

1

Religion and Philosophy

- In this course, Dr. Fiala will lead a philosophical exploration of religion. Topics will include cosmology, theology, psychology, ethics, and secularism. We will consider metaphysical arguments about religion, as well as arguments about the social value of religion. We will discuss the question of finding common ground among religious (and nonreligious) traditions, while encouraging you to think about religion in a way that is both tolerant and critical.
 - Oct. 20, 27, Nov. 3, 10, 3:00- 4:30 p.m

2

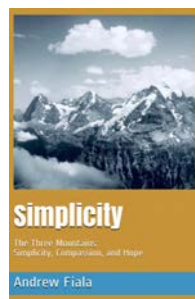
Course Plan

- October 20
 - The Parliament of the World's Religions
 - *Seeking Common Ground*
 - What is Religion? What is God?
- October 27
 - Arguments For and Against the Existence of God
 - The social and psychological value of religion
 - The Evolution of American Religion and the Rise of the Nones
- November 3
 - Ethical Issues
 - Religion in Art and Culture
 - Religion as Ideology
- November 10
 - Religion without God?
 - Political Challenges
 - Religious Liberty and Secularism

3

Fiala Introduction

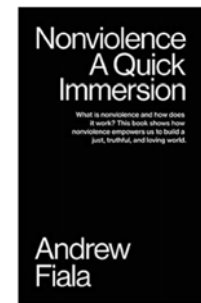
- www.andrewfiala.com
 - Lecture Notes Available
 - Join my email list!
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- Amazon Author Page:
<https://www.amazon.com/Andrew-G.-Fiala/e/B001IXOBAS>



<https://andrewfiala.com/simplicity/>



<https://andrewfiala.com/compassion/>



<https://andrewfiala.com/nonviolence-a-quick-immersion/>

4

The Ethics Center

<http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/ethicscenter/>

- Facebook: @FresnoEthicsCenter
- Youtube Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjOKzXxhqDstH73nE3-YauA>
- Oct. 21, 5-6pm
 - Discipline that Restores (with Ron and Roxanne Claassen)
 - <https://securelb.imodules.com/s/1692/GID2/blank.aspx?sid=1692&gid=2&pgid=1829&cid=3475>
- Oct. 26, 4-5:15pm
 - Dialogue on Climate Change:
 - <https://securelb.imodules.com/s/1692/GID2/blank.aspx?sid=1692&gid=2&pgid=1820&cid=3463>
- Nov. 15, 5-6pm
 - Ethical Leadership with Ashley Swearengin
 - <https://securelb.imodules.com/s/1692/GID2/blank.aspx?sid=1692&gid=2&pgid=1823&cid=3467>

5

Seeking Common Ground Book Launch

Dublin, Ireland and on Zoom
Nov. 4, 11:30AM Pacific

- <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/book-launch-seeking-common-ground-a-theistatheist-dialogue-tickets-192311096667>

DCU
Dublin City University

Book Launch

Seeking Common Ground: A Theist /Atheist Dialogue

by Peter Admirand, DCU
and Andrew Fiala,
Fresno State University

As part of the launch, both authors will be joined by a panel of experts discussing the obstacles and hopes in atheist-theist dialogue:

Dr Ed Kessler MBE,
Founder President, Woolf Institute,
Cambridge

Michael Nugent,
Chairperson, Atheist Ireland.

Jillian Brennan,
Chief Executive Officer, The Humanist
Association of Ireland

Dr Sandra Cullen,
Lecturer in Religious Education,
DCU School of Human Development

**SEEKING
COMMON
GROUND**
A Theist/Atheist Dialogue

Andrew Fiala Peter Admirand
foreword by Jack Molins

Date:
Thursday, 4th November 2021

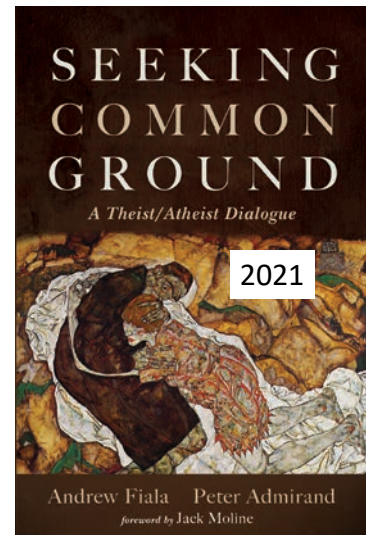
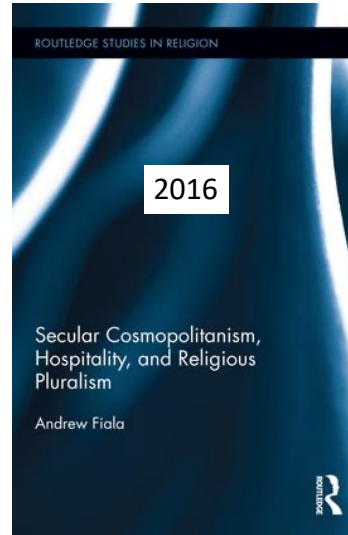
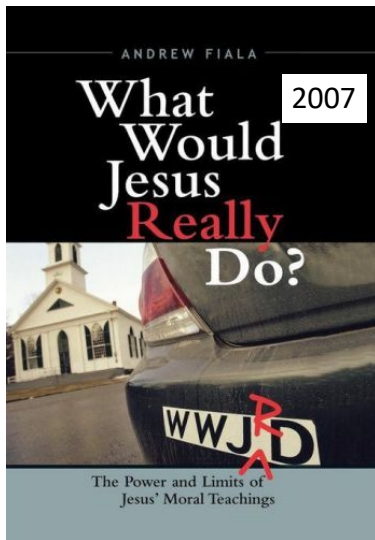
Time:
7.30 pm

Where:
John Hand Room,
DCU All Hallows Campus

RSVP:
Peter.admirand@dcu.ie

6

Some of my work on religion



7

Parliament of World's Religions

- Compassion (and Justice) as unifying ideas among world's religions
- The vision of a Global Ethic
 - Every Human Being Must Be Treated Humanely
 - Commitment to a Culture of Non-violence and Respect for Life
 - Commitment to a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order
 - Commitment to a Culture of Tolerance and a Life of Truthfulness
 - Commitment to a Culture of Equal Rights and Partnership Between Men and Women
- https://parliamentofreligions.org/sites/default/files/docs/global_ethic_pdf_-_2020_update.pdf



8

Parliament of World Religions 2021
Dalai Lama (and others), Oct. 18, 2021



9

Parliament of World Religions 2021
Dalai Lama (and others), Oct. 18, 2021



10

“Compassion as Common Ground? On the Problem of Compassion in Religious and Non-Religious Perspectives”

- Dr. Veena Howard
Fresno State
- Rabbi Laura Novak Winer
Hebrew Union College
- Dr. Peter Admirand
Dublin City University



11

“Compassion as Common Ground? On the Problem of Compassion in Religious and Non-Religious Perspectives”

• **Philosophy of Compassion**

- The more we think about compassion, the more questions we have. And the more questions we ask, the more compassionate we become.
- Philosophy is thoughtful questioning: open-minded, tolerant, hospitable.
- Importance of religious liberty and secular systems of government.

12

“Compassion as Common Ground? On the Problem of Compassion in Religious and Non-Religious Perspectives”

- **Compassion is important for dialogue**
- **But it is not the only value that matters.**
- Admirand/Fiala, Seeking Common Ground:
- Compassion does not mean we give everything away to the other. There is still room for disagreement in dialogue, especially when such disagreement is grounded in the need to honor one's own commitments, values, and beliefs—and in the basic idea that we honor the rationality, goodwill, and sincerity of our dialogue partner
 - (Admirand/Fiala, p. 37)

13

“Compassion as Common Ground? On the Problem of Compassion in Religious and Non-Religious Perspectives”

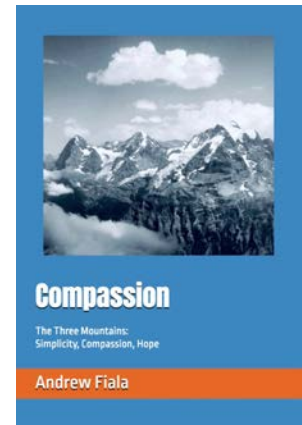
- **Compassion is energetic/chaotic—and not merely negative**
- Not only about shared suffering but also about *shared joy*
- But shared suffering and joy are disruptive
- **Compassion is important for ethics; but it is not the whole of ethics.**
- Dialogue and progress depend upon compassion.
- Progress also depends upon secular systems of justice/rights: extensive religious liberty, official toleration of religious diversity, and political equality.

14

Andrew Fiala, *Compassion* (vol. 2 of *The Three Mountains*)

<https://andrewfiala.com/compassion/>

- Compassion is not sorrowful or morose. It is active, energizing, and optimistic. It is as much about laughter as it is about tears. Compassion is not the only good. It must be balanced with justice, self-interest, and tranquility. There is wisdom in staying home, retreating to your inner citadel, and learning to mind your own business. But there is also wisdom in connection, dependence, and care.

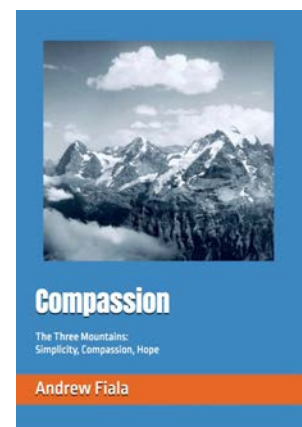


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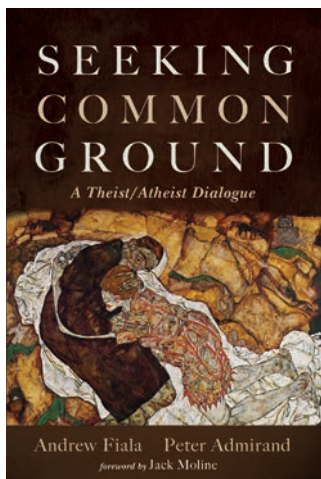
Andrew Fiala, *Compassion* (vol. 2 of *The Three Mountains*)

<https://andrewfiala.com/compassion/>

- Compassion is the circulation of minds. This is neither soft nor tidy. There is chaos in compassion. Giving and receiving disrupt tranquil simplicity. Compassion is joyful and exuberant, painful and sad. In every open embrace there is a touch of anarchy. Compassion fails when this is forgotten, when the arms that embrace become chains that impose.



16



<https://andrewfiala.com/seeking-common-ground-a-theist-atheist-dialogue/>

Dialogue

- Self-Exposure Seeking Understanding
- Not a debate that aims to convince, persuade, or convert
- Seeking common ground

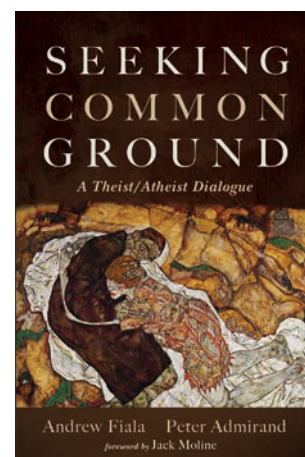
7 Dialogical Virtues

1. Harmony
2. Courage
3. Humility
4. Curiosity
5. Honesty
6. Compassion
7. Honor

17

Fiala, *Seeking Common Ground* Atheists have been welcomed

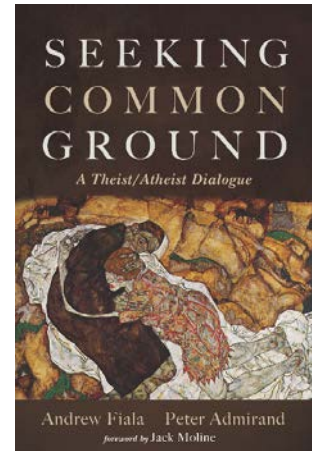
What has been remarkable to me in my interactions with hundreds of scholars and religious practitioners is that nearly all of these interactions have been peaceful and productive. This is remarkable because I am an atheist. But I have been welcomed by religious communities, fed by them, and have become friends with a wide range of people who see the world in ways quite different from the way I see things....



18

Fiala, *Seeking Common Ground* Dialogue: Explaining what you believe

There is a kind of common kindness, hospitality, and generosity of spirit that one finds among those who engage in interfaith and interreligious work. This is accompanied by a desire to understand and to be understood. Dialogical interaction among religious practitioners provides a chance for different people to explain to one another what they believe. These discussions are not focused on conversion or comeuppance. The goal of dialogue is not to defeat one's opponents and prove that the other person is wrong. Rather, dialogue is about self-exposure without self-righteousness.

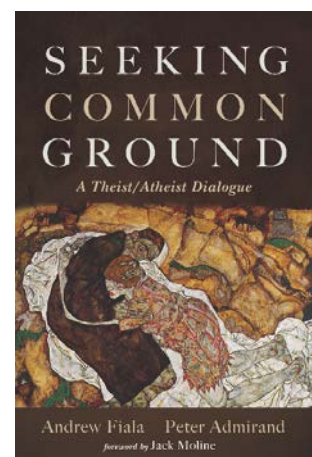


19

Fiala, *Seeking Common Ground* The Difference with Atheism

This process is, however, more difficult when we encounter the religious- nonreligious divide. Among religious people there is a kind of shared sense that the discussion points toward mysteries that go beyond the ken of mere mortals. Serious differences exist between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. These diverse faiths will never agree about the specifics of theology, spirituality, tradition, ritual, and community. But they agree that there is something larger and more mysterious than what the rational human mind can grasp. It is possible for these diverse faiths to agree that we can remain respectfully silent before those mysteries...

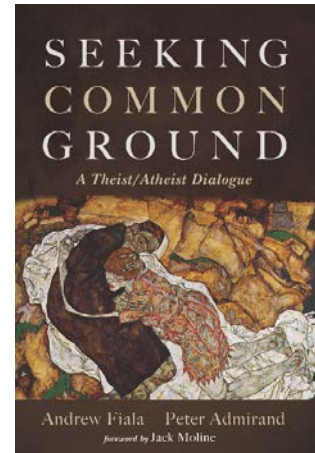
Nonreligious people—and atheists in particular—operate in a different epistemological and metaphysical field.



20

Fiala, *Seeking Common Ground* Common Humanity or Avoiding the Question?

The good news, however, is that it is even possible for theists and atheists to find common ground. One simple way that this happens is for the conversation to skirt and avoid epistemological and metaphysical issues. Much common ground can be found in discussing food, education, sports, art, and other issues of common human concern. This may seem like a weak strategy of avoidance. But human beings need to understand that they share a common humanity—and develop trusting relationships—before they can dive into the depths of epistemology and metaphysics.



21

Questions/Discussion

- What is the value of compassion in religious and non-religious worldviews?
- Can religious and non-religious people find common ground?
- What do genuine dialogues about religion look like?
- Is it really as easy as just being compassionate?
- What are the challenges and difficulties?



22

PART 2: WHAT IS RELIGION?

- Religion as Unity of Faith and Reason (Aquinas)
- Religion as Absolute Consciousness (Hegel)
- Religion as Soul-Power (Emerson)
- Religion as a human construction aiming to make meaning (Fiala)

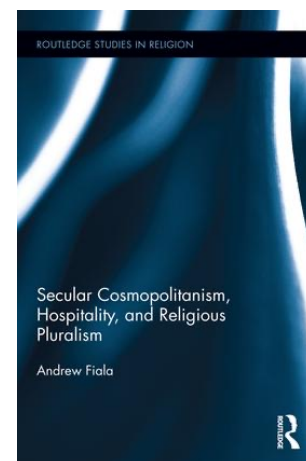


23

What is religion?

- In the West, we tend to think of religion as being about God. But like the term “religion,” “God” is also a term that is vexing and fraught with complexity. In this sense, “God” is less an answer than a question. And this question has had deep and pervasive historical significance.

- Fiala, *Secular Cosmopolitanism* (2016), p. 95

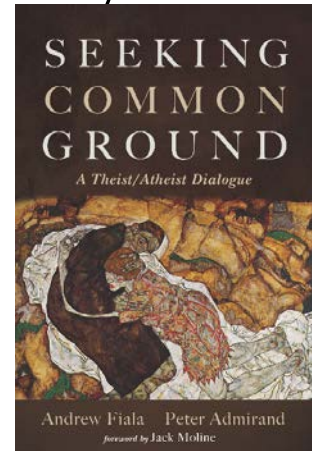


24

What is Religion?

Desire for meaning—related to Curiosity

- This is not merely curiosity about the literal truth of religion. Rather, it is about the *mythic power of religion*, what religion tells us about the meaning of life, ethics, political reality, and so on. And in fact, I still believe there is a lot to learn about religion—and by studying religion we learn a lot about ourselves, including about the ways we find and make meaning.
- I remain curious about religion because I am curious (in both speculative and existential senses) about human beings.
- There is a vast variety of religions in the world. I am curious about what other people believe, where they live, how they pray, and what they eat. My speculative curiosity impels me to ask whether their beliefs are true.

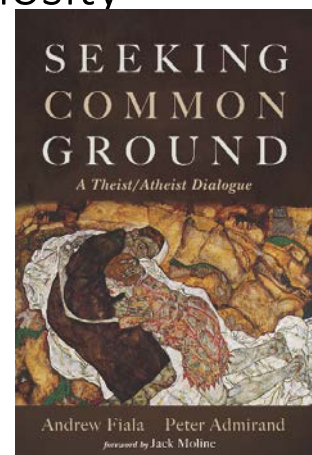


25

What is Religion?

Desire for meaning—related to Curiosity

- But religion is also more than merely a set of truth claims. It is also a system of practice, rituals, and mythic meaning, lived out in the real lives of people in places like Jerusalem and Jaffa.
- I agree with the general result of the critical theories of religion we have discussed here. But I remain curious about the human condition and about the various ways that human beings make sense of themselves and the world. It is this curiosity that drew me to the Holy Land. I became more skeptical there. But I also became more curious.

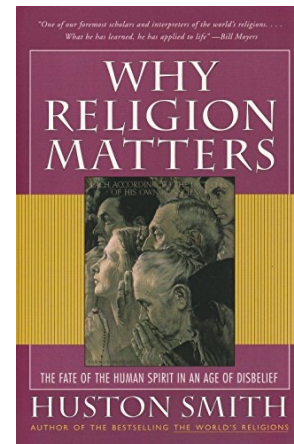


26

Religion and the Human quest for meaning

The religious sense recognizes instinctively that the ultimate questions human beings ask—What is the meaning of existence? Why are there pain and death? Why, in the end, is life worth living? What does reality consist of and what is its object?—are the defining essence of our humanity... They are the determining substance of what makes human beings human.

- Huston Smith, Why Religion Matters (HarperCollins, 2001), 274.



27

What is Religion?

- Books and Texts
- But which books?
 - Homer?
 - Bhagavad Gita?
 - Shakespeare?
 - The Koran?
 - The Book of Mormon?

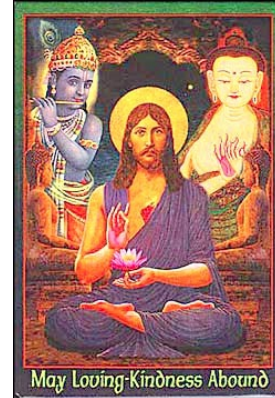


28

What is Religion?

- The teachings of divinely inspired prophets and priests

- But who are the prophets and priests?
 - Moses
 - Buddha
 - Jesus
 - Mohammed
 - Joseph Smith



29

What is Religion?

- Lived Practices of communities (culture)

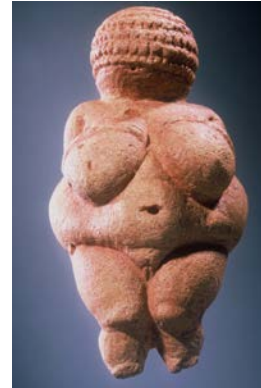
- But which practices count as religious?
 - Education
 - Diet
 - Rituals, Sabbaths, Festivals
 - Clothing
 - BUT: 4th of July, Black Friday, ball games?



30

What is Religion?

- Something about God?
- But who/what is “God”?
 - Zeus
 - Yahweh
 - Jesus
 - Allah
 - Krishna
- And what about non-theistic “religions”
 - Ex. Buddhism



Venus of Willendorf
24,000 years ago

31

What is Religion?

- A story/theory of salvation (soteriology) and ultimate destination (eschatology)
- But which theory?
 - Buddhist nirvana?
 - Christian atonement, grace, and judgment?
 - Bodily resurrection, separation of soul and body, transmigration of souls?
- And what about theories that deny the need for salvation?
 - Ancient Taoism—physical immortality?
 - Epicureanism—live well, be happy, don’t fear the gods, accept mortality



32

What is Religion?

- People, institutions, and hierarchy who self-identify as a group
- But which groups/institutions count as religious? And why?
 - Permanence?
 - Power?
 - Prestige?
- What about non-hierarchical and counter-cultural groups?



33

What is religion?

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

- *Re-legit* = re-reading or contemplating, ruminating, and pondering
 - Related *legible*
- *Re-eligere* = re-seeking, re-finding, or re-connecting (to God)
 - Related to *eligible* (choice and choice-worthy)
- *Religare* = process of binding
 - Related to: *ligature, ligament, obligate*



Thomas Aquinas
1225-1274

34

Aquinas: Faith and Reason



35

What is Religion?

Hegel: eternal truth → Philosophy

- We know that in religion we withdraw ourselves from what is temporal, and that religion is for our consciousness that region in which all the enigmas of the world are solved, all the contradictions of deeper-reaching thought have their meaning unveiled, and where the voice of the heart's pain is silenced the region of eternal truth, of eternal rest, of eternal peace.

• Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion* (1832)



G.W.F. Hegel
1770-1831

36

What is Religion?

Hegel: God as the Center (Geist/Spirit)

- All that has worth and dignity for man, all wherein he seeks his happiness, his glory, and his pride, finds its ultimate centre in religion, in the thought, the consciousness, and the feeling of God. Thus God is the beginning of all things, and the end of all things. As all things proceed from this point, so all return back to it again. He is the centre which gives life and quickening to all things, and which animates and preserves in existence all the various forms of being
- Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion* (1832)



G.W.F. Hegel
1770-1831

37

Hegel: Absolute Spirit Comprehended in Philosophy



38

What is Religion?

Emerson: Transcendent/Eternal → Beyond

- The first and last lesson of religion is: “the things that are seen are temporal; the things that are unseen are eternal.”
 - Emerson, *Nature* (1836)
- The sentiment of virtue is a reverence and delight in the presence of certain divine laws... These laws refuse to be adequately stated. They will not be written out on paper, or spoken by the tongue. Yet, this sentiment is the essence of all religion...
 - Emerson, *Divinity School Address* (1838)



**Ralph Waldo
Emerson
1803-1882**

39

What is Religion?

Emerson: Over-Soul vs. Organized Religion)

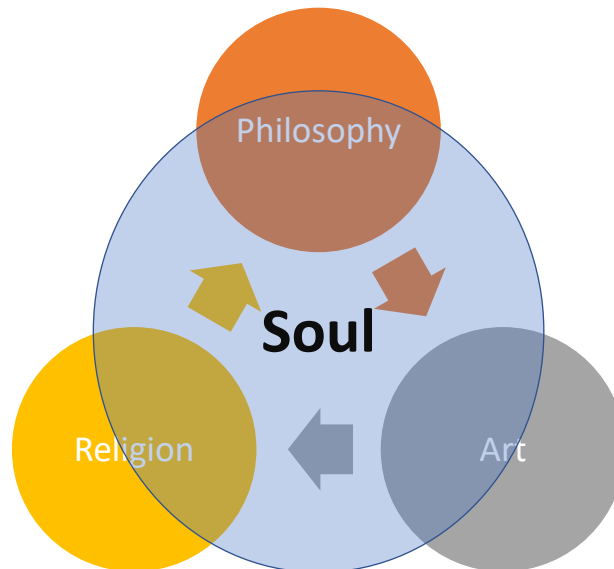
- We have contrasted the Church with the Soul. In the soul, then, let the redemption be sought. Wherever a man comes, there comes revolution. The old is for slaves. When a man comes, all books are legible, all things transparent, all religions are forms. He is religious.
- The stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed.
 - Emerson, *Divinity School Address* (1838)



**Ralph Waldo
Emerson
1803-1882**

40

Emerson: Living Religion of the Over-Soul



41

Discussion

- What is religion?
- Can atheists experience religion?
- Does religion require God?
- Does religion require theology/philosophy?
- Are organized religions necessary?



42

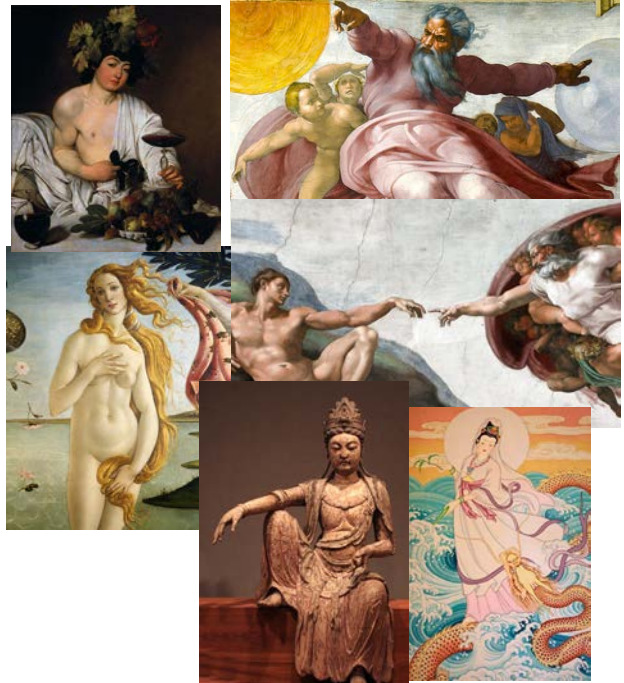
PART 3: WHAT IS GOD?



43

What is God?

- The Mythological God
 - God of “the imagination”
 - Personality, History
 - Changeable... Plural?
- The Theological God
 - God of “thought”
 - Monotheism vs. Polytheism
 - Pantheism
 - Theologically Pure and Absolute God:
 - Omnipotent
 - Omniscient
 - Omnipresent
 - Omnibenevolent



44

Is God Omnipotent? Does it matter?

- Ancient Polytheisms
 - Gods were at war with one another
 - Gods did evil/shameful things
- Medieval Monotheistic Christianity
 - God is unitary and almighty and good
- Enlightenment Theology
 - God is perfect being who exists outside of time and space and who cannot interact with us through miracles
- Questions?
 - If God is omnipotent, then why is there evil and death? (= Problem of Evil)
 - And how can our prayers impact God? (= Problem of miracles)



45

Christian Theological God: Omnipotence

- Apostle's Creed
 - I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth
- Nicene Creed
 - I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible
- QUESTION: What does it mean to say that God is "almighty"?



46

Christian Theological God: Omnipotence

- Augustine, Sermon on the Creed (ca. 390's?)
- You should say, I believe in God the Father Almighty. God is Almighty, and yet, though Almighty, He cannot die, cannot be deceived, cannot lie; and, as the Apostle says, cannot deny Himself. How many things that He cannot do, and yet is Almighty!
- Yea therefore is Almighty, because He cannot do these things. For if He could die, He were not Almighty; if to lie, if to be deceived, if to do unjustly, were possible for Him, He were not Almighty: because if this were in Him, He should not be worthy to be Almighty. To our Almighty Father, it is quite impossible to sin.
- He does whatsoever He will: that is Omnipotence. He does whatsoever He rightly will, whatsoever He justly will: but whatsoever is evil to do, He wills not.



Augustine
354-430

47

Christian Theological God: Omnipotence

- Aquinas, Summa Theologica (ca. 1260-70's)
- All confess that God is omnipotent; but it seems difficult to explain in what His omnipotence precisely consists: for there may be doubt as to the precise meaning of the word 'all' when we say that God can do all things. If, however, we consider the matter aright, since power is said in reference to possible things, this phrase, "God can do all things," is rightly understood to mean that God can do all things that are possible; and for this reason He is said to be omnipotent.
- The divine existence, however, upon which the nature of power in God is founded, is infinite, and is not limited to any genus of being; but possesses within itself the perfection of all being.



Thomas Aquinas
1225-1274

48

Discussion/Conclusion

- Do we have to agree about omnipotence and the existence of an almighty God in order to find common ground?
- Can we understand omnipotence and/or God?

