

# *Can We Prove that God Exists?*

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*Lehman College CUNY*

PHI 171 - Fall 2014





# Course Requirements

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- ❖ Three writing assignments: each 20% of the grade
  1. Argument analysis (**done!**)
  2. Paper outline (**1-2 pages — due Nov 17**)
  3. Final paper (**5-7 pages — due Dec 15**)
- ❖ Dialogue participation: 20% of the grade (**see schedule**)
- ❖ Final exam: 20% of the grade (**during exam period**)



Check the Website for More Information  
About the **Paper Outline** and the **Final Paper**

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# A Requirement for the Course is Your Participation in a Philosophical Dialogue

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A philosophical dialogue is a *10-15 minute calm, respectful and careful* discussion with your fellow classmates about a philosophical question.

From next week onwards two or three students per class will participate in a philosophical dialogue about a philosophical question of their choice.



# An Excerpt from a Philosophical Dialogue

A: If a man born blind was on a sudden made to see, he wouldn't be able to distinguish between things that are far away and things that are closer, right? He would have no idea of what distance is, right?

B: Sure.

A: But doesn't this show that distance is not something that is immediately perceived by the sense of sight?

B: Well, if it's not perceived by the sense of sight, what would distance be?

A: Distance is something that is constructed by the mind, but it does not exist in the objects we see.

B: Why?

A: Because, as I said earlier, if a blind men were made — suddenly — to see he would not be able to see the distance between objects. So, distance isn't something we perceive immediately. We learn to see it; the mind constructs it.

B: I agree that we learn to see the distance between two objects, but it does not follow that distance is merely constructed by the mind...



# Features of a Good Dialogue

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- The reasoning in the dialogue proceeds *slowly and in small steps*
- The interlocutors do not talk for too long and each interlocutor is given a chance to *raise objections*
- *Examples* are used to illustrate difficult concepts



Now Take a Piece of Paper and Write  
Down Three Questions From the  
Questions in the Slides That Follow

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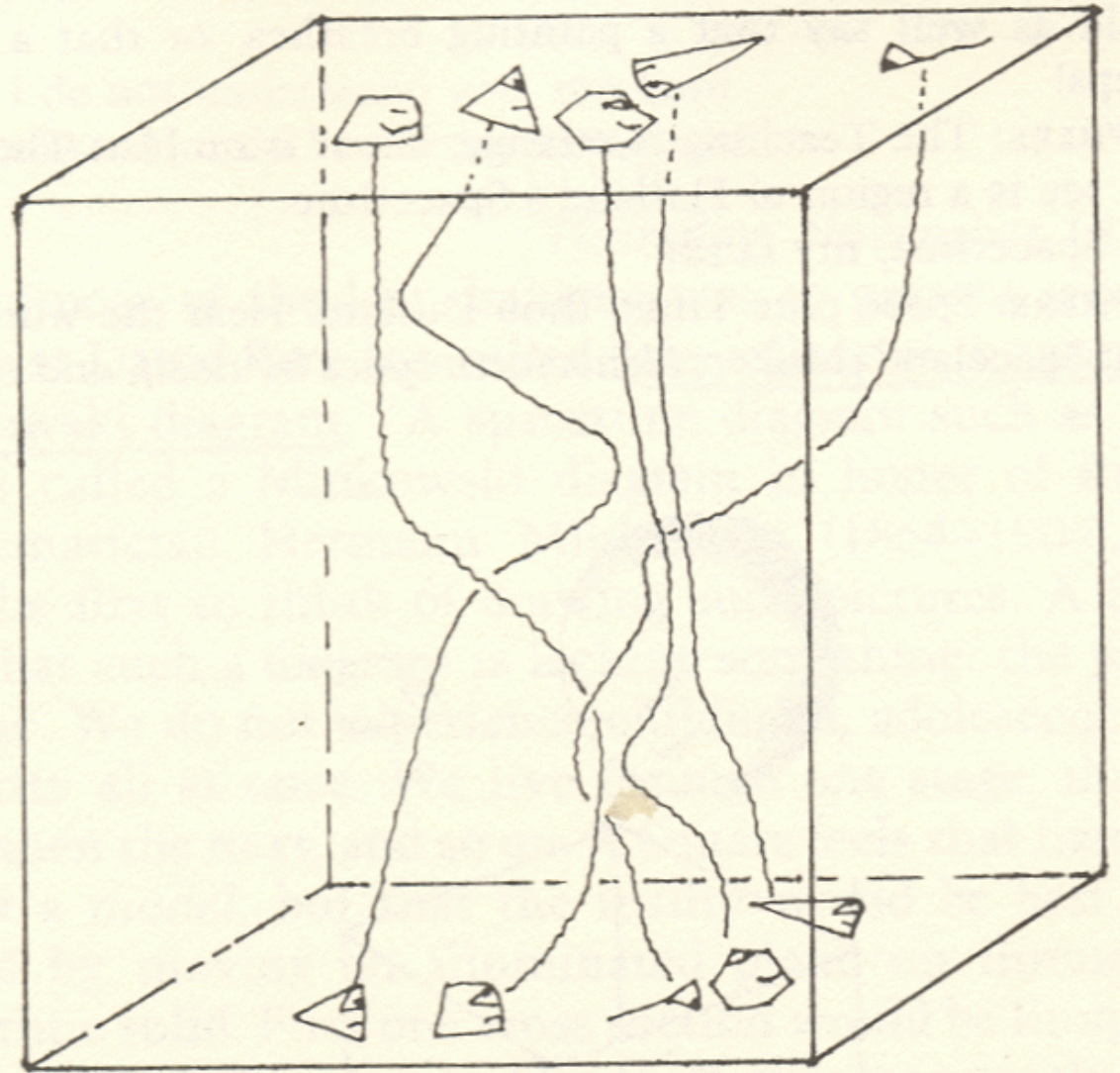


# Time and Change

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Is time real? Is time an illusion?

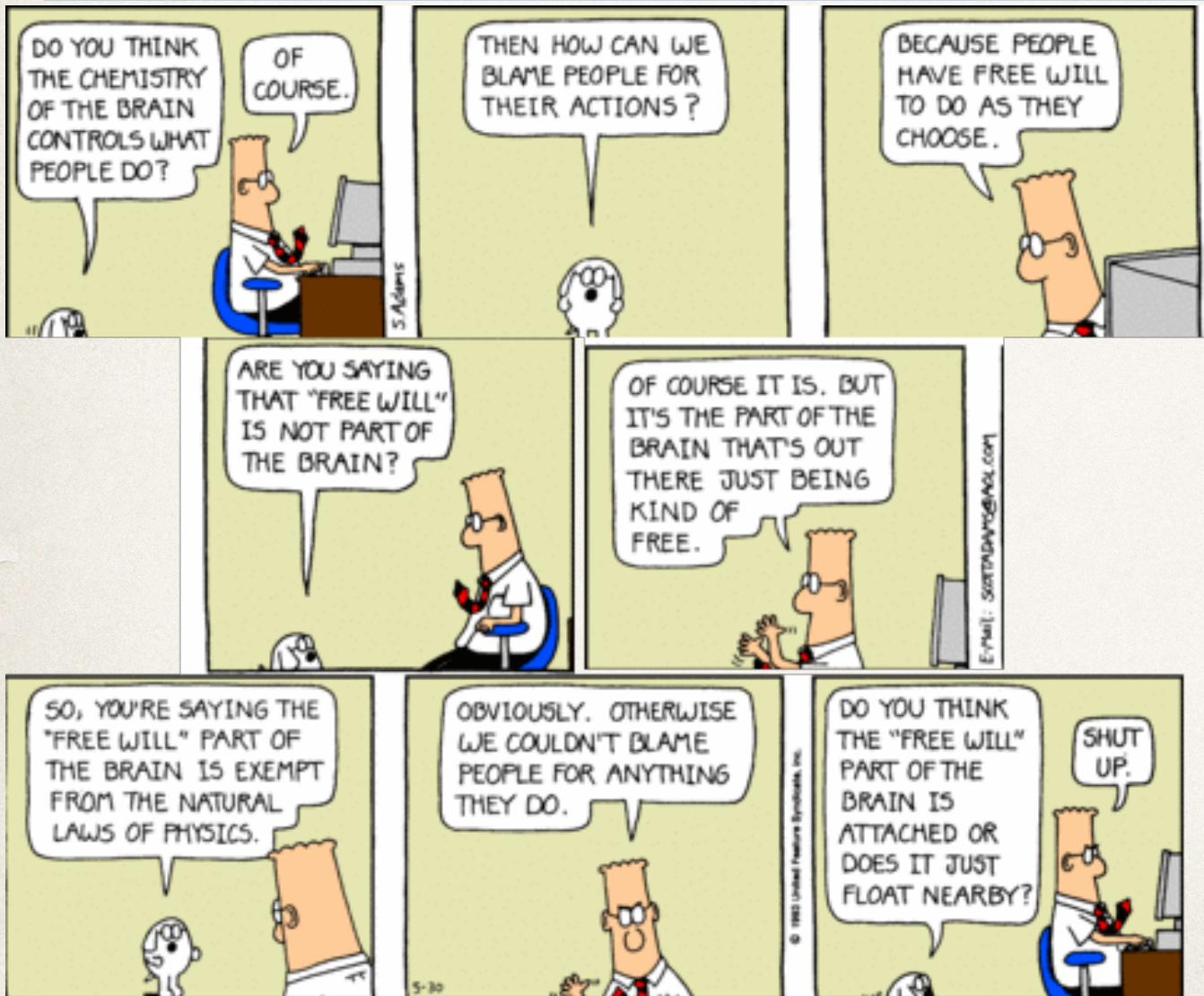
Does the world change? Or is change just an appearance?



*Fig. 140. A tangled tale.*



# Free Will and the Future



Is the future predetermined?

Do we have free will? Are we free to choose?



# Consciousness and Artificial Intelligence

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Can  
consciousness  
be physical?

Are we just our  
bodies and  
brains?

Can a machine  
think and  
understand?





# God, Suffering and Faith

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Can we prove  
that God exists?

If God exists,  
why is there  
suffering in the  
world?

Can we do  
away with  
faith?



Bruegel the Elder, *Tower of Babel*

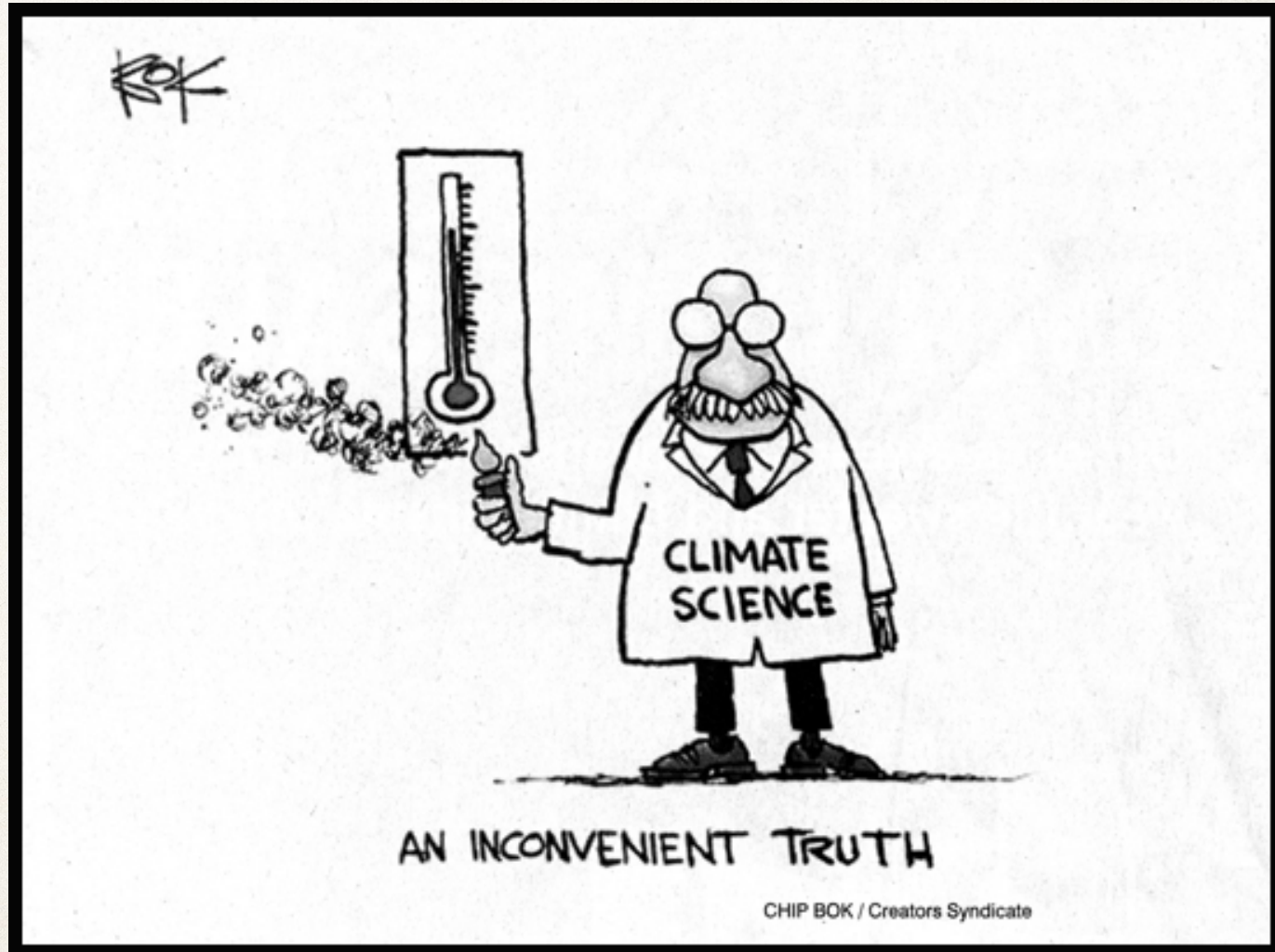


# Beliefs and Skepticism

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How do we  
justify our beliefs?

Can everything  
we believe be  
false?







# The Good and Justice

Angono, Philippines  
*Lester Garcia for  
National Geographic*

What's the right thing to do? Should we donate our money to the poor or be selfish?

What is a just society?  
Can economic inequalities be justified?



I Will Post a **Dialogue Schedule** ASAP  
— Please Come to Class and Participate  
in the Dialogue on Your Assigned Date

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And Now Our Text Topic: Can We  
Prove that God Exists?

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# Three Attitudes About God's Existence

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**Theism:** believing in God's existence

**Atheism:** believing in God's non-existence

**Agnosticism:** being undecided as to whether God exists or not.



# Two Types of Proofs of God's Existence

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- **A PRIORI PROOF:** It establishes the existence of God **given the concept of God alone**

*An a priori statement is one whose truth or falsity depends on thought alone and does not depend on sensory experience, data collection or experiments*

- **A POSTERIORI PROOF:** It establishes the existence of God **given our sensory experience**

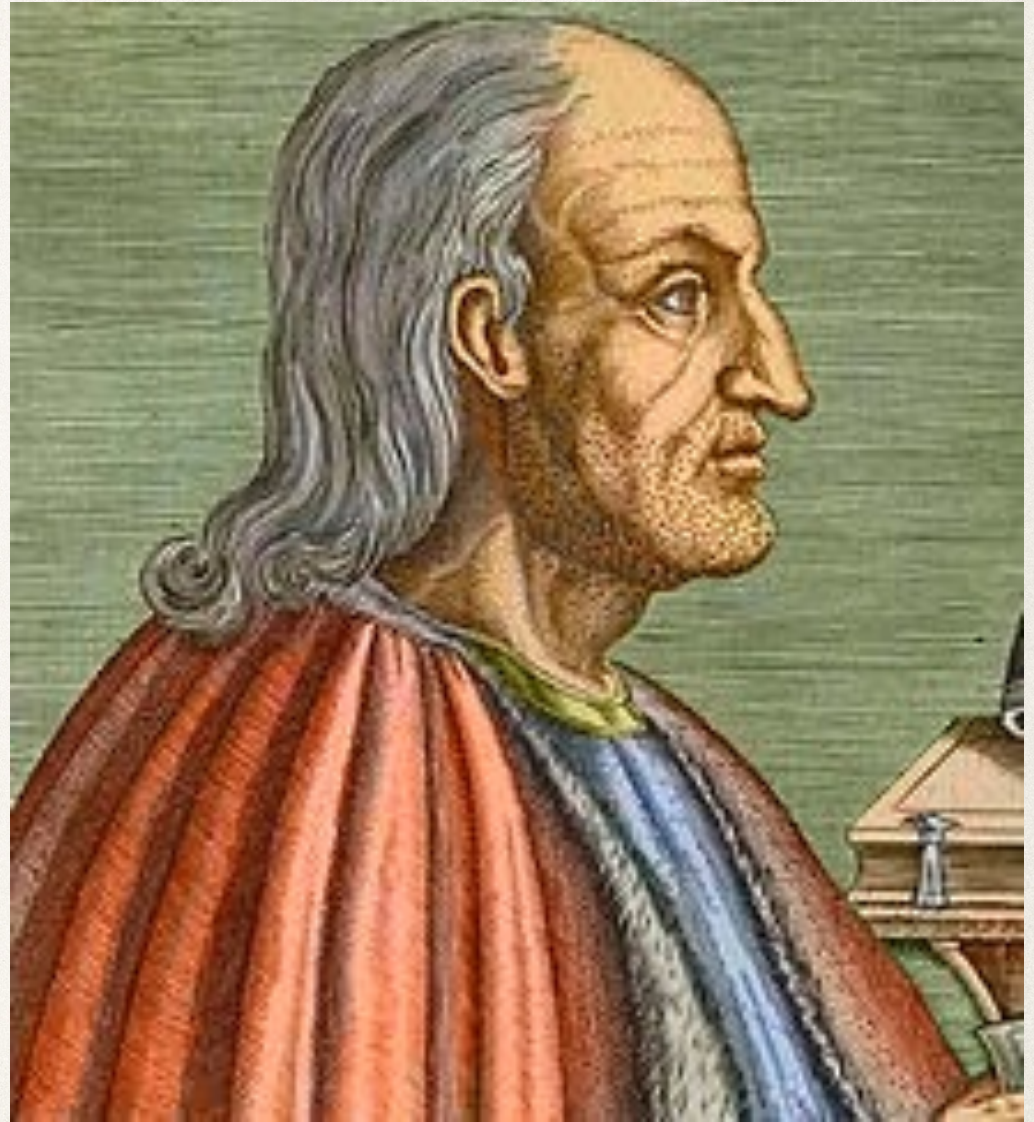
*An a posteriori statement is one whose truth or falsity depends on sensory experience, data collection or experiments*



# St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033—1099)

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*“For I do not seek to  
understand that I may believe,  
but I believe in order to  
understand. For this also I  
believe—that unless I believed,  
I should not understand”*





# Anselm's Ontological Argument

“Lord . . . we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

. . . The fool has said in his heart, there is no God (Psalms xiv. 1). But when this very fool hears of God, i.e. a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, he understands what he hears.

Even the fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be conceived, at least, exists in the mind.

But that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist in the mind alone. (For, suppose it exists in the mind alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which would be something greater.)

So, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the mind alone, it would be something than which something greater can be conceived.

But this is impossible, so that there exists—in reality—something than which nothing greater can be conceived.”