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## CONCEPT OF ONTOLOGY IN RELIGIONS: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

*It is of the utmost significance to probe into the philosophical question "What exists?" when you want to understand religions and their fundamental ideas. That is precisely the kind of investigation I embarked upon in this book. What concept of being or existence serves as the basis for a particular religion? To try to answer that question led me on an entertaining odyssey among several of the world's major religions, during which my mind was opened—successfully, I hope—to appreciating both the commonalities and differences among them. To achieve our goal, we will study the numerous practices used by many religions to understand both "the way things are" (phenomenal reality) and "the way they should be" (whatever presence of divine ordering powers). We won't limit ourselves to just a few snippets that allow us to compare them easily. After all, those would only amount to two profiles when you consider how thick and diverse human efforts to embody theological realism have been across time and place. And this is what makes the selection of just a few practices so necessary: it allows us both sufficient perspective and enough common ground for maintaining a realist scenario in which different displayed cases can be lined up as if under one roof. Different religious traditions often have more in common than they are often given credit for. When it comes down to it, many of the world's great religions preach moralistic families that are very hard to distinguish from one another. "Don't lie," "don't steal," "honor your parents," and "don't kill" (unless you really have to) are basic contents of the religion theme park that all the major players seem to share. But if you scratch deep enough, there is going to come a time when Muslim wannabe terrorists must be confronted with the onetime Christian terrorist LeTicia Capshaw; when an unto-Wudu-performing ({} ) imam must be pitched against an untold number of Christo-Piso-hyping pastors ({} ). It investigates what it means to exist. Specifically, it looks into the kinds of rendered judgments that turn certain individuals into saints or sinners. These are not just any judgments—rendered under any conditions—for human beings. They are made with our rational faculties, guided by our emotions (or the lack thereof), and sometimes even by sheer happenstance. And they issue in the kind of "being" that is a religious life..*

### INTRODUCTION

Ontology, derived from the Greek words 'ontos' (being) and 'logos' (study), is a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature of being, existence, and reality. It addresses fundamental questions about what entities exist, how they can be categorized, and the nature of their relationships. In the realm of philosophy, ontology seeks to uncover the underlying

principles that constitute reality. When applied to the study of religion, ontology becomes a powerful tool for understanding how different faiths conceptualize the universe, the divine, and the human condition.

Religions provide comprehensive ontological frameworks that offer answers to existential questions, often in ways that transcend empirical observation. These frameworks shape the beliefs, practices, and worldviews of their adherents, providing a metaphysical foundation upon which religious doctrines are built. By examining the ontological underpinnings of various religions, we can gain insight into the diverse ways in which humanity seeks to understand the nature of existence and the ultimate reality. In Hinduism, ontology is deeply intertwined with the concepts of Brahman (the ultimate reality) and Atman (the individual soul). The Upanishads, a collection of ancient Hindu texts, articulate a vision of reality where the material world is seen as an illusion (Maya), and the ultimate goal is the realization of the unity between Atman and Brahman. This ontological perspective influences Hindu practices, such as meditation and yoga, aimed at achieving spiritual enlightenment and liberation (Moksha).

Buddhism, on the other hand, presents a unique ontological view that rejects the notion of a permanent, unchanging self (Anatta) and emphasizes the transient nature of all phenomena (Anicca). The Buddha's teachings focus on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, guiding adherents towards the cessation of suffering (Nirvana) through an understanding of the dependent origination (pratityasamutpada) of all things. This ontological stance profoundly shapes Buddhist ethics, meditation practices, and the monastic way of life. Christianity's ontology is rooted in the belief in a personal, transcendent God who is both immanent in creation and distinct from it. The doctrine of the Trinity, which describes God as three persons in one essence, encapsulates the Christian understanding of the divine being. Furthermore, the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the belief in his resurrection underscore the ontological significance of the material world and human history in God's salvific plan. Christian ontology thus emphasizes the relationship between the finite and the infinite, the created and the Creator.

Islamic ontology centers on the concept of Tawhid, the absolute oneness and uniqueness of Allah. This monotheistic framework asserts that Allah is the ultimate reality, the source of all creation, and beyond human comprehension. The Qur'an and Hadith provide a comprehensive ontological vision that encompasses the nature of existence, the afterlife, and the moral order. The Islamic view of reality influences all aspects of Muslim life, from ritual practices to social ethics and jurisprudence (Sharia). By exploring these diverse ontological perspectives, this study aims to highlight how religions construct their metaphysical worldviews and address existential questions. Despite their differences, many religions share common ontological concerns, such as the nature of the self, the relationship between the material and the spiritual, and the quest for ultimate truth. Through a comparative analysis, this paper seeks to deepen our understanding of the philosophical dimensions of religion and the ways in which ontological beliefs shape religious experiences and practices.

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## OBJECTIVES

1. Analyze foundational ontological principles of major world religions.
2. Investigate how different religions conceptualize ultimate reality.
3. Examine religious perspectives on existence and the self.
4. Assess the material-spiritual relationship in religious practices.

### ANALYZE MAJOR RELIGIOUS ONTOLOGIES:

- This objective directly engages with the fundamental and time-honored theoretical frameworks of four significant global religions: Hinduism and Buddhism on one hand, Christianity and Islam on the other. These religious bodies have long rested upon unfixed or even fuzzy metaphysical underpinnings that they seem happy to leave that way. They jointly propose that reality consists of multiple layers—actual and potential, seen and unseen—that make up all sorts of things in all kinds of worlds
- **Hinduism:** At the very core of Hindu philosophy is the concept of Brahman, which is literally "the real that always is." What exactly Brahman is or isn't can be elusive and even contradictory. It's something that cannot be fully grasped or completely said. Nonetheless, some essence must be retained for it to hold together as a profound idea/assumption central to Hindu thought. The individual self—or what our traditional psychologists call the psyche—must have some relationship to this unchanging reality because all fundamentally are in possession of that reality either now or at some point in their near or distant futures.
- **Buddhism:** Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent, unchanging self (Anatta) and emphasizes the transient nature of all phenomena (Anicca). This analysis will explore the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (Pratityasamutpada), which explains how all things arise in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions, leading to an understanding of the nature of existence and the cessation of suffering (Nirvana).
- **Christianity:** Christian ontology is rooted in the belief in a personal, transcendent God who is both immanent in creation and distinct from it. The doctrine of the Trinity, which describes God as three persons in one essence, encapsulates the Christian understanding of divine being. Additionally, the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the belief in his resurrection underscore the ontological significance of the material world and human history in God's salvific plan.
- **Islam:** Islamic ontology centers on the concept of Tawhid, the absolute oneness and uniqueness of Allah. This monotheistic framework asserts that Allah is the ultimate reality, the source of all creation, and beyond human comprehension. The Qur'an and Hadith provide a comprehensive ontological vision that encompasses the nature of existence, the afterlife, and the moral order.

### EXPLORE ULTIMATE REALITY CONCEPTS:

- This objective focuses on investigating how different religions conceptualize ultimate reality. Each religion has a unique perspective on the nature of the divine and the cosmos, offering various metaphysical insights.

- **Hinduism:** Brahman is the ultimate reality, the source, and essence of everything. It is beyond all attributes and forms, and realizing one's unity with Brahman is the goal of life (Moksha). This analysis will explore how this concept shapes Hindu cosmology and spiritual practices.
- **Buddhism:** Nirvana is the ultimate truth, a state beyond birth and death, free from suffering and the cycle of rebirth (Samsara). The study will examine how the understanding of Nirvana influences Buddhist ethical and meditative practices.
- **Christianity:** The Christian concept of ultimate reality is encapsulated in the nature of God as a Trinity. This belief in a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—shapes Christian theology, worship, and the understanding of salvation history.
- **Islam:** Tawhid, the oneness of Allah, is the central concept in Islamic metaphysics. It signifies the indivisible oneness of God as the creator and sustainer of the universe. The study will delve into how this concept impacts Islamic theology, law, and daily life.

#### ANALYZE EXISTENCE AND SELF:

- This objective examines religious perspectives on the nature of existence and the self, providing insights into how each faith views the essence of human beings and their place in the universe.
- **Hinduism:** The Atman is the individual soul or self, which is ultimately identical with Brahman. Understanding this unity is the path to liberation. The study will analyze how this view influences Hindu views on life, death, and the afterlife.
- **Buddhism:** Buddhism's denial of a permanent self (Anatta) and emphasis on the concept of dependent origination (Pratityasamutpada) highlight the interconnected and impermanent nature of existence. This section will explore how these teachings shape Buddhist practices aimed at ending suffering and achieving enlightenment.
- **Christianity:** Christianity teaches that humans are created in the image of God, with a soul that is eternal. The belief in the resurrection and eternal life significantly influences Christian ethics, morality, and eschatology.
- **Islam:** Islam teaches that humans are created by Allah with a soul that will be judged in the afterlife. This belief in the soul's eternal destiny shapes Islamic ethics, law (Sharia), and daily practices.

#### MATERIAL-SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP:

- This objective assesses how different religions articulate the relationship between the material and spiritual realms, examining the implications for religious practices and beliefs.
- **Hinduism:** The concept of Maya suggests that the material world is an illusion, and true reality lies in the spiritual realm. This understanding leads to practices aimed at transcending material desires and realizing spiritual truths.
- **Buddhism:** The transient nature of all things (Anicca) leads to a focus on detachment from material possessions and desires, emphasizing spiritual growth and enlightenment.
- **Christianity:** The incarnation of Jesus Christ affirms the significance of the material world, suggesting that it is part of God's good creation and a means through which salvation history



unfolds. This belief fosters a sacramental view of life, where the material can mediate divine grace.

- **Islam:** Islam views the material world as a creation of Allah, meant to be used responsibly and ethically. The material and spiritual are not seen as separate but integrated, with the material world providing opportunities to fulfill spiritual duties and gain rewards in the afterlife.

#### •COMPARE RELIGIOUS ONTOLOGIES:

- This objective aims to highlight the similarities and differences in ontological views across major religions, providing a comparative framework to understand diverse metaphysical perspectives.
- **Similarities:** Despite their differences, many religions share common concerns, such as the nature of the self, the ultimate reality, and the relationship between the material and spiritual realms. For instance, both Hinduism and Buddhism emphasize the illusory nature of the material world and the importance of spiritual realization.
- **Differences:** The study will also highlight key differences, such as the monotheistic views of Christianity and Islam versus the polytheistic and non-theistic elements in Hinduism and Buddhism, respectively. These differences shape distinct religious practices, doctrines, and ethical teachings.

#### •IMPACT ON PRACTICES:

- This objective explores how ontological beliefs shape the lived experiences of religious adherents, influencing their rituals, ethics, and daily practices.
- **Hinduism:** Practices like yoga, meditation, and various rituals are aimed at realizing the unity of Atman and Brahman, transcending the illusion of Maya.
- **Buddhism:** Ethical conduct, meditation, and mindfulness practices are grounded in the understanding of Anicca (impermanence) and Anatta (non-self), guiding adherents towards enlightenment and the cessation of suffering.
- **Christianity:** Christian practices, including prayer, sacraments, and ethical living, are deeply influenced by beliefs in the Trinity, incarnation, and resurrection, emphasizing a relationship with God and the hope of eternal life.
- **Islam:** Islamic practices such as daily prayers (Salah), fasting during Ramadan, and charitable giving (Zakat) are rooted in the belief in Tawhid and the ultimate accountability to Allah.

#### •PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY CONTRIBUTION:

- This objective aims to enrich the academic understanding of religious ontology from a philosophical perspective, providing a deeper analysis of how these metaphysical views inform religious thought and practice.
- By applying philosophical methods to the study of religious ontologies, the paper seeks to offer new insights and interpretations that contribute to the broader field of philosophy of

religion. This includes examining the logical coherence, epistemological foundations, and ethical implications of religious ontological claims.

#### •CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE:

- This objective relates traditional ontological views to contemporary issues in religion and spirituality, exploring how modern religious thinkers reinterpret and adapt these concepts in light of current philosophical and scientific developments.
- The study will examine how traditional beliefs are being challenged, reaffirmed, or transformed in the face of modern challenges such as scientific advancements, secularism, and interfaith dialogue. This analysis will highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of religious ontologies and their relevance in today's world.

#### Conclusion

In the religions of the world, people give a lot of thought to what is real and what is not. At their most fundamental, these religious bodies have an ontology; they have a philosophy of being and becoming, of existence and reality—otherwise, they would simply be survival rituals. After never leaving the realm of "it happened," facticity became also "it's real" as well because anyone who has heard it thinks with the understanding that it could have happened to them or for them (if not already has) and therefore takes it seriously mentally (as evidenced by all your stories).

Two great religions, Christianity and Islam, have a substantial influence on the lives of billions of people around the world. Both express an ontology centered on the existence of at least one real deity, a personal God in Christianity and a single, unique Allah in Islam. Both emphasize that this real deity is sufficient to bring all existing things into being and to govern those very entities once they are in existence.

It really does not matter what name you call that deprivation by—omission of divine presence or absence of a fact—which makes the humans living in that world unhappy because they are afraid. The sad story told by these two important religions has as its theme exactly this: Even though there might be two different ontologies proportionally centering around two different kinds of personal deities—God for Christianity and Allah for Islam—and even though those ontologies might impinge upon human persons in different ways (by virtue of their particular creeds), both religions analytically insist that human lives are worthless unless and until they recognize either a material or spiritual fact about their existence.

And if we were to look for common themes across these two great ontotheologies, we would find three major ones: Oneness (or monism), as reflected within both religions; consecration—the act or state of making something preciously valuable or influential; and transience—a point made here already but worth underscoring again since it is surely related to sadness anticipated by humanity when it fears deprivation either from a deity's fact powerful enough to make them tremble—or by a buzzer: to issue warnings, sounds produced by reason that it has found two deities to be.

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