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16 Conclusion

Understanding Religion and Irreligion

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Understanding religion psychologically means being able to deal with and answer three kinds of question. First, what are the psychological—cognitive, emotional, moral, and social—functions of religion in contemporary individuals' lives? Second, provided that at least some of these functions may be universal, why are there important inter-individual differences in attitudes regarding religion? Finally, can the historical presence of religion in the human species be explained as having served some basic adaptive needs and the corresponding psychological mechanisms? The first question is typically a matter of social psychology; the second, of personality psychology; and the third, of evolutionary psychology.

The three questions are partially interdependent. For instance, it may be that the functions of religion as studied today in peoples' lives are ones to which religious people are more sensitive than the non-religious; and are ones that have some meaningful evolutionary psychological past. But the three questions are also partially independent from one another. Religion may influence cognitions, feelings, and behavior regardless of whether individuals are religious or not; and religion's role in human psychology may be independent from strictly evolutionary adaptive needs. Orthogonal to these questions is the issue of the extent to which religion's psychological functioning is universal and to what extent it is culture sensitive.

The main objective of this chapter is to offer an integrative synthesis of the psychological functions of religion on the basis of the accumulated empirical evidence of the last years reviewed in this volume's chapters. Attention will be paid to distinguish between the universal—for both believers and nonbelievers—character of the psychological needs addressed within religion and the specific ways through which these needs are addressed within a religious context, for instance compared to irreligion. An integrative view of the origins of individual differences on religiousness will also be provided. The emphasis will be on a social and personality psychological understanding of religion, while not neglecting some insight from evolutionary psychology. Finally, the chapter ends

with considerations for future research on personal religiousness as an individual differences construct to be studied principally in interaction with several contextual factors.

The Multiple Functions of Religion and Some Specifics

As shown through the various chapters of the present volume, religion, as a multifaceted reality, i.e., including the four “B” dimensions of believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging, has not a sole but rather multiple functions at the intra-individual, interpersonal, and social levels (see Figure 16.1 for an integrative view). These may be cognitive, emotional, moral, and social or may be rather transversal, i.e., for the individual and social self as a whole. Interestingly, none of these psychological functions seems unique, specific to religion, compared to other domains of human activity; they are universal, i.e., concern human beings in general, be they religious or not. Following Fiske’s (2010) model of five major social motives, as psychologists we can argue that religion is mainly based on panhuman motives: understanding, controlling, and trusting (oneself, others, and the world), as well as self-enhancing, and belonging. However, religion implies several specifics in the way these universal motives work within a religious context and/or among religious participants. Later in the chapter, I will focus on key characteristics and specifics that make religion to be both (1) built upon universal psychological motives and (2) distinct from irreligion

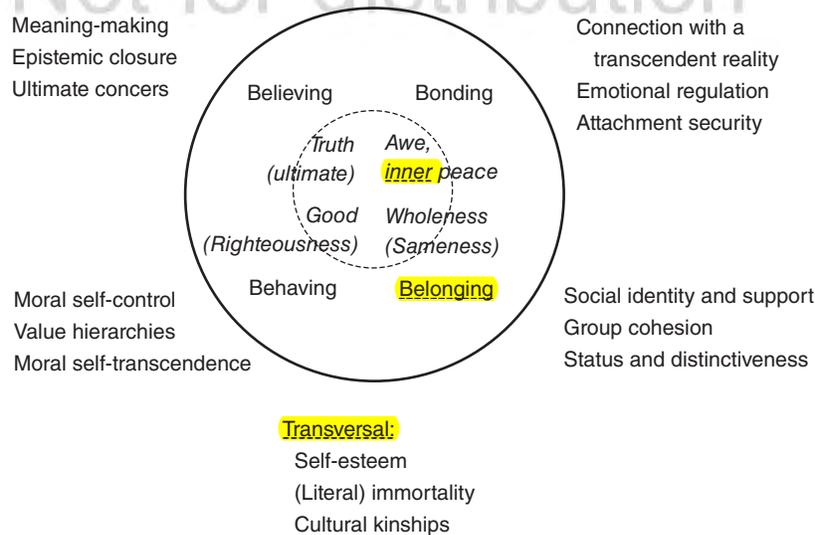


Figure 16.1 Cognitive, emotional, moral, and social functions of religion (individual level).

as well as from other, proximal to religion domains of human activity (e.g., art, paranormal beliefs, ideologies, morality, cultural/ethnic groups).

As it will be shown later, a key specificity of religion comes from the fact that the four basic components of religion (beliefs, ritualized experiences, norms, and groups) and the corresponding cognitive, emotional, moral, and social mechanisms are interdependent, mutually supportive, and delimitating of one another. This is especially the case with religions that have become historically dominant and large in membership.

Religion is not Simply a Meaning-Making System

Religion functions, to some extent, as a meaning-making system. It includes worldviews and beliefs, influences appraisal of internal and external events, and impacts attributions and causal inferences about the physical world, the self, others, and life in general. Thus, religious functions also intervene on decision making and the justification of thoughts, feelings, and acts. Correlational, biographical, historical, longitudinal, experimental, and neuropsychological evidence converges to show that religiousness is activated—mostly increases, sometimes decreases, or serves as a coping mechanism—when meaning and related self-control and self-esteem are threatened (see in this volume: Hayward & Krause, Chapter 12; Sedikides & Gebauer, Chapter 3). These threats cover a wide spectrum of situations and events: loneliness, ostracism, frustration, mortality salience, illness, death or loss of loved ones, uncertainty, loss of control, economic distress, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks. Through meaning making and related mechanisms, religion exerts some empowerment on people's lives, thus contributing to some extent to various aspects of well-being and mental health (Park, 2007).

However, compared to other meaning-making systems, religion is distinguished by several particularities (Saroglou, 2011). Religiousness implies intense investment on meaning making and strong beliefs in the meaningfulness of one's own life and the world. Moreover, religion provides distal, God-related, attributions when proximal (e.g., physical, psychological) explanations of unexplained events are missing. However, the core interest of religion is on the very distal causes of human existence. Therefore, it provides answers—more literal than symbolic—to the big existential enigmas, i.e., beliefs about specific transcendent entities, narratives about the origin of the world, and promises of literal immortality to face death-related anxiety. In fact, religion has *vacuum horror*: it prefers a world plenty of meaning over the experience of emptiness. Not surprisingly, therefore, religious conversion and spiritual transformation mainly constitute a transition from subjective meaningless to subjective meaningfulness (Paloutzian, 2005).

Related to this is the fact that religiousness implies a particular way of meaning making that is animated by the epistemic needs for order, structure, and closure—at least in monotheistic religions (Saroglou, 2002a). Interestingly, the increase of self-uncertainty and frustration leads to the radicalization of religious conviction; and conversely, people may de-radicalize after self-certainty has been re-established (Hogg, Adelman, & Blagg, 2010; McGregor, Nash, & Prentice, 2012). Consequently, even if well-being is a typical outcome of religious meaning making in general, to the extent to which it is mobilized by a high need for closure and a reduction of uncertainty, religion also leads to prejudice against various outgroups (Rowatt, Carpenter, & Haggard, Chapter 8, this volume; see also Brandt & Reyna, 2010). Note that modern spirituality, although equally motivated by a search for meaning, seems to evade traditional religiosity's temptation for epistemic closure and prejudice (Saroglou, 2002a, 2013).

The psychological functions of religion related to beliefs and meaning making are not isolated from other functions; they are importantly qualified by the co-presence of the three other religious dimensions, i.e., emotional, moral, and social. For instance, in religious conversion, emotional and relational factors play an equally, if not more, important role as cognitive factors and meaning-making processes. Moreover, religious beliefs are mostly moral in nature and implications rather than simple cognitive elaborations built, for instance, on the need for cognition to understand the world. Believing that God is the creator of the world, that Jesus was born to a virgin mother, or that a messiah will come to establish a new world, are moral affirmations rather than pure cognitions. In addition, religious and spiritual cognitions constitute shared beliefs within a group or community—even a virtual one—and they are subject to authority or tradition—even in the case of symbolic religiousness or non-religious spirituality. Finally, the fragile, unverifiable and, more importantly, counterintuitive character of many religious beliefs incites regular re-affirmation of these beliefs through emotional, ritualized, especially collective experiences and endorsement by a relatively homogenous group of numerous co-believers.

Religious beliefs in supernatural agents in general, and in Gods in particular, exemplify the fact that religion is built on common psychological mechanisms while at the same time implies a specific combination of psychological constructs and processes. Beliefs in supernatural entities should be understood as being based on common social cognition: they presuppose the acquisition of mentalizing capacities (mind perception or theory of mind) to infer the mental states of others, as well as of mind–body dualism (the perception of minds working differently from bodies) and teleology (the belief that there is some intentionality in nature and objects) (Gervais, Chapter 4, this volume; Norenzayan &

Gervais, 2012). At the same time, the most successful, in terms of cultural transmission, supernatural entities (Gods) are human-like beings perceived as possessing several specific counterintuitive *suprahuman* qualities. These qualities span four levels: cognitive (full knowledge and memory; Barrett, 2012; Boyer, 2001), emotional (the existence of secondary, human-specific, emotions but not primary, animal-specific, ones; Demoulin, Saroglou, & Van Pachterbeke, 2008), moral (higher, compared to the self, levels of moral personality traits; Saroglou, 2010; see also Oishi, Seol, Koo, & Miao, 2011, Table 2), and social (the capacity to relate with all human beings and nature).

In sum, although religion functions like other meaning systems, and religious cognitions are built on general mechanisms of social cognition, religious meaning making is specific in direction (affirmation of meaningfulness), content (specific religious beliefs), nature (several literal answers), extent (inferences, from the smallest personal event to the afterlife), validation source and means (community, tradition, authority, rituals), and underlying epistemic motives (order, certainty, and closure). All these make religion partly distinct from other meaning-making systems such as art, philosophical systems, political or moral ideologies, and paranormal beliefs.

Religious doubters, agnostics, or atheists are, of course, also concerned with the universal need for meaning making in general, and facing existential anxiety in particular. However, they seem to adopt, to some extent, different, if not opposite, pathways for exploring and creating meaning. Autonomy/nonconformity, skepticism, analytic rather intuitive and holistic thinking, open mindedness, and intelligence tend to overall characterize nonbelievers (Aarnio & Lindeman, 2007; Caldwell-Harris, 2012; Gervais, Chapter 4, this volume; Streib & Klein, 2013).

Religion is not Only a Heaven to Face Adversity

Religion also serves psychological functions related to emotions that are universal. However, like for beliefs and meaning making, it does so with some particularities; and the interaction with the other three dimensions—cognitive, moral, and social—impacts the emotional functioning of religion.

Religion provides means to cope with negative emotions and experiences and foster self-regulatory skills; and it provides practices—mainly rituals and especially prayer/meditation—and symbols that contribute psychologically, physiologically, and neurologically to emotional regulation, in particular for persons with a negative emotionality profile (Burris & Petrican, Chapter 5, this volume). Religion's regulatory role may encompass the whole spectrum of negative emotions, be they basic such as anger, fear, sadness, and disgust, or secondary and self-conscious

such as envy, contempt, guilt, and shame (Watts, 2007). Experimental induction of various negative affects in the laboratory increases individual religiousness (Sedikides & Gebauer, Chapter 3, this volume). Similarly, God serves as a substitute attachment figure in the context of prior attachment insecurity in childhood or adulthood (Granqvist, Chapter 13, this volume).

However, religion is not only a heaven to face adversity. Religious experience also generates positive emotions not aimed at compensating for previous vulnerability. Religion may involve all kinds of positive emotion ranging from the basic such as joy, amusement, and interest to the moral and/or complex such as pride, compassion, gratitude, enthusiasm, awe, and admiration (Emmons, 2005). More importantly, positive emotions not only result from religious experiences but may cause or facilitate them. Complementing previous evidence on religion as a way to compensate for adversity and deprivation, a series of recent experiments show that positive emotions are also capable of increasing spirituality and religiousness and related feelings and behaviors (Van Cappellen & Rimé, Chapter 6, this volume). Similarly, there is a bidirectional causal link between attachment security and religiousness: secure attachment generalizes to all kinds of relationships, including that with God, and trust in God consolidates relational quality (Granqvist, Chapter 13, this volume).

What is specific about religion regarding its emotional functioning? Scholars agree that there exists no specifically religious emotion. Religion involves common, universal emotions and related psychological processes. (This parallels the idea that religious beliefs about supernatural agents are built on common social cognition.) However, historical and empirical evidence suggests some affinities between religion and certain emotions. These are the so-called moral emotions, be they negative or positive.

For instance, religion both instills and helps one to face things such as existential anxiety (over death), guilt (over sins), shame (of being unworthy of the love of God), and moral disgust (against outgroups perceived to threaten religious values). Similarly, positive moral emotions, also called self-transcendent emotions, such as awe, elevation, admiration, and gratitude, but not self-focused positive emotions such as joy, pride, and especially amusement, have the power to activate or heighten spirituality (Van Cappellen & Rimé, Chapter 6, this volume). Music styles that reflect emotions such as awe, love, and compassion are preferred by religious and spiritual people, whereas music styles that reflect energy, activation, and amusement are unrelated to religiousness (Saroglou, Prade, & Rodriguez, 2012). Finally, in a series of studies, religiousness was found to predict low appreciation and use of several humor styles, and even low spontaneous humor creation as a way to cope with life's

everyday difficulties (at least in a cultural context influenced by Catholicism; Saroglou, 2002b, 2003a, 2004).

Overall, one gets the impression that William James (1985 [1902]) was right when affirming that religiousness implies a tonality of seriousness in life and gravity in human existence. It appears that religion favors emotional self-transcendence and inner peace but not simple changes of the reference framework (humor) or emotional energy. Note that “spiritual joy” is not quite the same thing as happiness or pleasure; and “spiritual laughter” is something different from sex jokes and sick humor (Saroglou & Anciaux, 2004).

Religion provides rituals that help one to experience emotions in a specific way, i.e., aesthetically (search for the sublime), in an artistically hieratic way (with self-mastery), and extraordinarily (outside of life’s everyday routine), but still familiarly (repetition of established behavior patterns). Moreover, within rituals, emotions translate bodily expressions into religious ideas and, in turn, consolidate them, thus heightening religious memory. Finally, like beliefs, emotions within a religious context have both moral and social identity orientations. As argued by Burriss and Petrican (Chapter 5, this volume), religious emotional self-regulation is a moral issue and is linked to one’s identity as a religious person and as a member of a specific religious community that values, legitimizes, or condemns certain emotions. Emotional regulation thus serves to preserve and promote individuals’ religious identity.

Empirical psychological research on religion, emotions, and rituals is somehow comparatively less developed than research investigating the cognitive and moral functions and consequences of religion. It is thus difficult to extrapolate on irreligion and make assumptions regarding the specifics in the way agnostics and atheists experience universal self-transcendent and moral emotions. There may be differences in the elicitors of the later emotions: for instance, science and not only nature elicit awe among the non-religious (Caldwell-Harris, Wilson, LoTempio, & Beit-Hallahmi, 2011). Also, as far as mental health is concerned, non-religious persons may evade religious sources of negative emotions such as beliefs and rituals that possibly induce fear, guilt, or shame. At the same time, they may also lack some of the self-regulatory resources that aid in coping with adversity, depression, and death anxiety. Currently, empirical research gives a modest but consistent advantage to the religious, regarding many emotional and regulatory aspects of mental health and well-being (Hayward & Krause, Chapter 12, this volume; Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012). Some argue, however, for a curvilinear relation with both the very religious and irreligious, compared to the moderately religious, being high on some aspects of well-being (Galen, 2012; Streib & Klein, 2013).

Religion is Not the Source of Universal Morality

A common idea is that religion serves as an important source of morality for humans. However, accumulated research using a variety of methodologies, including priming studies, shows that this is only partly true and needs to be importantly nuanced. Morality—moral emotions and values—emerges rather universally in early childhood and does so independently from (religious) teachings and socialization; children may question adults' behavior, including religious norms, as being immoral (Turiel, 2006). Among adults, religious conviction may be in conflict with moral conviction (Skitka, Bauman, & Lytle, 2009). Nevertheless, an important function of religion is to sustain a sense of righteousness. Religious righteousness overlaps to some extent with what humans universally consider to be moral, i.e., care- and justice-based morality, but not always.

There are, in fact, a number of specifics to keep in mind when one considers the role of religion with respect to morality. Religiousness implies, consistently across the major religions, a specific hierarchy between universal human values with an emphasis on values denoting primarily conservation and secondarily some self-transcendence (benevolence), and a low consideration of the values of autonomy and hedonism (Roccas & Elster, Chapter 9, this volume). Modern spirituality shifts the priority to valuing extended self-transcendence (universal prosocial concerns) while neglecting the values of power and hedonism (Saroglou & Muñoz-García, 2008). Moreover, religion explicitly emphasizes the importance of coherence between value hierarchy and behavior (Roccas & Elster, Chapter 9, this volume). This may activate and increase honesty, or decrease dishonesty, as has been shown in several experiments (Preston, Salomon, & Ritter, Chapter 7, this volume), but also renders more problematic the presence of religious moral hypocrisy. Witnessing the last is a major predictor of religious doubting and apostasy (Altemeyer, 2004; Saroglou, 2012a).

Another characteristic of religion is that it seems to encourage a double extension in the moral domain. On the one hand, through specific religious ideas (e.g., an omniscient and all-controlling supernatural agent, family-related metaphors) and collective practices (e.g., costly rituals that indicate fellows to trust), religion enhances prosocial behavior. In doing so, it has contributed to a cultural evolution from kinship-based altruism to an extended altruism in large societies disposing of moralizing gods (Preston et al., Chapter 7, this volume). On the other hand, in addition to interpersonal morality, which is founded on the universal principles of care and justice, religion is also concerned with non-interpersonal morality based primarily on purity (avoidance of moral disgust) and secondarily on group/society-related principles of loyalty and respect to authority (Graham & Haidt, 2010). The last three principles are more

strongly endorsed in collectivistic societies and by conservative individuals. This may explain the extension of religion's moralizing effects on other domains such as sexuality (restriction of), family (commitment to), and political preferences (cultural conservatism) (see in this volume: Li & Cohen, Chapter 10; Malka, Chapter 11).

The co-existence in religion of prosocial interpersonal morality with moral concerns for the preservation of social order and individual purity does not imply a simple extension of moral domains. In fact, conservative religiousness corresponds to excessive moralism—like excessive meaningfulness, as far as the religious meaning-making process is concerned—attested through moralization in all domains of life (e.g., Nucci & Turiel, 1993). Moreover, whereas in spirituality the extended prosocial values come first, in traditional religiosity, sexuality-, family- and purity-related concerns are predominant (Weeden, Cohen, & Kenrick, 2008; see also Malka, Chapter 11, this volume). More broadly, when in conflict, deontological moral judgment takes priority over consequentialism and prosocial concerns among traditionally religious people (Piazza, 2012) and authoritarians primed with religious ideas (Van Pachterbeke, Freyer, & Saroglou, 2011). Conservative, non-interpersonal moral principles may importantly limit prosocial religious tendencies (Saroglou, 2013). Similarly, religious prejudice against value-threatening individuals (homosexuals, atheists, members of other religions; Rowatt et al., Chapter 8, this volume) may be explained as resulting from deontological concerns that neutralize religious prosocial tendencies and the hypothetical support of the “sin–sinner” distinction. Note that, conversely, religious prosocial concerns may attenuate the antisocial effects of religious moral conservatism (Arzheimer & Carter, 2009; Malka, Chapter 11, this volume).

The moral functions of religion are reinforced by the co-presence of beliefs, rituals, practices, and the community. Religious moral tendencies—either prosocial or impersonal, deontological—are cognitively justified by religious beliefs, theological arguments, and narratives with key religious figures playing the role of moral exemplars (Oman, 2013; Saroglou, 2006b). These tendencies are amplified by emotions experienced in collective and private rituals (Van Cappellen & Rimé, Chapter 6, this volume). Religious practices such as fasting and meditation, together with beliefs and collective rituals, provide channels for fostering self-control. Self-control thus becomes a “moral muscle” that acts across a variety of domains of human activity and allows for the control of impulsivity, the resistance to temptations, the capacity to postpone gratification, and the perseverance to accomplish one's goals (Baumeister & Exline, 1999; Burriss & Petrican, Chapter 5, this volume; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Furthermore, the religious group legitimizes norms, rewards morality, punishes immorality, and defines the frontiers within which cultural altruism applies.

Finally, religion encourages the pursuit of high, possibly excessively high, moral standards. This concerns interpersonal morality, since sacrificial altruism has often been motivated by religious motives. It also concerns a strict deontological non-interpersonal morality that denotes excessive self-control to the detriment of hedonism—a kind of religious masochism.

Are agnostics and atheists low in prosociality and morality in general? There is currently a hot debate on whether this is simply a stereotype or may reflect truth (Galen, 2012; Myers, 2012; Saroglou, 2012c). No doubt, agnostics and atheists dispose of a huge variety of secular, non-religious, sources of, and motives for, moral action—all, in fact, of the cognitive, emotional, and social common determinants of morality. Nevertheless, as argued elsewhere (Saroglou, 2012c, 2013), the existing evidence suggests that agnostics and atheists may be overall less inclined to show prosocial tendencies and act prosocially. However, when prosociality occurs among the non-religious, it may be more autonomous than dependent on religious authority and norms, more altruistically than egoistically motivated, and more universal than ingroup-oriented. In addition, among the non-religious, morality seems to be focused on interpersonal aspects and less on concerns of purity, conservation of social order, and the development of a “moral muscle.”

Religion is not Simply Belonging to an Ingroup

Religion also implies some identification, be it weak or strong, with a group of coreligionists, thus serving common psychological functions relative to many social groups. These are mainly the need to belong, collective identity, social self-esteem, and social support. Additional functions include attachment to an ingroup, delimitation from outgroups, coalition formation for achieving various goals, disposing of a common culture (beliefs, norms, symbols, practices, and leisure activities), finding friends, professional acquaintances, and mating partners, and contracting marriages under public commitment (Gebauer & Maio, 2013; Johnson & Cohen, Chapter 15, this volume; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Li & Cohen, Chapter 10, this volume; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Many of these are known to contribute to mental health and well-being; this is also the case with religious groups (Hayward & Krause, Chapter 12, this volume).

However, religious groups are characterized by series of particularities. First, following theory on entitative social groups in general (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006; Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004), one can argue that religions—from world religions to small religious communities—are groups with high entitativity, homogeneity, and essentialism. This is because religious groups (1) are perceived as “real entities,” are particularly stable in time, and have fixed boundaries; (2)

include members of similar beliefs, values, and goals, whereas inter-individual variability is considered unimportant or secondary; and (3) are perceived as natural-like entities with a common essence rather than simply cultural networks. The last is facilitated by the geographical proximity and the distribution of the major world religions into few large zones of civilization (see Pew Research Center, 2012). The high need for sameness within religious groups can explain why the history of religions is replete of schisms and fights against heresies.

Second, religious groups satisfy not only motives for communion, social integration, and social cohesion, but also the agentic need for distinctiveness from the encompassing society, especially when that society is secular (Sedikides & Gebauer, Chapter 3, this volume). Religious identification is greater in religious groups of small size, a fact that suggests a need for optimal distinctiveness (Hoverd, Atkinson, & Sibley, 2012). The strength, especially under conditions of discrimination, of religious identification among immigrants, can be understood as resulting from, among other things, such a need for optimal distinctiveness (see Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012).

Third, contrary to other social identities such as ethnic, professional, or those related to leisure, which may be multiple and accumulative, religious social identities are mostly unique and exclusive. For the highly religious, religious identity is superior to all others. Additionally, religious identities are enhanced by an attachment to common beliefs, the practice of collective rituals where the group acts as a homogeneous whole, and the self-perception as moral and righteous; they thus serve to reduce feelings of uncertainty (Hogg et al., 2010). Not only does this increase the strength of the ingroup versus outgroup distinction, but it may render extremely difficult the creation of superordinate common ingroup identities (e.g., “world believers”). The last identities are known to constitute one possible solution for overcoming intergroup conflict (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). Subsequently, competition between religious groups to increase membership and social status and power may be particularly high, especially given the affinities between religion, physical territory, and political influence.

Fourth, religious groups are particular in that they are perceived by their members as eternal and glorious, much more so, in fact, than ethnic and national groups (Saroglou, 2011; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). The majority of world religions have their (glorious) origin situated in a very distant past—often earlier than the creation of modern nations—and promote the belief that they will survive as communities after the end of the world. This is an incredibly powerful source of collective self-esteem and a factor that contributes to an underestimation of believers regarding the dark sides of the religious group’s past and present.

Finally, religious groups have a hierarchical structure, with authority figures and instances (texts, persons, and institutions), leaders, and

followers. These imply asymmetric relations as well as deliberate or subtle mechanisms leading to submission to authority, conformity to the majority, and social influence by religious peers and other sources. Religious authorities exert various forms of power: reward based, coercive, expert, legitimate, and/or charismatic. Overall, one can distinguish between experts, i.e., ministers who are supposed to manipulate contact with the sacred, and models, such as saints and spiritual figures, who are admired as prototypes of the group's values. Note also that religious ministers in many societies are professionals who have succeeded to be paid by the society, like doctors, teachers, and functionaries and unlike artists, poets, philosophers, and astrologists who may also help, in their own way, people in meaning making and self-transcendence.

These characteristics may be particularly appealing for individuals with high dispositional submissiveness (see, for instance, some theories on gender difference on religion: Francis & Penny, Chapter 14, this volume). In a series of **nine** experiments, religious subliminal priming or explicit stimulation increased **a series of** relevant behaviors among participants with dispositional submissiveness/authoritarianism. These behaviors included accessibility to submission-related concepts and submission to the experimenter's suggestion to take revenge (Saroglou, Corneille, & Van Cappellen, 2009), conformity to peer informational influence (Van Cappellen, Corneille, Cols, & Saroglou, 2011), rigid deontological moral decisions at the detriment of the well-being of proximal others (Van Pachterbeke et al., 2011), and prosocial or anti-social tendencies depending on the prosocial versus violent nature of the biblical text participants were exposed to (Blogowska & Saroglou, 2013).

An intriguing question is whether the social functions of religion are less relevant for modern spirituality, to the point that spirituality is rather independent from religious institutions. It is reasonable, on one hand, to conceive modern spirituality as being independent from traditional forms of religious organizations' effects on power, conformity, and social influence. On the other hand, there may exist a feeling of belonging to a broad worldwide spiritual human community, which, additionally, is to be distinguished from nihilist and materialist individuals. There also exist new forms of spiritual groups consisting, for instance, of virtual networks. Research is needed on this issue, but one can expect self-identification as spiritual and as belonging to a spiritual world community to play a similar role with regard to the basic psychological functions mentioned earlier in this section: satisfaction of the need to belong, social self-esteem, and social support. Furthermore, even if marked by a spirit of autonomy, modern spiritual quest is made with a marked interest in the spiritual teachings of traditional religions—this is not necessarily the case for people who identify as “non-religious and non-spiritual.”

As far as the non-religious and non-spiritual are concerned, one might expect them to satisfy their social psychological needs through many non-religious/spiritual sources of community and belonging. It is also reasonable to expect agnostics and atheists to evade the characteristics and consequences of belonging to entitative and hierarchical religious groups—even if at the cost of some additional contributors to well-being like identifying with an eternal glorious group. However, attachment to alternative ideologies (e.g., secular humanism, laicism) or to organized groups (e.g., active atheist groups) may not be exempt from the respective risks for dogmatism and outgroup derogation. Nevertheless, the existing empirical evidence suggests that, overall, the non-religious are low, compared to the religious, on prejudice against various outgroups (ethnic and religious groups, minorities, and low-status groups), and that their possible ideological “ethnocentrism” and derogation of believers is weaker than the ideological “ethnocentrism” of the religious and their derogation of atheists (Altemeyer, 2010; Beit-Hallahmi, 2010; Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011; Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006; Zuckerman, 2009).

Conclusion: Religion and the Pyramids of Needs

The many cognitive, emotional, moral, and social functions of religion cover a large array of human psychological needs. Although these needs, within a religious context, are addressed through the many specific ways that were described earlier, they are universal needs. Following the classic pyramid of needs elaborated by Maslow (1968; Figure 16.2, left), it

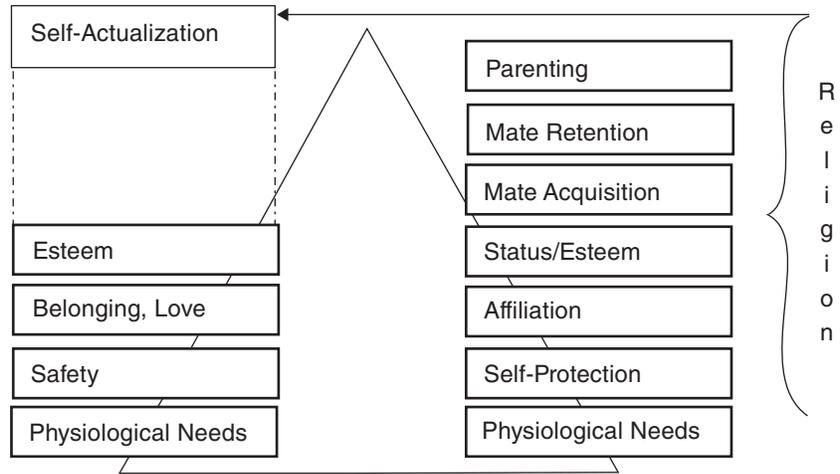


Figure 16.2 Religion and the pyramids of needs, according to Maslow’s (1968) humanistic psychological perspective (left), and Kenrick et al.’s (2010) evolutionary psychological perspective (right).

is often argued that religion satisfies principally the highest need in this pyramid, i.e., self-actualization, also referred to as a “being” need. This need is defined as the desire for self-fulfillment through actualization of one’s own potential and can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including intellectual, moral, and spiritual self-transcendence. However, as detailed by Batson and Stocks (2004) and as illustrated in this chapter, people seek religion **to satisfy** almost all of the basic, so-called “deficiency,” needs of the Maslow’s pyramid. These include self-esteem, love and belonging, safety, and even physiological needs. Regarding the physiological needs, Batson and Stocks (2004) note that people may pray to God for food—or rain to guarantee food—and physical health, as well as for issues related to sexual needs, for instance to find a convenient sexual partner, to resist sexual desires, or to sublimate them.

In a recent revision of Maslow’s pyramid of needs from an evolutionary psychology perspective (Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010; see Figure 16.2, right), three major developments were made. First, from a strictly evolutionary perspective, the need for self-actualization is no longer part of the pyramid as it does not constitute an evolutionarily adaptive need. Second, the need for sex is no longer included in the primary physiological needs but has become a need for mate acquisition that occurs later in human development. Third, the satisfaction of each need of the pyramid is no longer a *sine qua non* condition for the higher needs to emerge; each need concurrently exerts its influence on humans’ lives.

Subsequently, religion can be conceived as serving both psychological needs that are strictly evolutionarily adaptive, and other needs, located under the broad umbrella of “self-actualization,” that may be psychologically important today without having had an evolutionary past. Some functions of religion can thus be seen as responding, or as a past response, to evolutionarily fundamental needs, i.e., survival and reproductive motives. These are: (1) fertility, parenting, and protection of the offspring; (2) careful—often homo-religious—mate selection, and (3) efforts for mate retention through marriage and commitment; (4) reputation as being worthy of trust and establishment of status-based social hierarchies; (5) affiliation, reciprocity, and coalition formation; and, to some extent, (6) self-protection (e.g., hygienic religious rules and norms, belief on divine providence) and (7) physiological needs (e.g., control of hunger and thirst through religious fasting) (see also Kirkpatrick, 2005; Li & Cohen, Chapter 10, this volume; Preston et al., Chapter 7, this volume). Note also that, on the basis of the revised evolutionary pyramid of needs, religion should no longer be seen as something that emerges only to address some superior needs after more primary needs have been satisfied.

A final important distinction to be made is that between several evolutionarily adaptive needs that can be addressed within a religious

context—as they can be addressed within non-religious contexts—and religion itself as a system. Regarding the latter, there is a relative consensus today among evolutionary psychologists that religion may be a byproduct of psychological mechanisms (see the seven mentioned earlier) that evolved for their own adaptive purposes, i.e., before religion appeared. Religion thus resembles, for instance, art or sport, i.e., human activities that are not necessary outcomes of natural evolution, even if they imply psychological mechanisms that have been themselves selected for evolutionary reasons.

Religion and the Search for Unity

The force of religion lies not only in the multiplicity of the involved psychological functions, but also in the fact that the cognitive, emotional, moral, and social dimensions are organized into a coherent set. This is the case at least in the contemporary major world religions (Hinde, 2009). Of course, from an evolutionary psychological perspective, one should understand the different aspects of religion as corresponding to distinct psychological mechanisms (e.g., attachment, power structures, coalitions, mating) that are each domain specific and organized into functional systems with respective adaptive functions—like a body's organs and systems (see Figure 16.2, right). This view is preferred to that of the brain/mind as an all-purposed computer that operates on a small number of general principles in the service of only few broad motivations (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Nevertheless, the integration under one umbrella of a very specific pattern of different aspects of religion and their corresponding psychological functions, and the relative success of the major religions that have accomplished such integration, is an intellectually fascinating issue. For instance, adding a moralizing dimension to personal high Gods, rather than venerating natural objects and impersonal transcendent entities, has had numerous individual, collective, and cross-cultural implications (Stark, 2001; see also Shariff, Norenzayan, & Henrich, 2010).

I argue that the possible strength of the religious integration of such various aspects and psychological mechanisms into a unique set may lie in the fact that, in that way, religion fulfills straightforwardly a universal human search for unity and wholeness. Such a need may have been culturally present, possibly but not necessarily, as part of the motivation for self-actualization. Like self-actualization, the need for unity should not be perceived as having strictly an adaptive value, if we follow the revision of Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs from an evolutionary psychology perspective (Kenrick et al., 2010; see also Figure 16.2).

Theoretical and empirical evidence favors the idea that religion notably addresses a human search for unity, which reflects a broader need encompassing the more specific ones for epistemic order, connection

with the world, moral exhaustiveness, and the need to belong (Saroglou, 2006a). Humans often have the subjective experience that their internal world, as well the external world, are divided and fragmented—in many respects. This concerns the subjective experience of many divisions such as those between: mind and body, cognitions and emotions, intentions and behavior, the ideal and real self, men and women, three times (past, present, and future), the self and the others, humans and the world, as well as our world and the cosmos. Religion, while affirming the distinctiveness of each of these poles from their opposites, at the same time offers for all of these divisive experiences the subjective perception of unity. It thus emphasizes the following ideas which are fostered through rituals: humans are psychosomatic beings; cognitions and emotions, intentions and behaviors, and the different parts of the self in general, are unified in the spiritual life. Similarly, manhood and womanhood are two sides of unique humanness; divisions between past, present, and future are illusions, with the very end being in fact a return to the very origins. Finally, the self and others are co-included in an encompassing religious brotherhood and family; humans are just part of a broad world with a transcendent entity having also some relation with non-human beings and non-living entities; and our world is just part of a more global cosmos.

Note that the notion of “oceanic feeling,” popularized—although criticized—by Freud (1961 [1927]), qualifies the very essence of religious experience by pointing out this subjective experience of unity and wholeness. Similarly, magical thinking and holistic thinking, present in religious cognition (Gervais, Chapter 4, this volume), directly imply the perception of a common invisible essence across many distinct entities in the world and the importance of having a global, not fragmented, perception of things. From a perspective of embodied social cognition, this unity can metaphorically be represented through a horizontal axis of being (co-inclusion of all beings in a encompassing whole), but also a vertical axis that creates the subjective experience of order by locating all beings on a hierarchical chain. This chain spans from Gods through half-gods and humans to animals and further on to demons. The first axis reflects prosocial concerns, sameness (within a religious ingroup or a spiritual universe), and horizontal self-transcendence. The second axis points to the religion’s role in favoring vertical self-transcendence, but also hierarchy, status, and prejudice toward outgroups. Interestingly, religion’s strength is that it invests in both axes and creates a unity between them, even if there may exist inter-individual and cultural variability in the emphasis given to one axis over the other. (For the moral significance of the vertical chain of being and/or the social significance of the horizontal axis, see Brandt & Reyna, 2011; Haidt & Algoe, 2004.)

To use a Freudian wording, one can say that the promise to fulfill such a search for unity is an “illusion.” Probably religion’s utopia, or “positive illusion” like meaning, self-esteem, and optimism (Taylor & Brown, 1994), is to make people believe and feel that the world is a united whole. It may be an illusion, but it is built on the grounds of humans’ common social cognition. Although it is objectively known that “true” is in fact distinct from “beautiful,” that both are distinct from “good,” and that all three are distinct from “me/us,” humans implicitly perceive these four as interrelated to some extent. Empirical research shows, for instance, that people tend to perceive honest individuals as nice (Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, Cherubini, & Yzerbyt, 2012) and beautiful (Paunonen, 2006); and perceive beautiful persons as also being skilled in interpersonal qualities (Lemay, Clark, & Greenberg, 2010). People also overestimate their own qualities and those of their friends, i.e., think that “I” and “we” are good (Taylor & Brown, 1994). Philosophy, from *Bhagavad Gita* through Plato and up to Hegel, has conceived truth, goodness, and beauty as constituting the three major qualities of the transcendence (see also Gardner, 2011, for a modern essay; see Changeux, 2012, for a neuroscientific approach). For the Christian medieval thought, in God, the three are united into one. Note also that Jesus affirmed that he is “the way *and* the truth *and* the life” (John 14:6), thus blending into one the objectives of religious behaving, believing, and experiencing.

Just-world beliefs constitute another category of beliefs that, although universal, are particularly present in religion and foster a sense of unity. Substantial research attests that religiousness, across several countries, relates positively to just-world beliefs, i.e., the beliefs that one gets what s/he deserves, and that the way we behave determines what we get (Saroglou, 2003b, for a review). The world thus appears as having an implicit internal unity. Interestingly, intrinsic or symbolic religiousness is found to positively relate to ultimate justice (justice is not to be found here but later in another world) and outgroup tolerance, whereas extrinsic or orthodox religiousness relates to just-world belief for others (victims are responsible of their problems) and to victim derogation (Pichon & Saroglou, 2009; VanDeursen, Pope, & Warner, 2012). Related to the just-world belief are the problems of theodicy, i.e., why good people suffer, and unmerited gain, i.e., it is immoral to gain too much without having worked for it, both of which have received particular attention within religious traditions. Both situations threaten the perception of the world as ordered.

In sum, studying separately the multiple functions of religion without also trying to understand what makes religion a unique combination of various aspects and corresponding psychological functions may leave part of the picture unexplained. The encompassing character of the many distinct psychological domains and the “utopia” of a unity

that embraces a large spectrum of human issues may be what makes religion's presence so pervasive across history. To slightly extend Freud's (1961 [1927]) classic assertion, one can say that the force of religion is not only the strength of the underlying human needs religion is supposed to address, but also the extent of these needs.

Being Religious or Not: Understanding Individual Differences

The synthesis of the multiple psychological functions of religion made in this chapter and the portrayal of religion's specifics can facilitate the work of those who think of religion and irreligion in terms of (psychological) costs and benefits. It also raises the question of the origins of individual differences on religiousness: some people may be more oriented to the benefits of religion; others to the benefits of irreligion. This begs the question of the possible adaptive role of being religious or irreligious.

Religion and Irreligion: Costs and Benefits

Overall, and with the risk of extreme oversimplification, the global picture from existing research is that religion facilitates or reinforces—more precisely than “causes”—a sense of meaning, self-control, self-esteem, individual coherence and stability, well-being, prosociality, and social cohesion within group barriers. At the same time, it facilitates or reinforces—again, more precisely than “causes”—inflexibility in ideas, conservatism in many life domains (from sexuality and family to politics), rigid moral deontology, system justification, and intergroup conflict. Thus **it does not** contribute to optimal maturation, a process that implies autonomy and openness and leads to social change and possibly global peace.

The benefits and costs of religion are not fully orthogonal to each other; they are interdependent to some extent. Religion is helpful when facing situations of “under-control,” but at the same time it may be detrimental by leading to “over-control” (Gartner, 1996). Following the analysis made in the present chapter, this means that religion's positive role with respect to meaning making, emotional regulation, morality, and group belongingness includes the risk for, respectively, over-interpretation, hyper-emotionality, moralization, and heightened group entitativity. Regarding mental health, religion makes people “feel happy, but lack autonomy” (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008), at least in contexts where previous vulnerability push some to join small-size religious groups offering a heaven of safety. Similarly, from a social developmental perspective, the effects of religion point to “coherence at the detriment of openness” (Saroglou, 2012a). Again at the risk of extreme oversimplification, but

for the convenience of a synthesis, one can reasonably conclude that the benefits and costs of religion are respectively the costs and benefits of irreligion, at least as far as agnosticism and indifferent (not militant, organized) atheism are concerned.

From a strict rational choice theory perspective, one could suspect people to weigh the costs and benefits and to make decisions with regard to existential attitudes and endorsement or not of religious systems. However, from an individual differences psychological perspective, being religious or irreligious is not only a matter of choice; important determinisms also play a role.

The Origins of Individual Differences on Religiousness

Why are some people religious and others not? Existing research points to the coexistence of, and possibly interaction between, three kinds of source: generic influences, common environmental factors, and personal experiences (Ashton & Lee, Chapter 2, this volume; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009; Saroglou, 2012b).

Religiousness, or lack thereof, is rather stable across age periods when we consider differences *between* individuals. Changes (conversion, apostasy, change of religious affiliation, radicalization, de-radicalization) *within* individuals also occur and are important to understand psychologically. However, these changes are less important in size than the overall lifespan “rank-order” stability when comparing between the high, the moderate, the low, and the non-religious. *Socialization* seems to be the most important predictor not only of religious affiliation but also of individual differences on religiousness: family, in particular, but also peers and other sources of socialization, play a key role in transmitting religious beliefs, emotions, practices, and identities; or transmitting indifference to religion and atheism (Hood et al., 2009; Norenzayan & Gervais, 2012).

However, there are also *genetic influences* on religiousness. These influences are rather minimal in childhood and adolescence, when family impact is strong, but become important in early adulthood when young adults gain autonomy (Ashton & Lee, Chapter 2, this volume). The more plausible way to explain these differences—but which is still in need of empirical confirmation—is that genetic influences on religiousness are to some extent mediated by genetic influences on basic personality traits. In fact, agreeableness and conscientiousness (as well as honesty within the HEXACO model), which are heavily influenced by heritability, typically characterize religiousness and have been found to longitudinally predict it. Thus, people who are genetically predisposed to be agreeable and conscientious may become or remain religious if religious ideas and practices are available in their own social environment. People who are not high in agreeableness and conscientiousness may be more willing to

break the continuity of a religious family environment; or to be uninterested in religion if they were raised as non-religious (Saroglou 2010, 2012b). Moreover, high versus low openness to experience, another basic personality trait, predisposes one for respectively modern spiritual versus fundamentalist forms of religiousness. Note also that explanations of religiousness in terms of genetically influenced personality predispositions may help to explain, to some extent, gender differences in religiousness (Francis & Penny, Chapter 14, this volume).

Finally, *personal experiences* add a third source of inter-individual variability to religiousness. Often negative life events that touch the self, but also self-transcendent positive experiences, facilitate the emergence or intensification of religious quests—although negative experiences may also, under some conditions, facilitate religious doubt and apostasy (Hood et al., 2009; Van Cappellen & Rimé, Chapter 6, this volume). Attachment history seems to be a particularly powerful source of variety in trajectories related to religion or irreligion (Granqvist, Chapter 13, this volume). In addition, education and intelligence (Ashton & Lee, Chapter, 2, this volume), cognitive styles (Gervais, Chapter, 4, this volume) and cognitive, moral, and social development, especially in adolescence and young adulthood (Granqvist, Chapter 13, this volume), may provide opportunities and tools for religious doubting. Indeed, this age period implicates a questioning of religion **due to the** counterintuitiveness of religious beliefs, moral incoherence in some religious attitudes and behaviors, and social irrelevance of various religious aspects. Adolescence is thus a “sensitive” period for religious doubt and atheism (Saroglou, 2012a). These factors may, on the contrary, also provide opportunities for spiritual development (Good & Willoughby, 2008).

The impact of each piece of this puzzle on religiousness or irreligion (heritability, personality traits, thinking style, socialization, other environmental influences, life events, quality of family relations, and social development) has now received important empirical confirmation. However, there is still a need for studies that will empirically investigate how the interaction between these factors influences religiousness or irreligion. In particular, it is important to study the interaction between personality, socialization, and developmental factors; or between genetic influences, environmental influences, and specific personal experiences.

Religiousness and Irreligion: Both Adaptive?

An intriguing question is why religiousness has overall been more prevalent than irreligion across most societies. A related question is why there has consistently been an important minority of irreligious, be they atheists opposing religion, agnostics, persons indifferent to religion or, more

recently, persons socialized as atheists. On the basis of the personality characteristics of religiousness and the comparable or divergent social attitudes and practices (e.g., authoritarianism, paranormal beliefs, creativity, rebel ideologies), it has been argued that, overall, both religiousness and irreligion may have been adaptive for different reasons (Saroglou, 2010). Religiousness “clearly expresses, as a cultural adaptation of personality traits [agreeableness and conscientiousness], a human concern for personal and social stability and moral self-transcendence but not the human needs for playfulness, personal growth, and social change” (p. 119–120). The last are expressed by extraversion and openness to experience, personality traits whose “cultural adaptations (e.g., artistic interests, atheist orientations, contesting ideologies) provide entertainers, creators, rebels, and revolutionaries” (p. 120).

From an evolutionary psychology perspective that tries to understand the possible adaptiveness—or indifference with regard to adaptive functions—of individual differences, it can be speculated that variation between believers and nonbelievers may follow general evolutionary mechanisms proposed to explain individual differences. These are mainly (1) *frequency-dependent selection* (a balance between religiousness and atheism is optimal; if one of the two becomes too rare, evolution will increase its numeric presence); (2) *fluctuating optimum* (religiousness or atheism outperforms the other pole depending on what it is optimal under specific conditions in specific contexts); and (3) *contingency on other traits* (religiousness or irreligion is indirectly selected depending on the co-occurrence of other traits/characteristics (see also Johnson, 2012)). The evolutionary understanding of personality and individual differences is an emerging dynamic field of research (Buss & Hawley, 2011). Interpretations of individual differences on religiousness may be developed in the future, possibly in parallel with developments on the evolutionary understanding of the variation in basic personality traits (see Ashton, 2007; Nettle, 2011).

Understanding How Religiousness Works: Emerging Issues

Throughout the different chapters of the present volume, the contributors have proposed future research questions for the respective topics. In the present concluding chapter, I have also provided additional questions for future investigation. In concluding the chapter, it is of interest to focus on some methodological and theoretical issues that specifically regard individual religiousness and its consequences. These issues are important to keep in mind for future research. They concern the way individual religiousness interacts with (1) the activation of religious ideas, for instance in priming studies, (2) the induction of emotions and mood, and (3) the presence of cultural factors at the individual and the group levels, thus predicting divergent outcomes.

As stated in the previous section, religiousness can be regarded as an individual difference that is rather stable across lifespan, with stability being more pronounced than possible changes. However, changes exist in religiousness and its psychological consequences as a function of several factors. Important typical moderators of religiousness and its effects are age and gender (see in this volume, respectively: Granqvist, Chapter 13; and Francis & Penny, Chapter 14), as well as global societal changes impacting “cohorts,” i.e., **generations** (Dillon, 2007; Schwadel 2010, 2011). Recent social experimental and cross-cultural psychological research on religion urges us to consider some key additional moderators: religious context, emotional states, and cultural factors. I will comment on each of these in what follows.

Individual Religiousness as Interacting with Religious Stimulation

Does individual religiousness parallel the effects of religion, i.e., the effects of the activation of religious ideals and symbols? This is often the case but is not consistent. For instance, series of priming studies show that (devotional) religious ideas activate prosocial concepts and behavior; and that (coalitional) religious ideas activate prejudice against outgroups. These effects parallel those of individual religiousness and its forms, i.e., devotional versus coalitional (see in this volume, Preston et al., Chapter 7; Rowatt et al., Chapter 8). However, in many priming studies the religious activation of prosociality was independent from individual religiousness, i.e., it occurred for both religious and non-religious participants (Galen, 2012, for review). The religious priming was thus not more appealing for those participants for which religion was a central theme in their life, and was successful even for participants for whom religion was irrelevant in their life. However, other studies show that, whereas individual religiousness alone may not have the expected social effects (prosocial or antisocial, depending on the target and the religious dimension involved), it does so only after some activation of religious ideas and norms (Blogowska & Saroglou, 2013; Malhotra, 2010; Rothschild, Abdollahib, & Pyszczynski, 2009).

From an individual differences perspective, this implies that individual religiousness may not consistently function as a miraculous predictor of all kinds of social attitude and behavior. Some “arousal,” i.e., stimulation from relevant religious ideas and values is needed to activate or strengthen the consequences of individual religiousness. One can thus better understand why for centuries, across religions and societies, people regularly participated to religious services, listened to sermons, and read holy texts that repetitively evoke similar, if not the same ideas. This also suggests that the effects of religious activation may not necessarily

be long lasting. (Note that, until now, studies have examined only immediate effects of religious priming.)

Religiousness as a State, Not Only a Trait

The outcomes of religiousness also become more visible after some emotional arousal. For instance, associations of religiosity/spirituality with relevant outcomes (feelings of closeness with others, spiritual behavioral intentions, prosocial behavior, meaning of life) were confirmed or strengthened after participants were experimentally induced with self-transcendent emotions such as awe, admiration, or elevation (Van Cappellen & Rimé, Chapter 6, this volume).

More fundamentally, religiousness, including spirituality, may not only be a *trait*, i.e., an individual disposition that is stable across time and situations, but also a *state*, i.e., a momentary feeling that, although influenced by a trait disposition, may show within-person daily variability, as a function of personal and contextual factors. Following college students for two weeks and collecting daily data on spirituality and other measures, Kashdan and Nezlek (2012) found significant within-person daily variability on all measures, including spirituality. Moreover, present day spirituality increased the next day's meaning in life—although the present day's meaning in life did not predict the next day's spirituality. Furthermore, for people high in trait spirituality, present day negative affect predicted greater spirituality the next day.

Religiousness across Religions, Cultures, and Nations

Individual religiousness may function, to some extent, differently across (1) religions—be it in the same or different nations, (2) cultures—be it with the same or different religions, and (3) nations—be it for the same, different, or multiple religious groups (Johnson & Cohen, Chapter 15, this volume; Saroglou & Cohen, 2013). As shown in various chapters of the present volume, when studying the psychological characteristics of religiousness, cultural, cross-religious, and cross-national sensitivity leads to fascinating findings across a variety of research domains: personality and the self (Sedikides & Gebauer, Chapter 3), emotions (Burriss & Petrican, Chapter 5), values (Roccas & Elster, Chapter 9), politics (Malka, Chapter 11), gender differences (Francis & Penny, Chapter 14), and mental health (Hayward & Krause, Chapter 12; see also Loewenthal, 2007). This is also the case regarding cognition (Hommel et al., 2011; Li et al., 2012), human development (Holden & Vittrup, 2010; Trommsdorff & Chen, 2012), ritual (Atkinson & Whitehouse, 2011), morality (Cohen, Malka, Rozin, & Cherfas, 2006; Cohen & Rozin, 2001), and prosocial behavior and prejudice (Clobert, Saroglou, Hwang, & Soong, 2012; Clobert & Saroglou, in press).

It is important for future psychological research on religion to be sensitive to cultural influences and distinguish between different causal factors besides such influences in the analyses, both at the individual and the group level. Note that how religion works at the collective level may parallel—showing thus *isomorphism*—or be in contrast with how it works at the individual level (Saroglou & Cohen, 2013). A first source of difference is religious affiliation (individual level), religious dominant tradition (in a given country), or religious/civilizational area (across nations). A second source of difference is the mean level of religiousness (how religious or secular a study's sample or a country is) and the predominance of a given religious form (e.g., fundamentalism versus religious quest) at the individual and the collective levels. Third, at both levels, factors indicating socioeconomic and sociocultural development are important moderators, and sometimes mediators, of the psychological characteristics, predictors or outcomes, of individual religiousness. Fourth, at the country level, historical or current societal characteristics such as church–state relations or religious diversity have been found to be interesting moderators. Finally, there is a need to better take into account the influences of broad cultural, transnational, differences on the way religiousness works within and across religious groups, for instance by comparing Western and Eastern Buddhists to Western and Eastern Catholics or Protestants. These influences may result from deep cultural psychological specifics in personality, cognitions, emotions, social relationships, and moral thinking, or may stem from even further factors having to do with the natural environment and ecology such as those involving geography, climate, food, water, diseases and mortality, natural threats, and types of economy.

To conclude, a full understanding of the cognitive, emotional, moral, and social functions of religion and religiousness benefits from taking into account within-person, between-religion, and between-culture variability. Religion is one of the complex means humans have developed to address and transcend universal psychological needs that are deeply rooted in the physical, social, and cultural environment.

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