

Closer to truth;

an analysis of religious beliefs to eliminate the impossible and identify the probable

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1

Introduction

“When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” -- Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (UK author of Sherlock Holmes stories)

We can use deductive reasoning and other forms of logic and philosophical analysis to eliminate the impossible, the obvious mythological falsehoods found in mainstream religions and arrive at the truth or at least to something closer to the truth by narrowing down the possibilities.

The study of religions and philosophies is fascinating for those who are inquisitive and it is perhaps the highest and most important pursuit of humankind. After all, who wants to spend an eternity in a punishing hell? Or who wants to waste time worshipping a god named Thor so that he won't throw lightning bolts at us, when we can learn that lightning is a normal meteorological activity? So we need to examine and see where we are going or if there is even any afterlife at all. There are so many religions and competing philosophies, which one do we choose? Nearly all humans throughout history have simply accepted the religion they were born into. Such an important matter and left to the whim and chances of who we had for parents? The desire to please parents and the power of tradition and culture have left most humans to do this; to just blindly accept the religion of their birth family.

In fact, often offspring of a family will change their political beliefs and party affiliation to something vastly different from their parents. Yet for religion, they often remain in their birth religion. The power of religion, culture, and tradition is so powerful that you sometimes find a hard-core natural scientist who studied and accepted biological evolution in their studies and research still following and identifying with a religion that rejects biological evolution.

Some religions have adherents numbering in the billions. Can a billion people really be wrong about their beliefs? Yes and appeal to the numbers is referred to as the logical fallacy of *argumentum ad populum*. Not too long ago in history the vast majority of people believed that the earth was flat or that slavery was okay or that the earth was the center of the universe and that all planets and the sun revolved around earth. We know this is not the case today, but these were common beliefs in the past accepted by the majority.

“I was born a Catholic and remained a Catholic until I reached the age of reason. So I was Catholic for about two or two and a half years.” -- George Carlin, comedian and atheist

Allegory of the cave and our cultural lens

The famous Classical Greek philosopher, Plato (5th century BCE) described an allegory of the cave. In this story, there were prisoners chained so that their legs and necks are fixed, forcing them to gaze at the wall in front of them and not look around at the cave, each other, or themselves. Behind the prisoners is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners is a raised walkway with a low wall, behind which people walk carrying objects or puppets "of men and other living things." Plato then supposes that one prisoner is freed, being forced to turn and see

the fire. The light would hurt his eyes and make it hard for him to see the objects that are casting the shadows. If he is told that what he saw before was *not* real but instead that the objects he is now struggling to see are, he would not believe it. In his pain, Plato continues, the freed prisoner would turn away and run back to what he can see and is accustomed to, that is the shadows of the carried objects. He writes "...it would hurt his eyes, and he would escape by turning away to the things which he was able to look at, and these he would believe to be clearer than what was being shown to him." Plato continues: "suppose...that someone should drag him...by force, up the rough ascent, the steep way up, and never stop until he could drag him out into the light of the sun." The prisoner would be angry and in pain, and this would only worsen when the radiant light of the sun overwhelms his eyes and blinds him. The sunlight is representative of the new reality and knowledge that the freed prisoner is experiencing. Only after he can look straight at the sun "is he able to reason about it" and what it is.

Plato continues, saying that the freed prisoner would think that the real world was superior to the world he experienced in the cave; "he would bless himself for the change, and pity [the other prisoners]" and would want to bring his fellow cave dwellers out of the cave and into the sunlight. The returning prisoner, whose eyes have become acclimated to the light of the sun, would be blind when he re-enters the cave, just as he was when he was first exposed to the sun. The prisoners, would infer from the returning man's blindness that the journey out of the cave had harmed him and that they should not undertake a similar journey. Plato concludes that the prisoners, if they were able, would therefore reach out and kill anyone who attempted to drag them out of the cave.

Plato is describing how we are bound by what we experience and what we receive through our senses. If that is limited, we will certainly be limited and so will our knowledge. So we need to open up and broaden our horizons, so to speak.

A similar modern story is a woman who looks out her house window and constantly complains about her neighbors hanging dirty clothes on the clothes line. Then one day she exclaims that they finally put out clean clothes on the drying line. Her husband explains, "*no honey, I just cleaned the windows.*" In the same way, we see the world through our cultural lens of how we were raised. If we are open to examining all cultures, all ways of knowing and beliefs, philosophies and religions, we may arrive closer to the truth. If we limit ourselves, we may be missing out on important truths.

2

Deductive reasoning

First let's look at deductive reasoning.

Deductive reasoning, also **deductive logic** or **logical deduction** or, informally, "**top-down**" **logic**, is the process of reasoning from one or more statements (premises) to reach a logically certain conclusion. It differs from inductive reasoning or abductive reasoning.

Deductive reasoning links premises with conclusions. If all premises are true, the terms are clear, and the rules of deductive logic are followed, then the conclusion reached is necessarily true.

Deductive reasoning (top-down logic) contrasts with inductive reasoning (bottom-up logic) in the following way: In deductive reasoning, a conclusion is reached reductively by applying general rules that hold over the entirety of a closed domain of discourse, narrowing the range under consideration until only the conclusions are left. In inductive reasoning, the conclusion is reached by generalizing or extrapolating from, i.e., there is epistemic uncertainty.

Here is a simple example:

Premise 1. All men are mortal.

Premise 2. Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

The conclusion necessarily follows, i.e., it is logical and sound. We do not need to wait and see if Socrates is going to live forever or die. Once we know that the first two premises are true, the conclusion follows and we don't need to observe Socrates to prove that he is mortal. If however, one or more premises were false, the conclusion would most likely be false too. For example:

Premise 1. All frogs are immortal.

Premise 2. The frog in my pond named Tony is a frog.

Conclusion: Tony is immortal.

The conclusion is logical based on the premises, however, the premises are wrong because we know that frogs are not immortal. This is how many religions operate. They start with false premises. The conclusions of religions sound logical, they sound believable, but they are not if they start with false premises.

Apologetics

All religions have within them stories, fables, and mythologies. These myths serve to provide important proverbs, lessons or are meant as outright historical facts. Due to advances in our knowledge and science and the natural world, many religions have modified their teachings to keep up with the new knowledge. This is apologetics and being politically correct to keep their numbers from dropping in the face of this new knowledge. People most often associate the term

apologetics with the Christian apologetics and theologians around medieval times. However, the term actually is much more broad than that and includes the defense of obscure and archaic beliefs found in all major religions and continues to this day. Efforts are made by the clergy and leaders of all religions to reinterpret their scriptures and doctrines to keep up with the times. Often archaic doctrines are seen as allegory or symbolic. If the doctrine is essential to the teachings, essential to the foundation of the religion, then no scriptural interpretive gymnastics can or should save that religion. The analysis here will not accept religious apologetics if the new interpretation is at the opposition to an essential characteristic of the religion.

The author, neuroscientist, and philosopher Sam Harris has bluntly noted that fundamentalist religionists are following their religion correctly and it is the liberal and moderate followers of religions who are doing a disservice by not following their religion correctly and in effect keeping the extremist religions alive. If religions were seen as they really are, Harris argues, the archaic beliefs could finally be set-aside once and for all.

For the analysis here if the allegorical and symbolic accounts are not an essential facet of the religion's doctrine, then it will be considered to 'make the cut' in our elimination of the impossible as we narrow down the probable religious tenets.

Deductive reasoning #1

Premise 1. Biological evolution is a scientific fact.

Premise 2. Evolution includes the human species.

Premise 3.. Humans are members of the Animal Kingdom, not a separate kingdom

Conclusion 1. Any religion x which speaks of a supreme being in human terms is at odds with the facts of biological evolution.

Conclusion 2. Any religion x which does not consider animals as spiritual beings is at odds with the facts of biological evolution since humans are animals and evolved from animals.

The single most significant secular discovery in the history of humankind was Charles Darwin's evidence and writings in support of biological evolution in 1849. It was earth shattering and devastating and widely opposed and continues to be opposed due to its devastating effect on the teachings of so many religions. The evidence is however, overwhelming in favor of biological evolution and Darwin himself had to hurry and publish his findings because other scientists were getting ready to publish their own findings around the same time.

In actuality, a theory that has such tremendous support and physical evidence as is the case with biological evolution, is not even supposed to be called theory anymore, but rather, the law of biological evolution. The voices of some groups of people with dogmatic ideas are preventing the term to be correctly transferred from theory to law. The full subject of biological evolution is too lengthy and holds too much evidence to be placed in an essay such as this. Therefore, I will just briefly touch on a few points. The major driving force of biological evolution is natural selection. It is not that complicated, it simply states that the gene pool of a species can make gradual changes as a species adapts to an environment. For example, there are numerous species (nearly all) today that have different kinds of defense mechanisms against their predators, be it the ability to change colors or some other form of hiding. The species was not made that way, but rather evolved to those characteristics over millions of years. Members of the species which did not have those defense mechanisms were more likely to be killed for food from their predators and thus, were not as likely to pass on their genes. The biggest

misunderstanding that people have about biological evolution is that they expect to see some sort of transitional forms or they believe that evolutionary theory is that one species becomes another. One species may gradually change over millions of years to produce another species, but the old species still exists until some other later event leads them to extinction.

Chimpanzees, gorillas, and monkeys are not on an evolutionary path to become human beings. We as humans simply share common ancestors with other apes and much further in the past, to all animals.

What exactly is the definition of a transitional form? For most people, this means the intermediate state between the physical form from one species to the next. People may not like to hear this, but when you look into a mirror, you are looking at a transitional form. There is no final, perfected state for any species, including humans. Everything is impermanent and always changing. Our human gene pool is changing all the time. Assuming humans could still be around one million years from now or more, our species would most likely look a little different. Those humans of the future would look back on our fossils and call us the transitional form. Currently there are over two million species of life on this planet. Most of the species on this planet are insects or plants. This two million figure represents just one percent of all the species that has ever lived. Therefore, 99% of all the species that have lived on Earth are now extinct. Their fossil record remains, but there is no live specimen to view to see a transitional form. If you really want to see a transitional form, just look in a mirror.

Premise 3 above states that Humans are members of the Animal Kingdom, not a separate kingdom. This is the accepted truth of all natural scientists. Humans are not in some separate kingdom of life. Scientists typically divide all life on earth into the kingdoms of: animal, plant, algae, bacteria, fungi or some other variation with microorganisms making up one or more of the five or six kingdoms. In all variations of the classifications, the humans are placed in the Animal Kingdom. Therefore, we are animals. We happen to be quite intelligent animals compared to other species, but we are still animals, in the class of mammals, and order of primates. Like other mammals the female humans have breasts for breastfeeding infants and humans have numerous other similarities to other animals as well.

Conclusion 1 above states that Any religion x which speaks of a supreme being in human terms is at odds with the facts of biological evolution. This is because evolution works through natural means, it is not Divinely directed or designed. In fact, evolution is sometimes chaotic, involves random mutations and sometimes includes regressive features. For examples underground moles had eyesight but evolved to not having any sight since it was not a feature that was needed in their evolution as they moved around underground in darkness.

If the earth was created by some Divine being or Divine force, it could not be some being in anthropomorphic form. It cannot be some deity that looks like a human being or even remotely looking like a human form. This is because the evolution of the most dominant species could have taken any multitude of possible turns during the course of biological evolution. Any religion that claims such is then in the category of the impossible and should be discarded. For example, in Greek mythology there were numerous reports of anthropomorphic gods impregnating virgins and creating hybrid god-human children. For example, Dionysus is said to be the son of Zeus and a mortal human and the story existed over a thousand years before the Christian myth of the immaculate conception of Jesus.

There are numerous Christian apologetics who do accept biological evolution and follow liberal denominations of Christianity. However, the divinity of Jesus is considered such an essential feature to the religion of Christianity that I consider no apologetics for this faith acceptable on this issue and therefore, Christianity falls into the category of Greek mythology and one of the impossibles and removed from further consideration as for having any potential religious truth to it. The New Testament was actually originally written in Greek and not any Semitic language.

The Gospel of Thomas and other Gnostic texts and gospels, recently found, do not include any of the stories of the miracles or immaculate conception, were written in Coptic, a Semitic language of Egypt, close to Palestine / Israel where Jesus lived. The Gnostic sect of Christianity originated around the time and death of Jesus and is not a new religious movement and is a very good contemplative religion.

Conclusion 2 above states Any religion x which does not consider animals as spiritual beings is at odds with the facts of biological evolution since humans are animals and evolved from animals.

An understanding and acceptance of the theory of evolution is important because without that acceptance there is a perception of a great separation between humans and animals which simply is not true.

If animals are not spiritual beings subject to a heaven or hell or to rebirth; if animals do not have a soul, then neither do humans. The human species evolved from other species of animals. We are animals, members of the Animal Kingdom. If humans are spiritual beings, then so are all animals. You can't have it one way for humans and another way for animals; since we are all animals, we either are all spiritual beings or we are all not spiritual beings.

The philosopher and neuroscientist Sam Harris has noted this point too and mentions in his talks when debating about the concept of God; he asks why does a God who allegedly created the entire universe of billions of galaxies and billions of planets, so concerned with a species of primates that happens to exist on one single planet? In other words, why wouldn't this God also be concerned with the multitude of other animals when we in fact are animals too, just one species, one member out of many in the Order of primates? Why would this one species be singled out for so much attention and concern and not the others?

Therefore, only religions which have this all or none which is inclusive of animals make the cut of this conclusion number 3. The atheists make the cut since they are in the camp of all of us (humans and animals) not being spiritual beings (the none category). Eastern religions which believe in rebirth or reincarnation and include a progression where animals are spiritual beings too and move up and progress via good karma, good deeds and thus, that inclusiveness allows them to make this cut of conclusion number 3.

Mainstream Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam and several others are eliminated since they do not accept animals in the realm of the spiritual; as spiritual beings, even though humans are in fact, animals. Many Confucianists most likely do believe in reincarnation, but this is mostly from the influence of Taoism and Buddhism among the Chinese and the Confucian religion itself is almost entirely devoted to the human realm and social structure of humans.

Among the Western monotheistic religions I am certain there are some clergy and leaders who do accept animals as spiritual beings; they might even say that dogs go to some doggy heaven or join their human masters in heaven (how convenient, what the gullible want to hear and what about the ticks and the fleas?) or other nonsense, but this is not the fundamental nature of the religion and simply an apologetic. Or they might say that they are open to reincarnation among animals, but again, this is at complete odds with the foundation of the religion.

However, there are some contemplative mysticism type movements within the Abrahamic family of religions which tend to reject the creationist theories and focus more on contemplative practices, including meditation. These include Kabbalah, Sufism, and Gnosticism and they make the cut in this analysis since they are open to the idea of reincarnation or even outright accept it as part of their doctrines.

Deductive reasoning #2

Premise 4. The size of the observable universe is at least 91 billion light years in diameter.

Premise 5. Over 1900 planets have been identified in over 1200 planetary (solar) systems.

Premise 6. There are likely billions and billions more, just not currently observable or identified yet.

Premise 7. It would be improbable for life *not* to exist somewhere other than Earth.

Conclusion 3. Any religion x which has a simplistic creation myth where this myth is essential to the social order of how said religion recommends ordering society, is false.

Conclusion 4.. Any religion x which has a holy land or holy language or other holy place on earth is not universal, i.e., the religion could not exist on another planet.

Conclusion 5. Any religion x which has a holy final prophet or messiah which exists on earth is not universal.

Premises 4, 5, and 6 are known scientific findings, observed with high powered telescopes, including those in space. Premise number 7 is an actual statement made by many prominent scientists including Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking. There are so many planetary, solar systems in our galaxy and universe that there is bound to be some that have at least one planet at the right distance from the star (sun) to make life possible, not too cold (too far from the sun) and not too hot (too close to the sun).

Numerous religions have creation myths similar to the one found in the Bible. Now with the advance of knowledge and scientific findings, we again find the leaders of religions engaging in apologetics, stating that the myths are allegory, symbolic and not meant to be taken literally. This would be okay if the myths did not make demands on the ordering of society. We often find that the creation myths do in fact attempt to justify one group over another for example into different caste systems which are hereditary (Hinduism) or into chosen people (Judaism).

Christian fundamentalists have correctly noted that their Christian faith cannot be true if there were life on some place other than earth, for there can be only one Christ, only one holy land, one messiah. In Islam there is reference to Muhammad being the final or seal prophet. There can also be no other seal prophet on some other planet. For there to be religious, spiritual life on other planets and not negate religions on this planet, the religion here would need to be polytheistic at a minimum or otherwise allow for the teachings to exist on other planets. For example, in Jainism and Buddhism, it is stated that their founders, Mahavira and Buddha were just teachers of the masses in a long line of other teachers. These teachers of the masses appear when the true teachings have died out and the teachers renew interest in the philosophy

and way of life. Buddha and Mahavira did not say that they were the first teacher of the masses, nor did they say they were the last. The Buddhist and Jain scriptures do not prohibit the concept or idea that there could be other planets with intelligent life and a Buddha or Mahavira type teacher there, teaching the masses. In fact, some of their teachings even refer to other “world systems” possibly implying other planets and solar systems.

Shintoism and some forms of Hinduism and their precursors (Japanese folk religion and Brahmanism) are eliminated since their creation myths are essential to their religions and at odds with having a more universal religion which could exist on another planet. However, Hinduism is a vast, very diverse religion and there are certainly some modern Hindu movements and schools of Hinduism which could be described as universal and are based on the continuation of some ancient schools of Hinduism. Therefore, some of the modern movements which are universal, do not have creation myths and are based on continuing some ancient Hindu schools are added to the list.

Animism / Shamanism is one of the oldest religions on the planet, being the primary practice of indigenous peoples. It is actually a pretty good religion, accepting other animals on almost an equal footing with humans. It is largely responsible for the success of the New Age movement, which borrows a lot of practices from Animism. In many animistic world views, the human being is often regarded as on a roughly equal footing with other animals, plants, and natural forces. Therefore, it is morally imperative to treat these agents with respect. In this world view, humans are considered a part of nature, rather than superior to, or separate from it. Many people today no doubt see animism as primitive or backward, but it is actually quite advanced, making the cut up to this point in this analysis with its acceptance of animals and nature into the realm of the spiritual.

The remaining religions which survive the cut of this analysis have numerous things in common and could be said to be all in the Dharma family of religions or are contemplative wings of the Abrahamic religions. The Dharmic religions all, originated on the Indian subcontinent. Besides the Abrahamic contemplative sects, the only other exception is Taoism, which is an ancient Chinese religion, however, it has been heavily influenced by Dharmic religions and could be said to be very similar and possibly in the same family of beliefs as other Dharma religions. Even the belief in no god and no religion can be said to be a belief system and also quite possibly originated on the Indian subcontinent as there were philosophical groups known as materialists who regularly engaged in debate with other gurus and philosophers in ancient India, including debates with Mahavira or one of his followers and the Buddha or one of his followers.

3

Burden of proof and the existence or non-existence of God

This brings us to the discussion of the burden of proof in religious doctrines and why the atheist group is still here in our final analysis.

Theists (those who believe in a one creator God) often say that atheists haven't proven that there is no God. The problem with that statement is that you cannot prove a negative. It is not the atheists' duty to prove that there is no God. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof or evidence. It is the duty of the theists to prove that there is a God, which they have not done.

The famous English philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) came up with the following analogy (known today as Russell's teapot) to describe the importance of this burden of proof:

"I ought to call myself an agnostic; but, for all practical purposes, I am an atheist. I do not think the existence of the Christian God any more probable than the existence of the Gods of Olympus or Valhalla. To take another illustration: nobody can prove that there is not between the Earth and Mars a china teapot revolving in an elliptical orbit, but nobody thinks this sufficiently likely to be taken into account in practice. I think the Christian God just as unlikely."

Some modern atheists have further satirized this to say that they follow the FSM (Flying Spaghetti Monster) as their God; to say that there is just as much proof for the FSM as there is for the theists' God.

The Dharmic family of religions that made the final cut all do not accept a single creator God and in fact many are non-theistic or outright atheistic, including Jainism and Buddhism. In Jainism, Buddhism, and some of the other Dharmic religions there is said to be some divine beings known as devas, devis or other celestial beings, but they are just as much part of the rebirth process and karma as the rest of us, not an all-powerful creator-God.

Some Dharmic religions are pantheistic, including the more Hindu based movements and Sikhism, but still rejecting the traditional anthropomorphic God found in the Judeo-Christian monotheistic religions.

There have been numerous attempts to deductively prove or disprove the monotheistic creator-God concept over the centuries, so in this next part we will examine these arguments.

Some silly arguments for the existence of God

Over the years, people have come up with some creative, silly arguments for the existence of God in an attempt to prove that atheism is wrong. The examples below defy basic laws of logic

and contain the most basic of logical fallacies, making the argument invalid, unsound, illogical and in many cases, rather silly.

1. Transcendental argument, a.k.a. presuppositionalist (1) If reason exists then God exists. (2) Reason does exist. (3) Therefore, God exists.

Unwarranted assumption fallacy

2. Cosmological argument, a.k.a. first cause argument (1) If I say something must have a cause, it has a cause. (2) I say the universe must have a cause. (3) Therefore, the universe has a cause. (4) Therefore, God exists.

Affirming the consequent fallacy

3. Ontological argument (I) (1) I define God to be X. (2) Since I can conceive of X, X must exist. (3) Therefore, God exists.

Affirming the consequent fallacy

4. Ontological argument (II) (1) I can conceive of a perfect God. (2) One of the qualities of perfection is existence. (3) Therefore, God exists.

petitio principii begging the question fallacy

5. Modal ontological argument (1) God is either necessary or unnecessary. (2) God is not unnecessary, therefore he must be necessary. (3) Therefore, God exists.

petitio principii begging the question fallacy

6. Argument from design, a.k.a. God of the gaps, a.k.a. teleological argument (I) 1) Check out the world/universe/giraffe. Isn't it complex? (2) Only a supreme being could have made them so complex. (3) Therefore, God exists.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc after this, therefore because of this fallacy

7. Argument from beauty, a.k.a. design/teleological argument (II) 1) Isn't that baby/sunset/flower/tree beautiful? (2) Only a loving creator could have made them so beautiful. (3) Therefore, God exists.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc after this, therefore because of this fallacy

8. Argument from miracles (I) (1) My aunt had cancer. (2) The doctors gave her all these horrible treatments. (3) My aunt prayed to God and now she doesn't have cancer. (4) Therefore, God exists.

Anecdotal fallacy, faulty generalization - cherry picking fallacy (ignores the other numerous examples of atheists and others who also go into remission and never prayed)

9. Moral argument (I) (1) Person X, a well-known atheist, was morally inferior to the rest of us. (2) Therefore, God exists.

Argumentum ad hominem

10. Moral argument (II) (1) In my younger days I was a cursing, drinking, smoking, gambling, child-molesting, thieving, murdering, bed-wetting bastard. (2) That all changed once I became religious. (3) Therefore, God exists.

Anecdotal fallacy

11. Argument from intimidation, a.k.a. Tomas de Torquemada's argument (1) See this bonfire? (2) Therefore, God exists.

argumentum verbosium, argument by intimidation fallacy

12. Argument from numbers (1) Billions of people believe in some sort of supreme being. (2) They can't all be wrong, can they? (3) Therefore, God exists.

argumentum ad populum fallacy

13. Argument from incomplete destruction (1) A plane crashed killing 143 passengers and crew. (2) But one child survived with only third-degree burns. (3) Therefore, God exists.

false attribution fallacy, ludic fallacy, overwhelming exception fallacy (a very rare event when only one survives and even when this does occur, it still proves nothing)

14. Argument from possible worlds (1) If things had been different, then things would be different. (2) That would be bad. (3) Therefore, God exists.

false dilemma fallacy

15. Argument from crockery (1) Pots don't go around giving orders to the potter who made them. (2) Therefore, God exists.

false attribution fallacy

16. Argument from creative interpretation (1) God is: (a) The feeling you have when you look at a newborn baby. (b) The love of a mother for her child. (c) That little still voice in your heart. (d) Humankind's potential to overcome their difficulties. (e) How I feel when I look at a sunset. (f) The taste of ice cream on a hot day. (2) Therefore, God exists.

false attribution fallacy

17. Argument from postmodernism (1) I'm going to prove to you that God exists. (2) [Insert any of the other arguments on this page in here.] (3) [Atheist refutes argument.] (4) I cannot prove there is a supreme being any more than anyone of us can prove we really exist in a tangible world. (5) Therefore, God exists.

Onus probandi fallacy, the burden of proof is on the person who makes the claim

18. Argument from fortuitous coincidence (1) What are the odds of that happening? (2) Pretty long, I'll bet. (3) Therefore, God exists.

Gambler's fallacy

19. Argument from mysterious use of prepositions (1) It is impossible to disprove God with your puny human intellect unless you are above God. (2) Are you higher than God? (3) I'll take that puzzled look on your face as a 'No.' (4) Therefore, God (being the highest thing ever) exists.

thought terminating cliché fallacy

20. Argument from hurt feelings (1) God exists. (2) [Atheist makes counterarguments.] (3) I am deeply offended that you do not believe what I do. (4) Therefore, God exists.

argumentum ad misericordiam, appeal to pity fallacy

Below each "point" is listed the fallacy of how the argument fails to maintain basic logic and therefore, the arguments can be easily dismissed. Numerous other fallacies could have been listed as well as most of the above have multiple logical fallacies and not just one violation of presenting a logical argument. For example, virtually all of the above have some combination of the following logical fallacies: anecdotal fallacy, appeal to probability, unwarranted assumption fallacy, affirming the consequent, appeal to ignorance, ad hominem, begging the question, circular reasoning, assuming the conclusion, false attribution, false equivalence, false analogy, and wishful thinking fallacy.

Reasonable arguments for existence of God

There are some arguments that are not as silly as those listed above, composed by such great thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, Descartes, and others.

1. The unmoved mover argument asserts that, from our experience of motion in the universe (motion being the transition from potentiality to actuality) we can see that there must have been an initial mover. Aquinas argued that whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another thing, so there must be an unmoved mover.

2. Aquinas' argument from first cause started with the premise that it is impossible for a being to cause itself (because it would have to exist before it caused itself) and that it is impossible for there to be an infinite chain of causes, which would result in infinite regress. Therefore, there must be a first cause, itself uncaused.

3. The argument from necessary being asserts that all beings are contingent, meaning that it is possible for them not to exist. Aquinas argued that if everything can possibly not exist, there must have been a time when nothing existed; as things exist now, there must exist a being with necessary existence, regarded as God.

4. Aquinas argued from degree, considering the occurrence of degrees of goodness. He believed that things which are called good, must be called good in relation to a standard of good—a maximum. There must be a maximum goodness that which causes all goodness.

5. The teleological argument asserts the view that things without intelligence are ordered towards a purpose. Aquinas argued that unintelligent objects cannot be ordered unless they are done so by an intelligent being, which means that there must be an intelligent being to move objects to their ends: God.

The above arguments state that there must be a first cause to which atheists have responded that making God the first cause just deflects immediately and appropriately to who caused or created God. The theists reject an infinite regress but grant the God concept immunity from that.

Other arguments deal with intelligent design, history and other factors which are similar to the silly ones listed previously and are not very convincing as they use anecdotal evidence and appeal to mass support and emotion, which are fallacies.

Arguments against the existence of God

1. The argument from inconsistent revelations contests the existence of the deity called God as described in scriptures; such as the Hindu Vedas, the Jewish Tanakh, the Christian Bible, the Muslim Qur'an, the Book of Mormon or the Baha'i Aqdas; by identifying apparent contradictions between different scriptures, within a single scripture, or between scripture and known facts. To be effective this argument requires the other side to hold that its scriptural record is inerrant, or at least to assert that a proper understanding of scripture gives rise to knowledge of God's existence.

2. The problem of evil contests the existence of a god who is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent by arguing that such a god should not permit the existence of evil or suffering. The theist responses are called theodicies.

3. The destiny of the unevangelized, by which persons who have never even heard of a particular revelation might be harshly punished for not following its dictates.

4. The argument from poor design contests the idea that God created life on the basis that life forms, including humans, seem to exhibit poor design.

5. The argument from nonbelief contests the existence of an omnipotent God who wants humans to believe in him by arguing that such a god would do a better job of gathering believers.

6. The argument from parsimony (using Occam's razor) contends that since natural (non-supernatural) theories adequately explain the development of religion and belief in gods, the actual existence of such supernatural agents is superfluous and may be dismissed unless otherwise proven to be required to explain the phenomenon.

7. The analogy of Russell's teapot argues that the burden of proof for the existence of God lies with the theist rather than the atheist. The Russell's teapot analogy can be considered an extension of Occam's Razor.

8. Who created God? Stephen Hawking and co-author Leonard Mlodinow state in their book *The Grand Design* that it is reasonable to ask who or what created the universe, but if the answer is God, then the question has merely been deflected to that of who created God. In this view, it is accepted that some entity exists that needs no creator, and that entity is called God. This is known as the first-cause argument for the existence of God. Both authors claim however, that it is possible to answer these questions purely within the realm of science, and without invoking any divine beings. Some Christian philosophers disagree.

9. The Ultimate Boeing 747 gambit is a counter-argument to the argument from design. The argument from design claims that a complex or ordered structure must be designed. However, a god that is responsible for the creation of a universe would be at least as complicated as the universe that it creates. Therefore, it too must require a designer. And its designer would require a designer also, ad infinitum. The argument for the existence of God is then a logical fallacy with or without the use of special pleading. The Ultimate 747 gambit states that God does not provide an origin of complexity, it simply assumes that complexity always existed. It also states that design fails to account for complexity, which natural selection can explain.

10. The omnipotence paradox suggests that the concept of an omnipotent entity is logically contradictory, from considering a question like what Homer Simpson asked in *The Simpsons*: "*Can God make a burrito so hot that even he can't eat it?*" Either way you answer, God becomes limited.

11. The problem of hell is the idea that eternal damnation for actions committed in a finite existence contradicts God's omnibenevolence or omnipresence.

12. A perfect, permanent being or thing cannot be alive argument suggests that for something to be perfect and permanent, it would have to be dead. Anything that is alive is always changing and thus, God who is said to be perfect could not be alive, which is contradictory to the theistic position.

13. The human frailties paradox notes that God is supposed to be all-powerful and all-wise, yet has many human frailties, including anger, jealousy, and a very bloated ego. There are numerous stories of him being angry, punishing innocent people (killing first born Egyptian sons), demolishing whole cities (according to religious scriptures) and announcing his jealousy of other gods and demanding continual praise of himself through prayers and devotion to him daily, several times a day. If a human had such characteristics, people would most likely call him mad (insane) and demand he take some psychotropic drugs.

4

Pantheism and non-theistic spirituality

The above arguments for the existence of God and against the existence of God are primarily to a God as a person, as a being, as someone who sits in judgment. In many cases such a God is seen in anthropomorphic terms (looking like a man; also referred to as belief in a “personal God”). As we have seen earlier, such a theory can easily be dismissed since at the time of earth’s formation, there was no way of knowing what the dominant, most intelligent species would end up looking like. At several points along the progress of evolution, there could have been different mutations, a different turn of events. Natural scientists have correctly shown that there is no direction, no design, no designer to how evolution proceeds and it went on naturalistic methods of gene pool selection and other biological processes.

Another form of theism, not overtly discussed in the arguments for and against is known as pantheism.

Pantheism is the belief that the Universe (or nature as the totality of everything) is identical with divinity, or that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent God. Pantheists thus do not believe in a distinct personal or anthropomorphic god. Some of the Asian Dharmic religions that we have remaining in our analysis of the probable are considered to be pantheistically inclined.

Pantheism was popularised in the West as both a theology and philosophy based on the work of the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, whose book *Ethics* was an answer to Descartes' famous dualist theory that the body and spirit are separate. Spinoza held the monist view that the two are the same, and monism is a fundamental part of his philosophy. He used the word God to describe the unity of all substance. Although the term pantheism was not coined until after his death, Spinoza is regarded as its most celebrated advocate.

There are elements of pantheism in Hinduism, Animism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, Kabbalah-Judaism, Sufi-Islam, Gnostic-Christian, neo-paganism, Theosophy, and some modern religious movements, especially those that are syncretic and mix one or more religions or beliefs. Buddhism, Jainism and some other contemplative traditions additionally show that there are spiritual paths without theism of almost every kind, being primarily non-theistic.

Hinduism

Hindu religious texts are the oldest known literature containing pantheistic concepts. The Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism teaches that the Atman (true self; human soul) is indistinct from Brahman (the unknown reality of everything). The branches of Hinduism teaching forms of pantheism are known as non-dualist schools. All Mahāvākyas (Great Sayings) of the Upanishads, in one way or another, seem to indicate the unity of the world with the Brahman. It further says, "This whole universe is Brahman, from Brahman to a clod of earth."

Taoism

In the tradition of its leading thinkers Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi, Taoism is comparable with pantheism, as the Tao is always spoken of with profound religious reverence and respect, similar to the way that pantheism discusses the "God" that is everything. The Tao te Ching never speaks of a transcendent God, but of a mysterious and numinous ground of being underlying all things. Zhuangzi emphasized the pantheistic content of Taoism even more clearly: "Heaven and I were created together, and all things and I are one." When Tung Kuo Tzu asked Zhuangzi where the Tao was, he replied that it was in the ant, the grass, the clay tile, even in excrement: "There is nowhere where it is not... There is not a single thing without Tao."

Jainism

The Uttaradhyana Sutra provides an account of Gautama (a Jain, not Gotama-Buddha) explaining the meaning of nirvāṇa to Kesi, a disciple of Parshva:

"There is a safe place in view of all, but difficult of approach, where there is no old age nor death, no pain nor disease. It is what is called nirvāṇa, or freedom from pain, or perfection, which is in view of all; it is the safe, happy, and quiet place which the great sages reach. That is the eternal place, in view of all, but difficult of approach. Those sages who reach it are free from sorrows, they have put an end to the stream of existence." (Uttaradhyana Sutra 81-4)

Sikhism

Sikhism advocates the belief in one panentheistic God (Ek Onkar) who is omnipresent and has infinite qualities, whose name is true (Satnam), who is beyond the time (Akaal), who has no image (Murat), who is beyond from birth and death circulation (Ajunee), who is self-existent (Sai Bhang) and with the grace of word guru (eternal light) we can meet him (Gurprasaad). Sikhs do not have a gender for God, nor do they believe God takes a human form. According to the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, the supreme purpose of human life is to reconnect with Akal (The Timeless One), however, egotism is the biggest barrier in doing this.

Buddhism

Buddhism is much more complex and varied compared to the religions mentioned above. This is not to praise or condemn it, just a statement of fact. Buddhism comes in numerous varieties of Buddhist schools and traditions, some which focus entirely on meditation and others that do not practice meditation at all and simply chant a prayer or mantra.

The two major schools of Buddhism are Theravada and Mahayana. The Theravada is generally considered older and closer to how the Buddha and his monks and nuns practiced.

Buddhist monks, nuns, priests, and scholars both monastic and lay have varied opinions on the nature of the goal of Buddhism, namely Nirvana (Nibbana in the Pali language). There are numerous orthodox Theravadins who hold a view that Nirvana is the end of suffering, the end of existence, but argue that it is not annihilation since there was no permanent-self / soul to begin with. Other Theravadins hold a view of a subtle type of existence, not a capital I as in a soul, but some form of continuation that is not describable in our everyday language. Other Buddhists, including some Mahayanists hold a more polytheistic type view of existing in a Buddha-realm, a

sort of heavenly area beyond the normal heaven realms, for enlightened ones to go and do good works.

Pantheistic elements are more rare in Buddhism as compared to the other Dharmic religions, but there are still some elements of it found in the teachings and among some of its adherents.

The Buddha said:

“Everything exists: That is one extreme. Everything doesn't exist: That is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata (Buddha) teaches the Dhamma (Dharma) via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications . . .” (continues with Dependent Origination formula). (Samyutta Nikaya 12.15)

The Buddha answers no to the following 4 questions / possibilities (Majjhima Nikaya 72 also in Samyutta Nikaya 44.11):

- After death a Tathagata (Buddha) exists: only this is true (The Buddha answers "No")
- After death a Tathagata does not exist: only this is true (The Buddha answers "No")
- After death a Tathagata both exists & does not exist: only this is true (The Buddha answers "No")
- After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true (The Buddha answers "No")

The Buddha is apparently deliberately being vague since no terms in conventional language can do it justice to describe Nirvana. In other Suttas the Buddha argues against nihilism which suggests that Nirvana is not nihilistic.

Note the passage above from the Buddha, that exist or doesn't exist doesn't apply, that he teaches *"the Dhamma (Dharma) via the middle."* Can this middle be a subtle existence in a pantheistic way, not as an individual existence but as some form of universal consciousness / the divine? We cannot know for sure without glimpsing Nirvana for ourselves. There is a Mahayana Buddhist passage/riddle that goes: *How do you stop a drop of water from drying up? Answer: By placing it in the sea.*

Pantheists sometimes describe the union with the divine as a drop (the mind) entering the divine ocean, no longer existing in an individual sense but still existing in some way. Those holding this view in Buddhism have the following additional quote to support that view: *"Just as the river Ganges inclines toward the sea, flows towards the sea, and merges with the sea, so too Master Gotama's assembly with its homeless ones and its householders inclines toward Nibbana (Nirvana), and merges with Nibbana (Nirvana)."* (Majjhima Nikaya 73.14)

The somewhat famous Pabhassara Sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya (1.49 to 1.52) refers to a "luminous mind" (bright or shiny) which has been referenced as referring to Buddha-nature by Mahayana Buddhists and also to a pure mind (not defiled; a "true self") by some Theravada Buddhists. The Buddha stated: *"Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is freed from incoming defilements."* Pantheists sometimes refer to the mind as a "spark (or shiny element, aspect) of the divine."

Atheist scientific-materialism

Atheists are opposed to all theistic concepts and although the pantheism belief is not a personal (anthropomorphic) God, the atheist would still say that it is a religious concept and that there is no proof for that.

Surprisingly, however, we find a sort of pantheistic element even in scientific-materialism. Scientific-materialism is a worldview which holds that there is nothing but natural elements, principles, and relations of the kind studied by the natural sciences, i.e., those required to understand our physical environment by mathematical modelling. Scientific-materialists state that the only thing that exists is nature (nothing supernatural).

World famous astronomer and astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, Ph.D. has stated:
“The atoms of our bodies are traceable to stars that manufactured them in their cores and exploded these enriched ingredients across our galaxy, billions of years ago. For this reason, we are biologically connected to every other living thing in the world. We are chemically connected to all molecules on Earth. And we are atomically connected to all atoms in the universe. We are not figuratively, but literally stardust.”

The above quote is science of course and true and it shows that we are literally connected to all other living things on earth and in the universe. The pantheistic view would agree with this and be compatible with this scientific truth.

Pantheism conclusion

None of the above discussion and analysis in any way proves pantheism as a true belief. It does offer however, a potentially viable, probable divine concept to those who crave for some sort of divinity in their spiritual lives. And it may in fact be correct, but it is not testable either empirically nor by deductive reasoning. It does bypass some of the well-thought out deductive reasonings for not accepting an anthropomorphic God concept and therefore, remains a potentially probable belief, i.e., it is not eliminated as one of the impossible beliefs in our analysis.

Also, the non-creator, non-theistic views of Jainism and Buddhism also remain in the probable of philosophical views regarding theism and atheism. Jainism and Buddhism assert a religious and virtuous life is possible without the idea of a creator god and still have beliefs in an elaborate cosmology, reincarnation, karma, and Nirvana for the release from rebirth. The non-emphasis on theism in Jainism and Buddhism is by their rejection of a creator-God and the focus on the suffering inherent in life and the way out of suffering. As to the origin of the universe, the Jains and Buddhists do not get concerned with that and the Buddha is quoted as saying:

“there is no first beginning, no first beginning is knowable.” Samyutta Nikaya 15.1-2

5

Karma and reincarnation

A common belief running through the Dharmic religions is that of reincarnation (or rebirth) and karma. Such deeply religious concepts cannot be proven, nor can they be disproven, although there have been attempts to prove reincarnation with regression under hypnosis and other methods, using questionable techniques which are scoffed at by skeptics and atheists. The most notable research was done Ian Stevenson, a psychologist, Ph.D. and professor at a prestigious, accredited university, however, skeptics to this day still scoff at the findings, believing such alleged recall of past lives to be done through suggestion and / or prior research of the alleged past lives.

By using deductive reasoning we might be able to deductively find support (not proof) for reincarnation and karma.

Deductive reasoning #4

Premise #11. Actions have consequences. People do all kinds of things, positive and negative and the results of that are consequences, positive and negative.

Conclusion #7. The universe operates on the principle of causes and effects; things tend to equalize out for the best.

Conclusion #8. Karma and reincarnation is one potential answer to how some beings are born in one life over another. Karma explains how good happens to those who are good; bad happens to those who are bad and reincarnation explains why some are born with certain inequities, advantages and disadvantages.

Most religionists (followers of any religion) would most likely agree that the premise above is correct, that actions do have consequences. Atheists and agnostics would also agree that actions have consequences. They would argue that the consequences are from living in a society with rules and regulations. For example, if you violate the law, you get punished by society, sent to prison or fined or some other punishment. The atheists and agnostics might have a little harder time accepting that it is a natural law, however that there are always consequences. One need not look to studies to find the results of actions and their consequences. One only needs to look at their very own common emotional states, be it anger, jealousy, hatred, lust, etc. and see that they have negative consequences. One can also look and analyze some wholesome emotional states and see positive consequences to such things as altruism, kindness, generosity, etc. One can see the results for oneself. In addition, there actually have been some studies examining subjects who were generous and altruistic and the studies have found greater happiness in those who engaged in altruistic and generous actions.

And most would also agree that the world is somewhat just, that there is a sense or type of justice as good are rewarded and bad are punished. It could be from a Divine being or an automatic natural process such as karma. The problem with the Divine being and one-life explanation is that it does not adequately explain why some are born with some inequities, be it something physical, something mental, differences in intelligence, or be it differences in family

wealth to which they are born. And then as we have seen earlier, humans are animals too and if we include other animals, then why would some beings be born as some marine animal who lives a very short life in the deep ocean versus some other being who is born as an elephant or another in a wealthy human family. The equalizer could be karma and reincarnation.

Actions cause consequences. One need not experience full recollection of past lives to realize this. One can look at just the present life. People make wrong choices, and unfavorable things happen. We see people inherit hundreds of thousands of dollars or hear of some professional athletes earning hundreds of millions of dollars. Those that made bad choices, addictions, binge spending, showing off with million dollar cars, etc. and then they lose it all. In some cases, they have gone to homelessness. There are real cases of people earning and then losing hundreds of millions of dollars.

However, there is also the important principle of compassion. This does not mean we ignore them and blame them. We still should have compassion and do what we can. We are all "six degrees of separation" apart and in some cases probably less than that. Just a few right or wrong choices, right or wrong decisions and a poor person could be rich or a rich person could be poor.

Even among human births there is a wide disparity of advantages and disadvantages, well beyond economic differences. There are some babies who die within their first year of life without ever uttering a single word, no experience of their first day at school, their first date, their first job, career, etc. And then there are billions of others who live a very long life well into their nineties or beyond enjoying good health and happiness all the way to the end of their life. If there were only one life, it would be a very cruel universe indeed to have so many beings have a short life filled with intense suffering while others enjoy a long life of mostly contentment and happiness. If there is karma and reincarnation, then all of this equalizes out over the long run of a course of multiple successive lives. All of the Dharmic religions accept some form of karma and reincarnation.

Again, it should be noted that this set of deductive reasoning, although logical, does not prove karma or reincarnation, since we are coming to a conclusion that there are consequences to actions in the world and universe. As an academic exercise, we are going with that conclusion, but it is yet to be determined if the universe does operate on this principle all the time. An atheist would argue that this is arguing for a universal justice principle and that justice is a human concept, made-up and that we all are here by chance. And they very well may be right as it is difficult, if not impossible to fully prove any remaining religious doctrines or truths beyond what has been done so far. It is true that justice is a human concept however, the actions of karma and reincarnation are considered natural laws, simply consequences from actions. It is after the consequences that humans attach labels including justice to the actions. A better way of understanding karma and reincarnation is simply calling it the results, the consequences of actions. It just so happens that the results give the appearance of justice and then human beings put that label onto those results and consequences.

A further look at Karma

Re-birth (or alternatively, reincarnation) is on the same page so to speak with karma as they go together to provide one possible explanation for the disparities and inequities among beings, human and animal. It is difficult for some people to accept, especially those raised in a tradition

or culture that taught there is only one life or even among those who were not raised in such a belief system, but are simply skeptical of such religious concepts.

In science and in nature there are many examples of how life energies are transformed and proceed in cycles. There are the seasons which come and go. Consistently every 10,000 years or so there has been an ice age on this planet. Nature tends to act in cycles. Plants reproduce themselves with the coming and going of the seasons. All of the circular movements in nature give some evidence of the circular teachings found in karma and rebirth. Some people have trouble with the idea of changing forms in the process of re-birth.

Water is a bunch of molecules of hydrogen and oxygen, just as we are a bunch of various molecules. Water can take the form of fluidity (water as we typically know it), a solid form in ice, and a gas form by the steam or vapor that it sometimes forms. It is the same water in its molecules, but in the different forms or bodies of liquid, solid, and gas.

There is another example of these changing forms, not just of molecules and physical formation as in water, but also in the animal kingdom. A butterfly is an example of a complete change in physical appearance from one form to another. The butterfly starts as an egg or cocoon. It then becomes a caterpillar, then a pupa, and finally a butterfly. It goes through four stages in a complete metamorphosis. It appears to be the same being but actually has a completely different form of existence and body at each stage. At one stage it is crawling on the ground and at another it is flying in the air. The human fetus, like other mammals goes through similar changes inside the mother's womb. It goes from embryo to a fetus with webbed hands and feet like a reptile. At early stages a tail can be seen on the human fetus which eventually enters the body to become the tail bone. These are examples of metamorphosis or drastic changes, with the being appearing to be the same person. Re-birth is no different.

Nothing in nature gets destroyed, it only gets transformed. Another way of calling it is that it gets recycled. Some water in a river evaporates. It does not disappear. It becomes a cloud. Then it rains down, it grows crops, which later becomes food which we eat. And then our bodies take the nutrients and the rest goes to a bowel movement in the toilet. From there the waste goes to a sanitation district where the water is purified and sent back to a reservoir or lake or river and the process starts again. The same is true for even large objects. They do not get destroyed, but rather transformed. They might become dust or even if they are burned, they become gaseous vapors transforming or recycling yet again.

Current scientific knowledge suggests that as planets and solar systems perish (which they all do eventually), the remnants are asteroids and space dust. Eventually the space dust reconstitutes and forms new stars, new planets and the process starts over again. All of nature proceeds in a circular recycled fashion, similar to rebirth.

The above circumstantial phenomena of nature of course does not prove rebirth. Rebirth cannot be proved or disproved with our current scientific findings and knowledge. We can provide some evidence, however, for karma.

Karma (kamma in Pali) is simply cause and effect. One thing happens and produces an outcome. This is the same in science. In the laboratory or outside, one thing causes another. Or sometimes multiple factors cause an outcome or outcomes. In a laboratory you can add certain chemicals to others and produce a product that is highly different from the factors which were introduced.

Karma involves cause and effect, but it is important to note that this does not necessarily mean a single cause phenomena. Every event can have multiple causes. For example, a person may catch a cold. This does not necessarily mean that it is because of karma, from some bad deed performed earlier. There are multiple causes or reasons that may have contributed to the catching of a cold, including weather, accidental exposure to sick people, low immunity, or some other reasons. In modern science and scientific method, scientists rarely try to explain a certain phenomenon by explaining a one singular cause. Multiple factors are examined. In the Buddhist doctrine of karma there are five levels of cause and effect, including, the physical world, biological world, psychological world, karma, and the Dharma. Karma is only one of the levels of cause and effect and does not explain everything.

This cause and effect phenomenon is no different from karma. It orders and balances life the same way. Our karmic energies are subject to the choices we make. We do not need to speculate on an individual's karma, but we can look closely at our own lives. We have all made mistakes in life. Take a look at some of your choices you made in life. You do not need to wait to be re-born to experience your karma. The results of karma show their face rather quickly.

Perhaps you made a greedy choice at one time in your life. Maybe you tried to buy something for a very cheap price, hoping to save some money. You may have bought something of poor quality in a hope to save money for a gift for someone or for yourself. The product goes bad in a short time and there is little or no warranty. You are left to go out and buy the product you should have bought the first time. You experience karma first hand by paying almost double for one product that was supposed to save you money. Or perhaps you or someone you know became addicted to drugs or liquor. The addiction consumes them and causes all kinds of repercussions to personality, work performance, interpersonal relations. Consequences can include divorce, loss of wealth, income and numerous other things. Or one might eat too much animal protein, high fat foods and then later suffer obesity, heart disease and other problems.

There are numerous examples of mistakes we sometimes make. Especially when there seems to be some immorality present, the karmic effects take their toll. So many pleasurable experiences that have immorality with them end in large amounts of pain and suffering. Thus, you discover the effects of karma for yourself and change your life accordingly.

Newton's third law of motion states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Gravity and this law of motion are just natural laws of the universe. There is no supreme deity that makes these forces work. Karma works under the same process. It is simply a natural law. Can you imagine a supreme deity sitting in judgment, rewarding and punishing every behavior of every person on the planet or to all beings on all planets? Or even rewarding and punishing all people upon their deaths would be an impossible task as there are countless beings dying every second. Karma is just an automatic process that is a part of the natural laws of the universe in a similar way that gravity and the laws of motion work.

It is true the term justice is a human construct, but one need not refer to karma as justice. Karma is simply the effect, the result of actions. Humans can later interpret the results with such labels, but karma is not that; it is simply natural results from actions.

Atheism is partially eliminated from our analysis due to the role of consequences and the likelihood of karma being a natural law. However, it is not completely eliminated as there are elements of atheism in the Dharmic religions. This is especially true of Jainism and Buddhism

which are known as non-theistic religions with no creator-god. The other Dharmic religions are pantheistic, which rejects an anthropomorphic (human looking) god.

6

Dharma Paths

Dharmic religions or **Dharma Paths** are those that fit into the Dharma (Pali: Dhamma) category of religions and include those that originated on the Indian subcontinent. Taoism is included here since although it is of Chinese origin, it was heavily influenced by Dharmic religions and shares many common themes found in Dharmic Paths. Perhaps as many as hundreds of millions of people, especially in China follow a blend of Buddhism and Taoism (and Confucianism).

Unlike the Abrahamic religions which have a long history of intolerance toward each other, the Dharmic religions have mostly lived in peace with each other. This may be due to the fact that the Dharmic religions are mostly polytheistic and sometimes atheistic. Some historians have suggested that religions with the idea of only one god makes all others, even those who believe in god, to be inferior, since it is not the “correct” god, making the monotheistic trend toward intolerance of other religions. Other possibilities could be the Dharmic religions’ emphasis on ahimsa (nonviolence). Another or additional possibility is that the Dharmic religions do not believe that followers of other religions are barred from heavenly realms. Buddhism and the other Dharmic paths insist that anyone leading a good, moral life can have favorable rebirth in heaven or elsewhere. The ultimate goal is nirvana (Pali: nibbana) in all of the Dharmic religions.

Ahimsa

Ahimsa is a Dharmic term (Pali, Sanskrit) for non-violence, non-harming, non-injuring and compassion. The Dharmic religions all highly emphasize ahimsa, in fact more so than all of the major world religions.

Violence only begets more violence in a revenge game that never ends. Many great spiritual beings and political leaders have advocated non-violence, civil disobedience and anti-war policies. This includes, but is not limited to: Mahavira, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Jesus, Leonardo da Vinci, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and many more.

Meditation

Another key characteristic of the practice of Dharmic religions is meditation. All Dharmic religions focus on meditation; typically meditation is the primary practice with little to no prayers as part of their practice. If prayers really worked there would be no need for doctors, nurses, even hospitals. Numerous people have regained health from serious illness, those that prayed, had people pray for them and those that never prayed. It is the fallacy of anecdotal evidence to claim that prayer works when it does in isolated incidents. Meditation, on the other hand has proven effective for overall mental and physical health, not as an alternative to normal treatments, but as a spiritual exercise. Numerous benefits have been identified and are too many to go into great detail in an essay like this. Consult the internet or the library for the numerous references on the positive benefits of meditation.

Religions, sects, denominations that make the final cut

The religions listed below make the final cut of this philosophical analysis and can be considered to be “Closer to Truth” in that they are on the Path to awakening, a full understanding of religious and philosophical truths. Several make the final cut and are worthy of further study, practice and insight into their methods of discovery.

The Dharma family of religions

Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Hinduism, including new Hindu reform movements (Self Realization Fellowship, Transcendental Meditation, etc.), Sikhism

The above 5 religions represent the Dharma family of religions and as shown above are close to the known truth. They are also the most nonviolent, all following the principles of ahimsa and the Golden Rule, extending even to animal, insect, and plant life, as much as possible. The Dharmic religions are the closest to the known truth; that is to the truth we have from the natural sciences about how the world operates and how metaphysical principles might work and which religions are the most compatible to what we know to be certain about our natural world and universe.

The remaining groups of religions, Animism and Western mysticism religions accept karma and reincarnation in varying degrees among their varieties and many of their varieties still include some creation myths, however, they are still good practices to follow as they utilize the meditative, contemplative component and have utilized many Dharmic practices and truths in their syncretic forms.

The Dharma of Atheism

Atheism is technically not a religion, but it does have similarities. It is a belief system; that is the beliefs that there is no creator-god and that the complete truth cannot be known, at least not the metaphysical truths. Atheism makes the final cut as well as the Dharmic religions and contemplative religions due to the open-mindedness of this belief system and the self-responsibility it accepts. In a discussion about theism and morality a British-born Buddhist monk who studied under the famous Mahasi Sayadaw remarked:

“Then there are the many wars waged in the name of religion due to false beliefs and bigoted views. It may be much easier for the sceptical atheist or secular humanist to understand the Dhamma than for the devout follower of any religion (and that includes devout followers of Buddhism who are hypocrites). Believing in an Omnipotent Creator God is quite different to believing in devas or ghosts, or nature spirits of various kinds. The crucial point is accepting full responsibility for one’s own actions according to the teaching of Kammassakatta Sammādiṭṭhi (a Buddhist discourse of Theravada Buddhism). It doesn’t matter too much what else you believe in or don’t believe in, as long as you believe that you alone will inherit the results of volitional actions of body, speech, and thought done by yourself.”

(Bhikkhu Pesala

<http://dhammadownload.com/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=15942#p227849>)

In spite of holding to no religion whatsoever, atheists tend to be quite moralistic, ethical, following general principles for the betterment of society. They also look to no higher power

which can be a good thing in at least two important ways. One, they do not hear voices telling them who to kill or wage war against and two, they take full responsibility for everything in their life. If something goes bad they don't blame the devil or spend hours, days and years praying for a different result. They do the hard work and make the conditions to improve their life and others they care for.

In addition, we have seen that many Dharmic religions are non-theistic or even outright referred to as atheistic since there is no creator-god. The famous Kalama Sutta discourse of the Buddha states:

“Do not believe in something because it is reported. Do not believe in something because it has been practiced by generations or becomes a tradition or part of a culture. Do not believe in something because a scripture says it is so. Do not believe in something believing a god has inspired it. Do not believe in something a teacher tells you to. Do not believe in something because the authorities say it is so. Do not believe in hearsay, rumor, speculative opinion, public opinion, or mere acceptance to logic and inference alone. Help yourself, accept as completely true only that which is praised by the wise and which you test for yourself and know to be good for yourself and others.” (Anguttara Nikaya 3.65)

Many Buddhists have found much to praise in the Kalama Sutta for its rationality, allowing investigation and a healthy skepticism for keeping an open mind. In this same Sutta, the Buddha advises that even if rebirth were not true, if there is no afterlife, then the teachings are still helpful for happiness and contentment in this life and people should still practice and see for themselves.

It is good to be skeptical and have an open mind, however too much skepticism and one will not progress. The person with too much doubt is like a person driving a car who doesn't take his foot off the brake. He refuses to take it off, not knowing or afraid of what might happen. He sees a green light but knows that the green color has no intrinsic meaning and is culturally based. It might mean stop in one culture or go in another. He has no faith or confidence that the cars going the other way are stopped or will stop. So he keeps his foot on the brake. He goes nowhere. Another person has a good balance of some skepticism and confidence. He has confidence in the people who placed the signs that they did so at the right places. He follows those signs. He trusts that the signs will take him to the place where he is supposed to go. He is also careful, so when he enters the intersection, he still checks with his head and eyes to make sure it is clear. He gently puts his foot on the accelerator. He progresses toward his destination.

In the same way, in this simile the signs are the writings of the Dharma gurus and teachers, especially the founders of the Dharma religions. One takes a healthy skepticism mixed with some faith and confidence and tests it for themselves.

Certainly not all atheists, but a fairly good number of atheists, including Sam Harris, practice some forms of meditation. Many do so for the health benefits and the calm it brings to body and mind.

Animism / Shamanism / New Age

Long considered a backward and primitive set of beliefs by Christian missionaries and others, Animism, traditional indigenous beliefs and modern New Age practices make the final cut here. The beliefs of these practitioners are not primitive or backward at all. They are very in tune with

nature, often seeing all of nature as God or the Divine and they hold great respect for all of nature and are generally very peaceful.

Western mysticism religions and movements

The Gnostic school of Christianity, The Sufi school of Islam and the Kabbalah school of Judaism are the main forms of Western mysticism. They all practice forms of meditation, generally accept or are open to karma and reincarnation and are peaceful.

There are also modern religious movements which are offshoots of the above three and can be said to also be closer to truth.

Contemplative traditions

The above religions, denominations, or sects have the common denominator of being contemplative traditions; that is practicing some form of meditation. And with that typically comes doctrines of karma and reincarnation and the ever important ahimsa; nonviolence.

Each contemplative tradition can be seen as a technique for different temperaments. Different strokes for different folks. They are all good. All head toward heavenly realms and / or nirvana. Some take a short path, some take the scenic route.

7

Life of Pi conclusion

The 2012 movie *Life of Pi* (based on the 2001 novel) was nominated for 11 Academy Awards including Best Picture and won four. It involved a storyline of an Indian man named Piscine Molitor "Pi" Patel, living in Canada and telling a novelist about his life story and how at 16 he survives a shipwreck in which his family dies, and is stranded in the Pacific Ocean on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. In his childhood Pi studies and practices various religions in his search for the truth. We see him studying and practicing Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. In the beginning we see him eating vegetarian and near the end of the movie he is still eating vegetarian, apparently indicating that he remains a Hindu, but after careful investigation of many religions. In his journey across the ocean we see him having many adventures for survival with the tiger. He keeps his faith and struggle, not giving up due to his faith in God and his spiritual life. He sees the beauty of nature and the adventures on an island as signs of the Divine and this keeps him inspired to keep going and save himself and then animals on the boat with him.

When insurance investigators question him about his story they appear to be skeptical of his story. Pi explains how it could be explained in a much more simple fashion, but you would get the same result. The ship still goes down and he ends up to safety on a lifeboat. Pi explains (in so many words) how one story is rather stale and boring and the other is colorful and interesting and both stories end to the same result. One way to interpret this is that we are all going to die. No one escapes this world alive. We might continue in some form, but who we are now; our name, our family, our culture, our personality, will be gone. We all end to the same result. How we choose to live the journey is what we must decide. Do we go on thinking that this is it and that there is no hope. Or do we take a more colorful journey of self-exploration, contemplation, spirituality, happiness and community. Life is beautiful, suffering, pleasant, unpleasant, full of hardships, things to overcome and everyone has a story about life to give it meaning. We can take a cold, dry, atheistic type view of life OR we can take a colorful, cheerful and meaningful story. The choice is ours, so why not choose the amazing. By being on a spiritual path, you give life some color, cheer, and meaning; as opposed to a dry, depressing, atheistic view of the universe with no meaning.

Some surveys have been done asking people which they would prefer: to be smart or to be happy. The results were divided almost equally with about half choosing to be happy and half choosing to be smart rather than happy, with a slight edge for the majority choosing to be smart. Many brilliant, very intelligent people are atheist including Stephen Hawking and Neil deGrasse Tyson and most scientists. So we want to be smart, but our preference should be wisdom and happiness. As shown earlier, Dharmic religions tend to be atheistic or non-theistic or at least reject a creator-god. Thus, we can have a rich spiritual life and still be atheistic (smart) and then also happy. In Dharmic religions and other contemplative religions there is still a sense of the Divine with either pantheism, panentheism, polytheism (impermanent devas) and/or Deism.

It is good to be happy and people want happiness, but if we follow a path of pure hedonism, we are leading a life not different than any lower animal. All animals seek sleep, pleasure and food and there are some humans who do nothing but this too. Sure they might go to work, make a

living, but it is for the benefit of having funds for seeking further things and pleasure which they believe will give them more happiness. Happiness is a two sided coin or similar to the actor's masks. There is happiness and there is also sorrow and unpleasantness when we do not get what we want or when the activity doesn't continue or in a myriad of other ways. The contemplative traditions teach us the power of the present and remaining in equanimity, unphased by the vicissitudes of life.

By living a spiritual life you can be **smart and happy**. May you come closer to truth and be happy *too*.