

# *Philosophy of Religion*

*reason, faith, belief and doubt*



George Matthews, Pennsylvania College of Technology

2020

# *Perspectives on religion*

# *Perspectives on religion*

**From inside:** what religious beliefs or practices should I adhere to as someone aware of the mysteries of life and death?

# *Perspectives on religion*

**From inside:** what religious beliefs or practices should I adhere to as someone aware of the mysteries of life and death?

**From outside:**

# *Perspectives on religion*

**From inside:** what religious beliefs or practices should I adhere to as someone aware of the mysteries of life and death?

**From outside:**

- **Religious studies:** what are the practices, beliefs and histories of the many different world religions?

# *Perspectives on religion*

**From inside:** what religious beliefs or practices should I adhere to as someone aware of the mysteries of life and death?

**From outside:**

- **Religious studies:** what are the practices, beliefs and histories of the many different world religions?
- **Sociology:** how do religions work as institutions expressing shared values and social meaning?

# *Perspectives on religion*

**From inside:** what religious beliefs or practices should I adhere to as someone aware of the mysteries of life and death?

**From outside:**

- **Religious studies:** what are the practices, beliefs and histories of the many different world religions?
- **Sociology:** how do religions work as institutions expressing shared values and social meaning?
- **Psychology:** what is going on in the mind when people have religious beliefs and engage in religious practices?

# *Perspectives on religion*

**From inside:** what religious beliefs or practices should I adhere to as someone aware of the mysteries of life and death?

**From outside:**

- **Religious studies:** what are the practices, beliefs and histories of the many different world religions?
- **Sociology:** how do religions work as institutions expressing shared values and social meaning?
- **Psychology:** what is going on in the mind when people have religious beliefs and engage in religious practices?
- **Philosophy:** can religious beliefs be rationally justified?



# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory

- Does God exist?

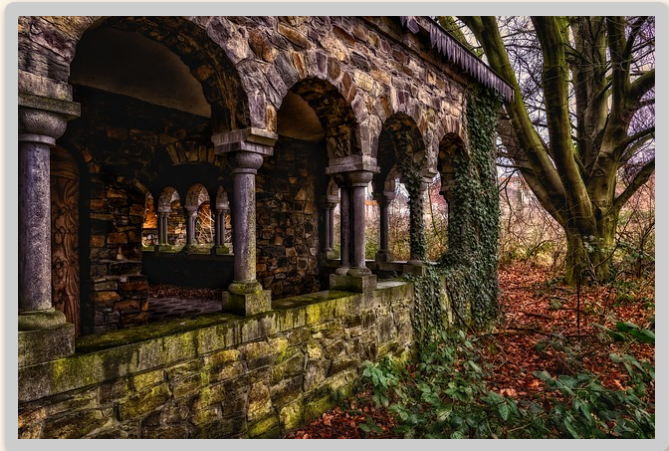


# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- Does God exist?
- If so, in what form? As a supernatural being, as identical with nature, as many disembodied spirits?

# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- Does God exist?
- If so, in what form? As a supernatural being, as identical with nature, as many disembodied spirits?
- What does the existence of evil imply about the existence or nature of God or the gods?

# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- Does God exist?
- If so, in what form? As a supernatural being, as identical with nature, as many disembodied spirits?
- What does the existence of evil imply about the existence or nature of God or the gods?
- Is the universe the result of deliberate planning or the result of the blind forces of nature that could easily have been otherwise?

# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory





# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- Can we know whether or not a God or gods exist?

# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- Can we know whether or not a God or gods exist?
- Are appeals to faith to justify religious belief legitimate?



# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- Can we know whether or not a God or gods exist?
- Are appeals to faith to justify religious belief legitimate?
- Are science and religion in conflict or are they compatible as two different ways of approaching reality?

# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- What is the relation between religion and morality?

# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- What is the relation between religion and morality?
- Is religion a purely private matter or does it have any role to play in public life?

# *Philosophy of religion*

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



- What is the relation between religion and morality?
- Is religion a purely private matter or does it have any role to play in public life?
- Should parents be allowed to opt out of scientifically established medical treatments for their kids on religious grounds?

*Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE

# *Does God exist?*

YES

**Theism** is the general term for the belief in the existence of a God or gods.

NO

MAYBE

# *Does God exist?*

YES

**Theism** is the general term for the belief in the existence of a God or gods.

NO

MAYBE

- Monotheism: there is only one God, and that God is a being with "personhood," with thoughts, feelings, intentions, free will...

# *Does God exist?*

YES

**Theism** is the general term for the belief in the existence of a God or gods.

NO

MAYBE

- Monotheism: there is only one God, and that God is a being with "personhood," with thoughts, feelings, intentions, free will...
- Polytheism: there are multiple gods often with many different personalities.



# *Does God exist?*

YES

**Theism** is the general term for the belief in the existence of a God or gods.

NO

MAYBE

- Monotheism: there is only one God, and that God is a being with "personhood," with thoughts, feelings, intentions, free will...
- Polytheism: there are multiple gods often with many different personalities.
- Pantheism: God is everywhere or in every thing.

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE



*Note that actual religions don't always clearly fit these definitions.*

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE



*Note that actual religions don't always clearly fit these definitions.*

- Hinduism is polytheistic, but Krishna is often seen as the main "God" with many other divinities as Krishna's "avatars" or manifestations.

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE



*Note that actual religions don't always clearly fit these definitions.*

- Hinduism is polytheistic, but Krishna is often seen as the main "God" with many other divinities as Krishna's "avatars" or manifestations.
- Christianity claims that God is *both* unitary *and* has three separate "persons" -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE

**Atheism** refers to the denial of the existence of God, the gods or a supernatural realm of spirits.

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE

**Atheism** refers to the denial of the existence of God, the gods or a supernatural realm of spirits.

*It is sometimes asserted that it is impossible to "prove a negative," or demonstrate that something does **not** exist or is **not true**.*



*But we do this all the time, whenever we show that the existence of something entails a contradiction, or is logically incompatible with other things we know to be true.*

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE



# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE

**Agnosticism** Is the view that we cannot tell for sure whether or not a God exists.

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE

**Agnosticism** Is the view that we cannot tell for sure whether or not a God exists.



*This is more an epistemological than a metaphysical view -- it concerns what we can know and not what exists.*

# *Does God exist?*

YES

NO

MAYBE

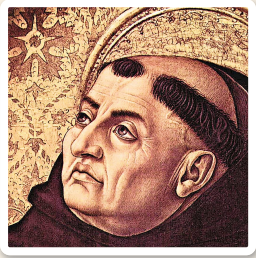
**Agnosticism** Is the view that we cannot tell for sure whether or not a God exists.



*This is more an epistemological than a metaphysical view -- it concerns what we can know and not what exists.*

- Buddhism might be considered an agnostic religion since it has many features of religion, yet often denies that metaphysical claims about the ultimate nature of reality matter.

# *Classic arguments for theism*



Saint Thomas  
Aquinas:  
1225-1274

# *Classic arguments for theism*

"God is evident in basic facts about the world of our experience."



Saint Thomas  
Aquinas:  
1225-1274

# *Classic arguments for theism*

"God is evident in basic facts about the world of our experience."



Saint Thomas  
Aquinas:  
1225-1274

- Aquinas was an important figure in the history of the Catholic Church.

# *Classic arguments for theism*

"God is evident in basic facts about the world of our experience."



Saint Thomas  
Aquinas:  
1225-1274

- Aquinas was an important figure in the history of the Catholic Church.
- He combined the conceptual framework of Ancient Greek philosophy with Christianity, thus given definitive form to the medieval world-view of the Great Chain of Being, where everything in Nature has its place in a world ruled by God.

# *Classic arguments for theism*

## *The Cosmological Argument*



Saint Thomas  
Aquinas:  
1225-1274

Everything that exists has a cause.

The universe as a whole exists.

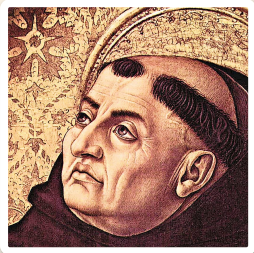
---

So the universe as a whole has a cause -- God.



# Classic arguments for theism

## The Cosmological Argument



Saint Thomas  
Aquinas:  
1225-1274

Everything that exists has a cause.

The universe as a whole exists.

---

So the universe as a whole has a cause -- God.

- The key idea here is that *this* universe exists and that specific things need specific causes. But *must* this cause be the God of Christianity?

# *Classic arguments for theism*



Saint Anselm:  
1033-1101

# *Classic arguments for theism*

"Reason alone can show us that God *must* exist."



Saint Anselm:  
1033-1101

- Anselm was an early Medieval philosopher convinced of the power of human reason to make sense of things.

# Classic arguments for theism

"Reason alone can show us that God *must* exist."



Saint Anselm:  
1033-1101

- Anselm was an early Medieval philosopher convinced of the power of human reason to make sense of things.
- His most famous argument is a negative argument that shows that God cannot, *not* exist.

# *Classic arguments for theism*

## *The Ontological Argument*



Saint Anselm:  
1033-1101

# Classic arguments for theism

## The Ontological Argument



Saint Anselm:  
1033-1101

We can imagine the existence of a perfect being.

But if such a being *did not exist* it would lack something and so be less than perfect.

---

Thus a perfect being must exist -- God.

# Classic arguments for theism

## The Ontological Argument



Saint Anselm:  
1033-1101

We can imagine the existence of a perfect being.

But if such a being *did not exist* it would lack something and so be less than perfect.

---

Thus a perfect being must exist -- God.

- Something seems fishy here, but it is hard to see what.

# Classic arguments for theism

## The Ontological Argument



Saint Anselm:  
1033-1101

We can imagine the existence of a perfect being.

But if such a being *did not exist* it would lack something and so be less than perfect.

---

Thus a perfect being must exist -- God.

- Something seems fishy here, but it is hard to see what.
- Can such abstract reasoning do more than just restate our original assumption that we *can* imagine such a being?



# *Classic arguments for theism*



William Paley:  
1743-1805

# *Classic arguments for theism*

"The hand of God is visible in the complexity of the natural world."



William Paley:  
1743-1805

- William Paley was an Anglican minister whose "natural theology" was taken to be the best explanation for biological complexity until Darwin challenged it.
- His argument is still popular among Christian fundamentalists who use it to oppose evolution.

# *Classic arguments for theism*

## *Paley's Watch*



William Paley:  
1743-1805

If you found a watch on the beach you'd be right to think it was not a product of chance but of design.

The organisms we "find" in nature are even more complex than a watch.

---

Thus a designer powerful enough to have designed biological organisms must exist -- God.

# *Classic arguments for theism*

## *Paley's Watch*



William Paley:  
1743-1805

If you found a watch on the beach you'd be right to think it was not a product of chance but of design.

The organisms we "find" in nature are even more complex than a watch.

---

Thus a designer powerful enough to have designed biological organisms must exist -- God.

- This argument fails to mention other possible explanations for biological complexity, like the "blind watchmaker" of evolution by natural selection.

# *Faith and the limits of reason*



# *Faith and the limits of reason*

- None of these arguments seem so convincing to modern readers.



# *Faith and the limits of reason*

- None of these arguments seem so convincing to modern readers.
- Perhaps the Eighteenth Century philosopher Immanuel Kant was right that these kinds of big metaphysical questions cannot be answered in any definite way.



# *Faith and the limits of reason*

- None of these arguments seem so convincing to modern readers.
- Perhaps the Eighteenth Century philosopher Immanuel Kant was right that these kinds of big metaphysical questions cannot be answered in any definite way.
- What then about appealing to faith as the basis of religious belief?





# *Faith and the limits of reason*



- None of these arguments seem so convincing to modern readers.
- Perhaps the Eighteenth Century philosopher Immanuel Kant was right that these kinds of big metaphysical questions cannot be answered in any definite way.
- What then about appealing to faith as the basis of religious belief?



*Appeals to faith are a double-edged sword. If there are **no reasons** offered, only belief, we also have no reason to take such appeals seriously.*

# *Atheism and the problem of evil*

# *Pascal's wager*

# *Buddhism*

## *Find out more*

**Anselm and the Argument for God:** Hank Green explores Anselm's ontological argument in this episode of The Crash Course.

**Aquinas and the Cosmological Arguments:** ore from te crash course, this time dealing with St. Thomas Aquinas' "five ways" to establish the existence of God.



### Credits

*Built with:*

Rstudio

xarignan html presentation framework

*Photos by:*

Peter H and Valter Cirillo at Pixabay

[download this presentation](#) or [print it](#)

[editorial suggestions and comments](#): requires a (free) GitHub account.