

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

A journey through one thousand years of intellectual history, exploring the intersection of faith and reason from medieval scholasticism to modern enlightenment.





THE VALUE AND TASK OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION

WHY PHILOSOPHY MATTERS

Philosophy serves three essential purposes: it provides intellectual exercise, helping us develop mental agility and discernment. It acts as navigation, showing us where we stand on the intellectual map. Most importantly, for Christians, it helps us see faith in proper perspective.

THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH

Following Anselm's principle: "**I believe in order that I may understand.**" We don't prove first, then believe. Rather, faith provides the foundation from which understanding grows. The task is analyzing the act, content, and presuppositions of belief.

INTRODUCTION: CHRISTIANITY AND PHILOSOPHY

THE CHALLENGE

Some Christians view philosophy with suspicion, fearing it undermines faith. Yet avoiding philosophy makes one vulnerable to unconscious influence by hostile ideas.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Since all truth is God's truth, philosophy can deepen our understanding. Historical debates have shaped Christian theology, making philosophical awareness essential.

THE TENSION

Throughout history, well-meaning voices from both sides have warned against union between faith and philosophy. Yet this intersection raises unavoidable questions.

The apostle Paul warned against philosophy "according to human tradition" (Colossians 2:8), yet the Christian faith inevitably raises philosophical questions about knowledge, existence, and truth that demand careful examination.

MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY: THE ROOTS OF MEDIEVAL THOUGHT

The Middle Ages witnessed an unprecedented synthesis between Christian faith and philosophical inquiry. This period, spanning roughly from the 5th to 15th centuries, established patterns of thought that would influence Christianity for centuries to come.

1 — **AUGUSTINE (354-430)**

The pivotal bishop of Hippo shaped theology through Scripture-based reasoning, addressing Manichaeism, Pelagianism, and developing Christian philosophy of history.

2 — **GREEK INFLUENCE**

Plato's theory of Forms and Aristotle's concepts of causation permeated medieval thought through figures like Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius.

3 — **SCHOLASTICISM**

Medieval schools developed systematic approaches to defining Christian understanding of reality, each with distinctive methods but shared concerns.



AUGUSTINE: THE FOUNDATION



FROM WANDERER TO WITNESS

Augustine's journey from Manichaeism through various philosophies to Christianity transformed not just his life but Christian thought itself. His *Confessions* remains one of history's greatest spiritual classics.

Against the Manicheans, he argued that evil is privation of good, not an eternal principle. Against Pelagians, he insisted that salvation comes through God's grace alone. His *City of God* pioneered Christian philosophy of history.

Both Catholicism and Protestantism trace roots to Augustine — the former emphasizing his high view of church and sacraments, the latter his teachings on God's sovereignty and human sinfulness.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY'S MEDIEVAL LEGACY

PLATO (427-347 BC)

Reality consists of eternal spiritual Forms, with the visible world being mere shadows. This idealism profoundly influenced Christian theology through Neo-Platonism.



ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC)

Ideas exist only in individual objects. His concepts of causation and the Unmoved Mover shaped medieval arguments for God's existence.

BOETHIUS (C.480-524)

Transmitted Greek philosophy to Latin West through translations and original works. His *Consolation of Philosophy* became a medieval classic.



MEDIEVAL METAPHYSICS

Medieval thinkers were preoccupied with metaphysics rather than physics — not with natural phenomena but with the relationship between natural and supernatural, temporal and eternal.



THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALS

When we speak of "goodness" or "greenness," does something beyond individual green or good things exist? This question divided medieval philosophers into three camps.



REALISTS

Following Plato, argued that universals are real — that eternal archetypes somehow bring particular things into existence.



NOMINALISTS

Rejected universals entirely. Only individual things exist; general terms are merely convenient ways of speaking about collections.



CONCEPTUALISTS

The middle way: universals belong to thought but represent real unifying features that exist in the diversity of experience.

ANSELM AND THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT



Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109)

Italian-born, became Abbot of Bec in Normandy and Archbishop of Canterbury during Norman England.

TWO LASTING CONTRIBUTIONS

- **Why God Became Man:** A logical demonstration of the necessity of the atonement based on God's character and human sin
- **The Ontological Argument:** An attempt to prove God's existence from the concept of "that than which nothing greater can be conceived"

The argument fascinates: if we can conceive of a perfect being, and existence is a perfection, then that being must exist. Critics from Aquinas to Kant have attacked it, yet it continues to intrigue philosophers.

ANSELM'S FAMOUS MOTTO

CREDO UT INTELLIGAM

"I believe in order that I may understand"

This principle challenged medieval natural theology. According to Karl Barth's interpretation, Anselm wasn't trying to prove God's existence through reason alone, but rather to demonstrate that once we know who God is through faith, we cannot rationally deny Him.

This approach — faith seeking understanding rather than proof seeking belief — aligns with the Reformers, Puritans, and evangelicals throughout history. It's the method we find in Scripture itself.

THOMAS AQUINAS: THE ANGELIC DOCTOR

LIFE AND LEGACY

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Italian Dominican friar, studied under Albertus Magnus. His massive *Summa Theologica* — 60 volumes in its critical edition — became the foundation of modern Roman Catholic theology.

Called the "Angelic Doctor" and "Universal Doctor of the Church," his synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian doctrine dominated Catholic thought.

MAJOR WORKS

- *Summa contra Gentiles* — missionary handbook
- *Summa Theologica* — systematic theology masterwork

His thought combines Scripture, church tradition, and philosophy (especially Aristotle) into comprehensive system addressing all theological questions.



THE FIVE WAYS: AQUINAS'S PROOFS FOR GOD

01

FROM MOTION

Everything in motion must be moved by something else. There must be an Unmoved Mover — God.

02

FROM CAUSATION

Every effect has a cause. Nothing causes itself. There must be a First Cause — God.

03

FROM CONTINGENCY

Things exist but might not have. There must be a Necessary Being — God.

04

FROM DEGREES OF PERFECTION

We judge things as more or less good. There must be a Perfect Standard — God.

05

FROM DESIGN

Natural objects show purposeful design. There must be an Intelligent Designer — God.

These arguments appear plausible but contain logical flaws. They don't prove the Christian God specifically, and they contradict their own premises by positing an uncaused cause.



AQUINAS ON ANALOGY

When we speak of God, we face a linguistic challenge. Our words aren't used **univocally** (meaning exactly the same as in ordinary usage) nor **equivocally** (meaning something completely different). Instead, religious language is **analogical**.

1

THE PROBLEM

When we call God "Father," we don't mean a biological human parent. Yet we're not speaking meaninglessly either.

2

THE SOLUTION

Analogy: God is neither totally like nor totally unlike the best human fathers. There are genuine points of similarity.

3

THE VINDICATION

This works because God has revealed Himself in action and word. Our language corresponds to reality through revelation and experience.

MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY'S RELEVANCE

TWO APPROACHES TO TRUTH

Natural Theology (Aquinas): First establish God's existence through reason, then build Christian doctrine on that foundation. A "two-story" approach — reason on the ground floor, faith upstairs.

Revealed Theology (Anselm): Faith and reason work together. Belief enables understanding. Truth emerges through living the faith.

THE HISTORICAL IMPACT

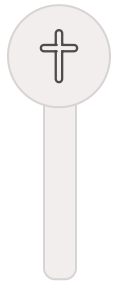
Aquinas's approach was officially endorsed by the First Vatican Council (1870) and continues to shape Catholic apologetics. Pope Paul VI (1963) declared his teaching "valid for all time."

The danger: mixing Christian revelation with foreign philosophy produces confused theology. When philosophy is later discredited, critics wrongly think they've refuted Christianity itself.

FROM REFORMATION TO ENLIGHTENMENT

THE CRADLE OF MODERN THOUGHT

The three hundred years from Reformation (16th century) to Enlightenment (18th century) formed the crucible of modern thought. These centuries witnessed three major tides:



REDISCOVERY OF GOD

The Reformation's recovery of Scripture and personal relationship with God through Christ, continued in Puritanism and Evangelical Revival.



INTEREST IN THE WORLD

Renaissance humanism and rise of modern science. Nature studied for its own sake as God's creation, not merely as evidence of the Creator.



RISE OF SECULARISM

Gradual pushing of God to the periphery as science explained more, culminating in declarations of human independence from divine authority.



PHILOSOPHY AND THE REFORMERS

Luther's famous last sermon in Wittenberg attacked reason as "the Devil's Whore." His writings overflow with harsh words for Aristotle: "destroyer of sound doctrine," "filthy pagan," "mere sophist." This earned him a reputation as an irresponsible irrationalist.

"When I was a monk, they despised the Bible. No one understood the Psalms. They believed the Epistle to the Romans contained controversies about Paul's day and was useless for our era. It was Scotus, Thomas, and Aristotle who had to be read."

But Luther wasn't condemning reason as such — only its abuse. Reason has its proper sphere in science and daily life. But it's not the sole criterion of truth. The true target was philosophy usurping revelation's place.

LUTHER'S THREE LIGHTS



LIGHT OF NATURE

Reason and common sense suffice for many everyday questions. The natural realm where human judgment functions adequately.



LIGHT OF GRACE

Revelation in Scripture gives knowledge of God otherwise unattainable. This is where faith enters, not as blind leap but as response to God's self-disclosure.



LIGHT OF GLORY

Belongs to the future. Many questions remain unresolved — like God's sovereignty and human responsibility — awaiting final resolution.

God has revealed in Christ all that man needs to know. Philosophy has its place, but Scripture provides life's orientation. "It is dangerous," Luther warned, "to investigate pure divinity by human reason without Christ the mediator."

CALVIN'S APPROACH



A DOUBLE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

General Awareness: All humans possess an inner consciousness of God. Creation's glory reflects the Creator. Yet sin has dulled our spiritual sensitivity.

Special Revelation: God has revealed Himself through Scripture, not just as Creator but as Redeemer in Christ. The Bible speaks relevantly to all ages.

Like Luther, Calvin held that faith precedes understanding. We encounter God personally through His self-revelation in Christ and Scripture, then reflect philosophically on that encounter.



RATIONALISM: THE CONTINENTAL APPROACH

While 16th-century Reformers focused on God, 17th-century rationalists became fascinated with the world. These weren't irreligious men — God held a place in their thought — but the problem shifted from personal relationship with God to understanding the universe's rational structure.

Rationalists believed in the universe's rationality and reason's power to comprehend it. Given correct data, one could map reality through proper logical deductions. Their techniques derived from mathematics, especially geometry.

RENÉ DESCARTES: FATHER OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY



René Descartes (1596-1650)

French philosopher, mathematician, military dilettante. Invented coordinate geometry. Pioneered rationalism and Cartesian doubt.

THE DAY IN THE STOVE

Winter 1619-20: Descartes spent a day meditating in a heated room. Emerged with his philosophy essentially complete. His principle: "Never accept anything as true unless I know it clearly to be such."

His method modeled on mathematics: "The long chains of simple and easy reasoning by which geometers reach their most difficult demonstrations led me to imagine that all things knowable by men follow in the same way."

COGITO ERGO SUM

I THINK, THEREFORE I AM

01

UNIVERSAL DOUBT

Descartes doubted everything possible — perhaps the world is mere illusion or dream. How can we be certain it exists?

02

THE INDUBITABLE

One thing cannot be doubted: the fact that I am doubting. The act of thinking proves my existence. *Cogito ergo sum.*

03

PROVING GOD

Combined causal and ontological arguments: the idea of an Infinite Being implies His existence. A Perfect Being must exist.

04

GUARANTEEING KNOWLEDGE

Since God is perfect, He wouldn't deceive us. Our clear and distinct ideas must be true. Reality is secure.

Descartes represents a watershed. Unlike medievals seeking God, he invoked God as a device (*deus ex machina*) to guarantee worldly knowledge. God retreats to the background.



DESCARTES' LEGACY: A DISASTROUS DAY

Archbishop William Temple once speculated: What was the most disastrous moment in European history? His answer: the day Descartes shut himself in that heated room.

Descartes epitomized a shift in focus — from God to self, from revelation to individual consciousness. He established individual consciousness as truth's final criterion. Though he believed he'd firmly grasped objective reality, he actually drove a wedge between mind and world.

The rationalist method dominated continental European philosophy, especially Germany, until late 18th century. Even when abandoned, many continued taking individual self-consciousness as starting point and sole reference.

SPINOZA: PANTHEISTIC RATIONALISM



Benedict (Baruch) Spinoza (1633-1677)

Born in Amsterdam to Jewish parents, expelled from synagogue for freethinking. Pioneer in biblical criticism.

Despite logical flaws, Spinoza fascinated 19th-century idealists. The idea of a single spiritual reality encompassing God and man, explaining everything through one system, dazzled philosophical minds — even when disconnected from historical Christianity.

THE IDENTITY OF GOD AND NATURE

Spinoza taught that only one Substance exists: that which exists and is conceived by itself. This Substance can be called either God or Nature — they're identical.

"Everything that exists is in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God. God is the immanent, not transient, cause of all things."

Whether we say "God" or "nature" makes little difference — just a shift in emphasis. God doesn't exist outside nature but within it. The system is as impersonal and mechanical as a theorem.



LEIBNIZ: UNIVERSAL GENIUS

G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716) was a Protestant polymath: co-discoverer of calculus (with Newton), pioneer in symbolic logic, inventor of calculating machine, fellow of the Royal Society, founder of Prussian Academy, diplomat, and philosopher.

THE MONAD THEORY

The universe consists of infinite "monads" — simple substances without parts or "windows" through which anything could enter or leave. Each monad mirrors total existence.

ASCENDING SERIES

Monads form a hierarchy from lowest (almost nothing) to highest (God). God is the Necessary Being, the "original simple substance" from which all created monads derive.

PERFECT MECHANISM

Everything functions as perfect clockwork where "sins carry their punishment by nature's order, and noble actions attract rewards by mechanical means."

RATIONALISM'S FATAL FLAW

Today rationalism stands discredited philosophically and theologically — for the same fundamental reason: **it's impossible to construct maps of reality starting with mere concepts and *a priori* definitions without checking whether theories match experience.**

PHILOSOPHICAL FAILURE

Rationalists were wrong trying to provide metaphysical understanding of natural order purely through abstract reasoning. Reality must be tested against observation.

THEOLOGICAL FAILURE

The rationalist god was a hypothetical abstraction — a *deus ex machina* invoked to make the system work, not the God encountered personally in history and present experience.

When later thinkers rejected rationalism and undermined traditional proofs for God's existence, many felt they'd eliminated God and religion entirely, leaving no alternative to agnosticism or frank atheism.



PASCAL: THE HEART HAS REASONS

LIFE AND FAITH

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662): contemporary of Descartes, mathematician, scientist, Catholic. In 1646 contacted Jansenism (emphasizing human need for divine grace). November 1654 experienced definitive conversion: discovering "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the god of philosophers and scientists."

MAJOR WORKS

- *Provincial Letters* (1656-57) — defending Jansenism
- *Pensées* — unfinished apology for Christianity, consisting of brilliant fragmentary thoughts

"Nothing is more intolerable to man than complete rest, without passions, work, diversions, occupation. Then he becomes conscious of his nothingness, abandonment, inadequacy, dependence, futility. Immediately wells up from his soul's depth: weariness, gloom, misery, exasperation, frustration, despair."

PASCAL'S WAGER AND THE HEART'S REASONS

1

THE WAGER

We cannot see God or prove the gospel beyond all doubt. We can only discover Christianity's truth by wagering our whole life on it. Calculate the risks: better to bet on God's existence.

2

THE HEART'S KNOWLEDGE

"The heart has its reasons which reason knows not... It is the heart, not reason, that is aware of God. This is faith: God perceived intuitively by the heart, not by reason."

3

KNOWING VS. LOVING

"What a vast difference between knowing God and loving Him!" Truth lies deeper than arguments. Biblical religion transcends philosophical proofs — as Reformers preached century earlier.

Pascal recognized that metaphysical proofs "produce little impact; even if they help some, the effect lasts only moments... That is the result of knowing God without Jesus Christ. Conversely, those who've known God through a mediator are aware of their own unworthiness."

EMPIRICISM: THE BRITISH APPROACH

While rationalism dominated continental Europe, Britain developed empiricism. In contrast to rationalists building systems from self-evident truths, empiricists emphasized experience's role in knowledge.

Core principle: We have no ideas except those derived from experience through the senses. Statements can be known true or false only by testing them in experience.

The three main representatives in 18th century were:



JOHN LOCKE (1632-1704)

English philosopher who pioneered empirical approach to knowledge, though personally a sincere Christian.



GEORGE BERKELEY (1685-1753)

Irish philosopher and Anglican bishop who used empiricism to argue for immaterialism — existence depends on perception.



DAVID HUME (1711-1776)

Scottish philosopher and historian who took empiricism to its skeptical conclusion, challenging all metaphysical certainty.



JOHN LOCKE: THE MIND AS BLANK SLATE

Locke rejected rationalist idea that the mind has innate notions stamped on it from birth. Instead, he portrayed the mind as *tabula rasa* — a blank slate receiving impressions from outside.

"Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? From whence all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer in one word: **from experience.**"

Knowledge comes from two sources: external objects perceived by senses (sensation), and internal operations of our minds (reflection). The mind processes this raw material through its own built-in concepts.



This is the **representative theory of knowledge**: the mind never has direct access to the external world. It only perceives data transmitted by the senses, which it then interprets. We're trapped inside our own sensory experience.

LOCKE ON FAITH AND REASON

1

REASON DEFINED

Discovery of certainty or probability through deductions from ideas obtained by natural faculties (sensation or reflection).

2

FAITH DEFINED

Assent given to propositions not derived by reason's deductions but received as from God through extraordinary communication — revelation.

3

THREE CATEGORIES

According to reason: truths discoverable by examining sense-ideas (God's existence). **Above reason:** truths reason can't derive (resurrection). **Contrary to reason:** inconsistent with clear ideas (multiple gods).

For Locke, Christianity's miracles aren't embarrassments but evidences. "Where the miracle is admitted, the doctrine cannot be rejected; it carries divine attestation to whoever accepts the miracle."

BERKELEY AND HUME: EMPIRICISM'S EXTREMES

BERKELEY'S IDEALISM

George Berkeley (1685-1753): Accepted representative perception theory but gave it new twist. What we really perceive aren't material things but ideas or perceptions. Things exist insofar as they're perceived (*esse est percipi*).

Objects don't cease existing when unobserved because they're always perceived by God's infinite mind. Thus Berkeley "disproved" matter's existence and "proved" God's — brilliant but problematic.

HUME'S SKEPTICISM

David Hume (1711-1776): Used reason to demonstrate reason's limitations. Took representative knowledge theory to logical conclusion: you can't prove anything exists outside yourself — even yourself!

"When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself without a perception."

EMPIRICISM'S UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES

REALITY AS PERCEPTION

Empiricism, seeking sensory truth, culminated in Berkeley's view that reality is fundamentally mental—existing only as ideas perceived by a mind, divine or human.

SKEPTICISM'S ASCENT

Hume pushed this further, questioning the very foundations of causality, personal identity, and the external world, asserting knowledge is limited to impressions and ideas.

EROSION OF CERTAINTY

The British empiricists, aiming to ground knowledge in experience, paradoxically led to profound doubts about objective reality and the limits of human understanding.

This philosophical trajectory left a significant challenge for theological and metaphysical claims, as traditional grounds for certainty were progressively undermined.

