

# The core of religion, art, and faith

[Religion](#)



The Core of Religion, Art, and Faith When reading both the texts of Georges Bataille and Soren Kierkegaard, the reader is taken on an exploration of humanity. Although approached differently, this humanity is shown to be intimately intertwined with religion by both authors. Bataille studiously delves into the mind of the prehistoric man through his cave art in an attempt to understand and define what it means to be human. The art of this prehistoric man is the art of a consciousness at war with what it is and what it will become.

It depicts a duality of identities. On one side the animalistic identity at one with nature and on the other side a creative rational identity that uses nature. This dual-meaning shown in the cave paintings lifts them to more than mere art. It is the visual first step in the transition from the simple to the complex. The cave art served as more than a creative outlet for our human ancestors. It held more of a ritualistic importance. They respected and loved the animals they hunted but also degradingly used them as an instrument for personal survival.

Bataille points out that it was in the ritual act of drawing the animal that the hunter created a spiritual connection. “ Everything points to the fact that the carvings or the paintings did not have meaning as permanent figures of a sanctuary in which rituals were celebrated. It seems that the execution of the paintings--or the carving--was itself part of these rituals. . . The nascent[developing] image ensured the approach of the beast and the communication of the hunter with the hunted. ” (75)

The animals on the cave walls possessed a divine strength in the eyes of prehistoric man and as a result the hunt, and the drawing of the hunt, were a

religious experience. Perhaps even the first religious experiences. As a product of the previously mentioned duality present in prehistoric man, the hunter used art as a corporeal representation of their remorse towards their desired prey. "... for the men of primitive times. . . the act of killing could also be shameful. Many primitive men ask for forgiveness beforehand for the evil that they are about to do to the animal they are pursuing. . For primitive human beings, the animal is not a thing. And this characterizes very broadly all of primitive humanity, for whom ordinary animality is rather divine. " (Bataille 54-55) To Bataille, "... the world of understanding is to religion as the clarity of day is to the horror of the night. " (122) Religion is an experience undefinable through direct words. This "horror of the night" is all that is not understood; it is the undefinable, the intangible, the experience that lacks rationality and is based instead on feeling.

It is how we explain and give meaning; it is the answer to the unanswerable questions that man has. Religion and art are intertwined in that they are both chaotic tools used by man to gain order over the chaotic horrors of the night. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, arrives at religion through the avenues of faith. To Kierkegaard, the man Abraham in the Bible is the perfect model of religious faith, the very first case in history of a man of pure faith, or as he calls it, a knight of faith.

Faith is similar to Bataille's idea of art and religion in that it can not be clearly defined through words. Faith is an experience; it is the idea that a single individual can have a one-on-one relationship with God that transcends the ethical. Abraham was faced with the dilemma of sacrificing his only son Isaac. Ethically and morally this would be labeled as murder, but

through faith it is an absolute duty. This absolute duty is not something that can be shared, it is a private struggle, it is a solitary path to follow God's command without remorse or doubt..

It is only moments before the murder and sacrifice of Isaac that God stops Abraham and directs him to a ram instead. Through faith, ethics and morality become an entirely different thing. " He who loves God without faith reflects upon himself; he who loves God in faith reflects upon God. " (Kierkegaard 37) God's will is the only correct way; what he asks is what will be done even if it goes against what society says is right. The man of the world, or ethical man, follows a different code of conduct. He is moral through and through and has a universal duty to others.

He follows the laws and commandments of God for the good of everybody around him. His actions are dictated by cultural norms and given meaning by religious institutions. He is understood and buoyed by his peers. This is precisely the opposite of the knight of faith. Abraham has to do what is ethically wrong to do what is absolutely right in the eyes of God. Both art and faith are passionate pathways connecting with the divine. They give humanity a structure in that they give meaning to our emotions and guidance to our actions. Faith is a marvel, and yet no human being is excluded from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is passion. " (Kierkegaard 67) Faith was Abraham's way of expressing the inexpressible duty he felt toward God, just as art was the expression of prehistoric man's inexpressible connection with the animal. Work Cited Bataille, Georges. *The Cradle of Humanity, Prehistoric Art, and Culture*. Brooklyn, New York: Zone Books, 2005. Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and*  
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