

Religion Fragments

Theories of Religion

Defining Religion	
What Religion Is [What sort of beliefs does it involve?]	What Religion Does [What functions does it perform?]
God / Gods / the supernatural?	Social control?
A moral code?	Socialisation (norms and values)?
Further Examples?	

Functionalism

Growing It Yourself: The Functions of Religion



Using your knowledge of Functionalist perspectives:

How do “religious ceremonies” such as christenings and weddings “bind together a community”?

Similarly, how do religious beliefs and rituals surrounding death (such as funerals) “alleviate a person's fear of mortality”?

Growing It Yourself: Predicting The Past?

Football

“Ron Murdoch has, for the past ten years, been able to detail the exact result of every Premier League football match played in this country. His talent doesn't stop there however. Ron can also tell you the name of every goal scorer, the exact time the goals were scored, how many fans were in the ground and the time of every player booking, penalty kick and sending-off”.

Religion

“Rhonda Murdoch has, for countless numbers of years, been able to detail every purpose and function of religion in this country. Her talent doesn't stop there however. Rhonda can explain the meaning of prayer, the real reason why people distinguish between the sacred and the profane and why religious attendances have increased and why they have declined”.

How plausible you find each of the above statements will depend, to a large extent, on the information you're given about them. Answer the following questions, being careful to **read all of the questions** before you start your answer.

1. Does Ron have an incredible talent?
2. Is that talent natural (God given perhaps?) or can it be nurtured?
3. Is it plausible that Ron's sister Rhona is able to explain the meaning of religion in a similar fashion to Ron's ability to detail football results?
4. Would your answers to the above be any different given the knowledge that Ron's ability stems from the fact he reads a newspaper every morning (that contains details of every game played the previous day) from which he records the information detailed above?

Postmodernism

Discussion Point : Religion as Metanarrative?

In small groups choose a religion with which you're familiar and think about whether or not it has the properties (truth, progress, subjectivity and exclusiveness) postmodernists associate with the concept of metanarratives.

For example: Within Christianity are there examples of:

Christian **truths**?

A sense that life is a **progression** towards ultimate happiness?

Subjective beliefs on which these truths are based?

Claims to possession of an **exclusive** insight into religious belief, practice or behaviour?

Discussion Point: Evolutionary Creation

The debate over the origins of life on earth can be simplified, for our purpose, by thinking about two opposed theories (the scientific theory of evolution and the religious theory of creationism - both are summarised below).

In two groups:

Group 1 should prepare a case to argue the validity of evolutionary theory.

Group 2 should prepare a case to argue the validity of creation theory.

As a class:

Each group should put its arguments to the whole class for discussion.

You might then like to consider:

- Is evolution theory a “metanarrative”?
- Is creationist theory a “metanarrative”?
- Which of these two theories, in your opinion, is the most plausible (you need to give your reasons).
- Do you think both these theories have equal credibility in terms of what they explain and how they explain it?

Evolution Model

Source: Joel Hanes (2005)

- 1. Evolution:** The world steadily changes and organisms are transformed in time.
- 2. Common descent:** Every group of organisms descended from a common ancestor.
- 3. Multiplication of species:** Species multiply by splitting (into related species) or evolving into new species through environment changes.
- 4. Gradualism:** Change is slow and gradual, not sudden.
- 5. Natural selection:** This relates to genetic variations (inherited and environmental) and how well they are adapted for survival.

Creation Model

Source: Duane Gish (1985)

1. By the acts of a Creator (such as God)
2. Creation of basic plant and animal types with characteristics complete in themselves.
3. Species variation is limited and clearly separated.
4. Sudden appearance in great variety of highly complex forms, each species having complete characteristics (no evolution).
5. No transitional forms between higher species (people not descended from apes)