

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 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

Upcoming Ethics Center Events

- 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>

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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>
- ZOOM Link: <https://dcu-ie.zoom.us/j/94928612384?pwd=Z25JOXRySkVWTWtFMEN3bW1GcStCZz09>

DCU
Office of the
Book Review
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 Molino

Date:
Thursday, 4th November 2021

Time:
7.30 pm

Where:
John Hand Room,
DCU All Hallows Campus

RSVP:
Peter.admirand@dcu.ie

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WHAT IS GOD?



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Some definitions

- Theism: belief in a God or gods
- Mono-theism: there is one God
- Poly-theism: there are many gods
- A-theism: there is no God or gods
- Agnosticism: we don't know whether there is a god or Gods (or not)

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Philosophical Critique of Religion Plato's *Euthyphro*

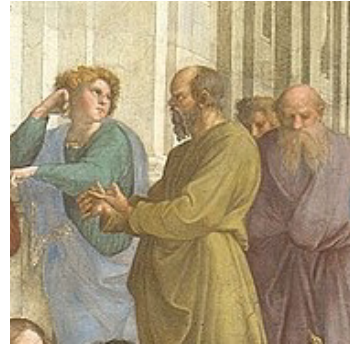
- Is a thing good (holy) because it is loved by the gods?
Or are things loved by the gods because they are good (holy)?
- Myths show the gods doing terrible things? Are these myths accurate and believable?
- What do we do about conflicting stories: a god who behaves inconsistently or conflicts among the gods?
- Why would the gods respond to our prayers and rituals? Does that give us power over the gods? And why would the gods want anything from us?



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Ancient Philosophical Solutions to Plato's *Euthyphro*

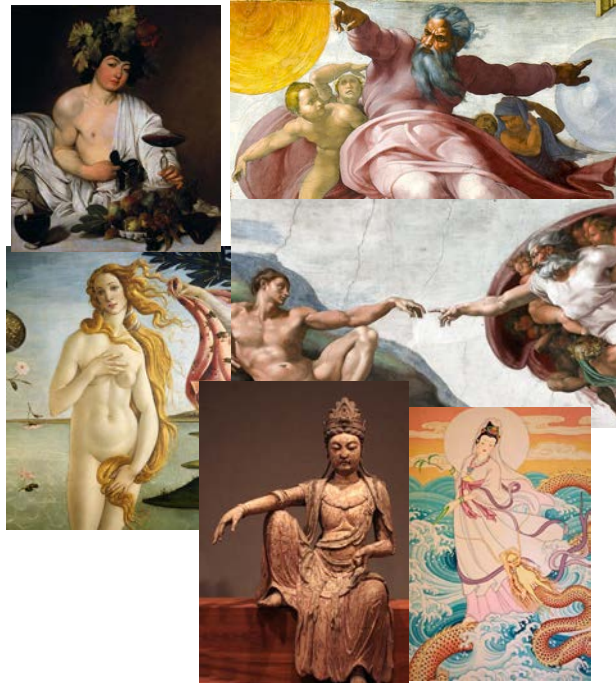
- Parmenidean Monism: There is one Good/Being = the source of the holy
- Platonic Idealism: Even God is limited by the rational, beautiful idea of the Good
- Critique of Myth: Apparent conflicts are the result of human interpretation and poetry
- Epicurean Humanism: Rituals and prayers are human creations (not really about God...)



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Who or What is God?

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



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Does God exist?

- Cosmological Argument
 - There is a first cause = God
- Argument from Design
 - There is evidence of a Designer = God
- Ontological Argument
 - The perfect being (God) must necessarily exist
- Moral Argument
 - Without God there is no source of morality or reason to be moral

- BUT: Problem of Evil

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Cosmological Argument

- There must be a first cause
 - Something cannot come from nothing
 - The First Cause must be self-caused
 - (or else: infinite regress = absurd)

 - Aristotle... Prime Mover

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Argument from Design (Teleological Argument)

- There is design (structure and order) in the cosmos
- This cannot have happened by chance
- SO: there must be an Intelligent Designer
 - Plato... Demiurgos (the Craftsman God)

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What do such proofs prove?

- “God of the philosophers”
 - Omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent being who is the cause of the universe and its designer
- How does this God connect to the God of scripture?
 - Which scripture--Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Christian...?

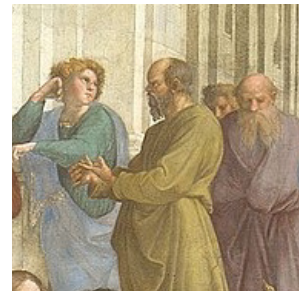


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Discussion1

Plato's critique of Religion and Arguments for the Existence of God

- Is Plato right to propose a philosophical solution to the puzzles created by religion (and are those really puzzles)?
- Are arguments for the existence of God useful?
- Do these arguments help us with religion—or are they only about the “philosopher’s God”?



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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 (Deism)
 - 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)



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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"?



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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

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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

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Problem For the Omnipotent God The Problem of Evil

- If God is omnipotent, He has the power to prevent evil
- But evil exists
- So God must not be omnipotent
 - (or He must not be good)



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Responding to the Problem of Evil

- Theodicy: a story/account that justifies God

Free Will Theodicy

- God gave human beings free will
- He knows that some human beings will misuse free will
- But a world with free will is “the best of all possible worlds” (Leibniz)



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Discussion 2: Omnipotence and the Problem of Evil

- Is God really omnipotent (and can we actually understand that)?
- If so, why is there evil?
- Is evil a problem for the existence of God?



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Religion vs. Theology

- Religion
 - Group/Community/Ethnicity/Social practice
 - Ritual
 - Myth and Narrative
 - Art/Music
 - Play?
 - Plurality: there are many religions... (studied by social sciences..)
- Theology
 - Theory and Argument
 - Knowledge and Truth
 - Epistemology, Metaphysics, Cosmology, etc.
 - Aims at unity: there should be one true theory (know through rational argument)

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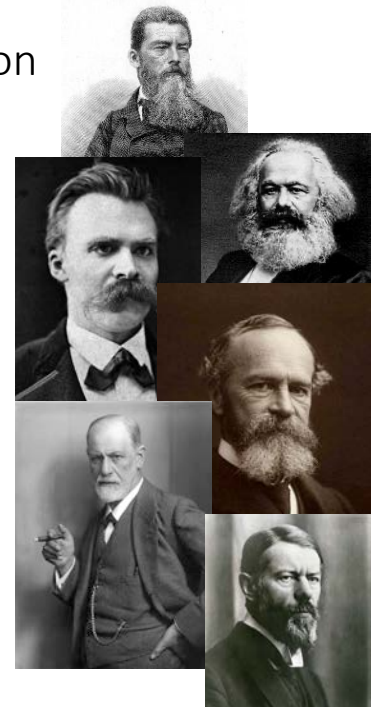
Social and Psychological Value of Religion

- What matters? the truth of a religious doctrine or its social/psychological value?
- Greek → Enlightenment Philosophy
 - Truth/Knowledge are fundamental
 - Are religious claims true? What can we know about God, souls, immortality?
- Marxist/Critical/Pragmatist/ Philosophy and Psychology
 - Knowledge is guided by interests/values
 - Truth is Ideological
 - There are various ways of living and making meaning
 - How does religion help or hinder us?

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Social and Psychological Critiques of Religion

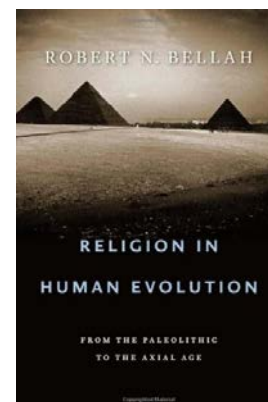
- Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)
 - Religion is a human projection: *Homo Homini Deus Est (Man is a God to Man)*
 - Anthro-po-centrism is *The Essence of Christianity*
- Karl Marx (1818-1883)
 - Religion is the opiate of the people
 - Ideological Critique
- Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)
 - Christianity is “slave morality”
 - *The Genealogy of Morals*
- William James (1842-1910)
 - Religion “cash value” as subjective experience of the divine, hope, meaning
 - *Varieties of Religious Experience*
- Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
 - Religion is a wish fulfillment, illusion, and cultural imposition (taboo, Super-Ego, etc.)
 - *Civilization and its Discontents, Future of an Illusion*
- Max Weber (1864-1920)
 - Secularization, and the Disenchantment of the World
 - *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*



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Two Evolutionary/Social Accounts of Religion Robert Bellah and Charles Taylor

- Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011)
 - Religions (and art, science, politics, and philosophy) evolve out of basic human capacities and instincts
 - Empathy, play, reflection
 - And hierarchical social systems
 - Human nature = organize our lives by way of narratives, rules, and rituals—supported by hierarchical systems that give meaning and purpose
 - American Religiosity = “Civil Religion”
 - Patriotic Americanism as religion



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Two Evolutionary/Social Accounts of Religion Robert Bellah and Charles Taylor

- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (2007)

- Naïve religion (“unreflective”)
 - Myth, narrative, and ritual taken as “immediate reality” (natural/naïve belief/practice)
 - Belief/practice are “unchallenged” and “unproblematic” — and social reinforced/rewarded
- Secularism
 - Belief in God is challenged/problematic
 - Religion is “one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace”... “belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives.”
 - Religious belief is privatized = not socially rewarded/supported



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Evolution of American Religion

- Pre-history (before 1776)
 - Native religions (plural)
 - Catholic missionaries (conversion and intermixing)
 - Protestant exodus (Reformed Christianity)
 - Protest American exclusion, domination, extermination
- Enlightenment Religiosity of the Founding (1776...)
 - Deism
 - Secular Ideals
 - BUT: religious conflicts about slavery, war, power, etc.
- New American Religions and Expansion (19th Century)
 - Transcendentalism, Christian Science, Mormonism, etc.
 - Fragmented Protestant Hegemony
 - Inclusion of formerly excluded religions (Catholic, Mormon, etc.)
 - Critique of Religion: Feminist, Marxist, etc.
- Syncretism and Secularization (20th Century)
 - Growth of Religious Diversity (including new immigrants)
 - Religious Shifting and Intermixing
 - Expanded First Amendment
 - The Nones: including Spiritual but not religious

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Example: The Feminist Critique Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

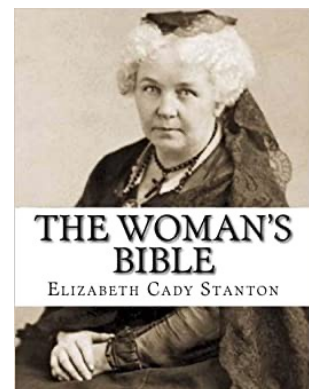
- God created man in his own image, male and female (*Woman's Bible*, 1890's)
- "Has Christianity Benefited Women?" (1888)
- The moral degradation of women is due more to theological superstitions than to all other influences together.
- Man, seeking after knowledge, was opposed by the church ; woman, by both church and man.
- Making woman an afterthought in the creation, the author of sin, in collusion with the devil, sex a crime, marriage a condition of slavery for woman and defilement for man.
- Not one wrong has been righted until women themselves made organized resistance against it.



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The Woman's Bible (1890's) Edited by Cady Stanton

- The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. Here is the Bible position of woman briefly summed up.



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Fiala: “There is No American Religion”

<https://andrewfiala.com/there-is-no-american-religion/> (Fresno Bee, July 18, 2021)

- 2020 Census of American Religion:
<https://www.prii.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>
- 70% Christian
- 23% Not affiliated (“none”)
 - Includes atheists/agnostics = only 6% of all Americans
- 6-7% Other (Non-Christian)



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Fiala: “There is No American Religion”

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- Fresno County is typical in this regard with the same percentage of non-affiliated people (23%) as the rest of America. The Central Valley is generally more religious than the rest of California. In San Luis Obispo County, 36% are unaffiliated, for example.
- Young Americans are more diverse than older generations. In the 18-29 age cohort, only 54% are Christian, 36% are unaffiliated, with non-Christians making up the rest.



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Fiala: “There is No American Religion”

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- This is what religious liberty looks like. In this country, you can change religions, marry someone from a different faith, or simply stop going to church. You can also openly criticize religion without fear of prosecution for blasphemy or apostasy.
- Young people are exercising their liberty and creating a future that will contain more religious diversity than their grandparents encountered. Young people will need guidance as they re-weave the religious fabric of the nation. They need education about religious diversity and religious liberty. But the youth can also lead the way by showing the rest of us what freedom looks like.



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Discussion 3: the Social and Psychological Value of Religion

- Is it a good thing that religion is evolving in America?
- What is the social/psychological value of religion?
- Are we really living in a “secular age”? And is that a good or bad thing?



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Summary and Conclusion

- Philosophical Critiques of Religion
- Arguments for and against the existence of God
- Theology vs. Religion
- Omnipotence and the Problem of Evil
- Evolution of Religion and dawning of a secular age
- American religion
- Religious Liberty