



Philosophy of Religion

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Agenda

Definitions

Examples of Beliefs (in general)

Reasons for Beliefs (in general)

Reasons for Belief in a Deity

Philosophical Arguments for God



Some Definitions

- **“If you want to converse with me, define your terms” - Voltaire**
- Gnostic (from Greek 'gnosis' - knowledge) something can be known – i.e., existence of a god can be known.
- Agnostic – something cannot be known – i.e., impossible to know whether a god exists.
- Deist - Belief in a god who created the world but does not act to influence events.
- Theist – Belief in a god and who acts to influence events.
 - Polytheist – belief in many gods
 - Monotheist – belief in a single god (Trinity?)
- Atheist – Lack of belief in a god / not enough evidence to believe in a god.

Beliefs



- Stuff humans believe that can't be scientifically proved / no direct evidence

Examples - 1

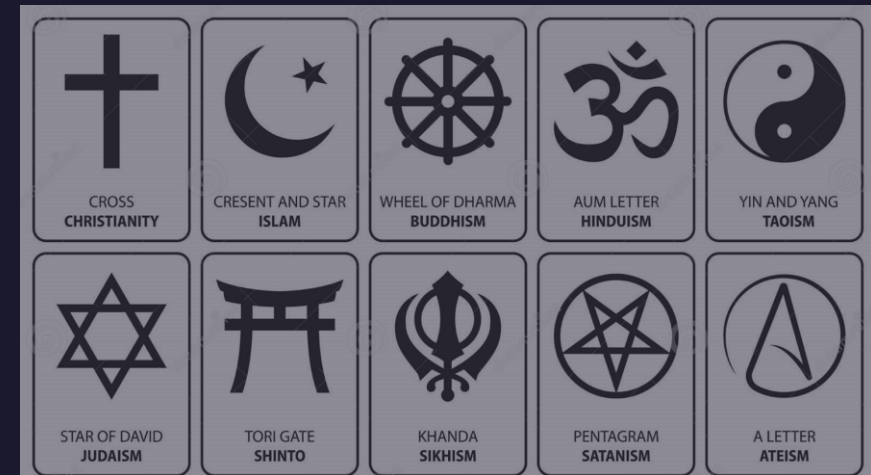


- Religions

- Wikipedia: “According to some estimates, there are roughly 4,200 religions, churches, denominations, religious bodies, faith groups, movements”

- Largest (from Wikipedia):

- Christianity - 2.4 billion (1,000's of denominations)
- Islam – 2.0 billion
- Hinduism – 1.2 billion
- Buddhism – 0.5 billion



- Other Beliefs:

- Reincarnation / Watched over by Ancestors / Animal Spirit Guides / Guardian Angel
- Philosophy of Religion

Examples - 2

- Superstitions:

- 13 & Friday 13th / Horseshoes / Touching Wood / Salt Over Shoulder / Fingers Crossed
 - [4 in China/Japan/Korea, 9 Japan, 17 Italy, 39 Afghan, 43 Japan, 666 Christianity DCLXVI]

- Mythical Creatures:

- Vampires / Werewolves / Fairies / Leprechauns / Pixies / Bigfoot / Yeti / Dragons / Loch Ness Monster

- Paranormal:

- Ghosts / Spirits / Poltergeists / Witches / Alien Abductions / Spoon Bending



Examples - 3



- Astrology:

- Horoscopes / Tarot Cards / Fortune Telling / Numerology / Divination

- Conspiracy Theories:

- JFK assassination / Moon Landings / 5G / Global Warming (YouGov poll: 32% of Brits aged 55+ think its over-exaggerated) / Flat Earth (YouGov poll: 3% of Brits believe the Earth is flat). Guardian: “Study shows 60% of Britons believe in conspiracy theories”

- Pseudo-science:

- Bermuda Triangle / Dowsing / Feng Shui / Homeopathy / Vaccine Hesitancy

- Childhood:

- Father Christmas / Tooth Fairy



Why?

- Some thoughts:
 - More “fun” if something fantastical were true (e.g. Loch Ness monster)
 - We believe our own senses
 - We believe what we are told – particularly by “trusted” source (social media / scams)



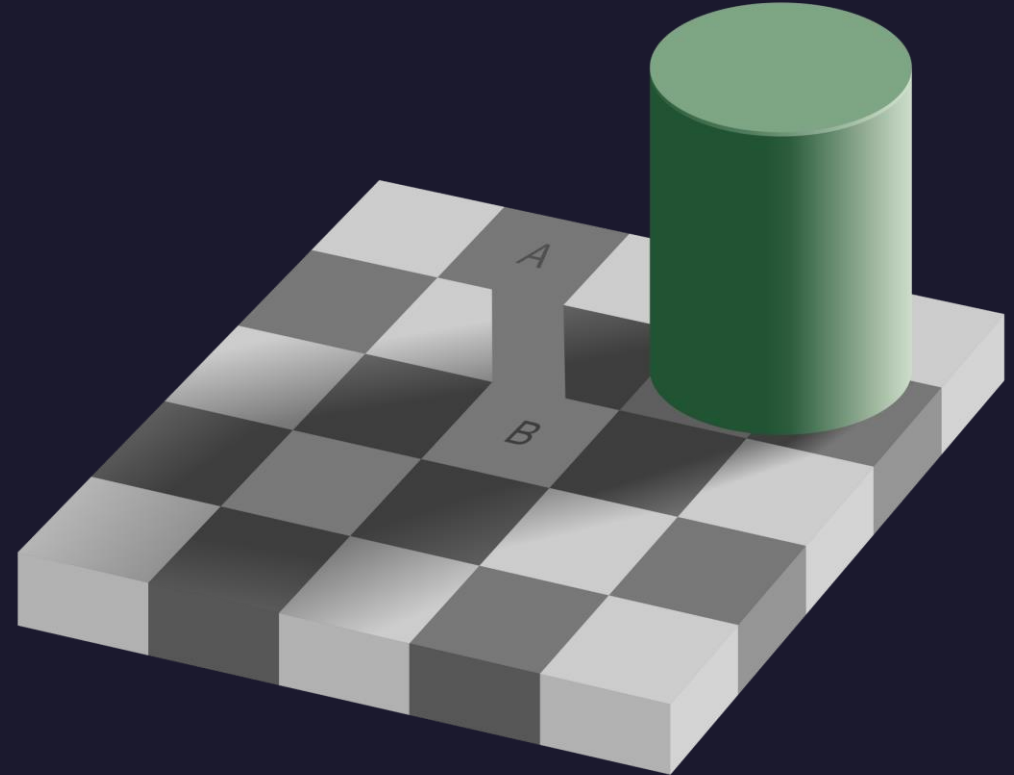
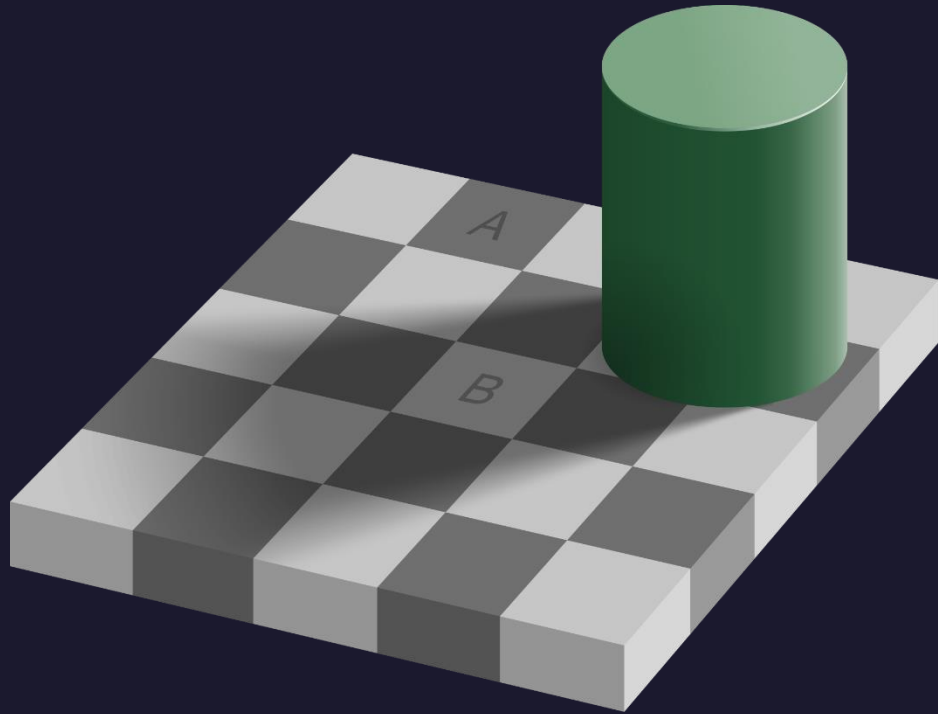
Can we trust sight?

- Pareidolia - the tendency to perceive a specific, often meaningful image in a random or ambiguous visual pattern.



A Danish Believer in the Virgin Mary in Peru

Can we trust sight?



Can we trust hearing?

Brainstorm



Can we trust hearing?

Green Needle



Believing what we are told

- “Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence” – Carl Sagan 1979 (from Hulme?)
- Example 1: “I have a new puppy”
 - known person / animal lover
- Example 2: “I have fairies at the end of my garden”
 - Not consistent with world view
 - “I have a photo!”

Cottingley Fairies (1917 / 1920)



Reasons to believe in a/several Deity

Happens throughout all human societies and throughout written history. Probably ever since there have been homo sapiens?

- The Deity (in whichever form) is real
- Personal Experience (Divine Revelation)
- Cultural Heritage
 - Dawkins: “How thoughtful of God to arrange matters so that, wherever you happen to be born, the local religion always turns out to be the true one.”
- “I don’t know” is an unsatisfactory answer
 - therefore must be a deity (personal incredulity fallacy)

Reasons to believe in Deity

- HADD

- Hyperactive Agency Detection Device (Barrett) Bush moves – might be wind or Sabre tooth tiger.

- Evolutionary advantage

- More altruistic behaviour / more cooperation if watched over (Bering, Johnson)

- Childhood

- parents are “deities” All-knowing / All-powerful / All-loving
- Freud stated that believers revert to the childhood needs of security and forgiveness.



Reasons to believe in Deity

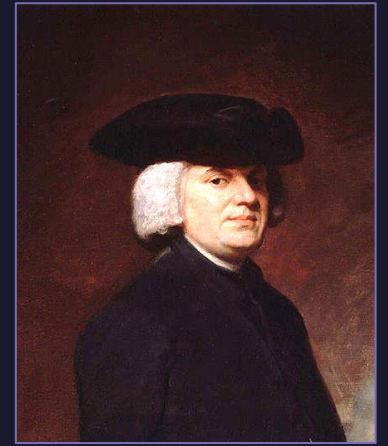
- Fear of Death

- We are the only animals on the planet that know we are mortal
- But we have self-preservation instinct => conflict.
- Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski) - beliefs / rituals provide way out of conflict
- TMT posits that religion is a means for humans to cope with their own mortality.

Arguments for existence of God

Some common philosophical arguments for the existence of God

Watchmaker Analogy



- William Paley (1743 – 1805)
- English Anglican clergyman, Christian apologist, philosopher and utilitarian.
- Watchmaker Analogy published in “Natural Theology” in 1802

Watchmaker Analogy

- Analogy:

- Walking across heath and came across a stone – how did it come to be here? Answer – created by natural causes.
- Came across a watch – complex nature => must have been designed
- Consider Humans – orders of magnitude more complex than a watch => requires a designer. Designer is God.

- Criticism:

- False analogy fallacy - assuming that because two things are alike in one respect, they are necessarily alike in some other respect. Example: “Plants are green and that’s why they can photosynthesise. If you paint yourself green you will get more energy from the sun”
- We already know watches are designed.
- Darwin in “The Origin of Species” (1859) showed than complexity can occur naturally.

Pascal's Wager



- Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)
- French mathematician, physicist, inventor, philosopher, and Catholic writer
- Development of probability theory was his most influential contribution to mathematics

Pascal's Wager

God is, or God is not. Reason cannot decide between the two alternatives

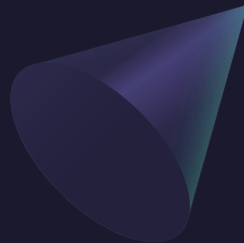
A Game is being played... where heads or tails will turn up

You must wager (it is not optional)

Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing

Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.

| | God exists | God does not exist |
|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Belief | infinite gain | finite loss |
| Disbelief | infinite loss | finite gain |



Pascal's Wager

| | God exists | God does not exist |
|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Belief | infinite gain | finite loss |
| Disbelief | infinite loss | finite gain |

Criticism:

- Which god? Believing in "the wrong god" would eliminate the mathematical advantage Pascal claimed
- Cannot decide to believe (can't decide to believe in unicorns)

Cosmological Argument

- Infinite Regress
- Aristotle
- Thomas Aquinas
- Kalam

Infinite Regress

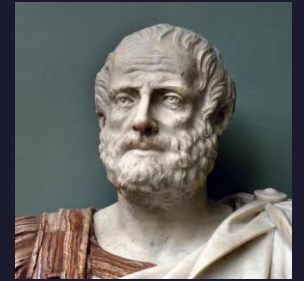
- A well-known scientist once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the centre of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy.
- At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant turtle."
- The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, "What is the turtle standing on?"
- "You're very clever, young man," said the old lady. "But it's turtles all the way down!"



Infinite Regress



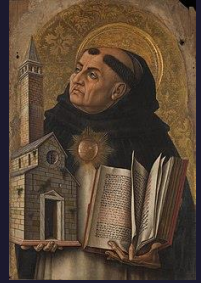
Aristotle – Unmoved mover



384 - 322 BC

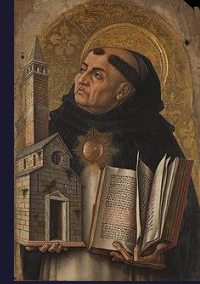
- In *Metaphysics*: “If it is true that when A is in motion there must be some B that moves A, then if B is itself in motion there must be some C moving B, and so on. This series cannot go on forever, and so it must come to a halt in some X that is a cause of motion but does not move itself - an unmoved mover” [we might use the word ‘change’ rather than ‘motion’]
- As is implicit in the name, the unmoved mover moves other things, but is not itself moved by any prior action
- Aristotle concludes that God is the unmoved mover

⁽¹²²⁵⁻¹²⁷⁴⁾ Thomas Aquinas – First Cause



- A Christian monk and theologian (1225 - 1274).
- His conception of first cause was that nothing can cause itself so the Universe must be caused by something that is itself uncaused.
- Aquinas argued that the first cause must have no beginning - that is, nothing caused it to exist because the first cause is eternal.
- He argued that this first cause is God. God is eternal (has no beginning, was never started) and God caused the world and everything else to exist.

Thomas Aquinas – First Cause



Criticism:

- 'Who caused (created) God?' If everything requires a cause (something to start it) surely this must apply to God as well. Special pleading fallacy.
- If God is eternal and requires no cause, then surely you could argue that the universe is eternal, and so doesn't require God for it to exist.

Kalam Cosmological Argument



Originally from Al-Ghazali (c. 1058). Popularised by William Lane Craig (pub 1979)

- P1: Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
- P2: The universe began to exist.
- C: Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Kalam Cosmological Augment

- Criticism:

- P1 - is an intuition, (things cannot “pop” into existence from nothing) but intuitions can be false (e.g. the earth appears flat).
- P1 - What applies to things within in the universe may not apply to the universe itself - Composition fallacy. e.g. Atoms are not alive – so everything made of atoms is not alive.
- P2 – do we know the universe began to exist? What existed before the “big bang”? We don’t know.
- C1 - If the propositions are accepted, and “the universe has a cause” that does not necessarily lead to existence of a deity.

Kalam Cosmological Argument

- P1: Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
- P2: The universe began to exist.
- C: Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Added by William Lane Craig:

- If the universe has a cause, then an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe exists who sans (without) the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless and enormously powerful.
- Therefore, an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe exists, who sans the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless and enormously powerful.

Kalam Cosmological Augment

- Variant to challenge the Kalam:
- P1: Everything that begins to exist **was made from pre-existing “stuff”**.
- P2: The universe began to exist.
- C: Therefore, the universe **was made from pre-existing “stuff”**.

Questions?