reason, faith, belief and doubt



George Matthews, Pennsylvania College of Technology 2020

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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?

### metaphysics

epistemology



#### metaphysics

epistemology

value theory

o Does God exist?



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epistemology



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- 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?

metaphysics

epistemology



metaphysics

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value theory



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

metaphysics

epistemology



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

metaphysics

#### epistemology



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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?

metaphysics

epistemology

value theory



• What is the relation between religion and morality?

metaphysics

epistemology



- What is the relation between religion and morality?
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metaphysics

epistemology



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- 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?

YES

NO

MAYBE

YES

NO

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YES

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- Pantheism: God is everywhere or in every thing.

YES

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- Christianity claims that God is both unitary and has three separate "persons" -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

YES

NO

MAYBE

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It is sometimes, asserted that it it 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.

YES

NO

MAYBE

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NO

**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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- 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.



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## The Cosmological Argument



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 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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- His most famous argument is a negative argument that shows that God cannot, *not* exist.

## The Ontological Argument



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

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- Can such abstract reasoning do more than just restate our original assumption that we *can* imagine such a being?



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- His argument is still popular among Christian fundamentalists who use it to oppose evolution.

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

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



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



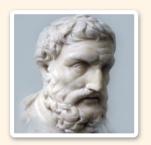
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- Perhaps the Eighteenth Century philosopher Immanuel Kant was right that these kinds of big metaphysical questions cannot be answered in any definite way.
- What then about appealing to faith as the basis of religious belief?
  - Appeals to faith are a double-edged sword. If there are no reasons offered, only belief, we also have no reason to take such appeals seriously.



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- He argued against religious belief in an era when it was almost universally accepted.

## The Argument from Evil



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- Can this defense deal with "natural evils" like disease or natural disasters without blaming the victim?

# Belief and uncertainty



Blaise Pascal 1623-1662

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Blaise Pascal 1623-1662

- Blaise Pascal was deeply religious, but also a mathematician and gambler who laid the foundations of probability theory.
- Pascal offers an argument in defense of belief in God that assumes that we cannot know for sure whether or not God exists.

# Pascal's Wager



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But the risk of not believing is far worse than that of believing.

Thus we should accept that God exists.

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• This argument may show that we have a *motive* to believe -- to avoid punishment for unbelief *if* God turns out to exist -- but is that really a *reason* to think the conclusion is true?



Buddha 4th Century BCE

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- Buddhism spread throughout Asia and now takes a multitude of forms, but all emphasize self-discipline and not being too attached to things in the world.

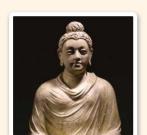


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# The Parable of the Arrow



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### The Parable of the Arrow

Arguing about God, the universe and the soul is like arguing about who exactly just shot you with an arrow and why.

It's more important to pull the arrow out.

That's what religion too should be about, addressing our suffering.

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• Is Buddhism even a religion or is it a philosophy, or agnostic spiritual and ethical system?

#### 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: more from the Crash Course, this time dealing with St. Thomas Aquinas' "five ways" to establish the existence of God.

Religion Facts: this is a great website for exploring the many varieties of religion from around the world and throughout history.

Philosophy of Religion: a comprehensive overview of the major issues in this sub-field of philosophy from the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.



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