

In self-awareness in  
the world, the start of



In our modern society, one would assume that talks about religion and what it stands for - its doctrines - would not really matter. When people think about religion, they often think about a set of beliefs in relation to something holy, sacred, spiritual, divine, or worthy of great respect of something other-worldly. We think in a world run by machines and technologies brought by advances in the different fields of sciences, why would it really matter if one can prove or disprove the existence of God or a Divine Being? However, if talks about religion do not really matter in these modern times, because it is simply not "making sense" anymore, then why do the opinions of religious leaders still matter or why do we still hear news on wars, which cost a lot of money and lives due to religious differences? The roots of religion may be traced back into the early years of man's awareness of the world and his place in this world - his being. The first men on Earth called for the Gods and the deities when, for example, their harvests had problems and their survival threatened. They called for the God and the deities when the materialistic world was not favoring their means for existing. But now, why would we call for God when we do not have food to continue surviving, when we can work to earn the money to buy the food we need. We simply do not pray when we are hungry, we now "work" for our needs. So, the question arises as to what is the role of religion now, if it does not serve anymore its "original purposes". Or, when we have reached this much knowledge and have evolved this advanced to actually reason out about the existence of God or Divine Beings. If religion is the start of man's self-awareness in the world, the start of man's idea through being, interaction with his material world and making sense of it, then religion itself is a

powerful tool man harnessed for the creation of societies and in maintaining its stability.

Religion now represents one of man's ultimate capability – making sense of the world and making something out of it. We may understand the role of religion in a contemporary society, its creation and stability, through three different sociological perspectives: symbolic interactionism through Weber, functionalist through Durkheim, and conflict through Marx. Coming this far in the history of human race, one must understand that the role of religion ultimately evolved along with humans' ideas. The first conception of human ideas by being, until this moment represents a wealth inherent in religion. The ideas now are an entity of its own guiding human actions.

Such can be represented by the relationship between ascetic Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism proposed by Weber in his famous, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. According to Weber, the religious ideas – idea of "the calling" and asceticism, that guided the life of Protestants inevitably influenced the development of capitalism. In other words, Weber is not saying Protestants caused capitalism, but if capitalism was a fire, Protestantism is the gas that made it spread. Protestantism justified their rationalistic yet individualistic and thus very hazardous way of life. The Spirit of Capitalism was ultimately -make money in order to make more money. Protestantism was an individual relationship with god, which caused a great deal of anxiety to the Protestants.

Questions such as, 'does God still love me', or 'will I go to heaven' caused nervousness for the Protestants as well. This was the belief of all of

life being predetermined, and your faith being selected. Working on their "calling", stirring away from all "idolatry of the flesh", preserving their possessions for it is the proof of how much they worked and how much they did not use it for things that do not "serve God's glory" became the rationale for a bourgeois economic life where it ultimately represents a "modern economic man". Moreover, it can still justify exploitations as part of "God's design". Human activity, regardless of its evilness, can now be justified by the idea that God allowed it for his will that is above all us (PA Weber: 138-173). In this modern day of capitalism, dead religious beliefs hunt us, for it is represented by evolved ideas within the concept of religion. Weber's idea supports Durkheim's definition of religion.

Religion became a social support to the kind of society we have developed so far. This is because central to Durkheim's definition of religion, is the uniformity of beliefs and practices which can unite into one single moral community (e. g. the community of Protestants and their way of "working for the calling", the seemingly secularized societies today and their way of economic life) (EF Durkheim: 33-44). Specifically, Durkheim defined religion as, "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called Church, all those who adhere to them" (EF Durkheim: 33-44). Ultimately, we do not call multi-million organizations and companies of today as Church, but the idea is that the primitive ideas and doctrines of religion, such as asceticism, has evolved into this day to be able to adapt into the modern life of an economic man. The belief systems ultimately became the social glue of much of our society today.

Also, the fact that we still see the relevance of the Church and its teaching despite the boom in scientific knowledge, ultimately represents the power religion has over man's thoughts and actions. According to *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, people are not interested in true and false, but interested in how we create meaning around the world. It is to be noted that not all religions are false, but also not saying that they are all true.

Religions are all real because it can ultimately compel people to do things. In regard to Durkheim, he was a very progressive thinker in terms of the way he thought of other people. Religion has beliefs, and rites. The beliefs are representations, and options such as sacred and profane, the distinction between good and evil. Something can lift up from profane to sacred - the belief in sacred will make you have rites.

Rites are essentially the modes of action. Durkheim is saying we have to distinguish religion from magic. One thing that religion has that magic doesn't is that a community really matters, there is not church in magic. Religion has the moral community, a community of believers in a church, mosque, or temple. Durkheim's main focus is on how religion maintains social organization, not on the specific beliefs each religion has. Furthermore, religions have power for how it can be a representative of a group on which a member of it identifies himself. Each individual identifying himself with the religion and what it stands for, ultimately gives life to it as social institution and further makes the "mystified" a reality for the human being (EF Durkheim: 207-225).

Weber focused on how specific ideas promoted by the mystification of religion and internalized by the person, which made it his way of life, was able to make a "spirit" of the society. Durkheim on the other hand, took a larger step in making this seemingly generalizable to all other religions by arguing that the individual cannot exist in isolation, hence collectively creating a reality apart of him which would continue to bind all other individuals into this collective uniteven after the individual's death. One can only expect that the complexity of humanity's development would always be in relation to the evolution of religion, the wealth of ideas, and culture inherent in it. Religion's extent to be a motor of social change or stability then lies in the power of the ideas representative of the reality of human beings regardless of the time. As long as religion can represent a part of human history's being, it would always be relevant to society. These realities can only be conceived as we are part of our nature or according to Marx, our inorganic body- "man lives from nature, i. e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die.

"The relationship of nature and man have always been so complicated; hence we have different kinds of dialogue today. Similar to what we have now, but such complicated relationship represents the power man has over nature, and nature has over man. Moreover, according to Marx, our essence is in our capacity for consciousness and activity.

Now, we reflect on our essence through work, and the product of our work, for this our way of exercising consciousness, activity, and validating our existence (EL Marx: 70-81). Despite the different perspectives, the

three views were consistent in emphasizing the role of religion as a body of

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beliefs created by man, and of which man is being created, and thus society. On the other hand, its role in the contemporary society is not distinct from it, but a part of it. Religion helps build the society we know now following the ideas of the three sociological theories presented. Additionally, the answer to the question of the possibility of living in a society without religion lies in the continuous development of man's essence.

Ultimately, the goal of the theorists discussed is not to pinpoint the specific time when religion would cease to exist, but provide us an insight to its role and function in the society. As long as we find meanings and our sense of being in it, its existence would not be a matter of question. However, in relation to this, we can ponder on this statement from Marx, "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call them to give up their illusions about their conditions is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo." (EL Marx: 70-81)

Sociology as a field of study in relation to religion is then placed side by side with man and society.

Sociology has the ultimate goal of being a scientific field capable of aiding man in his development as a being by adding to the wealth of ideas a man can work with. Like religion, sociology as a science can be a system of beliefs on which man can reflect on his essence.