

Philosophical Theology 1 (TH5)

Philosophy of Religion

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Lakeside institute of Theology**



Philosophical Theology 1 (TH5)

Aug. 15 – Intro to Philosophical Theology; Logic

Aug. 22 – Truth & Epistemology

Aug. 29 – Metaphysics

Sept. 5 – ***No Class***

Sept. 12 – Philosophy of Religion

Sept. 19 – Philosophy of Science; Human
Nature; Philosophy of Politics

Sept. 26 – Ethics: What is Right?; Aesthetics:
What is Beautiful?

October 3 – Conclusion; Final Exam



What is philosophy?

- Literally, it is *a love of wisdom* – *phileo* is Greek for “love,” *sophos* means “wisdom.”
- Philosophy is the critical examination of our foundational beliefs concerning the nature of reality, knowledge and truth; and our moral and social values.
- Philosophy is the means and process by which we examine our lives and the meaning in our lives.
- **Philosophy is the attempt to think rationally and critically about life’s most important questions in order to obtain knowledge and wisdom about them.**

Philosophy of Religion – Does God Exist?

- **The question of the existence or non-existence of God affects EVERYTHING else.**
 - If God exists, there are reasons, purposes, meaning and hope attached to human existence.
 - If God does not exist, everything is random, nothing has ultimate meaning or significance, and there is not reason to hope for anything better.
 - But believing in God – at least a Christian God – has its downside in that it demands accountability.
- **So, does God exist?**
 - Prior to mid-19th century, virtually everyone was convinced God's existence could be proven. Most philosophers were advocates of ***natural theology*** – the belief that God could be known by human reason and experience.
 - Today very few are even aware of what were once well-known arguments for God's existence.

Philosophy of Religion – Does God Exist?

➤ Anselm's Ontological Argument

- Suggests that the very *idea* of God logically proves His existence. (“*ontological*” means “being” or “existence”)
- The argument goes like this:
 - 1. I can conceive of a greatest conceivable being (GCB).
 - 2. What is real and concrete (outside my mind) is greater than what exists only in my mind.
 - 3. If the greatest conceivable being exists **ONLY** in my mind, then it would not be the greatest conceivable being (because I can conceive of the GCB existing in reality, and *not* just in my mind).
 - 4. Therefore, the greatest conceivable being **MUST** exist in reality.

Philosophy of Religion – Does God Exist?

➤ **Aquinas' Cosmological Argument**

- The “argument from causation” suggests that, since every effect must have a cause, and there cannot logically be an infinite regression of causes, there must be a First Cause (or Prime Mover) which started everything.

- The argument goes like this:
 - 1. There is an order of causes in the world.
 - 2. Nothing can be the cause of itself.
 - 3. Therefore, everything that is caused must be caused by something else.
 - 4. There cannot be an infinite regression of causes.
 - 5. Therefore, there **MUST** be a first, uncaused cause (i.e., God).

Philosophy of Religion – Does God Exist?

➤ **Paley's Teleological Argument**

- The “argument from design,” or “watchmaker argument” says that the complexity of the world demands belief in a Creator, in the same way that the complexity of a watch demands belief in a watchmaker.
- The argument goes like this:
 - 1. A watch has many complex parts, works a specific and intentional function, and is intelligently designed to achieve that function.
 - 2. Similarly, the world has many complex parts, works a specific and intentional function (esp. the sustaining of life), and is intelligently designed to achieve that function.
 - 3. Therefore, there is a very high probability that the world – like the watch – was intelligently designed by a Creator.

Philosophy of Religion – Does God Exist?

➤ **The Fine-Tuning Teleological Argument**

- A version of the teleological argument, this is based on scientific discoveries of “cosmic constants” which have existed since the Big Bang. If the values of the cosmic constants were even *very* slightly different, life on earth would not be possible.
- **1. Rate of Expansion of the Universe.** If this were different by as little as $1/10^{60}$ the universe would either have collapsed or would have expanded too rapidly for stars to form.
- **2. Strong Nuclear Force.** If the force that binds protons and neutrons together had been even 5% stronger or weaker, life would not have been possible.
- **3. Force of Gravity.** If gravity had been stronger or weaker by even $1/10^{40}$ then stars which can support life (like our sun) would not have been formed.

Philosophy of Religion – Does God Exist?

➤ **The Kalam Cosmological Argument**

➤ The argument goes like this:

➤ **1. The universe had a beginning.**

➤ To say the universe had no beginning would require an infinite number of past, concrete events – which creates logical absurdities and so is not possible.

➤ Science now confirms the universe had a beginning.

➤ **2. The beginning of the universe was caused.**

➤ Something cannot come from nothing. Whatever exists must have some cause for its existence.

➤ **3. The cause of the beginning of the universe was God.**

➤ The cause of the universe would have to have been *transcendent, immutable, immaterial, uncaused, exceedingly powerful, personal/volitional, and good/moral.*

(Sounds like God...)

Twenty Arguments For The Existence Of God – Peter Kreeft

1. The Argument from Change
2. The Argument from Efficient Causality
3. The Argument from Time and Contingency
4. The Argument from Degrees of Perfection
5. The Design Argument
6. The Kalam Argument
7. The Argument from Contingency
8. The Argument from the World as an Interacting Whole
9. The Argument from Miracles
10. The Argument from Consciousness
11. The Argument from Truth
12. The Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God
13. The Ontological Argument
14. The Moral Argument
15. The Argument from Conscience
16. The Argument from Desire
17. The Argument from Aesthetic Experience
18. The Argument from Religious Experience
19. The Common Consent Argument
20. Pascal's Wager

Do we even need rational arguments for God's existence?

- Many modern philosophers and scientists maintain the principle of **evidentialism** – the view that *no belief should be held unless one has sufficient evidence for it*.
- There is strong logical evidence for the existence of God – but ***why should belief in God require evidence at all?***
- Why can't belief in God be seen as properly basic to our existence – that all people have a “*sense of the divine*” (as Calvin put it), in the same way that we have visual, auditory and other senses that require no further evidential support?
- **Reformed epistemology** proposes exactly that – insisting that belief in God is *properly basic* to humanity, and that those who do not have such belief are broken and blinded (by sin).
- **While we *have* good arguments for the existence of God, such arguments are not necessary for rational belief in God.**

What do we believe ABOUT God – what is God like?

- **Omnipotent** – having the power to do anything that is logically possible; that is, anything that is *not inherently contradictory*.
- **Atemporal** – transcending time; that is, not being limited by time, since time is necessarily relative (to space, velocity, mass, etc.), and an absolute God could not be so limited.
 - *Sempiternalism* is the contrasting view that God must be temporal in order to be personal – to act in history, answer prayers, etc.
 - *Omnitemporalism* is the view that God is atemporal in that he is not limited by time, but instead is present at all times at once, and so is also able to act *within* time.

What do we believe ABOUT God – what is God like?

- **Omniscient** – all-knowing. (Raises the question of how God can know everything, including the future, and yet people still have free will.)
- Compatibilist View – accepts that people have free will to do what they want, but that they don't have free will to do otherwise. This suggests people can be “free” and morally responsible, and yet still act in pre-determined ways.
- Open Theist Solution – the belief that God knows what will happen in most ways, but that He does not have foreknowledge of the future actions of free humans.
- Ockhamist Solution – proposes that God knows what will happen in the future *because that is what is going to happen in the future*. In other words, a person exercises free will, and in every case God simply knows that those free choices were going to be made. If a person makes a *different* choice, God also would have know in advance that this new choice is what will happen.
- Molinist Solution – the belief that God possesses *middle knowledge* – the knowledge of all possible alternative outcomes from all possible free choices, and that God simply directs circumstances to prompt in the direction He wills.

What do we believe ABOUT God – what is God like?

- **Impassibility** – Is God affected by outside forces; especially, can God experience emotions?
- Impassibility – the belief that God *cannot* be affected by outside forces, and so cannot experience emotions, as a necessary aspect of His perfection and immutability. (Emotions imply change, and God cannot change.)
- Passibility – the belief that God *can* experience genuine emotions, suffering, etc., as a necessary aspect of His ability to personally relate to us. (Emotion is as essential to divine personhood as it is to human personhood.)
- Divine Omnipathos – the belief that God does experience emotion but – unlike people – He experiences all emotions at all times and for all eternity, so there is no sense in which God is either *dominated* or *changed* by His experience of emotions, and so He remains immutable.

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

1. God is omniscient; He knows all things that are logically possible to know.
 2. God is omnipotent; He is able to do anything that it is logically possible to do.
 3. God is omnibenevolent; He desires to do every good thing that can possibly be done.
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4. If God is omniscient, He is fully aware of all the pain and suffering that occurs.
 5. If God is omnipotent, He is able to prevent all pain and suffering.
 6. If God is omnibenevolent, He would want to prevent all pain and suffering.

Yet pain and suffering continue; *therefore*, God is either NOT all knowing, or NOT all-powerful; or NOT all-good; or He doesn't exist.

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The Problem of Evil and Suffering

1. If God is omniscient, He is fully aware of all the pain and suffering that occurs.
2. If God is omnipotent, He is able to prevent all pain and suffering.
 - Yes, and God has shown His awareness and His compassion – by sharing in our humanity and suffering through Jesus; by limiting the suffering He allows (i.e., Job); and in lessening the suffering by providing healing and comfort, especially by the presence of His Holy Spirit.
 - Evil and suffering exist as a direct result of the misuse of human free will. For God to remove all suffering by fiat would irrevocably compromise human will and freedom – the consequences of which we cannot even imagine.

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

3. If God is omnibenevolent, He would want to prevent all pain and suffering.
 - More accurately, God's benevolence means He desires the greatest good – which *may not* be the immediate relief of suffering. Pain often directs people back to God; people often grow best through suffering; and – again – much of what it means to be freely human seems almost to require the existence of suffering. We simply may not see far enough or clearly enough to understand.
 - This assumes physical suffering is the greatest evil, and stopping it is the greatest good – both of which may be wrong. The greatest evil is human rejection of God and His love; and the greatest good is in our returning to Him, to love and serve Him.
 - Our human lives are only a breath in God's eternity, and God will eventually make all things right in a heaven free from suffering – perhaps even (as C.S. Lewis suggests) to the point of God working retroactively to turn all past suffering into glory.

Is Christianity Exclusively True?

- Accepting theistic belief in God, which VERSION of belief in God is correct? (The law of non-contradiction demands that not every religion can be correct, at least when they make contradictory claims.)
- **Arguments for Religious Pluralism**
 - Argument from Religious Diversity – the suggestion that the very existence of multiple religions means that no one religion is exclusively true, especially “because God would not allow that to happen.”
 - Contra – The Law of Non-Contradiction demands that when religions are plainly contradictory in their beliefs, they cannot all be right, no matter how many people believe it.
 - Contra – There are other beliefs which are held by many people (ghosts, aliens visitation, conspiracy theories), but which cannot be assumed to be true simply *because* people believe them.
 - Contra – There may be a spiritual force in the world that is committed to misleading people.

Is Christianity Exclusively True?

➤ Arguments for Religious Pluralism

- Argument from Unity of Teaching – the belief that all religions are basically the same in teachings, only differing in superficial ways.
- Contra – This shows a serious lack of understanding about the world's religions. While most do advocate goodness and generosity, some do not believe in the existence of God at all; some do not believe in a *personal* God we can relate to; some have no belief in an afterlife or salvation; some propose multiple gods versus One God; some propose salvation as the result of good works, etc.
- Contra – G.K Chesterton observed that the idea that all faiths believe the same things but just practice their religions differently is the exact opposite of the truth: ALL religions have some sort of priests/ministers/shamans; and all religions practice some sort of ritual/ liturgy/rite; but what they actually BELIEVE is VERY different indeed.

Is Christianity Exclusively True?

- **Argument from Divine Transcendence** – this emphasizes our ignorance about God, and how we therefore cannot declare what we believe to be right and others wrong.
 - Contra – While it is true that we are called to have humility and compassion, we also must acknowledge that Christianity (at least) is a revealed religion. So what we know about God is not dependent on our own abilities, but on God's grace in revealing Himself to us.
- **Argument from the Relativity of Truth and Logic** – this argues that appeals to reason or logic (like the Law of Non-Contradiction) to make absolute truth claims regarding exclusivity in religious belief is wrong and that only experience (but *not* reason) are relevant to religious belief.
 - Contra – Why must we abandon reason and logic when speaking of God, when we are unwilling to do so in any other considerations?
 - Contra – In saying we cannot make any absolute truth claims about religion, the relativists are making an absolute truth claim, and so are self-defeating.

Is Christianity Exclusively True?

- **Argument from Relativity of Religious Perception** – the suggestion that we cannot be so sure of our religious beliefs, as we all experience them through our own filters of perception, and so not be sure of their absolute truth.
- Contra – Rather than arguing against religion exclusivism, this argument actually suggests there might be no such thing as a legitimate religious belief of any kind. However, if any religious belief is possible, then it is still possible that one is more right than others.
- Contra – This argument actually counters that *Argument from Religious Pluralism* by suggesting the existence of so many different belief systems may just be products of individualized perceptions – rather than to argue against one system being correct when others are mistaken.

The Problem of Miracles

- Given (as we have argued) that it's legitimate to hold one religious belief as being more true than others, why do we think Christianity is that true belief?
- **The historical witness**, especially to the life, miracles and especially the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
 - **Miracle** – an event or occurrence in which God acts, or allows his servants to act, with intentionality in a way not limited by the usual boundaries of natural law which He has put in place.
- **The Scriptural witness**, and the power and truth reflected there.
- **The Church throughout history.**
- **The record of personal experience and changed lives** over the past 2000 years.
- **The unique ability of Christianity to respond to the problem of evil.**

Philosophy of Science

- What is “science” – how should it properly be defined?
 - What are the limits of science?

 - Science is hard to define specifically, but we might say science is *“the systematic inquiry into the natural world which aims to organize, predict and explain empirical data.”*
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