Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1930
Pavane for the Sons of the Morning



And in the end Job lives happily ever after.

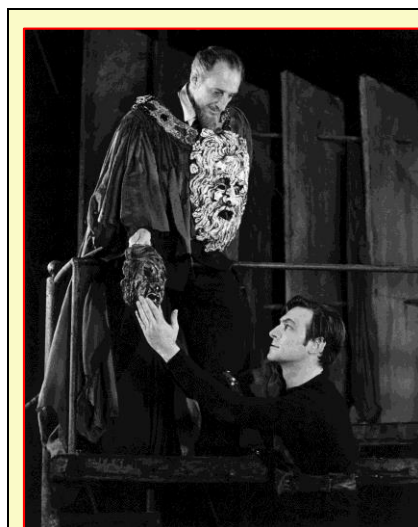
Job 42:12-17: So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Kerenhappuch.

And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.

After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations.

So Job died, being old and full of days.



Nickles' Song

I heard upon his dry dung heap
That man cry out who cannot sleep:
"If God is God He is not good,
If God is good He is not God;
Take the even, take the odd,
I would not sleep here if I could
Except for the little green leaves
 in the wood
And the wind on the water."

Archibald MacLeish, 1958

Mr. Zuss and Nickles

Archibald MacLeish wrote the play *J. B.* based upon *The Book of Job*. J.B., a rich and observant banker, is tested by God. In the original Broadway production, the character Mr. Zuss (cf Zeus) was played by Raymond Massey and Nickles (cf Satan, or Old Nick) was played by Christopher Plummer. Like its biblical source, the play brings up issues concerning


- God's omnipotence – if God is omnipotent and benevolent why is there suffering in the world?
- Justice – why is goodness not always rewarded and why do the evil prosper?
- Understanding – how can finite minds comprehend the actions of an infinite God?
- Consolation – how can we alleviate the sufferings of others? (Not by telling them that it is all their own fault)

Nickles' song deals with God omnipotence? Either God is not omnipotent or He is not benevolent.

In the photograph the characters take up their masks to play the roles assigned to them.

A Masque of Reason

Robert Frost, 1945



I've had you on my mind a thousand years
 To thank you someday for the way you helped me
 Establish once for all the principle
 There's no connection man can reason out
 Between his just deserts and what he gets.
 Virtue may fail and wickedness succeed.

Yousuf Karsh, 1958

Robert Frost considered the issues raised by the story of Job in his *Masque of Reason*. God talks to Job. The above comments continue:

'Twas a great demonstration we put on.
 I should have spoken sooner had I found
 The word I wanted. You would have supposed
 One who in the beginning was the Word
 Would be in a position to command it.
 I have to wait for words like anyone.
 Too long I've owed you this apology
 For the apparently unmeaning sorrow
 You were afflicted with in those old days.
 But it was of the essence of the trial
 You shouldn't understand it at the time.

It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning.
And it came out all right. I have no doubt
You realize by now the part you played
To stultify the Deuteronomist
And change the tenor of religious thought.
My thanks are to you for releasing me
From moral bondage to the human race.
The only free will there at first was man's,
Who could do good or evil as he chose.
I had no choice but I must follow him
With forfeits and rewards he understood—
Unless I liked to suffer loss of worship.
I had to prosper good and punish evil.
You changed all that. You set me free to reign.
You are the Emancipator of your God,
And as such I promote you to a saint.

Theodicy

The problem of undeserved suffering is the most common reason for not believing in a God or in one that pays special attention to humanity.

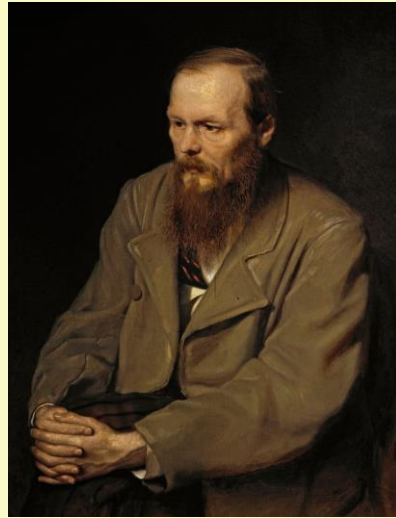
Counter arguments are that suffering

- i. is a proper part of a **grand plan**: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." (Isaiah 45:7).
- ii. allows us to develop **virtue**: "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist." (Augustine)
- iii. will be **compensated**: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8: 18)
- iv. is in exact retribution for wrongdoing either in this life or in previous lives (**karma**)
- v. is a necessary part of the universe becoming perfect (**process theology**)

The Brothers Karamazov

Fyodor Dostoyevsky completed his final novel in 1880 just before he died. It tells of the murder of Fyodor Karamazov, the father of three legitimate sons Dmitri, Ivan and Alexei, and one illegitimate son Smerdyakov. Among the many issues considered in the book is the idea that “without God everything is permitted.”

Portrait of Dostoyevsky
Vasily Perov, 1872



The Grand Inquisitor

Toward the end of the novel, Ivan tells Alexei a poem in prose about the second coming of Christ in Seville in the 16th Century. After performing some miracles He is arrested on orders of the Grand Inquisitor. That night the Grand Inquisitor visits Him.

Pope Innocent X
Diego Velazquez
1650

Ivan Karamazov, tormented by the realization that God, if he indeed exists, allows the suffering of innocent children, rejects the salvation proffered by such a God. Justice is more important than divinity. To illustrate these problems he tells his younger brother Alexei (Alyosha) the story of *The Grand Inquisitor*.

The illustration shows Pope Innocent X, who lived about 100 years after Dostoyevsky's imaginary Grand Inquisitor, serving as pope from 1644-1655. One of his acts was to condemn the heresies of the Jansenists, who did not believe in free will.



This is Francis Bacon's 1953 painting based on the Velazquez portrait of Innocent X. The horror behind absolute power.



When the Grand Inquisitor visits Christ in prison, he explains to him how the Church has done what Christ refused to do when he was tempted in the wilderness. This painting by Sandro Botticelli (1482) in the Sistine Chapel shows *The Temptations of Christ*.

The relevant text is Matthew 4: 1-11

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

In Dostoyevsky's story the Cardinal says that Christ would not change stones into bread to feed the people because man does not live by bread alone. The Church, however, has provided the poor with sufficient food to live on, feeding them first before asking them to be virtuous. Christ would not show the people his supernatural powers. The Church, however, has given the people all sorts of miracles to believe in. Christ would not rule the world because the kingdom of Heaven is spiritual rather than temporal. The Church, however, has allied itself to the Caesars of the world and given man community.



This is a clip from *The Grand Inquisitor*, produced in 1975 for BBC-TV by the Open University. John Gielgud plays the Grand Inquisitor.

Full video is at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om6HcUUa8DI>

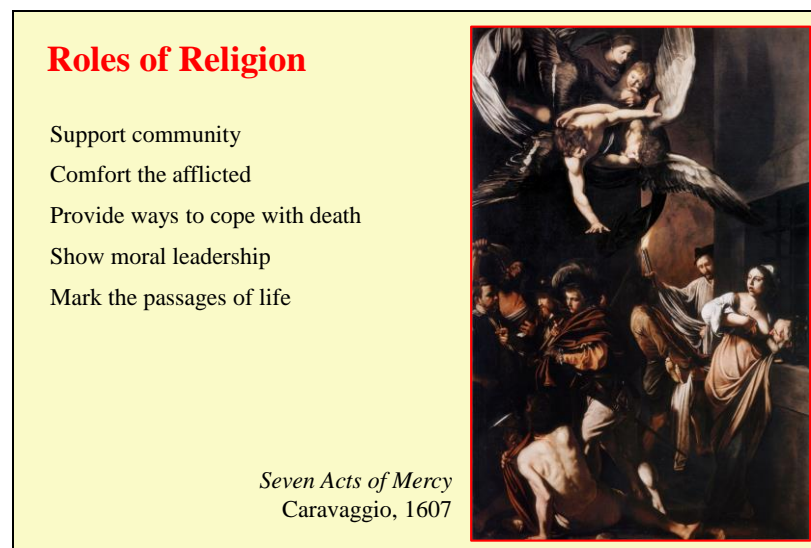
from Garnett translation:

And everyone will be happy, all the millions of creatures, except for the hundred thousand of those who govern them. For only we, we who keep the mystery, only we shall be unhappy. There will be thousands of millions of happy babes, and a hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil. Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in your name, and beyond the grave they will find only death. But we will keep the secret, and for their own happiness we will entice them with a heavenly and eternal reward.

Throughout the Cardinal's long diatribe Christ says nothing. Finally he "approaches the old man in silence and gently kisses him." The Cardinal shudders, opens the door to the prison and lets Christ leave, telling him never to return. "The kiss burns in his heart, but the old man holds to his former idea."

The legend ends on this ambiguous note. Does the kiss recognize the Cardinal's betrayal of the truth, like the kiss of Judas when he identified Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane? Does it represent Christ's love for the sinner no matter how great the sin? Does it suggest that Christ approves of what the Cardinal is doing and sympathizes with his sacrifice for the greater good?

What then is the role of religion in human society?



The seven acts of mercy in the painting are

- burial of the dead
- visiting those in prison
- feeding the hungry
- sheltering the homeless
- clothing the naked
- comforting the sick
- refreshing the thirsty

A more complete discussion of the painting is at

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23753234.2017.1287283>.

Truth is One, though the
sages know it variously.
(*Rig Veda* 1:164:46)

In my Father's house are
many mansions: if it
were not so, I would
have told you. I go to
prepare a place for you.
(*John* 14:2)

The Lamps are different,
but the Light is the
same; it comes from
Beyond. (*Jalal ad-Din
Muhammad Rumi*)

Religious Pluralism

Painting in Jain Temple

If such are the roles of religion in society, it may not matter which religion serves these roles.

The Hindu concept of religious pluralism is known as *istadevata*. Believers choose which of the (Hindu) gods they wish to worship. The 5 most commonly worshiped are Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesh, Shakti, Surya.

In Jainism the concept is called *anekantaveda* (not+one+side+doctrine). The Jain painting shows the parable of the blind men describing an elephant.

Roman Catholicism produced a *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* called *Nosta aetate* (in our time) in 1965. This recognized that other religions may teach some aspects of the truth. However, the church maintained that the only way to salvation is through Christ: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (*John* 14:6 – scant 4 verses after “many mansions”)

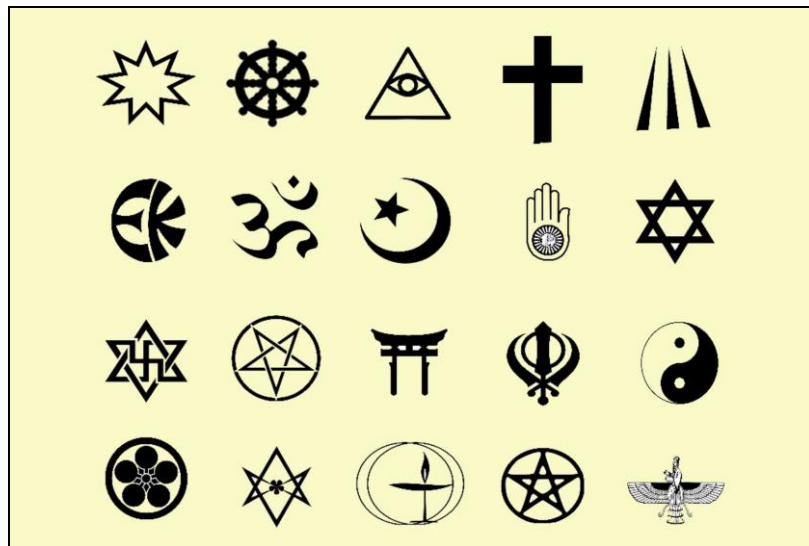
Rumi was a Sufi poet (or a poet with Sufi leanings) who lived in the 13th Century CE. Sufism is usually considered to be part of Islam though believers in the ultra-conservative Salafism consider Sufism a heresy.

There are 3 approaches to the multiple religion issue:

exclusivism – our religion is the only true religion; all other religions are false.

inclusivism – our religion is the only completely true religion; other religions are partially true.

pluralism – all religions provide a way to interact with the transcendent.



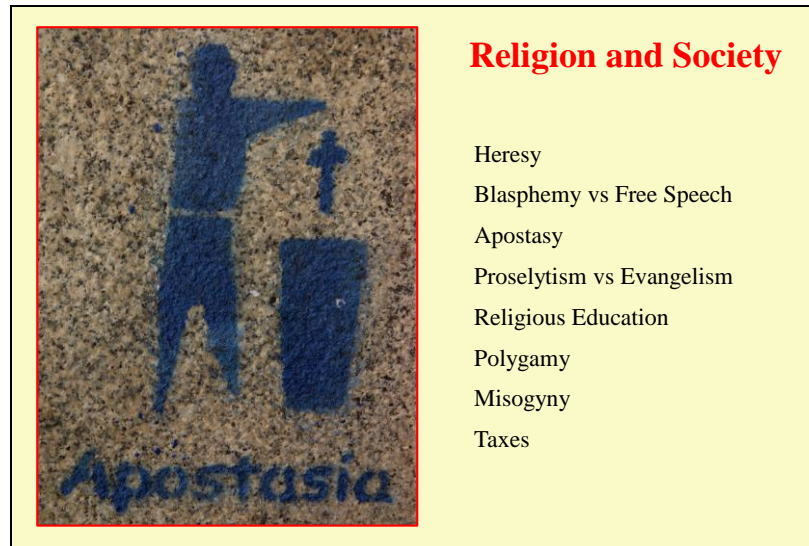
There are many different religions in the world. This illustration shows the symbols for Baha'i, Buddhism, Caodaism, Christianity, Druidism, Eckankar, Hinduism, Islam Jainism, Judaism, Raëlism, Satanism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Tenrikyo, Thelema, Unitarian, Wicca, Zoroastrianism

Some of these combine different aspects of other religions: Caodaism combines Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism; Eckankar uses gods from Ancient Egypt; Thelema combines Shinto and Buddhist practices.

Some are recent and have bizarre beliefs: Eckankar believes in soul travel; Raëlism believes in that human life was created by extraterrestrials who still visit earth in spaceships. spaceships. This tends to make them suspect; as one of the characters in *Angels in America* remarks “Any religion that's not at least two thousand years old is a cult.” However, the beliefs of the long established religions are just as strange if considered objectively. Pascal Boyer remembers describing some of the beliefs of the Fang people in Africa about witches at a Cambridge college dinner. One of the Catholic theologians remarked “That is what makes anthropology so fascinating and so difficult too. You have to explain how people can believe such nonsense.” This from someone who believed in the immaculate conception, the virgin birth, the resurrection from the dead, etc.

Some issues that must be raised from the existence of so many contradictory belief systems

- Does this make any justification for any one religion less convincing. If all the other religions are wrong how can mine be right?
- Religious toleration (e.g. as built into the US constitution 1st amendment) must be fostered. We should not pressure others to convert to our beliefs.



The illustration shows the logo of the Spanish Apostasia movement which urges citizens to defect from the Church.

This slide lists the main problems concerning the relations between Religion and Society. In many countries heresy, blasphemy and apostasy are considered crimes. This goes against any idea of natural law or human rights. In Japan during the 19th century it was a crime to try to convert any Japanese person to Christianity. This is the subject of Scorsese's 2016 movie *Silence*. Is it justified to prevent people from hearing about other world views?

In relation to religious education there is a statement that has been attributed to Ignatius Loyola: "Give me the child for the first seven years and I will give you the man." Should we not provide religious education?

Polygamy is supported in various religions. Is it wrong?

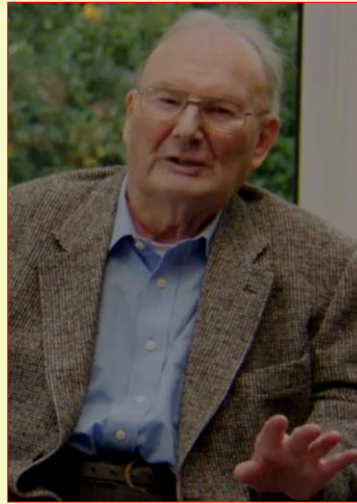
Are all religions basically misogynist? There are no religions (even Wicca) wherein the priests are mainly female. Yet women are significantly more committed to religion than men.

Should religions not pay their taxes? Should Scientology?

John Hick (1922-2012)

Hick proposed that religion helps us to perceive and interact with a transcendent reality. This reality is the same for the different religions regardless of their specific teachings:

“We should not see the other religions as rivals or enemies, or look down upon them as inferior, but simply as different human responses to the divine reality, formed in the past within different strands of human history and culture.”



An interview with John Hick conducted by Robert Lawrence Kuhn on the PBS program *Closer to Truth* can be accessed at:

<https://www.closetotruth.com/series/do-religions-complement-or-contradict#video-2396>

The ideas that Hick presents were also formulated by the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who wrote in 1831 that the diversity of the different religious views is necessary to portray the infinite within the limitations of human understanding.

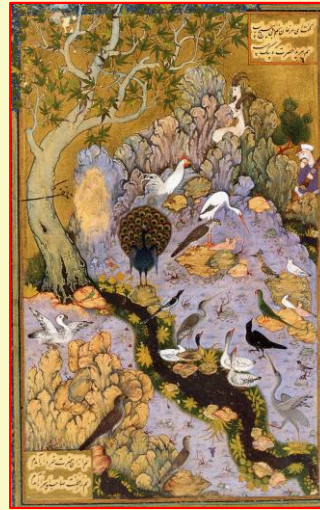
Why have I assumed that religion can only be given fully in a great multitude of forms of the utmost definiteness? Only on grounds that naturally follow from what has been said of the nature of religion. The whole of religion is nothing but the sum of all relations of man to God, apprehended in all the possible ways in which any man can be immediately conscious in His life. In this sense there is but one religion, for it would be but a poverty-stricken and halting life, if all these relations did not exist wherever religion ought to be. Yet all men will not by any means apprehend them in the same way, but quite differently. Now this difference alone is felt and alone can be exhibited while the reduction of all differences is only thought.

Mantiq al-Tayr (Canticle of the Birds)

Led by the Hoopoe, the birds decide to seek the legendary *Simorgh*, bird of the sun, phoenix, all-knowing divinity.



Illustration 1609
Habibollah of
Mashhad



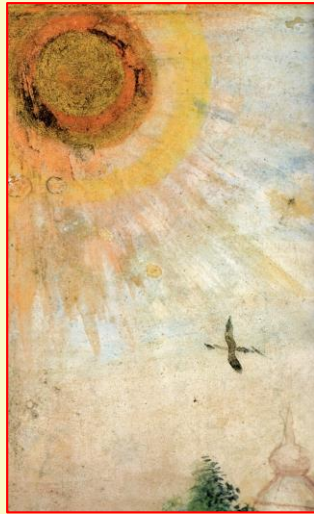
To illustrate the many ways to reach the divine, we can consider a 12th-Century Sufi poem by the Persian Farid ud-Din Attar. He tells how all the different birds got together to seek the legendary Simorgh. The hoopoe bird, characterized by his crown of feathers, was chosen as their leader. He was renowned for having carried messages between Solomon and Sheba.

The hunter on the right represents the devil who is trying to catch unwary birds.

After much discussion the birds depart and fly toward Mount Kaf where Simorgh dwells. On the way they cross seven valleys. These represent the stages on the Sufi path to the divine: seeking, love, insight, detachment, unity, bewilderment and nothingness. Only thirty birds survive the journey.



This is a representation of Simorgh by the Persian Ibn Bakhtishu, 1298.



As the thirty birds arrive at Mount Kaf, a herald greets them and tells them to turn back before witnessing the fearful splendor of Simorgh:

The blaze of majesty
Reduces souls to unreality
And if your souls are burned then all the pain
That you have suffered will have been in vain

Detail of a painting by Basavan
Mogul India, 1598

When they finally behold Simorgh, the birds are amazed to see themselves. The moment of recognition is a poetic pun since *si murgh* also means “thirty birds.”



Anonymous
Mogul India
1630

There in the Simorgh’s radiant face they saw
Themselves, the Simorgh of the world – with awe
They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend
They were the Simorgh and the journey’s end.

A famous Islamic hadith quoted by Ibn Arabi is: “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” What does it mean that when we finally see God we see ourselves? Although we can interpret this in terms of the unity of consciousness, it may also reflect the way we see the world. We create our own interpretation of the truth.

Intersections Between Science, Art and Religion

Our final slide is Paul Klee's watercolor *Mural from the Temple of Longing* (1922). The colors of the painting come from the desert. The surface is weathered as if by wind and sand. The shapes likely represent a mountain village in North Africa. Klee had been irrevocably changed by a brief sojourn in Tunis in the summer of 1914, and themes from that visit recur in many of his paintings. The blues of the picture suggest twilight, and the circular and semicircular shapes in the upper part of the picture may hint at a moon both full and waxing.

The various vertical constructions terminate in arrows which move away from us, upward and deeper into the space of the picture. Arrows occur many times in Klee's paintings and mean many things: the passage of time, the movement of things, and the force of desire. Here they may represent thoughts or questions:

The father of the arrow is the thought: how do I expand my reach? Over this river?

This lake? That mountain? (Klee, 1925)

For the purposes of this course, the arrows represent the human search for the numinous. Many directions. All upward.