

## **Final Paper: Reflection and Summary Chapter 3**

### **Do you believe in God?**

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Do you believe in God? If he's real, what does he look like? These major questions discussing the circumstances of a higher being are just some questions philosophers focus on when researching the mystery of God, a topic which is significant in the philosophical subject. When it comes to the existence of God, the variety of arguments and conceptions of this higher being are what can give a greater perspective in determining your own personal beliefs. This belief is what determines whether you identify as a theist, a person who does believe in God, an atheist, a person who doesn't believe in God, and an agnostic, a person who simply is undecided. In chapter 3 of *The Big Questions A Short Introduction To Philosophy*, readers are educated in a variety of topics involving the explanation, beliefs, traditional concepts, reasoning, etc, allowing us to get incite on the central issue having to do with the philosophy of religion, God and its impact on society.

We firstly take a look at the topic of believing in God and focus on how western philosophies define the greater being. They tend to view God as an individual who makes sense of how the universe was created and gives the idea of life a meaning. This belief of God is said to correlate with one's confidence, so philosopher Campus, an individual who strongly believed in the idea of justice, felt as though this could never be his reality and that life was absurd. People also choose to believe in God for the opposite purpose, because they believe that in this world there is no true justice until it comes to God. "To believe that God exists is not the same as to believe in God" meaning that you can believe that his existence is real for hypothetical reasons, but not follow his faith, like philosopher Voltaire did (66). This leads to the idea that if we choose to believe in God as giving life purpose, it doesn't allow sense to be made of all the injustice and unfairness humans face so often. Philosopher Kierkegaard suggested that "believing in God, as a matter of great importance to our view of life, is not just a matter of intellectually accepting the proposition that God exists" but a matter of passion and sense of worth to a higher being(66). To further this discussion and gain perspective on other cultural beliefs of God other than the traditional western beliefs of only one superior being, we must understand that other traditions may have a variety of beliefs of multiple gods or goddesses. Many different religions concentrate their beliefs on the community activity rather than just individual faith. There are religions, such as Greeks and Romans, that choose to distribute the power amongst several different gods and goddesses. When asked the question who is your God, this could translate to which gods or goddesses do you pray to or believe in. The belief of there only being one God and not several is known as monotheism, while the belief of there being several is polytheism.

Geering the attention in western traditional conceptions of God, it is important to focus on the historical and cultural factors that have formed this view. When we learn about God in Islamic and Catholic perspectives, we see that "He is distinctively a male God...and our conception of God is inevitably anthropomorphic" meaning he has few human like

characteristics, rather than Greeks and Romans who are almost wholly anthropomorphic, viewing them as very human-like. Greek gods would often act with human emotions such as jealousy and vengeful actions. However, in Judeo-Christian religions although we believe God has some anthropomorphic features, God is still characterized by only love and acceptance. In the bible it is emphasized that “one of the features of Christianity as it has developed is the strong emphasis on the mystery of God, the fact that it is impossible for us to understand God or comprehend God’s ways”(70). It is also said that God is one who listens to our prayers and cares for all humans. In understanding the history of God and the mystery, we have to say what our conception of what God is. God as a transcendent is a conception of God that emphasizes God as “beyond the ordinary world of human experience, outside of ourselves and distinct from the world God created”(71). This is the conception that also makes people believe that God is a higher being that is present everywhere and not facing the issue of the unknown mystery of God. God as an immanent is a conception where God can relate to humans in everyday tasks and relations with others, being identified as panentheism. This also puts the focus on the idea of relationship. God as a total immanent is a conception that holds the idea that God is everything, and that we are all God, even though God is not a single individual. We all “transcend our limited perceptions and our idea of something outside us and instead come to see ourselves as part and parcel of that great being”(74). God as a universal spirit is a conception that describes humans as being the form of spiritual expression of God, and that this higher being acts through our decisions. This is a more emotional connection. God as a process is that God is not something that is God is not perceived the same at every time of your life, but rather a long process of becoming and development over a period of time. God as a transcendent creator, also known as deism, is the conception that the only true creation God has made is the world. Philosopher Voltaire emphasizes that with this concept that human beings are not characterized by the object of their belief. God as the unknown object of faith is the concept that one is to act as though there is absolute certainty of his existence and that even though God is unknown, he is always present. God as a moral being is the conception that God is a being that has only set the laws for how the universe works but is still one of us and cares about all other beings, yet still has the power to punish those who disobey these laws. With all these conceptions of God come open ended unanswered questions since none of these conceptions can particularly answer every question of who God is and how he works.

We now must take a step further and look at the other side of these conceptions since these conceptions all “seem to be at odds with one obvious fact about the world-evil and suffering flourish” (80). If the argument of evil is true, three aspects of the argument have to be that God can't do anything to fix the hardships, God doesn't know about the hardships, or that God simply just doesn't care. All these seem to be contradictory to the conceptions of God therefore arguments have been made to prove them. One argument is the denial of God, which is an argument that one comes to the conclusion that God's existence isn't real, since God cannot be all powerful, all knowing, and all good. Another argument is that there are two kinds of evil, meaning that many philosophers have tried to distinguish moral evil from non-moral evil. Moral

evil is the outcome of humans' own actions and intentions opposed to non-moral evil which is natural disasters or problems that are out of control of humans. The denial of evil is an argument that was created to completely deny evil as being real, and act as though there is no wrong in the world and to just disregard people's troubles and even your own. The argument of humans living the least of the evils is about how humans were given the best of all possible outcomes of the worlds, and that God had chosen the world where humans endure the least amount of suffering. The aesthetic solution is an argument in which humans are to "take in the big picture in order to see that the beauty and goodness of the whole depend, in part, on the shadows and tragedies that seem to us to be evil"(83). This correlates to the conception of God as a process, since it emphasizes that we as a whole need to take several steps into development. The free will solution is one where God created humans with the choice of free will meaning humans can choose what we want to do with our own actions, also meaning that all the pain and suffering in the world isn't at the fault of God, but at the fault of humans choices. The argument that there will be justice in the afterlife is a solution that emphasizes the idea of there being punishment in the afterlife for those who have chosen to do wrong, and that there is rewards for those who have chosen to do right and be good. This also involves the belief of the afterlife to be real. The solution that God works in mysterious ways is one where we simply just do not understand why God does what he does or how God works, and to just accept the mystery of it all since we should not question this higher being. Some say that this is a solution that was created just because humans simply do not know how to answer these issues and have no idea or the reasoning behind the pain and suffering in the world. Unfortunately, not a single one of these responses is adequate in itself, yet not a single one of the conceptions is a final answer either. This makes it extremely difficult for philosophers to come to a single conclusion on the mystery of God. It is suggested in the textbook that if you choose to have a belief in God, "you should also determine what moral qualities you believe God has and whether these can be made compatible with the existence of evil and suffering in the world"(85). And to those who choose not to believe in God, this problem of evil is just evidence as to how God isn't real. Regardless of whether you choose to believe in God or not, there are still questions behind the reasoning of the pain and suffering this world faces everyday and will continue to be a major aspect in understanding the mystery of God in the subject of philosophy.

We now take a look in the textbook at the faith and reasoning to believe in God, since many people who believe in God see reasoning as only evidence to support his existence, not to contradict it. Some people choose to believe that God is rather rational and we can assure his existence because of our various thoughts about him. On the other hand there are also some people who believe in God but say that it isn't possible for God to be rationally studied. The way we choose to believe God varies on the conception on which you believe is true about him. It goes the same for an atheist when they also have to determine if they do not believe in God, which conceptions of him do they believe are false. This indicates that both believers and nonbelievers are to choose which concessions they choose to not follow. Philosopher Saint Anselm was one philosopher who focused on proving God's existence to be true and developed

several ways that we can see his existence to be true. He is an example of someone who believed in the cosmological argument where it is said that “everything has to be caused or created from something else. Therefore, there must have been a first cause, or what Aristotle called a ‘prime mover,’ and this first cause is God”(87). He also believed that God had basically set the cause of the creation of the universe while also preserving the existence of it. The argument from design is one that is supported by philosopher William Paley, which was that the designer of the entire universe, such as the environment, stars, and human anatomy, was God. The ontological argument is the argument that consists on three different elements being: “1)We cannot conceive of God except as an infinite and most perfect being 2) A being who had all perfections except for the perfection of existence, would not be ‘most perfect’ 3)Therefore, the most perfect being necessarily exists”(90). This argument was created by philosopher Saint Anselm as well, describing that just with logic and every other idea we have formulated about God, is what proves that his existence is real.

There have been several attempts to prove that God is in fact rational, but not from the arguments that were stated. For example philosopher Kant had rejected all of the three arguments and instead believed that “the belief in God is rationally necessary for anyone who would morally be a good person”(91). This idea of rational faith is one that focuses on God's existence having to be proven in order to live a morally positive life. He also believed that there would be no foundation for humans in aspects of things such as justice, without belief in God. another kind a proof that is argued by philosopher Blaise Pascal, is one that is described as “if we believe in God and he exists, we will be rewarded with infinite bliss” and “if we believe in God but he does not exist, then the worst that has happened is that we have given up a few sinful pleasures that we might otherwise have enjoyed”(92). Yet if we believe that God doesn't exist, humans will face a few amount of sins but not ever be punished with eternal damnation. This philosophical argument was later known as Pascal's wager. Since not every argument is based on the belief that God was rational, many had believed that the existence of God did not have to be proven. For example, philosopher Kierkegaard believed that faith was an irrational subject and that trying to prove the existence of God was irrelevant. “For Kierkegaard, faith in God is an intensely personal, passionate concern, not prone to ‘proof’ by any means” making it known that irrational faith was only based on your personal connection with God (93). Another irrational approach known as mysticism is one where “one can come to believe in God by way of special experience or vision that cannot be described or communicated to anyone else”(93). These experiences are known as being ineffable.

When studying how religion has greatly impacted how society works, it is important to remember that not every individual has a religious outlook on how the world works. However, appreciating the power and significance of religion should still take place. The idea of religious tolerance is an important one to grasp since “it is necessary to learn to articulate and understand not only our own religious beliefs, but also those of other people”(95). When religion is thought to be only studied as a form of belief rather than a type of knowledge, it is proven that the idea of religious argument has its limits. When such things as religion take such a toll and important

significance in one's life, usually one would try to convince others to follow their form of beliefs. However, this is something that can lead to an irresolvable conflict because of the abundance of different religions that different cultures around the world may follow. When understanding that, it is also important to see that "mere logic would suggest that it is hard to believe something without believing that it is true" leading to the fact that believing in a certain religion is to believe in its doctrines. So when trying to prove that religious tolerance is indeed possible, we have to face the problem of the emphasis that is put on belief.

With these variety of conceptions and ideas in proving God's existence, one must come to terms with them because of the event that these lead to doubts in the philosophy of religion. For example, well known philosopher Sigmund Freud had believed that "belief in God is irrational because it is a childish illusion that gives us unwarranted and sometimes destructive attitudes and expectations toward life"(97). Another philosopher, Karl Marx, had believed that "belief in God is like a drug, which soothes our suffering but prevents us from seeing the ways in which we can actually improve the world we live in"(97). These are some examples of doubts people can have when studying the philosophy of religion. Even when you have simply chosen to accept the idea of irrational faith being the best possible answer, we also have to remember the importance that religious belief is more than just an illusion because this discredits the people who follow it.

In studying the subject of philosophy, understanding the concepts and historical background explaining the existence of God is crucial to the development of your own beliefs having to do with faith or possible higher being. It was an interesting topic to research because of the variety of explanations of God's existence as well as the counter arguments that disproved them. These explanations are what assist individuals to formulating their own conceptions and choosing which one to follow. It was also important to learn about how the different religions based on cultural differences, may possibly believe in a variety of different gods and goddesses instead of one singular ultimate higher being. It is important to accept all peoples beliefs and explanations on whether or not God's existence is true in order to fully gain perspective and see a broader more philosophical view on the idea of religion,, since religion has such an impact on how society works.

### **Works Cited**

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