



**Introduction; Talking about God**

# Overview

## Introduction

### Talking about God

- The problem

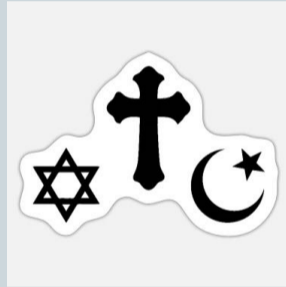
- Negative theology

- Metaphorical talk

- Analogy

- Meaning the same

- Philosophy of *God*
- the God of monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)
- God as creator: everything other than God is totally dependent on God for its existing and for its being as it is
- God is unchangeable; outside of time (?); *very different* from everything we know.
- But then: **how can we talk about God?**



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# Term overview

- week 1** Talking about God: Can we? How?
- week 2** Religious belief: Are we responsible for our beliefs? Can we control what we believe? What *should* we believe?
- week 3** The Ontological Argument for God's existence
- week 4** The Cosmological Argument for God's existence
- week 5** What if there are no good arguments? (Wager!)
- week 6** Does God know everything? Does God know the future?
- week 7** God as creator, East & West
- week 8** Can there be God if there is Evil?
- week 9** Religious practice and mysticism
- week 10** Does morality rely on religion?

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# The Problem of God-Talk

MARY. "I love you."

JOHN. "Do you really mean that?"

MARY. "Yes."

JOHN. "Then you want to be with me?"

MARY. "No."

JOHN. "But you do want to talk to me?"

MARY. "No."

JOHN. "Surely you want to share things with me?"

MARY. "No."

JOHN. "And you don't want us to make love together."

MARY. "That's right, I don't."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Modified from Brian Davies, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*.

# The problem of God-talk

- ① We do seem to talk about God (“God is good”; “God is powerful”; etc.)
- ② God is very different from anything else.

Why is this a problem?

- We attribute meanings to words by using them in different contexts
- We get the sense of words like ‘agent’, ‘willing’, ‘knowing’, etc. by using them for things that are bodily (= human beings)
- But if God is something completely different, then what do these words *mean* when we use them for God?

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.13.5:

“When ‘wise’ is used of a human, it... delimits the aspect of the human that it signifies. But this is not so when it is used of God... Therefore, it is clear that the word ‘wise’ is not used in the same sense of God and humans. And the same is true of all other words.”

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- 1 Negative Theology (Moses Maimondes)
- 2 Metaphorical Talk
- 3 Doctrine of Analogy (Thomas Aquinas)
- 4 Meaning the Same (Duns Scotus)

# 1. Negative Theology

“There is no necessity at all for you to use positive attributes of God with the view of magnifying Him in your thoughts. . . . You will come nearer to the to the knowledge and comprehension of God by the negative attributes.”

- E.g.: knowing what a ship is *not*
- **But:** only knowing what something is not gives no indication of what it actually *is*.
- We do speak of God in positive terms ('God is good,' etc.)



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## 2. Metaphorical Talk

- When we use metaphors, we refer to things by means of words which we can use for something very different.
- E.g.: 'ship of state', 'God is a mighty fortress'
- So maybe all talk about God is metaphorical!
- **But:** Is 'God is living', 'God is good' also metaphorical? What would the metaphor mean?

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### 3. Doctrine of Analogy

“Some words are used neither univocally nor purely equivocally of God and creatures, but analogically.”

- univocal use of terms: ‘Dolly is a dog’; ‘Fido is a dog’
- equivocal use: ‘I live on the bank’; ‘I keep my money in the bank’.
- **analogical use**: between these two; e.g.: ‘this book is good’; ‘Peter is good’. Creatures have positive characteristics due to God as their first cause, grounding the analogy.



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## 4. Meaning the Same (Univocity)

- God is the cause of things
- Causes resemble their effects (e.g., fire – heat)
- Thus, we can use the same terms to God that we use for things, and in the same sense.
- **But:** Is it true that causes *literally* resemble their effects?
- How do we discriminate between effects we want to consider and effects we don't want to consider? E.g., is God a body?



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How can we talk about God, if God is so different?

- by negative attributes?
- by metaphors?
- by analogy?
- simply univocally?

**Another problem:** Can we talk about God at all, if some form of verificationism is true?

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