

Frequently Asked Questions On Ethnic Religions

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The original text was written in Greek. The translation to English is computer assisted. Some language problems may exist.

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1 Prologue

This text is not written as an apology, nor as a proselytising intervention. It is written as an attempt at distinction. Experience shows that in contemporary discourse on religion or atheism, terms are used without clear boundaries, with the result that phenomena of a different nature are equated and categories that are not of the same kind are confused. This confusion is not merely theoretical; it has direct consequences on the way younger people understand both tradition and their own position towards it.

The purpose of this text is to propose a stricter categorisation of religions, not on the basis of value judgments, but on the basis of their structure and historical formation. Specifically, a distinction will be made between two types: ethnic (or natural) religions and founded religions. We will also discuss about atheism.

By *ethnic religions* are meant those religious systems which:

- cannot be traced back to a founder with a historically identifiable teaching,
- are not grounded in an initial act of revelation of a binding character,
- but arise gradually, as an expression of the collective life of a specific people, embedded in its practices, institutions and memory.

By contrast, *founded religions* are those which:

- trace their origin to a specific founder or to a limited circle of founding figures,
- rest on an identifiable teaching presented as normative and universally binding,
- and are formed around an event or set of events that function as the foundation of faith.

This distinction is not merely descriptive but diagnostic. It is not enough to say that a religion “evolved historically”—this holds true for every human phenomenon. The crucial question is whether this evolution presupposes an initial point of normative establishment or whether it constitutes an unbroken continuity of collective life without a founding rupture. In other words: is it a matter of development, or of development on the basis of a founding? (*Important note:* The distinction is typological, not absolute; historical cases may present mixed forms.)

The answer to this question allows for a clearer classification of individual cases and prevents the arbitrary equation of dissimilar phenomena.

At this point a methodological clarification is necessary. The author of this text has a specific religious position. However, the analysis that follows does not attempt to rely on it, nor to impose it. The question being asked is categorical and not confessional: it concerns *how* different types of religion can be distinguished, not *which* of them is true. Distinction precedes evaluation; without it, any evaluative discussion inevitably ends in confusion.

The need for this distinction becomes particularly evident in the pedagogical field. Young people come into contact with the term “religion” or “non-religion” as if it were a single and homogeneous phenomenon. As a result, they are called upon to compare, accept or reject things that are not comparable in the same way. Without basic conceptual tools, their stance oscillates between uncritical acceptance and levelling rejection. This text aims to offer one such initial tool: a clear distinction that allows understanding before judgment.

The question-and-answer form that follows is not intended to be fragmentary, but rather to achieve gradual clarification. Each individual question examines one aspect of the issue, with the aim that a comprehensive picture emerges in the end. The final synthesis will be explicitly attempted in the concluding part of the text.

With these preliminaries, we can proceed to the systematic examination of the main questions.

2 Fundamentals

1. What do we mean by “religion”?

Religion is that system which defines what is sacred¹ and how man

¹The term “sacred” is used here descriptively, to denote that which is set as a non-negotiable limit within a system, regardless of its metaphysical grounding. Sacred here

relates to it. It is not merely a set of beliefs, but a way of seeing the world and living within it.

The defining element of any religion is not the names of the deities, but the principles it lays down: what it considers sacred, how it understands the world, and what place it gives to man within it.

Different answers to these questions lead to radically different and often incompatible systems.

2. What distinguishes a “natural/ethnic” religion from a “founded” one?

Natural or ethnic religions arise organically through the life of a people. They are not invented by a person, but are shaped through experience, tradition, and continuous testing over time. They are inseparably bound to nature, community, and history.

By contrast, founded religions begin with a specific teaching attributed to a founder and presented as absolute truth. This system is imposed from above and demands acceptance of specific dogmas.

The former evolve together with society. The latter tend to bind it.

3. Is this distinction historical, functional, or evaluative?

It is all three. It is historical with respect to origin, functional with respect to the way the life of believers is organised, but also evaluative, because it has direct consequences on whether a religion promotes freedom or submission.

4. Does the concept of “ethnic religion” lead to nationalism?

The concept of ethnic religion is not related to nationalism.

Ethnic religion means that a religious tradition develops within a people and is connected to its history, language, and way of life. It does not imply superiority over others nor imposition.

Nationalism, by contrast, is an ideology that attributes superiority and often seeks domination.

The confusion between the two arises when a natural identity is turned into an ideological tool. Greek, like other ethnic religions (e.g., Hinduism), is by nature neither expansionist nor exclusive; it is tied to a specific community and way of life.

means that which is exempted from instrumental use and balancing procedures.

5. What does “sacred” mean and how does it arise?

Sacred is whatever may not be violated. It is not an abstract concept, but a foundation of action.

In ethnic religions, the sacred arises from the nature of the world. Life, nature, and the order of the world are sacred because they constitute the very basis of existence.

By contrast, in founded religions the sacred is not located in the world, but outside it, in the will of a transcendent god. This means that the value of life is not intrinsic, but depends on the extent to which it serves an external purpose.

When the sacred is disconnected from the world, <i>the way is opened for its violation.</i>
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3 Is the “sacred” the same in all religions?

The use of the term “sacred” may create the impression that it is a single, homogeneous concept. However, a closer examination shows that, while every religion defines something as sacred, the way in which the sacred is constituted and experienced is not the same in all cases.

In ethnic religions, the sacred does not appear as the result of an initial formulation or teaching. There is no point at which someone explicitly and normatively defines what is sacred and what is not. Rather, the sacred emerges gradually through collective life: it is connected to places, actions, festivals, memories. It does not precede life as a system of rules; it is formed within life and expressed through it.

For this reason, the sacred in religions of this type is in principle embedded in the world, not cut off from it. It is not confined to a text or a set of explicit commandments, but is found in a network of practices and meanings that are not always fully codified. Understanding it presupposes participation in a way of life, not merely acceptance of a teaching.

By contrast, in founded religions the sacred is defined with reference to a foundational act or teaching. There is an initial point at which

the sacred is defined, either through revelation or through teaching presented as normative. What is sacred and what is not is determined explicitly and bindingly, and this distinction is maintained through texts, dogmas, and institutions.

In this framework, the sacred does not merely emerge from the life of the community, but is set as a criterion for it. The community is called to align itself with an already formulated definition of the sacred, which does not depend on a specific place or historical context but claims universal validity.

This difference is not merely a matter of degree of organisation or systematisation. It concerns the very mode of existence of the sacred: in one case we have a sacred that emerges and is recognised retrospectively within life; in the other, a sacred that is defined in advance and functions normatively for life. This distinction is crucial because it allows us to understand why religious systems called by the same term are not necessarily comparable in the same way.

6. Is religion primarily dogma, practice, or a way of life?

In founded religions, religion is primarily dogma. Man is called to believe and obey.

In ethnic religions, religion is a way of life and action. It does not begin with the acceptance of abstract truths, but with participation in the world and the community.

This difference is fundamental: in the former, faith comes first; <i>in the latter, life.</i>
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4 Metaphysics (Gods and Goddesses, Nature, Reality)

1. Is the existence of gods necessary for religion to exist?

Yes. Without gods there is no foundation for the sacred.

Gods are not merely objects of belief, but ways of understanding and respecting the world. When it is said that a forest belongs to Artemis, this is not a “myth” in the sense of falsehood; it is a way of declaring that the forest is sacred and cannot be destroyed without consequences.

Without this dimension, the world becomes a mere object of exploitation.

2. If gods exist, are they personal, impersonal, or multiple?

In founded religions, god is presented as a person, usually unique, who stands outside the world and governs it.

In ethnic religions, the gods are not merely persons, but expressions of the powers and principles that constitute the world. They are multiple, because the world too is multiple.

They are not “humans with superpowers”, but
realities^a that govern nature and life.

^aand hence beings

3. Is the “divine” defined as transcendent, immanent, or both?

In founded religions, the divine is transcendent: it lies outside the world and exists independently of it.

In ethnic religions, the divine is immanent: it lies within the world and is part of its structure.

This means that the world is not a mere creation, but something sacred in itself.

4. What is the relationship between nature and the sacred?

In the Greek ethnic religion, nature is sacred. It is not merely a set of resources to be exploited, but a living reality that must be respected.

The severance of the sacred from nature leads inevitably to its destruction.

5. Is the world a product of purpose or the result of natural processes?

The world is not a construction with an external purpose. It is an eternal order governed by laws and necessity.

The gods do not manufacture the world; they constitute and express it.

5 Epistemology

1. By what criteria are religious claims evaluated?

Religious claims are judged by their coherence with the world and by their consequences for life. A system that conflicts with experience, reason, and the natural order cannot stand in the long term.

Truth is not an arbitrary statement, but agreement with reality.

2. What is the role of experience versus faith?

Experience comes first. Faith that is not grounded in experience and reason ends up in arbitrariness.

In ethnic religions, knowledge of the world and participation in it is the foundation. In founded religions, faith is often prioritised as an obligation.

3. Can science replace religion?

No.

Science explains “how” the world works, not “what is valuable” and “what is sacred”.
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However, a religion that conflicts with science refutes itself.

4. Is the concept of revelation reliable?

The concept of revelation is problematic when it is presented as absolute and unverifiable truth. Without the possibility of verification, any claim can be presented as “revelation”.

Knowledge must be able to stand on reason and experience, not on authority alone.

5. How are conflicting traditions dealt with?

By the criterion of coherence with the world and the consequences they have for human life.

Not all traditions are equivalent; some are more compatible with the nature of the world than others.

6 Ethics

1. Does ethics need a foundation in a god or gods?

Ethics needs a foundation in the sacred. Without it, it becomes relative and ultimately arbitrary.

The gods express this foundation, not as external commands, but as an immanent order of the world.

2. Is there objective ethics?

Yes, to the extent that there is an objective order in the world. Ethics is not mere convention, but an expression of “according to nature” (*secundum naturam*).

3. What is the relationship between “according to nature” and “according to law”?

“According to nature” is the foundation. “According to law” is a human construction.

When laws agree with nature, they are just. When they violate it, they become arbitrary.

4. Can a society without religion have a stable ethics?

With difficulty. Without reference to something sacred, ethics becomes relative and changeable according to current interests.

Temporary stability may exist, but there is no deep foundation to support it.

5. How are practices judged against nature (*contra naturam*) interpreted?

As practices that go against the nature of man or the world. “*Contra naturam*” is not an arbitrary moral judgment, but a reference to a real incompatibility with the natural order.

When life deviates from “according to nature”, consequences inevitably appear.

6. Is ethics universal or culturally relative?

Ethics has a universal core, because the nature of the world is common. However, its expressions differ according to culture.

Complete relativisation leads to the collapse of any stable criterion.

7 Anthropology

1. What is man?

Man is part of the world and of nature, not something outside them. He is a rational and social being who participates in the order of the world.

He is neither a mere biological being nor a detached “soul” waiting to leave the world.

2. What is the role of the community?

The community is fundamental. Man does not exist as an isolated individual, but as a member of a living tradition.

Religion is expressed and maintained within the community.

3. How is religion related to identity?

In ethnic religions, religion is part of the identity of a people. It is not something external or optional, but an element of their mode of existence.

4. Is faith individual or collective?

It has both an individual and a collective dimension, but it cannot exist without community. Complete individualisation leads to the dissolution of religion.

5. What is the place of tradition?

Tradition is accumulated experience. It is not an authority to be blindly imposed, but knowledge that has been tested over time.

8 Worship and Practice

1. Is worship necessary?

Yes. Worship is the act through which man recognises the sacred and integrates it into his life.

Without worship, religion becomes an abstract idea with no practical bearing.

2. What does ritual offer?

Ritual connects man with the world, the community, and the sacred. It is not a formality, but a way of participating in the order of the world.

3. Can religion exist without worship?

Not essentially. Without worship, there is no living relation to the sacred.

9 Pluralism

1. Can many religions be simultaneously true?

Not in the sense that they all say the same thing. Religions express different and often incompatible conceptions of the world.

However, they can coexist when they do not claim exclusivity.

2. How is diversity treated?

With respect, but also with clarity. Respect does not mean equating all positions, but recognising difference without imposition.

10 Relation to Science

1. Does science conflict with religion?

It conflicts only with religions that make claims contrary to reality.

A religion that respects the world has no reason to conflict with science.

2. What are the limits of science?

Science describes and explains phenomena. It cannot ground values or define what is sacred.

3. Can they coexist?

Yes, when each stays within its domain. Science without values is both blind and dangerous; religion without contact with reality is equally dangerous.

11 Critique from Atheism

1. If gods do not exist, why do religions exist?

Because man seeks meaning, value, and sacredness. The question is whether this search corresponds to reality or is a mere construction.

2. Is religion merely a psychological mechanism?

It may function as such, but this does not mean it is only that. The fact that something has a function does not negate its truth.

3. Can atheism ground values?

It can propose values, but it struggles to ground them as binding. Without reference to something beyond the individual, everything ultimately remains negotiable.

4. Does atheism have consequences for man's stance towards the world?²

Atheism,³ in its strict sense, consists in the denial of the existence of a deity. As such, it does not in itself constitute a complete worldview, nor does it necessarily imply a unified system of values. However, this denial has certain conceptual consequences, particularly regarding the way in which the concept of the sacred can be grounded.⁴

If no form of transcendental or immanent sacredness exists, then the world—including nature—cannot be considered sacred in a strong sense. It may be valued as precious, useful, or worthy of protection, but these attributes remain in principle negotiable, to the extent that they rest on human evaluations and not on an irreducible foundation.

Within this framework, nature tends to be approached primarily as a set of resources. Its use is not prohibited in principle, but is regulated on the basis of criteria such as utility, necessity, or consent. The limits imposed are functional rather than absolute: they can be altered should the relevant criteria change.

This observation does not constitute an accusation against specific persons or historical instances. However, it helps us understand why,

²What follows is not aimed at causal proof, but at conceptual possibility/tendency. The analysis concerns what becomes possible within a framework, not what necessarily happens.

³Atheism as such is not identical to a specific philosophical position; the objections that follow concern the consequences of the absence of the sacred, not the adequacy of particular philosophical systems.

⁴The following observations do not negate the possibility of constructing coherent non-theistic ethical systems, but concern whether such systems establish non-revisable limits.

in cultural contexts where the concept of the sacred has weakened or disappeared, the development of techno-scientific power is not necessarily accompanied by inherent restrictions on its use. Possibility itself becomes, to a large extent, a criterion of legitimation.

...nature tends to be approached primarily as a set of resources, and this helps us understand why, in the lack of the sacred, the development of techno-scientific power is not accompanied by inherent restrictions on its use.

Under such conditions, phenomena such as the extensive exploitation of the natural environment or the production of means with destructive potential appear not as the violation of a sacred limit, but as matters of management, cost, and benefit. The question is not whether it is permitted in principle, but under what conditions it is expedient or acceptable.

The issue, therefore, is not whether atheism “causes” specific phenomena, but whether it can ground, in a non-negotiable way, limits that do not depend on changing human assessments. The answer to this question is not self-evident and is a subject for further philosophical inquiry.

5. Is the statement “I am an atheist” sufficient to define a coherent worldview?

The statement “I am an atheist” specifies, in the strict sense, a negation: the denial of the existence of a deity. It does not, however, necessarily specify a positive set of positions regarding man, the world, or ethics. As such, atheism functions primarily as a negative designation and not as a complete worldview system.

This fact has an important consequence: from the declaration of atheism one cannot infer, without further clarification, the speaker’s position on fundamental issues such as the nature of morality, the limits of human action, or the value of the natural world. Different people who identify as atheists may adopt entirely different and sometimes incompatible philosophical frameworks.

In practice, atheism often functions as a general marker of detachment from specific religious traditions, without being accompanied by an explicit adoption of an alternative system. The result is that

the statement “I am an atheist” may remain conceptually underdetermined: it states what is rejected, but not what is put in its place.

This underdetermination is not necessarily a problem on a personal level. In the context of dialogue, however, it creates difficulties. Whereas in the case of religious systems with a clearer structure one can, at least approximately, recognise a framework of positions, in the case of atheism further clarification is required each time. Without it, the discussion risks being conducted on undefined terms.

This observation makes necessary an additional distinction: the denial of deity is one thing, the formation of a coherent worldview another. The former can be stated in a single word; the latter requires explicit positioning on a range of fundamental issues. Confusing the two often leads to the illusion that an answer has already been given where the question remains open.

6. Can atheism adequately ground moral limits without the concept of the sacred?

A common counterargument holds that atheism does not entail any moral deficiency. It is argued that people can establish robust ethical frameworks without any reference to the sacred, simply through reason, empathy, and social agreement. Typically, three main approaches are proposed: rationalist theories that derive rules from universal logic, utilitarian approaches that judge actions by their consequences (maximizing benefit), and theories of rights or social contract that rely on negotiable yet stabilized consensus.

This position is coherent, but it raises certain conceptual issues. First, these approaches provide rules and justification procedures, but they do not necessarily offer an irreducible foundation; their principles (rationality, well-being, rights) are presupposed as valid values. Second, even when strong rules emerge, their binding nature remains, in principle, revisable; in cases of conflict (e.g., maximizing benefit versus rights), boundaries are set through balancing. Third, without the concept of the sacred, boundaries tend to take on an instrumental character: they exist to serve a purpose, and when that purpose changes, so do they. Finally, in extreme conditions (war, technological leaps, states of emergency), instrumental justifications can easily expand.

The above does not prove that atheism necessarily leads to specific practices. However, it shows that, in the absence of the sacred, the

boundaries set are generally revisable and depend on processes of weighing and balancing.

By contrast, the introduction of the concept of the sacred functions as a way of instituting limits that are not reducible to instrumental justification. The “it is not permitted” then does not depend on whether, when, or to what degree it serves a purpose, but is expressed as a categorical prohibition.

The issue, therefore, is not whether moral systems without the sacred can exist—they can. The question is whether they can ground limits that are *non-negotiable* and independent of changeable assessments. The answer to this question remains open and constitutes the core of the present inquiry.

7. What remains non-negotiable in a fully desacralised framework?

If the sacred is absent, then every boundary must be justified by reference to purely human criteria: benefit, avoidance of harm, rights, and consent. These criteria may be strong and functional, yet they remain, in principle, revisable—because they are based on evaluations that change over time, with circumstances, and with knowledge.

In other words, “it is not allowed” transforms into “it is not allowed under certain conditions”. And these conditions are always determined through a process of weighing and balancing. That is precisely where the difference lies: the concept of the sacred introduces a boundary that precedes this weighing, whereas without it, weighing becomes the only tool, and nothing remains outside the calculation.

This observation does not imply that ethics can function without judgment in individual cases. The existence of non-negotiable limits does not negate the need for balancing, but sets limits beyond which balancing does not extend.

The question that arises is not whether limits can be set, but whether limits can be set that do not depend on such balancing. In other words: are there things that are not permitted *without exception*, not because they are disadvantageous or cause harm, but because they are intrinsically unacceptable?

The concept of the sacred introduces precisely this possibility. The sacred does not function as the conclusion of balancing, but as a limit that precedes it. Where something is recognised as sacred, the prohibition does not arise from calculation, but sets a limit to calculation itself.

If, on the contrary, every limit remains within a framework of balancing, then the question is not whether there will be exceptions, but under what conditions they will be considered justified. In this case, the “non-negotiable” tends to disappear as a category and to be replaced by a system of hierarchies.

This observation does not impose a specific conclusion. It does, however, raise a critical question: if one desires the existence of limits that are not subject to revision, what is their conceptual grounding in a framework where the sacred is absent?

12 Critique from Monotheism

1. Why not one absolute truth?

The idea of one absolute truth often leads to exclusion and imposition. The world, however, is complex and multidimensional.

2. What does “idolatry” mean?

It is a designation used by monotheistic systems to reject other forms of religion. It does not objectively describe reality.

3. How is the concept of revelation answered?

With scepticism. A truth that can neither be verified nor discussed cannot constitute a universal criterion.

4. What is the basic difference?

In monotheism, man is called to obey an external god. In ethnic religions, he is called to live according to the order of the world.

13 War, Violence and the Sanctity of Life

1. Since ethnic religions consider life sacred, why do they have war deities?

The existence of war deities does not negate the sanctity of life, but places it within the reality of the world.

The world is neither static nor completely harmonious. It includes conflict, decay and the need for defence. Life is sacred, but precisely for this reason it needs to be protected.

War deities express this dimension:

- the necessity of defence,
- the preservation of order against disintegration,
- and the limit beyond which violence becomes hubris.

They do not legitimise uncontrolled violence; they integrate it within rules.

2. How does this approach differ from a simple glorification of war?

War is not glorified as an end in itself.

In the Greek tradition, conflict has meaning only when it serves the restoration of order and the protection of life. Excess, destruction without measure and arrogance constitute hubris.

The deities themselves set limits:

- power without wisdom leads to destruction (let us recall here that in the Greek Pantheon, Athena is a war deity even though she is the goddess of wisdom; and she complements Ares),
- violence without measure ultimately turns against man himself.

3. What is the relationship between war and “according to nature”?

War can be either according to nature or contrary to nature.

It is according to nature when:

- it is a defence,
- it protects life and the community,
- it restores balance.

It is contrary to nature when:

- it is waged for domination or greed,
- it destroys without reason,
- it violates all measure.

4. What does this mean for the stance of man?

Man is called neither to reject all conflict nor to pursue it.

He is called to handle it with measure, awareness and responsibility.

Recognising conflict as part of the world does not lead to violence, but to understanding its limits.

14 Religion, Suicide and Assisted Suicide

1. What is the position of religions and atheism on suicide?

Most religions reject suicide, but for different reasons.

In founded religions, it is often considered a violation of a divine command. In ethnic religions, it is considered a rupture with the natural order of life.

From an atheistic perspective, the issue is usually approached in terms of individual choice and consequences.

The essence of the issue is whether life is considered part of a broader order that must be preserved, or exclusively a personal matter.

2. How is assisted suicide addressed when there is extreme pain?

Life is sacred, but sacredness does not mean prolonging existence at all costs and under all conditions.

In ethnic religions, there is no idea that pain constitutes a “trial” imposed by a god that one must endure regardless of circumstances. Pain is part of physical reality, not a divine command.

The question is not simply “to live or to die”, but:

- whether life still retains coherence and the possibility of participation in the world,
- or whether it has turned into a state of complete disintegration and loss of dignity.

3. How is the balance struck between the sanctity of life and dignity?

The balance is not achieved through absolute rules, but on the basis of “measure” and “discernment”.

Life as biological existence is not the only criterion. Life as participation in the world, as relationship, as the capacity for action and consciousness, is equally essential.

When these have been irretrievably lost, then the question becomes tragic and does not admit of simple answers.

4. What is the role of the community in such a decision?

The decision is not entirely private, because a person’s life also belongs to the community. The community must support, alleviate, exhaust every possibility of care.

Only when these possibilities have truly been exhausted can the question of definitive termination be raised.

5. Can the termination of life ever be justified?

It cannot be established as a general rule.

However, in extreme cases where:

- the pain is continuous and unbearable,
- there is no prospect of recovery,
- and life has lost all coherence and dignity,

the discussion cannot simply be dismissed as “forbidden”.

Addressing such cases requires responsibility, seriousness, and a deep awareness of the consequences.

6. What is the danger of such a stance?

The danger is that of turning a tragic exception into an easy solution.

For this reason, what is required is strict measure, avoidance of hasty decisions, and constant reference to the value of life.

Recognising limits does not mean abandoning the principle.

15 Additional Issues

1. What is the role of sacrifice, prayer, and festivals?

Sacrifice, prayer, and festivals are not formal acts, but ways of man’s participation in the order of the world.

Sacrifice expresses the recognition that man is not the centre of everything, but part of a larger whole. It is not an “exchange” with the gods, but an act of gratitude and integration.

Prayer is not a request for arbitrary interventions, but a way of harmonising man with the sacred.

Festivals express the rhythm of life and nature. They unite the community and reconnect man with the world to which he belongs.

2. What does “natural” mean in a scientific and in a religious context?

In science, “natural” means that which obeys laws and can be observed and studied.

In the religious context of ethnic religions, “natural” means that which belongs to the order of the world and is in accordance with it. It is not limited to the measurable, but also includes meaning and value. The natural is not merely a mechanism; it is an order that must be respected.

3. How does religious stance affect everyday life?

Religious stance determines the way man sees and lives the world.

If the world is considered sacred, then everyday action acquires weight and responsibility. If it is considered a mere object, then action is limited to self-interest.

Religion is not something separate from life; it is the way life is experienced.

4. Which virtues are cultivated and how?

Virtues are cultivated that allow man to live according to nature and in harmony with the community: measure, justice, courage, wisdom.

Virtues are not imposed as commands, but are cultivated through action, education, and participation in the community.

5. How does tradition handle issues such as gender, family, death?

Tradition treats them as parts of the natural order of the world, not as abstract matters to be arbitrarily defined.

Gender and family are integrated into the continuity of life. Death is not a failure, but part of the cycle of existence.

The approach is not denial or arbitrariness, but understanding and integration.

6. You just mentioned the integration of gender into the continuity of life. Is there a problem with homosexuals, trans people, etc.?

The issue is not the existence of different people, but the understanding of what “according to nature” means.

Ethnic religions are not based on absolute prohibitions arising from external commands, but on a conception of the natural order of the world.

Human reality is complex and includes diversity. The existence of different forms of identity or behavior cannot be treated simply by denial.

The crucial point, however, remains the distinction between what is part of the natural diversity of humans and what deviates from the coherence and continuity of life. The resulting stance is neither absolute rejection nor uncritical acceptance, but an effort to understand within the framework of human nature and the world.

7. How should these issues be handled in practice?

With measure and discernment.⁵

Respect for the individual is necessary, because every person is part of the community and of life. At the same time, the community cannot function without reference to some conception of “according to nature”.

This balance is difficult but necessary:

- without respect, we are led to exclusion,
- without a criterion, we are led to confusion.

8. How can the issue of adoption by same-sex couples be examined in light of the present analysis?

The discussion about adoption concerns not only the acceptance or rejection of specific forms of family, but also the criteria by which the best interest of the child and, more broadly, the very concept of the family are defined. For this reason, the issue lends itself to examination beyond immediate moral reactions, with emphasis on the structure of the argumentation.

One key area of discussion is the so-called child-centred argument, ie, the attempt to determine what is in the child’s best interest.

On the one hand, it is argued that the decisive factors for a child’s development are stability, care, and emotional security. According to this approach, the gender of the parents is not in itself a critical factor, provided the above conditions are met. Adoption by same-sex couples may therefore be considered acceptable insofar as it provides a stable and supportive environment, especially in cases where the alternative is the child remaining in institutional care.

⁵The ability to distinguish different cases, not to equate dissimilar things, to judge on the basis of principles, not generalisations.

On the other hand, it is argued that the child's best interest is linked not only to general indicators of well-being, but also to the specific structure of the family. According to this view, the presence of both a male and a female role model is considered important for balanced development, while the family is understood as an institution with specific characteristics that are not reducible exclusively to functional criteria. From this perspective, changing the form of the family is not neutral, but affects the way the child is integrated into a broader cultural context.

The disagreement between the two approaches concerns not only empirical data, but also the kind of criteria considered fundamental. In the first case, the criteria are primarily instrumental: they are evaluated on the basis of outcome, ie, the child's well-being as it can be assessed. In the second, the idea is introduced that certain structures have a particular, possibly non-negotiable character, which is not exhausted by measurable outcomes.

At this point, the connection with the broader problematic of the present text becomes evident. If there is no concept of the sacred that binds the form of the family, then limits are set through balancing: which form best serves the child's interest under given circumstances. Conversely, if certain forms are considered to have a binding character in principle, then the possibility of changing them is restricted regardless of particular assessments.

The present analysis does not decide which of these approaches is correct. It attempts, however, to make clear that the disagreement is not exhausted by different evaluations of the same data, but reflects different ways of grounding limits: instrumental on the one hand and, possibly, non-negotiable on the other. Without this distinction, the discussion risks remaining at the level of mutual misunderstanding.

The discussion acquires an additional dimension when one considers the practical conditions under which certain forms of procreation, such as surrogacy, take place. At the international level, it has been noted that such practices may be linked to economic inequalities, insofar as women in vulnerable positions assume the relevant role for payment.

This issue concerns not only specific categories of parents, but the structure of the institutional framework itself. It raises, however, a broader question: to what extent can practices based on contractual agreements be considered fully free when they take place under con-

ditions of significant inequality?

In this context, evaluation is not limited to the immediate interest of the child or the parties involved, but extends to the conditions under which the relevant decisions are made. The existence of choice does not necessarily imply equality of terms.

This observation connects with the broader problematic of the present text, insofar as it highlights the role of the criteria by which limits are set: if these are primarily instrumental, then issues such as exploitation tend to be addressed in terms of management rather than in terms of their acceptance in principle.

The comparison of practices such as surrogacy with other forms of economic activity, such as labour or the provision of services, is often put forward as an argument for the acceptance of surrogacy. However, this comparison remains conceptually deficient, insofar as it overlooks crucial differences.

Unlike labour, pregnancy and the birth of a child constitute irreversible processes that involve not only the contracting parties but also a third person, whose interest cannot be fully reduced to contractual terms. Moreover, procreation is not merely the provision of a service, but the creation of a new subject of rights.

These differences render problematic the direct transfer of concepts from the sphere of economic activity to the sphere of reproduction. The question, therefore, is not only whether a practice can be adequately regulated, but whether it can be fully integrated into an instrumental framework of evaluation, or whether there remain aspects of it that are not adequately accounted for by such a framework.

9. What does “eudaimonia” or “the good life” mean?

Eudaimonia is not simple pleasure nor individual success.

It is life in agreement with the nature of the world and of man. It is balance, measure, and harmony.

It is not achieved by withdrawing from the world, but by right participation in it.

10. What would constitute sufficient reason for one to change one’s belief?

Sufficient reason is the clear recognition that a belief conflicts with reality or leads to disastrous consequences.

Change occurs not through pressure or imposition, but through understanding.

11. What are the limits of human reason in these matters?

Human reason is powerful, but not absolute. It can understand the order of the world to a great extent, but not completely.

Recognising limits does not mean abandoning reason, but avoiding hubris: the delusion that man can define everything at will.

16 Further Issues

1. Is there a distinction between religion in books and religion in practice?

Yes, and it is often decisive. “Religion in books” is the body of formulated teachings, while “religion in practice” is the way these live within the community.

No religion is fully identical with its texts. Its real form is revealed in the way it affects people’s lives.

When there is a large divergence, the criterion cannot be only theory, but real consequences.

2. How should one behave in a world where religion in practice prevails over theory?

With awareness and judgment. It is not enough to examine what a religion declares, but what it produces in practice.

The stance should be neither naive acceptance nor levelling rejection, but discrimination: to recognise what is in accordance with nature and what is not.

3. Can there be a definitive victory of one religion over others, and how should followers behave?

The complete dominance of one religion is historically possible only through imposition, not through free acceptance.

Such a “victory” is not an indication of truth, but of power.

Followers must defend their own tradition without seeking to eliminate others, but also without accepting imposition.

4. If ethics is objective, why not abolish all religions and keep the best one?

If ethics has an objective core, this does not mean it is fully expressed in the same way everywhere.

Religions are different expressions of the human effort to understand and live according to that order.

“Abolishing” all except one presupposes that someone fully possesses the truth, which is difficult to justify without leading to arbitrariness.

5. If ethics is not objective, on what basis can one religion criticise another?

If ethics were completely relative, then every criticism would be equivalent to every other, and there would be no substantial criterion.

In practice, however, people compare systems on the basis of their coherence, their relation to nature, and their consequences for life.

These criteria give meaning to criticism and add value to arguments.

6. Are such comparisons ultimately valuable?

Yes, because without comparison there is no understanding or choice.

Their value lies not in imposing one view, but in bringing out which approach is more compatible with reality and leads to a more sustainable life.

17 Critique of Practices and Deviations

1. How is a practice judged within a religious tradition?

The fact that a practice exists within a tradition does not mean it expresses the tradition’s essence.

The basic criterion is whether it is *according to nature* or *contrary to nature*. That is:

- whether it respects life and the continuity of the world,
- whether it strengthens harmony or disrupts it,
- whether it arises from the order of the world or from human arbitrariness.

Practices are judged by principles, not principles by practices.
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2. How is the phenomenon of Sati in India judged?

Sati, i.e., the burning of widows, is an example of a practice that may exist within a tradition without expressing its essence.

It is a practice *contrary to nature*, because:

- it destroys life without natural necessity,
- it turns the person into a means for social or ideological purposes,
- it ruptures the natural order of life.

The fact that it appeared historically does not make it correct. On the contrary, it shows that even great traditions can undergo distortions.

Rejecting such practices does not require rejecting the entire tradition, but discrimination.

3. How should such cases be treated by people who reject a religion because of them?

The complete rejection of a tradition because of specific practices is understandable as a reaction, but it is not necessarily correct as a judgment.

Every great tradition includes:

- fundamental principles,
- historical developments,
- and practices that may deviate.

Distinguishing these levels is necessary before any overall judgment.

4. How is the position of wealthy women in ancient Athens judged?

The social restrictions on wealthy women in ancient Athens are a historical reality, but they are not automatically identical with the religious worldview.

The Greek religious tradition:

- recognises powerful and fundamental female deities,
- does not ground an ontological inferiority of women,
- integrates the feminine element as an essential part of the cosmic order.

The specific social forms reflect historical conditions and choices, not necessarily the full expression of the worldview.

5. Can a tradition contain mistaken practices?

Yes. No human society perfectly applies its principles.

Traditions evolve and are subject to historical pressures, social imbalances, and mistaken interpretations.

The existence of errors does not negate the value of the tradition, but demands criticism and correction. In ethnic religions, the nation that bears the religion has the absolute right to make the corrections it deems right and according to nature. In founded religions, changes are not only rarer, but whenever they occur they are from above and are not open to criticism by followers.

6. What is the right stance towards tradition?

Neither uncritical acceptance nor total rejection.

The right stance is:

- respect for tradition as a bearer of knowledge,
- but also criticism on the basis of “according to nature”.

Only thus does tradition remain alive and turn neither into dogma nor into a fossil.

18 Epilogue

This text began from an observation: that in contemporary discourse on religion or atheism, a single term is used to describe phenomena which are not of the same kind. The lack of distinction inevitably leads either to superficial comparisons or to fruitless confrontations, in which arguments shift without a stable conceptual framework.

The preceding examination has shown that it is possible to distinguish at least two different types of religion: the ethnic (or natural) and the founded. This distinction is not based on a value hierarchy, but on the way each religious system is constituted: whether it arises as a historical development within a specific collective life, or whether it is founded on an act of establishment that normatively defines its content.

A crucial element of this distinction proved to be the concept of the sacred. Although every religion defines something as sacred, the way in which the sacred is constituted differs substantially. In the one case, the sacred emerges from the life of the community and is inseparably linked

to it; in the other, it is defined through teaching and functions as a criterion to which the community is called to conform. This difference renders problematic any direct and indiscriminately applied comparison.

Several consequences follow from this distinction. First, it is no longer self-evident that all religious systems can be evaluated by the same criteria or placed within the same comparative framework without adjustments. Second, the tensions that arise when different types of religion come into contact are better explained, since what collide are not merely different positions, but different modes of constituting the religious phenomenon. Third, it becomes clear that many contemporary discussions suffer not from a lack of arguments, but from a lack of prior conceptual clarification.

The importance of this distinction is especially evident in the pedagogical field. The young person, in the absence of clear conceptual tools, is called upon to take a stance towards a set of phenomena presented as a single whole. The result is either uncritical acceptance or wholesale rejection, without genuine understanding. The introduction of a basic distinction does not dictate conclusions; it does, however, allow for the formation of a conscious judgment.

This text does not seek to answer the question of which religion is true. It seeks to clarify this question, by showing that it presupposes the prior distinction of the categories to which it refers. In this sense, the preceding analysis constitutes not a conclusion, but a precondition for any further discussion.

The analysis that precedes is categorical in method, to the extent that it attempts to distinguish types rather than evaluate contents. However, its consequences inevitably have normative implications, insofar as the distinction itself affects the way in which the relevant questions are posed.

The author does not conceal that he approaches the subject from a specific religious starting point. However, the distinction proposed does not depend on acceptance of that starting point. If it has any value, it lies in the fact that it can function as a common tool for understanding, regardless of the reader's final position.

In this sense, what is at stake is not agreement, but distinction. And without distinction, no meaningful agreement or disagreement is possible.

[The author of this article did not form his views from the following bibliography, but from his religious choices. The following bibliography is given for two reasons. First, for those who wish to read more in this direction, and secondly, to make it clear that the author of this article did not invent the wheel. Many others, long before him, have thoroughly studied these lines of thought.]

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