

The 11 Pillars of Rational Religion

Religion has had, to say the least, a chequered history. It has provided many with purpose and meaning, yet there have been many wars waged in its name at a great cost in human life.

But what is religion? How is it defined? Can logical conclusions be drawn from its analysis and if so, can they be applied in practical terms to our lives? Attempting to answer these questions in a logical and objective way is the purpose of this article.

Pillar 1: Religion is the search for the ideal values on which to live life, within the context of a bigger picture.

The Macquarie Dictionary, defines **Religion** as:

“The quest for the values of the ideal life, involving three phases: the ideal, the practices for attaining the values of the ideal, and the theology or world view relating the quest to the enviroing universe.”

Two key words in this definition are “quest” and “values”. Adding their definitions, from the same source, gives an expanded definition:

“The quest [act or instance of seeking or pursuing something; a search] for the values [any object or quality desirable as a means or as an end in itself] of the ideal life, involving three phases: the ideal, the practices for attaining the values of the ideal, and the theology or world view relating the quest to the enviroing universe.”

It would seem from this definition, that religion is in essence, a process. It involves a quest or search, supporting perhaps the notion that life is a journey and not a destination. Both the “quest for the values” and “the practices for attaining the values” imply active processes – the ongoing application of values to life experiences. Drawing conclusions seems less important than the experience of the attempt.

It is also interesting that there is nothing in the definition that requires being part of an organised religion to pursue the quest.

Pillar 2: Major religions espouse similar values.

Major religions espouse very similar values. For example, in the interaction with our fellow human beings, many advocate treating others the same way as we would like to be treated. The **Baha’i** faith says: “Beware lest ye prefer yourselves above your neighbours.” (*Baha’u’llah, Gleanings, 315*). **Buddhism** says: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” (*Udana-Varqa, 5:18*). **Christianity** teaches: “All things whatsoever ye would that men do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (*Matthew 7:12*). **Confucianism** says: “Surely it is the maxim of loving kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you. (*Analects, XV, 23*). **Hinduism** says: “This is the sum of all true righteousness: deal with others as thou wouldst thyself be dealt by. Do nothing to thy neighbour which thou would not have him do to thee after.” (*The Mahabharata*). **Islam** teaches: “No-one of you is truly a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.” (*Sunnah*). **Judaism** says: “That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow, this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary, go and learn it.” (*The Talmud, Shabbat 31a*). **Zoroastrianism** teaches: “That nature only is good

when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for oneself.” (Dadistan-i-Dinik, 94:5).

Pillar 3: Major religions combine their core values with a set of rules and regulations in all-or-nothing “package deals”.

Organised religions come as “package deals” combining their core values with a unique set of rules and regulations which are fixed and immutable. They adopt an “all-or-nothing” demand of their adherents with hierarchical structures that both enshrine and enforce their “packages”. In essence, they are religions of authority that require mere intellectual assent to their set of beliefs. The “*quest for values*” implies action in the here and now, whereas, religions of authority are rooted in the past. Challenging their authority can come at a price. Viewing the heavens through his telescope, Galileo discovered hitherto unseen stars and for challenging the church’s belief in a fixed firmament was placed under lifetime house arrest, a ruling only officially revoked in 1965 – over 300 years later!

Pillar 4: Religious conflict occurs as a result of differences in relatively unimportant rules and regulations, not core values.

In looking more closely at values, there appears to be an almost intuitive agreement on the “right” values. Love, honesty, integrity, forgiveness, tolerance, understanding and respect seem to be the hallmarks of an “ideal” life whether you are guided by organised religion or are on a personal quest. Logically, these values all support the notion of inclusion which, taken to its logical conclusion, would mean unified humanity, whereas their opposites, based on exclusion, inevitably lead to fragmentation.

In looking at the source of religious conflict, it appears that differences in core values are not the cause, but differences in the relative merits of prophets and differences in creeds and rituals. In most cases, it seems the tail is wagging the dog. Religions agree 90% and differ by 10% yet, for some illogical reason, this relatively unimportant 10% receives 90% of the attention.

Pillar 5: Most religions believe that they are right and all others are wrong.

It would seem that each religion, and every sect or division of every religion, has the conviction that they are the one and only true religion. They believe they are right and everyone else is wrong. This is often reinforced with the belief that only followers of their religion will/can earn salvation.

Logically, “exclusive truth” makes little sense. For example, there may be many different ways to climb a mountain. Is any one path “right” to the exclusion of all others? Don’t all paths arrive at the same place and isn’t the view from the top identical? Also, every language and dialect throughout the world will have a name for what English calls “the moon”. Is a Parisian calling it “la lune” or any other of the hundreds of global “moon” words, wrong? Differences in mountain paths and language are tolerated, even celebrated, but acceptance of differences in religions, for some illogical reason, are not.

Many religions claim divine origins as a source of their “rightness”. Their claims may or may not be true, but all have certainly gone through a process of formalisation, documentation and publication – stages all involving the hand of man. Any claim of divine infallibility should be viewed within this context.

Pillar 6: The major reason we follow a particular religion is the family into which we are born.

Many defend their religion as being the only “right” one as if they had been to the Religion Supermarket, surveyed all offerings, assessed which make the most sense or relevance and have then chosen the “best” one. In reality, it is more a matter of luck – the circumstances of birth. A child born into an Orthodox Jewish family is likely to become an Orthodox Jew. A child of a Mennonite family is likely to become a Mennonite.

Pillar 7: If you believe in a Creator, there can be only one.

The Creator is called God by Christians, Allah by Muslims and Yahweh by Jews. All are monotheists, hence none would agree, and it makes no sense, to have three Master Architects. Ultimately there must be One, or none. (The term “the Creator” is used here to embrace all three.) The three religions have a good deal of similarity in their core beliefs about the Creator. They all acknowledge one Creator, that everything we have is owed to that Creator and that we should love or serve that Creator. **Christianity** teaches us to love both God and neighbour, **Islam** teaches that the purpose of existence is to love and serve Allah, while **Judaism** emphasises the personal relationship with Yahweh and living a moral life.

Pillar 8: If you believe in creation, then the Creator must have created all there is – including us.

It is logical that the Creator of anything must have superior knowledge and perspective over and above that which is created. The buck of Creation must stop somewhere. This applies to the Creator making a universe or a human being creating an artifact. Anything created must start as an intention, or purpose in the mind of the creator who must then have access to the requisite materials and skill to manifest that creation.

If you believe in creation of the universe, then the Creator made **everything** in it. On a physical level, our scientists agree. They maintain, through the various Laws of Thermodynamics, that matter and energy can be neither created nor destroyed, and yet they exist. If energy and matter weren’t created, then they must have created themselves. The logical implication is that a glass of water is more intelligent than a human being as it somehow created itself but a human being is incapable of doing so.

Belief in a Creator must also apply to the creation of the non-physical world – such as thought, intellect, instincts, mind, emotions, humour, imagination and free will. All these were either created or they created themselves which again raises the glass of water analogy.

In the absence of self-creation, it follows that the Creator must have not only made the physical and non-physical worlds, but also created us. It may be worth pausing here a moment to grasp the potential implications of this. If this thesis is correct, the Creator made us – not our parents. They were perhaps the conduit, the opportunity, but as humans are unable to create a single atom of matter, how reasonable is it to suggest that humans can create another human being? The logical conclusion is that we are in the first instance true offspring of the Creator, courtesy of our parents with the corollary that, as we all come from the same Creator, we are all primarily brothers and sisters. Isn’t the selfless act of a stranger, with no thought for their own safety,

diving into a swollen river to save a drowning child evidence of our universal connection?

But what is the true “us”? We see ourselves mainly as bodies and believe that “in there somewhere” is a soul, essence or spirit that may be able to transcend bodily death. (The term “spirit” will be used to cover all three.) From the Creator’s point of view, could it be that the true “us” is spirit, only temporarily housed in a body that allows the spirit to express itself?

One critical gift the Creator must have endowed us with is free will. Without it we are robots and life would be an interesting but ultimately purposeless enterprise. Logically, free will must be total – anything less than 100% isn’t free.

Consider also that the Creator needs to withdraw completely to allow our free will to manifest unhindered. Could this be the reason why, despite repeated calls, the Creator doesn’t intervene in either our personal or global affairs?

Pillar 9: The true nature of the Creator and the full scope Creation is unknown, unknowable and irrelevant.

Many people feel they need a full understanding of the Creator and Creation before they can make any religious choices. Logically, we can never hope to understand everything about the Creator and Creation as any conception by a human mind must, by definition, contain no greater intelligence than that of the human conceiver.

It’s like wanting to explain algebra to a two year old. We know that for them, for now, algebra is unknown, unknowable and irrelevant to their lives. But we also know the potential of the two year old and are patient in allowing them time to develop. A lack of understanding of algebra in no way limits their lives now.

Is this perhaps analogous to the Creator’s view of us and our potential on a spiritual level? Maybe for us, for now, the full answers are unknown, unknowable and irrelevant? While we may acknowledge there is still “algebra” waiting for us to learn, could there be a task for us now that is knowable and relevant?

Pillar 10: If there is a purpose to our lives, there must be something “in it” for the Creator.

This relates to the last part of the definition of religion “... *the theology or world view relating the quest to the envioning universe*”. If our lives have a purpose, then that purpose must have been determined by the Creator. Whatever the purpose is, there must be something of value, something “in it”, for the Creator, otherwise why bother? It also makes sense that it must be something that we can create that the Creator can’t.

And it would seem that there are specific time/space limits for us to either create that value or not – a “test period” to arrive at a conclusion. The time would seem limited to our bodily life, within the fixed space of Earth.

Pillar 11: If there is a purpose to our lives, there must be something “in it” for us.

As proposed in the definition of religion, maybe the purpose of life is to apply the values we regard as being part of the “ideal life” in real-life situations with the results becoming our “scorecard” of life, recorded in our spirit. Do we choose good over evil? Do we choose compassion over arrogance? And could it be that through the trials and tribulations of life, we could be challenged to maintain our values which may seem easy in good times, but put us to the test during adverse ones? Maybe there is value to the Creator in the outcomes of our struggle. Are we still able to believe in the Creator and our purpose when times are tough? Is this where faith plays a role? The full answers of course, are unknowable and unnecessary to our Earthly quest.

Our spirit, being non-physical, has the possibility to transcend physical death. In fact, could it be that this spirit has the possibility of eternal existence? Could this not mean that the spirit within us is eternal now? Might we already have what we are looking for – eternity within?

One must speculate on the value to the Creator of any spirit that has for long rejected the Creator and that even just before physical death, makes a commitment to the Creator and the “work of life”? Could it in fact be that such a person who has endured so much and eventually chooses to believe, is just as valuable to the Creator’s future purposes, as those living a lifetime of piety?

But what of the opposite, what if we choose to ultimately reject the Creator and the value of our life struggles? What choice do we leave the Creator? It doesn’t make sense that the Creator would force salvation on anyone as that would be a breach of our free will.

As the two year old has an unknowable yet boundless future ahead of them as a human being, isn’t the analogous opportunity for us full of intrigue and excitement, perhaps literally beyond our imaginations? Maybe by giving ourselves the opportunity to embrace the unknown and unknowable, we could be in for the rides of our eternal lives!
