

# *Philosophy of Religion*

*reason, faith, belief and doubt*



George Matthews, Pennsylvania College of Technology

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# *Perspectives on religion*

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- **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



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value theory

- Does God exist?



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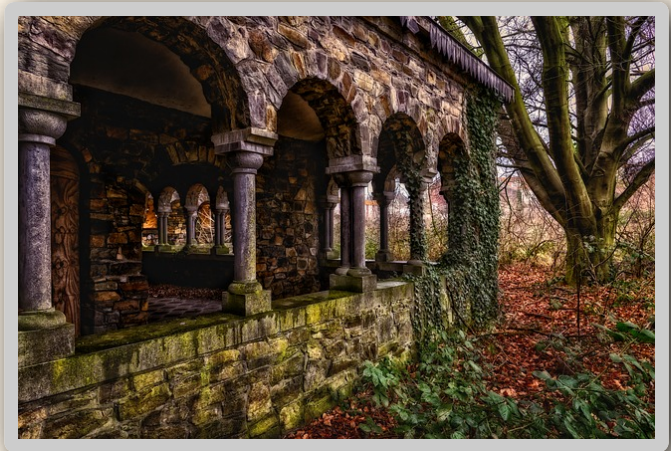
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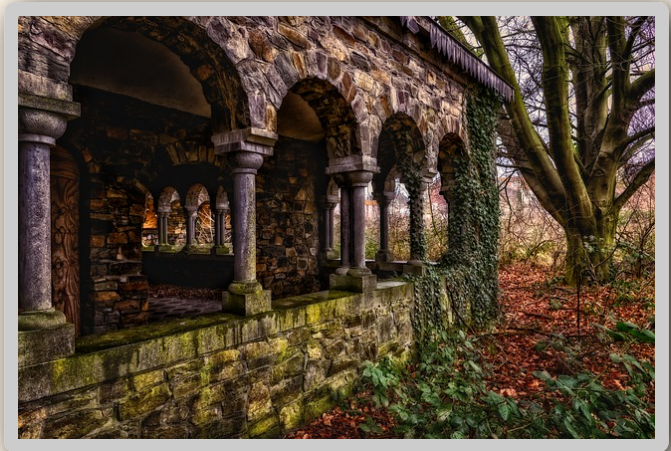
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- What does the existence of evil imply about the existence or nature of God or the gods?
- Is the universe the result of deliberate planning or the result of the blind forces of nature that could easily have been otherwise?

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

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- 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?

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- What is the relation between religion and morality?

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- 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

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

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- Polytheism: there are multiple gods often with many different personalities.
- Pantheism: God is everywhere or in every thing.

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- 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.

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**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.*

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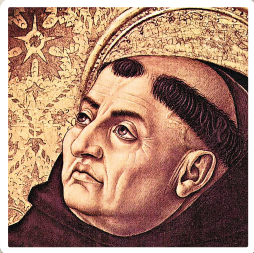
**Agnosticism** Is the view that we cannot tell for sure whether or not a God exists.



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- 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

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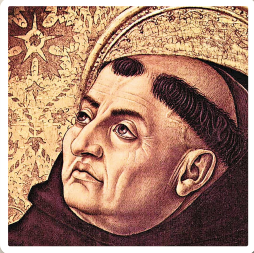
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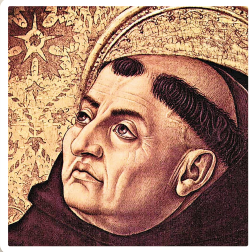


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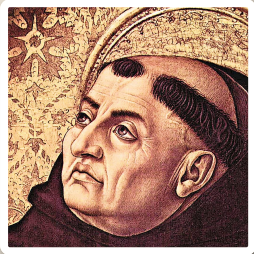


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- Aquinas was an important figure in the history of the Catholic Church.
- He combined the conceptual framework of Ancient Greek philosophy with Christianity, thus given definitive form to the medieval world-view of the Great Chain of Being, where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

# *Classic arguments for theism*

## *The Cosmological Argument*



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Everything that exists has a cause.

The universe as a whole exists.

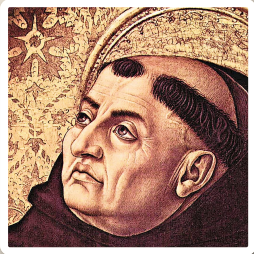
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So the universe as a whole has a cause -- God.

- 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?

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- 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.

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## *The Ontological Argument*



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We can imagine the existence of a perfect being.

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- 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

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



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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.

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## *Paley's Watch*



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

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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.

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*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.



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