

Religion and the Individual

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this tutorial, you are going to see how religion involves the life of the individual. There is a rich history of how religions have supported the individual's relationship to the questions and the predicaments that life seems to present. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Religion on a Person Level
2. Thrown-ness
3. Daily Life from Different Views

1. Religion on a Person Level

Religion involves the beliefs and practices of groups and individuals, and it reaches far back into history. However, religion also involves the life of the individual. There is a rich history of how religions have supported the individual's relationship to the questions and the predicaments that life seems to present.

Every individual is confronted with these questions on some level, to some degree. Religion supports the individual search for meaning and for understanding.

The problem is that these things are not so easily explainable. God, **The Divine**, the transcendent are terms and methods that are used to try to understand this mystery. It is a way to present it, so to speak, to a person's understanding. Aspects of religion—such as sacred texts, traditions, holidays, and customs, et cetera—function to link the world as it appears with the belief that the unseen is somehow real and, therefore, also a vital part of human experience.

So whether an individual chooses to follow a religious path when asking these questions or not, the questions are still there for everyone in some way with some degree of urgency and importance.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** The question of death: What happens? Where do we go? Why? These questions may not be as important or urgent to someone young and in good health, but, to someone who is facing death, they may be of the utmost importance.

Perhaps when we're a bit more quiet and receptive is the best time to ask these kinds of questions.



TERM TO KNOW

The Divine

That which is other than, superior to, and prior in existence to humanity.

2. Thrown-ness

Martin Heidegger is a 20th-century German philosopher who studied theology for a good portion of the early part of his career. He had a term to describe the existential moment in an individual's questioning life. To the extent that a person desires to understand their place in the world, they have to come to define the concepts with which they are struggling. One of those concepts is the "I am thrown passively into the world, but it's a world that sincerely matters to me." Heidegger contrasted this with the idea of freedom to act.

Whether one chooses to explore the concept of thrown-ness from a theistic, **non-theistic**, or even **atheistic** approach, the questions are still there. Question marks like stop signs pop up at different intersections along the way of life.

The freedom to act would be to choose one of those three ways or some other path of engaging with the questions. Again, one's decision to choose a path is going to depend upon the level of urgency and importance one gives to these questions.



TERMS TO KNOW

Non-theistic

Rejecting the doctrine and philosophy of theism.

Atheistic

Rejecting belief in the existence of god.

3. Daily Life from Different Views

Knowing what and how to act is a question that everyone has to face. Some find religion to be a path toward understanding, and others find a route without reference to God or gods. The world as it appears might be explainable, but built into our human sensibility there is also this itching suspicion that the unseen is also there somehow.

The difference between a theistic and a non-theistic or an atheistic approach has to do with how important these ultimate questions are to the individual. For example, whether they're answerable in any way, whether they're worth pursuing, and if so, how much?

So individually, the holidays that are celebrated, customs, and the daily routines—in other words, individual daily life—are often very different for practitioners of different faiths or a non-practitioner, such as an atheist.

IN CONTEXT

A weekly day of rest is a good example of a custom practiced differently for different beliefs. Generally, it's a day without work. This is a social custom that is inherited from religious tradition. However, even an atheist or a non-theistic person is affected by religion with regard to this, possibly without even noticing it.

For observant Jews, this day without work is called the Sabbath, and it extends from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. It is a traditional day of worship and rest. A strictly observant Jewish individual will not even use electricity because of the prohibition in the Torah against lighting a fire and thus generating heat and light.

For Christians, Sunday is this Sabbath day of worship, when one generally rests and refrains from work. The third Abrahamic faith that also follows this weekly full day of pause from productivity and worldly affairs is Islam. For Muslims, Friday is the holy day of worship.



SUMMARY

Religion on a personal level is a way someone can grasp and understand the ultimate questions life presents. Martin Heidegger described the concept of **thrown-ness**. This is the contrast between the idea of being passively thrown into the world and confronted with the questions and the freedom to act. Ultimately, a person can choose to approach these concepts and questions through a theistic, non-theistic, or even atheistic approach. Individuals may see **daily life from different views** depending on their beliefs. While many peoples and cultures have similar customs, they may experience them differently because of their beliefs.

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