

Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction

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What is Philosophy of Religion?

Philosophy of Religion: the philosophical study of religious themes and concepts, such as the nature and existence of God and the rationality of religious belief and commitment.

Difference between Philosophy of Religion and Theology?

- Relationship to a Religious Tradition
 - Theology often happens WITHIN a religious tradition
 - E.g. how do we make sense of the Trinity?
 - Philosophy of religion often doesn't
 - E.g. natural theology, atheistic phil religion, etc.
- Analytic/Continental Divide
 - Philosophy of religion often associated with analytic philosophy
 - Theology often associated with continental philosophy (exception: analytic theology)

Philosophy of Religion: A VERY Brief History

- Plato (mid 400s-mid 300s BCE): Euthyphro dilemma
- Aristotle (384-322 BCE): unmoved mover
- Augustine (354-430): influenced by Plato, free will/foreknowledge
- Anselm (1033-1109): ontological argument (and lots of other cool stuff)
- Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111): a pre-Pascalian wager; a big figure in medieval Islamic scholasticism, which is where the Kalam cosmological argument originates
- Aquinas (1224-1274): basically a Christian Aristotle; 5 ways (basically wrote about everything, ever)
- Teresa of Avila (1515-1582): mysticism, prayer, divine transcendence (*Interior Castle*)
- Descartes (1596-1650): mind-body dualism, args for God
- Pascal (1623-1662): the famous wager
- Leibniz (1646-1716): best possible world
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): God's sovereignty, religious affections
- Hume (1711-1776): religious skeptic, argument against miracles
- Kant (1724-1804): you just have to mention Kant—divine transcendence
- Kierkegaard (1813-1855): fideism
- Simone Weil (pronounced “while”) (1909-1943): influenced by Plato, wrote about creation, divine necessity, etc.

Philosophy of Religion today: Three Main Questions

1. Does God exist?

- a. Arguments for God's existence: ontological, cosmological, fine tuning, moral
- b. Arguments against God's existence: problem of evil, divine hiddenness, ockham's razor

2. What is God like (if God exists)?

- a. Monotheism vs. polytheism vs. pantheism/panentheism
- b. Omniscience (foreknowledge?), omnipotent, omnipresent, omnibenevolent, necessary existence
- c. Classical theism: is God simple? Timeless? Emotional? A person?
- d. Relationship between God and morality

3. Whether and when is religious commitment rational?

- a. Commitment: belief or action
- b. Rational: epistemically, practically
- c. Epistemic stuff: Religious disagreement, religion and science, etc.

There's questions concerning specific religions, too, but these are arguably more philosophical theology.

- Christianity-specific: atonement, incarnation, trinity
- Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism
 - Topics: prayer, afterlife (heaven/hell/reincarnation), creation, evil

See: <https://philpapers.org/browse/philosophy-of-religion>

Philosophy of Religion

Edited by **Thomas Senor** (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville)

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About this topic

Summary The philosophy of religion is the philosophical exploration of religious matters. Conceptual analyses of the varying conceptions of God, philosophical arguments for and against the existence of a deity (or deities), epistemological concerns about the rationality of religious belief, philosophical discussions of the theological claims of religious doctrines, and questions of life after death are among the many topics at home in the philosophy of religion.

Key works While the philosophy of religion in the west dates back to the works of Plato (e.g., [Burnet 1977](#)) and Aristotle ([Aristotle & Lawson-Tancred 1998](#)), it was in the medieval period that interest in religious matters became central in the work of philosophers. [Augustine 2006](#), [Aquinas 1274](#), and [Anselm 1979](#) are classics from that period. The classic from the modern area is [Gaskin 1998/2009](#). In the latter half of the twentieth century, the philosophy of religion came out of hibernation. [Flew et al 1964](#) is a collection in which religious language is considered in light of the verificationism that was rampant at the time. Among the key works published in the final quarter of the century were [Hick 1966](#), [Plantinga 1974](#), [Swinburne 1977](#), [Mackie 1982](#), and [Alston 1991](#).

Introductions A fine introduction to the subject that is historically informed and yet issue-oriented is [Rowe 2001](#).

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- Fine-Tuning in Cosmology* (256) Yann Benétreau-Dupin
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Trending in Philosophy of Religion

Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God.

Over **97,000**
philosophy of
religion
articles (and
they are
helpfully
categorized)!

It's easy to make
philosophical claims /
assumptions without knowing
about the relevant research
that's been done by
professional philosophers!

For example: Pascal's Wager

Many people (especially on YouTube/online) dismiss PW quickly (...if I had a dollar for every time I heard “what about the many gods objection?!”) without paying any attention at all to the relevant academic research. Instead, we should be thinking about questions like:

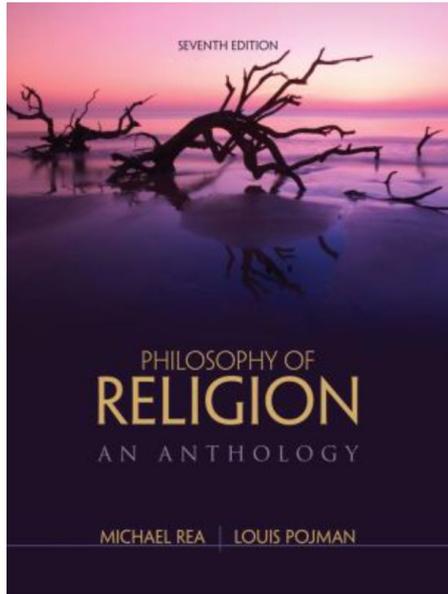
1. Are there stronger versions of the argument I haven't considered?
2. Have my objections to the argument been responded to?
3. And even: are there objections to the argument that I haven't considered?

In the case of Pascal's wager, I find that the answer is normally “yes” to all three. For example:

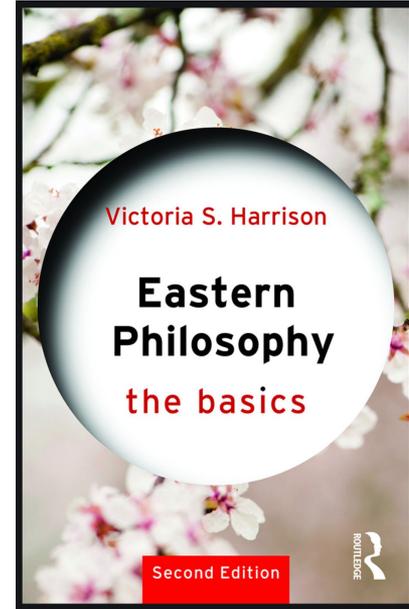
1. Yes, versions of the wager that appeal to commitment/action, epistemic permissivism
2. Yes, most philosophers are well aware of the many gods objection
3. Yes, e.g. the mixed strategies objection is HUGE among philosophers but I rarely hear about it on YouTube

Okay, fine Liz, but how the heck am I supposed to tackle all this research!?

Two books to check out



Rea and Pojman,
“Philosophy of Religion:
An Anthology”



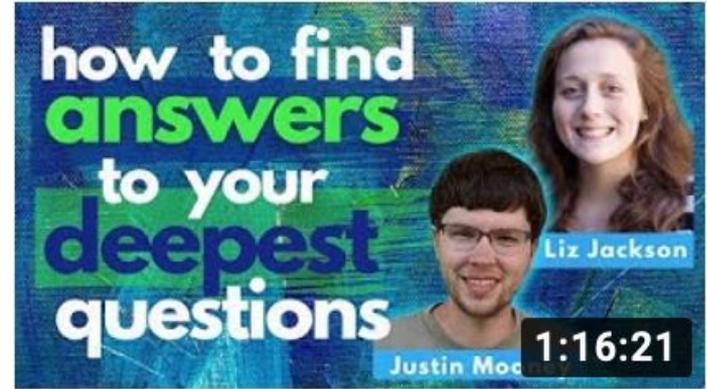
Victoria Harrison,
“Eastern Philosophy:
The Basics”

Where can I learn more?

--More scholarly--

- Top Philosophy of Religion Journals:
 - Faith and Philosophy
 - Religious Studies
 - Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion
 - International Journal of Philosophy of Religion
 - Journal of Analytic Theology
 - European Journal of Philosophy of Religion
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Philosophy Compass
- 1000-word Philosophy
- YouTube channels and podcasts that feature philosophy of religion like Finding Truth, The Analytic Christian, Capturing Christianity, the History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps, etc.

--More accessible--



The Do's and Don'ts of Philosophical Research (Dr....

780 views •

Justin Mooney and I made a video on The Analytic Christian about philosophical research