Bakinaz Abdalla - University of Birmingham, UK

From the One, Many Things Come into Existence: A Jewish Perspective on the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

The doctrine of divine simplicity was central to medieval philosophical theology. To say that God is simple is to say that God is free from all sorts of parts. This also means that God maintains aseity, since His essence does not involve parts on which His existence would be contingent. One major critique of the DDS in modern discourse considers the conviction central to monotheistic religions that God is the intelligent Creator of all existents. Supposing that God's creative acts proceed from wisdom, His essence would accordingly involve multiple thoughts correspondingly with the diversity of existents that He creates. Medieval Jewish philosophers were aware of this difficulty. Yet, they earnestly attempted to demonstrate the coherence of the DDS and its compatibility with the conviction that God is the First Cause of existence. The proposed paper aims to reflect on some problematic issues with attempts to this effect and eventually reconstruct solutions from within the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition. The textual basis for this purpose will be a treatise written by the 13th Jewish philosopher Isaac Albalag, Sefer Tiqqun ha-deot [the Emendation of the Doctrines].

Despite Albalag's avowed support of the DDS and his attempts to redress flawed arguments for God's simplicity, many of his metaphysical opinions imply that the divine essence involves conceptual parts. To spare Albalag from the charge of incoherence, I reconstruct two solutions from his dispersed discussions of God's existence, knowledge, and causal relation to the world. The first solution suggests that God's ontological independence is not necessarily bound up to a conception of absolute simplicity that requires removing all sorts of internal parts from the divine essence. God's self-sufficiency and causal relation to the world could be explained in light of the doctrine of divine priority. Alternatively, several remarks in the Tiqqun about the cognitive limitation of human beings allude to a mysterian outlook; they promote the idea that God's essence is both simple and involves multiplicity, while at the same time rule out the possibility of understanding how. This idea, despite seemingly contradictory, can be supported by modern quantum-based explanations.

Shaffarullah Abdul Rahman - Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

Hick, Kaplan and Harrison: Three religious pluralism models

The fact that the world is religiously diverse poses a problem on the nature of what different religions take to be the Ultimate. One of most discussed philosophical responses to religious diversity of this sort is called religious pluralism. I consider three religious pluralism models championed by Hick (1989), Kaplan (2001) and Harrison (2006) respectively. Despite sharing a similar view about the need to accommodate diverse religious beliefs about the Ultimate, the religious pluralism models that they propose are actually quite distinct to one another with respect to the ontological and soteriological questions. After fleshing out the distinctions between these three models, I discuss what I think the strengths and weaknesses of each model.

Reza Akbari - Imam Sadiq University, Iran
Mulla Sadra and the Proof of the Veracious (Burhan al-Siddiqin) for the Existence of God: Proof or Reminder

In Islamic philosophy, the Proof of the Veracious (Burhan al-Siddiqin) is the most famous proof for the existence of God. Although it is indebted to Avicenna for its designation, Mulla Sadra is the one who developed it among Iranian Muslim philosophers. Concentrating on Mulla Sadra's dicta on this proof and his philosophical principles, such as the principality of existence and the ontological causality, his commentators in Iran have presented many versions of it. According to Mulla Sadra, its main characteristic is that it begins with God's existence, and consequently, it is the firmest, fastest, and most elevated proof. Examining two versions of this proof, I will show that it is no proof at all. By bringing to light what Mulla Sadra hid unconsciously to represent this proof as being very firm and elevated, one will be shocked to know that it has many disputed premises that dethrone its fictitious kingdom in Iranian Islamic philosophy. The only way to save this proof is to assume that it plays the role of a reminder (Tanabbuh) of a basic belief for someone who has accepted Mulla Sadra's philosophical framework, has had unitary experience and believes in the accuracy of this kind of mystical experience.

Akinmayowa Akin-otiko - Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria

Beyond Presumption: Proof of Olódùmarè's existence in aféfé (air), ilè (soil), and omi (water) among the Yoruba

In the study of the religion of the Yoruba, there have been discussions that engage the meaning of key religious concepts based on presumed existence of Olódùmarè (God). Such discussions do not ask how Olódùmarè came to be. As such, once the question of whether Olódùmarè exists is raised, recourse is made to highlighting the attributes, again based on the presumption that Olódùmarè exists. This study, however, will examine three elements of nature - aféfé (air), ilè (soil), and omi (water) in the belief of the Yoruba, and use them as proofs of the existence of Olódùmarè. This study will adopt a bottom to tom approach in proving the existence of Olódùmarè. It will engage what is seen, felt and known in order to prove the existence of what is unseen and unknown. The content of Ifá corpus will be examined to highlight the nature of these three elements; the findings will be analyzed to prove Olódùmarè's existence. This study will help to highlight the attributes that are natural to these three elements, as well as shared with Olódùmarè. These qualities will highlight the existence of Olódùmarè without denying that there are divinities directly linked to these three natural elements. This work will show how these elements of nature are so grand and seemingly limitless yet are not rated same as Olódùmarè; at best they point to something greater and different which can only be Olódùmarè without any form of contradiction in the belief of the Yoruba.

Emann Allebban - Providence College, USA

Explaining the Cosmos: Creation as Conservation in Avicenna’s Metaphysics

Avicenna’s argument from contingency for a necessarily existent being is one of the most celebrated and influential contributions to the history of Islamic philosophy. It was a central topic in the medieval Latin and Islamic philosophical traditions, and invited both vehement critique and defense. I reconstruct central causal principles of the proof that have been omitted from standard formulations of the argument. In so doing, I revisit key topics concerning the existence and nature of the divine: the metaphysics of creation ex nihilo, God’s relation to and interaction with the created realm, divine conservation of contingent existents, the principle of sufficient reason, and the relative roles of natural versus divine agency in the world. I argue that Avicenna’s proof is predicated on a
robust theory of causation, one that grounds his concepts of contingency and necessity in the causedness and uncausedness of essences. Specifically, the proof rests on a fundamental distinction that a true cause is the cause of the existence of the essence of individuals of various species. That is, a metaphysical cause of species is one that gives a contingently existent essence its existence and thus must be of a species other than the species of the caused effect. An adequate explanation of the existence of humanity must reference a non-human cause. It is such causing that constitutes divine efficient causation. I argue that a central distinction that Avicenna advances with regard to the efficient cause is that between the cause of the effect qua species (or essence) (naw?) and the cause of the effect qua individual (shakh?). Avicenna views the cause of the effect qua species as explanatorily and ontologically distinct from the cause of the effect qua individual. By “individual,” Avicenna in this context does not mean a particular as standardly understood, i.e. Socrates or this black item. Rather, “individual” refers to the entire domain of explananda in physics, that is, accounts of natural motion and change. The efficient cause, as defined in metaphysics, gives a contingently existent essence its existence and must not only be external to the species but external to the natural causes of motion and change – whatever it is causally doing, it is not doing it by moving or changing anything. That is, while the causes proper to physics explain the continued generation of things, including the infinite production of the individuals of a species, they do not explain a further metaphysical question, namely, why contingent essences exist, or are instantiated in the first place. Avicenna takes this causing and conserving of species to be at the heart of divine creative activity, with key implications for how we may understand the dependency relation between God and the universe.

Khalil Andani - Augustana College, USA

Islamic Neoplatonism: A Contemporary Alternative to Analytic Theism

Neoplatonism remains an underrepresented unvoiced position in contemporary philosophy of religion. Several Sufi and Shia traditions of Islamic thought developed a distinctive Islamic version of Neoplatonic metaphysics and cosmology – termed here as “Islamic Neoplatonism”. Islamic Neoplatonism offers a theo-cosmological alternative to the Christian theism often upheld by many analytic philosophers. For example, philosophers like Plantinga, Feser, and Koons present binary ontologies that feature an eternal necessary being called God who creates and sustains contingent finite creatures. In contrast, Islamic Neoplatonism presents a hierarchical worldview featuring an absolutely simple and ineffable God (the One), an eternal Universal Intellect (Nous) that contains all eternal necessary truths and intelligible forms, an omnitemporal Universal Soul as the creator-demiurge, and a Cosmos that encompasses spiritual and material existents.

In this paper, I argue that Islamic Neoplatonism offers a richer and more coherent worldview than most forms of analytic theism prevalent in the philosophy of religion. Islamic Neoplatonism provides a more consistent interpretation of various theistic arguments by offering a total explanation of the Cosmos; it reconciles current debates over anthropomorphism and temporality in relation to God; and it provides a metaphysical foundation that affirms the varieties of human religious experience. Most theist philosophers of religion offer several cosmological arguments to establish the existence of the God featured in their systems; such as the contingency argument, kalam cosmological argument, design argument, and the Augustinian argument. Analytic philosophers tend to assume that these different arguments refer to one and the same supernatural being (God) without substantiating this claim. Islamic Neoplatonic thought better accommodates these different arguments by interpreting their conclusions in reference to the specific levels of the Neoplatonic triad. For example, the contingency argument – if one accepts its cogency – establishes the existence of an absolutely simple God (the Neoplatonic One); the Augustinian argument establishes the existence of an eternal intellect that contains virtual multiplicity – the Neoplatonic Universal
Intellect; and the kalam cosmological argument establishes the existence of an omni-temporal “demiurgic” creator of the Universe – the Neoplatonic Universal Soul.

Second, there are debates in philosophy of religion about the nature of God’s attributes, qualities and relationship to time and space. Philosophers who identify as classical theists deny that God has real attributes, personal qualities, or temporality by affirming divine simplicity; but many analytic philosophers (Plantinga, Craig, Mullins), often appealing to their scripture, affirm that God has personal and temporal qualities. Islamic Neoplatonism integrates the views of both camps – by ascribing divine simplicity and timelessness to the ineffable God and divine personality and omni-temporality to the Universal Soul. Finally, an Islamic Neoplatonic worldview can account for the diversity of human religious experience because it affirms a dynamic relationship between each individual soul and the Universal Soul. This means that the absolute ineffable God self-manifests through a diversity of aspects or “faces” through the mediation of the Neoplatonic Intellect and Soul. This worldview accommodates and integrates the real human experience of multiple deities, angels, revelations, and holy men across various cultures and faiths.

Andrei-Valentin Bacrau - Independent Scholar

The Parallels between Kantian Aesthetics and the Presence of Tibetan Art in the Yuan-Ming Era (1279-1644)

This paper will look at Kant’s views of the aesthetic experience, in relationship to Buddhist philosophical and political discussions of art and social organization. The primary focus in Kantian literature explores the relationship between free and dependent beauty, as well as Kant’s paradox of taste. The central argument of the Kantian portion is going to navigate the paradox of taste via Graham Priest’s epistemic and conceptual distinction regarding the limits of thought. The implication for a potential resolution to the paradox of taste pertains to further clarifying the normative implications of Kantian aesthetics to practical reasoning. Secondly, I shall contextualize the debate with similar argumentation found in medieval Tibetan literature, by thinkers such as Tsongkhapa and Drakpa Gyaltsen. Lastly, I shall look at the political and artistic state of affairs in Yuan and Ming Dynasties and assert the applicability of both Kantian and Tibetan discussions of effibility and practical constrains in the context of Tibetan poetry and Thangkas. There are two particular hallmarks of Kantian philosophy that are going to be contextualized in the Yuan-Ming era. Firstly, the aesthetic-normative interdependence in Kant is mirrored into the Vajrayana framework of normative duties towards others. Additionally, Tibetan art during this particular period excelled into understanding the relationship between the duties towards others for the sake of liberation through displays of enlightened deities and their activities. Lastly, the Kantian view of a cosmopolitan and enlightened society is also exemplified by the Mongolian ambitions of bringing closer the Tibetan and Chinese societies within Yuan rule.

Davi Heckert Cesar Bastos - Department of Philosophy, University of Campinas (Unicamp), Brazil

It’s too Good to be False: the Plantinga-Tolkien Argument for the Truth of Christianity

I address in this article an argument in favor of the truth of Christianity which was similarly posed by Alvin Plantinga and J. R. R. Tolkien. I present first Plantinga’s version, followed by Tolkien’s version, and by my defense that the presented arguments are similar variations of the same underlying argument. I proceed with a critique of the argument and conclude with a new and (I hope) less defeasible version of the argument. In general lines, the argument ascribes to the story of Jesus (specially his incarnation, atonement, and resurrection) a supreme value, and expects to derive its
truth based on its value. Plantinga does so in the context of his Felix Culpa theodicy, while Tolkien in the context of his remarks on Fairy Stories, creation, and sub-creation.

I argue that the mechanism behind both arguments is similar: some kind of supreme value (moral or aesthetic) is ascribed to some punctual events in the story of Jesus, and this supreme value is claimed to entail the truth of Jesus’s story. But this argument is quite controversial and fragile, and, maybe, only Christians would grant such premises. What I do in the final part of the paper, is to present four objections to the argument and strip the argument from its bold claims. The Confirmation Bias Objection states that religious believers are not impartial in claiming their belief has supreme value. The Vicious Circularity Objection states that this argument presupposes Christianity in order to prove it. The Armchair Axiology Objection states that we are not in a solid epistemic position to affirm that there are supreme values such as those postulated by this argument. The Objection from Religious Pluralism states that not just Jesus’s story may be thought to have supreme value, but also Mohammad’s, Krishna’s, Moses’s and so on.

Assuming an externalist theory of justification, I conclude that if some religious belief I hold actually has supreme value and I believe it has that supreme value by a reliable mechanism, then I have a justifier for my religious belief (and I assume this is the case not just for Christianity but for every religious belief). This is a much weaker claim (it is no longer needed to hold that the religious belief in fact has supreme value) but a much less defeasible, and I hold that this claim can respond to the four objections previously raised.

Kay Malte Bischof - University of Notre Dame, USA

Spinoza’s God First Metaphysics

Historically, the existence of a perfect being or God has been one of the most central and widespread commitments in metaphysics. However, already Leibniz warned that ‘the most widely accepted and meaningful notion we have of God is expressed well enough in these words, that God is an absolutely perfect being; yet the consequences of these words are not sufficiently considered’ (1686; PE 35). Two conceptions of God proved to be immensely influential: Theistic and pantheistic conceptions of God. But while theistic strategies to determine the nature of God have been explored extensively, pantheistic strategies have been largely ignored.

I shall introduce Spinoza’s God First Metaphysics as a noteworthy pantheistic alternative to theistic ways to conceive of God. Theism can be divided in two traditions: classical and neo-theism. Neo-theists assume that our terms apply univocally to God. In order to render God’s attributes compossible, neo-theists argue that God lacks a certain perfection or deny that God has a certain perfection to a maximal degree. Classical theists assume our words do not apply univocally to God. In order to render God’s attributes compossible, classical theists argue that we can determine the nature of God only ex negativo in terms of what may not be said about God or per analogia in terms that are deficient but relevantly similar to God’s perfections.

I shall argue that Spinozism is the rigorous reconsideration of the perfect being thesis under the conditions of rationalism. Specifically, Spinoza adheres to the following to constraints. First, God’s perfection is uncompromised. Second, everything, including God, is intelligible. Both constraints render it impossible for Spinoza to adopt theistic strategies to derive his concept of God. The intelligibility constraint prohibits Spinoza from following classical theism by rendering the nature of God partially or completely obscure. The divine constraint prohibits Spinoza from following neo-theism by compromising God’s perfection. The principles thus require Spinoza to find a way to determine the nature of God literally without having to compromise His perfection.
Spinoza’s God First Metaphysics takes God as a starting point to determine the individual essence of his attributes assuming that attributes are explanatory posterior and conceptually dependent on God’s essence. For example, extension, on Spinoza’s view, is something that lacks voluminous properties, such as breath, depth, and height. This conception of extension has been particularly vexing because it contrasts with what we typically conceive of as extension. But for Spinoza, it is merely a conceptual consequence of God’s perfect nature derived from a clear and distinct idea of God’s nature. Spinoza is thus able to determine God literally without compromising His perfection by tailoring the attributes of God such that they are compatible with each other (as opposed to tinkering with the nature of God by making it less perfect).

Andrei A. Buckareff - Marist College, USA

Axiological Pantheism

In this paper, I focus on an axiological puzzle for pantheism. ‘Pantheism’, as I understand it, denotes a metaphysic of the divine on which God is identical with the cosmos. I assume that ontological naturalism is true, where by ‘ontological naturalism’ I mean the hypothesis that “reality, the whole of being, is constituted by the spacetime world” (Armstrong 1999, 84). Differently stated, according to ontological naturalism, the universe and the existents constitutive of it are all that exists. Ergo, given the foregoing, on the pantheistic metaphysic of the divine I assume, if God exists, then God is identical with the totality of existents constitutive of the universe. In particular, I maintain that, if pantheism is correct, then the universe is a divine mind (where the ‘is’ is the ‘is’ of identity).

Understanding pantheism in this way allows us to make a principled distinction between it and other similar metaphysics of the divine such as panentheism, proponents of which can truthfully assert that “God is everything.” (The universe would be a [proper] part of God, according to the panentheist. God would be identical with everything — where ‘everything’ denotes the universe plus any distinctively divine properties.)

The axiological puzzle with which I am interested is over whether a pantheistic metaphysic of the divine delivers a conception of God on which its being true that God exists results in an overall better state of affairs for the cosmos as a whole than would be the case if it were not true. To some, it may be natural to assume that, if pantheism is true, then God’s existence or non-existence makes little difference axiologically. After all, it may seem that if the universe is a cosmic mind that we can describe as divine, then nothing changes in terms of value. To the contrary, I argue that if there is a description under which the universe can be truthfully described as God, then this is axiologically significant. In particular, I argue that the sort of connectedness of the parts of the universe that we would find if pantheism is true results in an overall better state of affairs than would obtain if no such connectedness exists. I maintain that it would be both intrinsically and extrinsically better for the truthmakers for pantheistic representations of the universe as the divine mind to exist in the world than not. In making my case, I distinguish my own proposal from the Platonist proposal of John Leslie to the effect that there is some ethical requirement that the universe exist and that the satisfaction of this ethical requirement includes that the universe is an infinite mind that knows all that is worth knowing.

Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty - Rabindra Bharati University, India

God as the Cause of Creation: the Sceptic and the Believer
The idea of God has been formulated in very many different ways in the history of human thought. Philosophers in classical India, though they trace their origin in some Vedic or non-Vedic sources, have gone well beyond the foundational texts in producing arguments and counter arguments for their thesis of either proving or disproving the existence of God. The history of this intellectual acumen is indeed rich with philosophical insights and reasoning skills. The present paper is a brief attempt to capture a small part of that debate, unearthing some key ideas working behind this debate. I would like focus on some of the Buddhist counter-arguments that try to refute the arguments designed to justify the belief in the existence of God with special reference to Vasubandhu. Although Vasubandhu does not mention any individual’s name with one or two exceptions while showing inadequacies in the arguments offered by the believers, it is evident that the arguments that Vasubandhu analyses and criticises are the ones advocated by classical Nyaya philosophers. One must, however, note at the outset that in this debate Vasubandhu applies the inferential modus operandi of the Nyaya philosophers themselves to refute the Nyaya position. So the parameters and the methods of acceptance/refutation in the debate are shared by both the parties. This implies the inter-systemic applicability of the Nyaya method of reasoning. Although Buddhists and Nyaya philosophers differ over fundamental metaphysical issues, they could succeed in entering in substantial debates only because they share a common method of reasoning in its general outlines. And in spite of Vasubandhu’s all out attempt to refute the Nyaya argument, Vasubandhu’s catholicity does not stop him from encashing the Nyaya method of reasoning. Another point that I find noteworthy is that neither of the parties in the debate refer to their respective foundational texts to justify their theses. The arguments are developed independent of any reference to the founding persons of the respective systems or some valued works in their systems. In this sense the arguments are secular in nature.

The paper ends with a defense of the view, taking cues from Wittgenstein, that the difference between a believer and a non-believer is not about whether something is the case or not. Religious beliefs claim something more than the belief that something is the case. Believers mean something different in the sense that those beliefs commit the believer to look at the world, her own life and actions in a certain way. Religious beliefs are not declarative sentences in the ordinary sense. Believer takes a lot of risk in holding on to her beliefs.

Lok-Chi Chan - National Taiwan University, Taiwan

Divine Creation and Human Errors

Results from cognitive science show us that we are prone to biases when making moral judgments. Recently, Teeham (2016) and Park (2018) argue from the existence of these biases that we are not designed by a perfect God. Using a series of nested arguments, we argue that the argument from biases is neither philosophically nor scientifically compelling. Firstly, we will begin by arguing that even if our moral cognition is biased it might not be ‘principally biased’, by which we mean biased in a manner which does not serve any greater cognitive purpose and is therefore a brute deviation from rationality. Secondly, we will argue that even if we grant that our moral cognition might be principally biased, it might still not be evidence of God’s poor design. Thirdly, we will argue that even if we grant that it is evidence of God’s poor design, it might still not be novel evidence against God’s existence, and thus provides no real evidential benefit to atheism. For the argument from biases to work as intended, every one of these nested arguments would have to fail. Finally, we will consider what implications the argument from biases has for wider philosophical discussions involving the major monotheistic traditions. We argue that even though the argument does not constitute a compelling line of argument against the existence of God, it does serve to motivate some further discussions.
Brent Louis Constantine - University of Birmingham, UK

*The Modal Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God*

In this paper I introduce a novel version of the Modal Cosmological Argument for the existence of God. This novel Modal Cosmological Argument argues that any possible universe has some explanation of its actuality if it is actual. Since the actual universe is an actual possible universe, the actual universe requires some explanation. From these, and an examination of what it would mean to be an explanation of the actuality of an actual universe, the necessary and inescapable conclusion is shown to be that God is the explanation of the actual universe’s actuality – thereby deriving the existence of God.

Davlat Dadikhuda - JYU/LMU, Finland/Germany

*An Avicennian argument against 'existential inertia'*

‘Existential inertia’ (EI) is the claim that once something comes to be it remains in being independent of a sustaining cause. EI has implications for how we understand the relation between a putative deity and the universe. In the secondary phil. of religion literature, proponents of EI seem to treat it as a default state of beings, such that its opposite should be demonstrated. Among EI’s opponents, Thomists stand out in particular for their attempt to provide the requisite rebutting defeater. In this paper, I will add to the effort made against EI, but drawing from the Islamic philosopher Avicenna (d. 1037). To do that, I’ll proceed in two stages: first, critically evaluate the Thomistic case against EI. Then, supply an Avicennian argument for a thesis about all efficient causation - namely, the conservation thesis (CT), which has it that an effect needs its cause not only coming to exist but also for sustaining it in existence. With CT established, the falsity of EI straightforwardly follows.

Edgar Danielyan - Formerly Heythrop College and University of Buckingham, UK

*Why Gaunilo must fail: determination of the concept of God as understood in the Abrahamic traditions*

In his well-known parody and objection to St Anselm’s ontological argument(s), Gaunilo of Marmoïters exposes a subtle yet important problem in the philosophy of religion: the possibility of the determination of the concept of God as understood in the Abrahamic traditions. In this short talk I propose to discuss why Gaunilo’s objection fails and why every similar objection must fail, with particular reference to proposals by Brian Garrett and Milo Crimi, drawing on recent work by Maria Rosa Antognazza (The Hypercategorematic Infinite, Leibniz Review, Vol. 25, 12.2015, p. 5-30.) and my earlier objections to J. L. Schellenberg and his argument from divine hiddenness.

Ignacio del Carril - Universidad Austral, Argentina

*The Concept of “Intelligence”, Between Form and Design*

This paper argues for the necessary relation between finality and intelligence in Aquinas’s “fifth way” to demonstrate God’s existence. The object of multiple -- and not always dispassionate -- debates, the fifth way is commonly designated as “the way from final causes,” a fact that often leads to confusion with the argument from design. Aquinas, however, is clear about its distinct aim, by calling it “argument from the governance of the world.” And yet, the fifth way shares a fundamental trait with the argument from design, since it includes the notion of “teleology”, i.e. the existence of
final causes within the world. It is precisely the metaphysical nature of such concept that turns the fifth way problematic, as it places it beyond the scope of scientific method. But even if we set aside this issue and bluntly assume the presence of finality in natural beings, there still remains a hurdle to be cleared: establishing a relation of necessity between finality and intelligence, which, it is argued, can be effectively accomplished by recurring to Aristotle’s concept of “form”.

Roberto Di Ceglie - Pontifical Lateran University (Rome), Italy

Divine Providence and Human Explanation

Debates on providence have traditionally been characterized by production of arguments aimed at demonstrating or refuting that a providential order can be harmonized with the apparent disorder of historical events.

Two substantial problems emerge from these debates. One is epistemological, the other one is moral. The epistemological problem is that it is hard for us to determine whether or not a providential order governs our experience. We are hardly able to know completed historical facts, that is, facts whose consequences, at least the most relevant ones, have all occurred. As a result, we can only probably say whether or not the facts in question reveal the existence of a providential order. Their consequences, which we may know in the future, may always modify our view. The moral problem consists in the fact that those who believe that they can attain knowledge of whether or not a providential order applies to observable facts of history, will likely feel entitled to adopt a judgemental attitude towards those who do not act in accordance with that knowledge. Once the existence of a providential order has been demonstrated, those who act against it will appear to be blameable. On the other hand, if it is the non-existence of such an order that has been demonstrated, again, those who act in accordance with a non-existent order will appear to be blameable.

I intend to argue that the cause of this way of conducting debates as well as of the problems that derive from it is an inadequate approach to the knowledge of historical events. I call this approach “human explanation”. On the other hand, I call its alternative “divine providence”. Those who adopt divine providence firmly believe that an ultimate and good end of history exists, and give up arguing that historical events demonstrate or refute it. My argument is that divine providence is preferable to human explanation because the latter causes the two problems mentioned above, which instead divine providence avoids.

Jonathan Duquette - University of Birmingham, UK

Hierarchy, Identity and Transcendence: A Brief History of the Trimurti

There is perhaps no more widespread notion about Hinduism than the idea that Hindu deities—Brahma, Viṣṇu, Siva, Sakti and others—embody different aspects of the same absolute godhead. This notion is typically represented in the figure of the trimurti: the ‘three forms’ of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva, which respectively account for the cosmic functions of creation, maintenance and destruction. In this presentation, I complicate this narrative by examining different perspectives on the trimurti taken by medieval and early modern philosophers of Vedanta. I will highlight the fact that these philosophers were not unanimous on what the trimurti stands for, because they made different metaphysical assumptions about the nature of deity, power, identity and transcendence.

Åke Lars Gafvelin Lindström - University of Cambridge, UK

No God, No God’s Eye - Revisiting Plantinga’s Quasi-Putnamian argument for Monotheism
Metaphysical realism is the thesis that “the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects” such that “there is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’” [Putnam 1981; 49]. In the first part of this presentation, I present Hilary Putnam’s famous BIV-argument against metaphysical realism, and find that it relies on the rejection of a noetic-ray theory of reference (NTR). In the second part, I demonstrate two ways in which a metaphysical realist could save an NTR, and I develop Plantinga’s claim that metaphysical realists can only rid of Putnam’s concern by adopting the thesis that the objects of our conceptual schemes roughly correspond to reality [see Plantinga 2006]. Thirdly, I argue that naturalism fails to explain such a correspondence, and that monotheism is the only candidate that does so successfully. In the last part, I show that metaphysical realism in fact holds. The line of argumentation is two-fold: pragmatic and theoretical. If metaphysical realism does not hold, then normative considerations must guide theory-choice. But fundamental non-verbal normative disputes are not possible if metaphysical realism is false. Hence, there can be no non-equivocal counterarguments to the claim that metaphysical realism should be adopted if it is false. This amounts to a pragmatic argument for metaphysical realism. Secondly, I employ a reversed Putnamian BIV-argument to show that metaphysical realism is true: if metaphysical realism is false, we cannot assert that it is false, as its denial is only possible from God’s point of view. But we can assert that it is false. Hence, it is true. The conclusion, that God exists, is surely is apt to generate the sort of incredulous stare that any metaphysically ambitious armchair argument is subject to. The fundamental point, however, is that no such stare has any epistemological status if God does not exist.

José David Garcia - Pontifica Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Atheism as a doxastic privation

In this talk is proposed a logical analysis of atheism. This analysis starts with a definition of the concept of God from a logical-epistemic perspective. Specifically, the main thesis consists in maintaining that atheism, rather than being the negation of theism, is its privation. The atheist is the agent who is prived of belief in God.

To justify that thesis, two conceptual sources of support are used. On the one hand, we will use one of the Aristotelian definitions of privation (stèresis), presented in Met. V, 22. 1022 b 22 ss. What Aristotle tells us in this passage is that one is prived of something when one does not have what one ought to have at a specific time. This definition will serve to shape atheism as a kind of doxastic privation. On the other hand, the main tool of analysis used will be the first-order epistemic logic. With this logic the main definitions and results will be presented. This tool is used because the concepts of theism and atheism contain a clear reference to agent beliefs, but especially, we will use these types of logics, because our formulation of atheism depends on a modal conception of privation, and also because our characterization of God as the only omniscient agent contains quantification over states of information.

Our proposal is relevant because it offers a novel formulation of atheism and the varieties of positions opposed to theism. Also, through our proposal, we can establish how opposite atheism is from theism and what is the mode of relation between human agents (theist/atheist agents) and God (omniscient agent). Among other things, it is useful because it is the first step in analyzing the phenomenon of religious conversion.

The plan of the talk is as follows. In the first part, the technical preliminaries will be presented. On
the one hand, a standard characterization of the system of first-order epistemic logic will be defined. On the other hand, the Aristotelian definition of privation will be outlined, and with the language of epistemic logic, the formal definition of privation will be presented. In the second part, the question of the definition of atheism is analyzed, specifically, (Flew, 1972), (Demey, 2019) and (Burgess-Jackson, 2018) are analyzed, and our proposal for the definition of atheism and the variety of non-theisms will be presented. Finally, part three presents the main results and some prospects.

Hamed Ghadiri/Mohsen Feyzbakhsh - Tarbiat Modarres University/University of Tehran, Iran

**Impossibility-sensitivity in the Ontological Argument**

There has been controversies over whether Anselm’s “that than which a greater cannot be conceived” is a possible entity. But there is little attention to whether the possibility of the concept is sufficient for the argument to be sound. In this research, we aim at addressing this latter problem. We shall show that every formulation of the ontological argument ought to satisfy what we call impossibility-sensitivity, that is, by assuming the impossibility of the concept, the argument must fail. Needless to say, this means that an impossible-insensitive ontological argument ought to fail either by being invalid in at least one step of the argument or by falsity of at least one of its premises. This criterion comes from the idea that a sound argument cannot result in the existence of an impossible concept. So, even if one demonstrates the possibility of “that than which a greater cannot be conceived”, the argument would not work unless it is also sensitive to the impossibility of the concept.

However, one can satisfy the criterion merely by transforming one of the premises of their argument into a conditional the antecedent of which is “‘that than which a greater cannot be conceived’ is possible.” So, at the next step, we shall try to strengthen the criterion to avoid these kinds of ad hoc solutions. We call the new criterion justifiable impossibility-sensitivity in which one should be able to give an explanation of the impossibility-sensitive point of their argument independent of the argument itself. This criteria can serve as a logical tool to assess the different formulations of the ontological argument.

Philip Goff - Durham University, UK

**Who Needs the Supernatural?**

I will consider three traditional arguments for the existence of God:

1. The Contingency Argument: There must be something that exists necessarily, in order to explain contingent reality.
2. The Fine-Tuning Argument: There must be an intelligent designer, in order to explain why the universe is fine-tuned for life.
3. The Moral Argument: There must be an ultimate source of goodness and moral objectivity, in order to ground moral facts.

In each case I will argue that, whilst these arguments have force, we can address them by adding properties to the physical universe rather than postulating something supernatural. The result is a form of pantheism, according to which only the physical universe exists but it possesses many of the qualities traditionally ascribed to God.

Susana Gómez Gutiérrez - Independent scholar, Bogota, Colombia

**Rationality in the Context of a Dialetheist Approach to the doctrine of the Incarnation**
One way to respond to the coherence problem of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the doctrine that says that Christ is truly divine and truly human, is assuming, like Beall (2019 and 2021) does, that the doctrine is in fact contradictory and that this can be accepted without hesitation. According to Beall, the reason why is because the problem of logical absurdity—the idea that, in the event that the doctrine of the Incarnation was contradictory, anything would follow from it—can be avoided if one accepts a logic like FDE as the subjacent logic of the theory.

From this perspective, the issues related to what I call a “dialetheist approach to the Incarnation” seem to be solved. But beyond this, there is another problem that, on my view, a contradiction theorist must face, namely, the problem of the irrationality of the doctrine, which has been pointed out by authors like Tertullian and Kierkegaard. If the doctrine is contradictory, it is irrational.

Based on Plantinga’s model of rationality for Christian beliefs, James Anderson (2007) develops a model of rationality for Christian doctrines like the Incarnation and the Trinity that intends to address this problem.

On the one hand, according to Anderson, what makes the belief in the Christian doctrines rational—warranted—is that they are based on the Biblical texts, which are believed to be God’s word. On the other hand, the author conceives the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity as being paradoxical. For Anderson, the term “paradoxical” refers in this context to doctrines that appear to be contradictory but actually aren’t so because the reality to which they refer is consistent. This notion opposes to the notion of genuine contradiction, which refers to contradictions that can’t be solved, i.e., it’s not possible to give a consistent version of the doctrines because the reality to which they refer is inconsistent. According to the author, what makes these paradoxical doctrines warranted is precisely that they are merely apparently contradictory and not genuinely contradictory.

In opposition to Anderson, I present here a model of rationality for the doctrine of the Incarnation understood as a genuine contradiction. This model is based on Anderson’s proposal and some objections that I advance against it. My general objection is that his defense of the idea that genuinely contradictory theories can’t be true is not conclusive, therefore there is no reason to suppose that the doctrine of the Incarnation would be irrational if we accept its genuine contradictoriness. On my view, once that is accepted, we can use his own model to show the rationality of the doctrine.

John Theodore (Ted) Good - University of Toronto, Canada

A Design Argument for Two

The Argument from Design is common in philosophy of religion, but one attempting to establish the existence of two divine beings is not. In general, design arguments highlight the harmonious complexity of some system and uses that to infer to a being organizing it. Although the argument has various formulations, none have formulated it in such a way that the resulting inference produces evidence for two divine beings.

The 9th century Zoroastrian thinker, Mardanfarrox, advanced just such an argument; Mardanfarrox was a contemporary of early Islamic philosophers, such as al-Kindi, as well as early practitioners of Islamic theology (kalam), and his argumentative style is well-imbedded in that historical period and philosophical tradition. Mardanfarrox’s proof presumes certain features of Aristotelian physics—e.g., that the four elements are the ultimate constituents of matter—in order to proceed using a
formulation of the design argument common in Islamic theology: the argument from particularization. In addition to its historical interest, Mardanfarrox’s remarkable ability to extract from his initial proof consequences for divine attributes as well as theodicy is worthy of serious study. Moreover, the sheer novelty of a design argument for two divine beings is noteworthy in itself.

This presentation will sketch some historical context and detail the three major movements in Mardanfarrox’s argument: the particularization argument for god, it’s corollary that god has free will, and a further corollary that god’s free will indicates a co-eternal contrary to god.

Akshay Gupta - University of Cambridge, UK

A Hindu Theodicy

The problem of evil is one of the biggest challenges to perfect being theism. Currently, most extant theodicies pertain exclusively to Christianity. In this paper, I develop a non-Christian theodicy by drawing upon the theological resources of the Hindu religious tradition known as Caitanya Vai??avism. Specifically, this theodicy holds that each self once resided in a supramundane realm with God and then chose to leave God’s company in order to come to this physical world. This theodicy thus exculpates God from any charges of moral imperfection by asserting that the root cause of a self’s suffering is the misuse of their volitional capacities. This in turn raises the following objection: why did God not prevent the self from falling away from God? In order to answer this objection, which is similar to a famous objection advanced by J.L. Mackie, I put forth an argument that utilizes modal logic to demonstrate that it is impossible for God to control our actions while allowing us to be agents with libertarian free will, provided that 1) God’s omnibenevolence entails that God necessarily performs certain types of actions, and 2) libertarian free will requires the principle of alternate possibilities to hold. I thus maintain that a successful argument from evil that is targeted against the Caitanya Vai??ava tradition will have to challenge both 1) and 2).

Soufiane Hamri - University of Birmingham, UK

A New Look at the Ontological Argument

Standard ontological arguments have their roots in Perfect Being Theology (PBT), which defines God as the greatest possible being. PBT-based ontological arguments have been challenged on various grounds and are considered worthless by many philosophers, theists and atheists alike. My aim is to defend a new family of ontological arguments that are based on an alternative concept of God, which is at least as faithful to the ordinary concept of God as that of PBT. I argue that these new ontological arguments are not vulnerable to the main objections levelled against standard ontological arguments. Moreover, these arguments offer the prospects of a unification with cosmological arguments and of shifting the focus of the debate on ontological arguments to that on central issues in fundamental metaphysics that are usually taken to be neutral from a theological perspective. If I am right, a fruitful dialogue between philosophy of religion and general metaphysics is in the offing.

Leland Royce Harper - Siena Heights University, USA

Rejecting Passive Faith: Pan(en)theism as a Tool to Fight COVID-19
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, at least in North America, we have seen the growth of two distinct yet often intertwined groups of people commonly referred to as “anti-vaxxers” and “anti-maskers.” Anti-vaxxers, at least, in this case, are those who dismiss the value of potential or actual COVID-19 vaccines. In contrast, anti-maskers are those who dismiss the effectiveness of wearing face-masks and face-coverings as a mode of mitigating the spread of COVID-19. One of the primary reasons cited by those who dismiss vaccines and face-masks is a faith in God and His creative abilities. So, the argument goes, God has created my lungs and my immune system, and He does not need any help. Therefore, I will not get vaccinated or wear a mask because I have faith in God’s creative abilities.

This kind of faith seems to be based on a very narrow view of theism and faith. It is my argument that if these people (or, possibly, Western society as a whole) were to broaden their theistic worldview to include pantheism or panentheism, then we would see much more progress in the way of stopping the spread of COVID-19. Making the pan(en)theistic shift would allow these theists to embrace scientific discovery and progress more so than does a narrow sense of theism that relies far more heavily on passive faith. Pan(en)theists find their meaning, place and build their relationship with God by, among other things, understanding the processes of nature and by embracing their position within it. I take developing an understanding of science to fall under the umbrella of understanding the processes of nature, and this allows pan(en)theists to maintain their faith while still embracing developments within the fields of immunology and epidemiology and heeding the recommendations of the experts in those fields without harming the integrity of their faith. I ultimately argue that the active approach to faith and understanding natural processes and science, which is foundational to pan(en)theistic practice, would provide us with another tool to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

Victoria Harrison - University of Macau, Macau

On ghosts and gods

This paper focuses on the spiritual ontology of traditional Chinese folk religion, and specifically on the animist tendency found within that in the context of ancient and modern Chinese ghost culture. Within traditional Chinese folk religion, gods have a transitory status. A spirit can transition between being a god, an ancestor, or a possibly malicious ghost. This way of conceiving deity and other spiritual beings is grounded in certain metaphysical assumptions that stand in stark contrast to those usually considered by philosophers of religion. For example, that the dead enjoy a continuing relationship with the living and that their condition in the afterlife depends, to a large extent, on how the living treat them. For a spirit to become a god requires that people decide to treat it as if it were a god. This dynamic is accompanied by distinctive expectations about what a deity should be able to accomplish to fulfil its role. This is an underexplored subject within philosophy of religion, and it provides a pathway to philosophical research based on ontological perspectives grounding unfamiliar ways of conceptualising relations between the living and those in the spirit world: gods, ancestors and ghosts.

Clemente Huneeus - Universidad de los Andes, Chile

“GOD” and theoretical terms: the semantic and hermeneutic function of natural theology

A return to the question of the meaningfulness of religious language might help recover a distinctive approach to natural theology. After a short introduction distinguishing the present approach from others more common in recent literature, this paper restates the neopositivist objection against the meaningfulness of religious propositions (Flew's falsification problem) as a semantic problem
regarding the fixation of a referent for the word “God” (Alston problem with the reference of theistic propositions within semantic theories of direct reference).

The paper suggests dealing with this problem by treating God as what some philosophers of science have named a theoretical term, that is, a term naming an entity unsusceptible to direct observation but still fulfilling a certain explanatory role within theories that purport to explain the things open to experience. Following En? we can say that the referential apparatus of theoretical terms combines a kripkean-ostensive element (the name is imposed to designate the entities that account for certain individualizaba phenomena) and a descriptivist component (the meaning of the term is associated with the broader conceptual framework of the theory within which it has an explanatory function, and that requires the entity to adequately fulfill certain descriptions).

Considering some characteristic features of theoretical terms when dealing with “God” might shed new light on various matters discussed by contemporary philosophy of religion. On the one hand, the falsification of theistic propositions is not achieved through simple confrontation with empirical data, but involves a more complex and time consuming process. Theistic and God-dispensing ontologies must be seen as alternatives theories or research programs aiming to better explain the world we experience. On the other hand, successfully referring to God involves both recognizing certain features of the universe that claim for an explanation (arguments for God's existence) and developing an account of this facts through the God-hypothesis (a theoretical account of divine attributes that depends on the previous discussion of God's existence). Wether or not this process ends up with a deity resembling the "God" worshipped be classical theism is an open question, that will hardly depend on the exact explanatory function we are associating with the concept and also our general ideas regarding "explanations" and scientific realism.

This conclusion particularly recalls the semantic and hermeneutic functions that should be granted to natural theology if the proposed way of stating and solving the problem is accepted. This is so because the classical arguments to demonstrate God's existence constitute a path through which the very concept of "God" becomes intelligible and consequently religious discourse turns out meaningful. In order to fulfill this function arguments need not be strictly apomictic, but just probable. However, a complete failure of natural theology results in the meaninglessness of any God-talk.

Asha Lancaster-Thomas - Atlanta Classical Academy, USA

Breaking the Sound Barrier of Religious Experience

If an individual has a condition that limits their ability to receive a religious experience, is this a case of spiritual discrimination? Much work has been done in the classification of religious experiences, yet the sub-categorisation of auditory religious experiences has been somewhat overlooked in the philosophy of religion. In this presentation, I explore two underdeveloped questions in the analysis of religious experience. The first is how we can delineate between different sub-types of sonic religious experience. The second is whether those who do not have the capacity to hear are at what one might call a spiritual disadvantage as a result of not having the ability to experience certain types of religious experience. This question is particularly important as it explores the broader issue of whether a deity would discriminate against particular individuals who have specific sensory/communication impairments.

Joanna Leidenhag - University of St Andrews, UK
Does Panpsychism Entail Theism?: An Argument from Panpsychism to the Existence of God(s)

Arguments from consciousness suggest that the reality of conscious experience within the physical universe increases the probability of the existence of God and may even give us clues as to the nature of any such deity/deities. I first outline three formats that the argument from consciousness might take: an argument from analogy, an argument from divine intervention, or an argument from explanatory structure. I then adopt the third of these formats to argue that panpsychism strongly implies the existence of creator God/gods. This is because the explanatory structure of panpsychism is the same as the explanatory structure employed within the cosmological argument(s). Given that panpsychism is a philosophy of mind shared by both eastern and western philosophical traditions, this argument has implications for a wide variety of theistic traditions.

Qiu Lin - Duke University, USA

Wang Daiyu on the Three Ultimates: An Islamic Makeover

This paper investigates the theory of transformative creation developed by Wang Daiyu (1570-1660), the earliest as well as one of the most influential figures in the Han Kitab tradition (a Chinese-Arabic compound literally meaning “the Chinese books”), which was produced by the huiru, or “Confucian Muslims”. First, I provide a systematic analysis of Wang Daiyu’s appropriation of three concepts from traditional Chinese cosmogony to articulate his theory of transformative creation: (1) the Non-Ultimate; (2) the Great-Ultimate; and (3) the Human-Ultimate. Second, I establish the novelty and importance of Wang Daiyu’s contribution to the heated philosophical history about the three Ultimates. In their attempts to develop a metaphysics from this cosmogony, Neo-Confucians find themselves disagree widely as regard the relation between the two, thereby leading to a classic debate in the history of Chinese metaphysics. From the perspective of this debate, I argue that Wang Daiyu adds a fresh perspective and a bold voice to a predominantly non-theistic philosophical discourse.

Andrew Loke - Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

The Kalam Cosmological Argument and the Existence and Nature of God

This paper discusses what we can learn about the existence and attributes of God through a rational reflection on the origin of the cosmos. The development of Big Bang cosmology has led to renewed interest concerning the question of First-Cause and the traditional Kalam Cosmological Argument (KCA) for the existence of God. Nevertheless, while the Big Bang is commonly understood as the beginning of space-time, many cosmologists are now discussing pre-Big Bang scenarios in which the Big Bang is not the absolute beginning. On the other hand, cosmologist George Ellis (‘Issues in the Philosophy of Cosmology,’ 2007) notes, with respect to the criteria for a good scientific theory (internal consistency, explanatory power, etc.), that “these criteria are philosophical in nature in that they themselves cannot be proven to be correct by any experiment. Rather their choice is based on past experience combined with philosophical reflection.” In view of the importance of philosophical considerations, cosmologists should not ignore the philosophical problems associated with certain models of the universe, such as problems concerning traversing an actual infinite, the violation of Causal Principle, etc. Indeed, scientists who are well-informed about the importance of philosophy have used philosophical arguments against an infinite regress to argue against cosmological models that postulate an infinite past (e.g. Ellis et al., ‘Multiverses and physical cosmology,’ 2004). This indicates that philosophical arguments are relevant for modern cosmology. In this paper, I shall develop a new philosophical argument taken from my books God and Ultimate Origins (Springer, 2017) and The Teleological and Kalam Cosmological Arguments Revisited (Springer, forthcoming). It
demonstrates that, if every prior entity in a causal chain has a beginning, then given the Causal Principle ‘everything that begins to exist requires a cause’ nothing would ever begin to exist, therefore what is required is a beginningless First Cause. In addition, I shall develop a new Modus Tollens argument for the Causal Principle which addresses the objections by Graham Oppy and others, and which demonstrates that, if something (say, the universe) begins to exist uncaused, then some other things which begin to exist would also begin uncaused, which is not the case, therefore the antecedent is not the case. In response to Stephen Hawking’s proposal that the initial state of the universe consisted of a timeless (no boundary) state, which can be understood as a beginningless impersonal First Cause, I shall use these new arguments to show that an infinite regress of events (changes) is impossible and the first event did not begin uncaused. Thus the first change (=first event) must have been caused by a First Cause which was initially changeless, and which must have libertarian freedom in order to bring about the first event from an initially changeless state. A First Cause with the attributes of beginninglessness and libertarian freedom is a personal Creator of the universe, whom Christians refer to by the word ‘God’ (Romans 1:20).

Shoaib Ahmed Malik - Zayed University, UAE

An Ash’arite Perspective on Theology of Nature

There have been many developments in the field of science and religion over the past few decades. One such development is referred to as theology of nature (hereon referred to as ToN), which is the activity of building and/or revising theological frameworks in light of contemporary scientific developments, e.g. evolution, chaos theory, and quantum mechanics. Ian Barbour, John Polkinghorne, and Arthur Peacocke - all of whom are Christian thinkers - are the most well-known of advocates of this kind of thinking. However, this discourse has hardly been looked at from an Islamic perspective. Given this gap, in this article I view this strand of thinking from the specific lens of Ash’arite theology, a Sunni school of Islam. I first establish what Ash’arism as a theological system represents. In doing so I separate what are historical and secondary considerations from the primary principles of Ash’arism. The framework of Ash’arism is then understood as the conjunction of occasionalism, the broadest modality of God’s creative powers, the radical contingency of the world, and divine command theory. ToN is then evaluated through this framework. An important distinction is made between science-informed theology and existence-informed theology. For Ash’arites, an existence-informed theology is sufficient for understanding God but they would find the science-informed theology displayed in ToN to be problematic; the motivation and methodology of localising or modifying God’s nature or attributes to fit the science of the day would be seen as theologically very costly and a form of scientism. Subsequently, it is concluded that ToN would be seen as a problematic project in Ash’arite theology.

Iain McGee - University of Bristol, UK

John Calvin and Humankind’s Knowledge of the Existence of God: A Triple Lens Perspective

Calvin’s references to the sensus divinitatis (SD) in the Institutes have been variously understood and applied. Famously, both Barth and Brunner appealed to Calvin in support of polar opposite positions on ‘natural’ knowledge of God in their fiery debate of 1934. In this paper I start by presenting 4 possible understandings of Calvin’s meaning of the SD: no knowledge of God, some knowledge, environment-specific knowledge and a sceptical position that posits Calvin was not really interested in this subject. After summarising these positions, I suggest that further light on the subject can be had through a consideration of Calvin’s writings outside the Institutes. I provide an overview of his comments on the semen religionis and conscience in the prologue of the first chapter of John’s
gospel (the second lens focus in the study) and also consider his comments on ‘false’ religions in a number of his commentaries (the third lens). I suggest that all four interpretations outlined at the beginning of the presentation are plausible within the first few chapters of Book 1 of the Institutes alone (the first lens). However, I suggest that only one interpretation is able to account for comments made by Calvin elsewhere in his writings. This position is that Calvin believed humankind to possess some knowledge of the God of the Bible. I close by considering the possible role of Calvin’s historical context in influencing his thought on this subject.

Damiano Migliorini - Independent Scholar, Italy

A “Kantian-inspired” Argument for the Trinity

I will argue that the Trinity is part of natural theology even if it is a contradictory doctrine, because anyone wondering about the nature of God come to think in a trinitarian way. In the first part of the paper, I will explain why any theistic system must be Trinitarian (an emblematic example is Swinburne’s deduction of the trinitarian nature of the divine from the necessity of God’s unselfish love). At the same time, I will show that there are strong arguments for holding the Trinity to be a contradictory doctrine, although we must admit it is an inevitable description of God. If all the “solutions” (developed in contemporary discussion) for the aporias generated by the existence of three divine persons are unsatisfactory, a “Kantian-inspired Argument” will allow us to still believe in the Trinity despite all odds. This is possible because we have antinomic situations in two realms of knowledge: that ontological realm of fundamental entities, and that of God’s nature. In both realms we choose between “absurd options”, because this is our common way of knowing and believing. This pushes the question even further, because it implies defining what is “rational”, and therefore what belongs to natural theology.

Taylor-Grey Miller/Derek Haderlie - University of Texas at Austin/Brigham Young University, USA

How Unorthodox is the Mormon Conception of God?

According to what we might call the standard theological tradition in Mormonism, the starting point for theorizing about the nature of God consists in reflecting on ways that God is bound or constrained. According to this way of theorizing, we don’t begin with God’s status as a maximally perfect being possessing all the great-making qualities, and from there work to reconcile God’s relationship to the world in all its limitations. Rather, we begin with the world with all its constraints and crowded ontology and work up to a characterization of God made to fit that world. The result is what at first appears to be a thoroughly finitistic conception of God. This has ramifications for the way in which Mormon theology is apt to characterize the ontological relationships between the members of the trinity, and has led many (both Mormon and non-Mormon alike) to conclude that there is a gulf of dissimilarity between the Mormon conception of the trinity and anything like what falls within the banner of Christian Orthodoxy. Our aim is to show that while these may be deep methodological differences they interestingly don’t have to result in deep metaphysical differences.

We begin by arguing that the core claims regarding the nature of God made by standard Mormon theologians can be helpfully explicated in terms of the contemporary ideology of grounding. We then show, following Joshua Sijuwade [2021], that these same tools offer an explication of the core commitment of orthodox trinitarianism. Call this Orthodox Grounding Trinitarianism. As Sijuwade points out, in order for Orthodox Grounding Trinitarianism to be properly orthodox, it requires taking a strong view of the explanatory role of metaphysical laws; that they in some real sense govern grounding explanations. This turns out to be very near the natural way of understanding the
way Mormon theologians have characterized the explanatory role of metaphysical laws. We conclude there is one deep similarity in the background metaphysical pictures. Both share a conception of laws as governing the structure of the world.

Rafael Miranda-Rojas - University Catholic of Maule, Chile

*Intuitions, Evidentialism and Skeptical Theism*

This paper seeks to evaluate the scope of the link between skeptical theism, the evidential problem of evil and the role of intuitions as a case of sui generis a priori epistemic access. In order to do this, I will first address the theoretical assumptions present in the understanding of what is an intuition and, consequently, what is an intuitive belief as a case of non-inferential and a priori belief. Following Church et al (2020), one main point of this research would be to highlight the link between intuitions and evidentialism, as it is considered in the evidential problem of evil. This will allow a moderate and empirically informed rationalist analysis of what is understood as evidence regarding the possible (and probable in some readings) non-existence of God, if it is the case that there is at least one instance of gratuitous evil (pointless evil) in the world. To strengthen this reading in favor of an a priori - a posteriori link as a way of responding to the argument of evil and its role of undercutting defeater (Oliveira, 2019), two assumptions present in the discussion will be considered, and their plausibility: i) that a priori reasons are not strictly understood as evidence for religious belief of a proposition p; ii) that the irrationality of religious belief arises from the absence of justification for the occurrence of an event of evil. I maintain there is a tension between i) and ii), specifically regarding the absence of evidence that allows us to sustain the incompatibility between gratuitous evil and the non-existence of God.

Mohsen Moghri - Sharif University of Technology, Iran

*A Platonic Creation Story: Goodness is what ultimately gives existence to the world*

Why is there something concrete, instead of there being nothing at all? In response to this question, most theists maintain: God is a metaphysically necessary being and has created all other things in the world. But when one asks theists, “What explains God’s existence as a metaphysical necessary being?”, they respond that the question does not make sense: Something’s being necessary means that no alternative is possible. In other world, they say, it lies in the essence of God that He exists, and the fact that His essence is so is not apt for further explanation. However, some evidence shows that even metaphysically necessary facts might be further explained. There are theists who concede that God’s necessary existence is the ultimate brute fact, it could have an explanation but it does not. Moreover, some theists attempt to explain God’s necessary existence through facts of value. Some of them go so far as using the term, God, for the creative force of value. They follow Plato’s footsteps in viewing the Form of Good as what gives existence to things. That kind of Platonic explanation was intended by many great theologians of the past: “The Good is that on which all else depends” (Plotinus); “Goodness as a cause is prior to being”, and “Even non-existent things seek a good, namely, to exist” (Aquinas). As a recent supporter of that view, Paul Tillich says: God “is not a being” but is instead “the power of being”, “the creative ground of existence.”

But one might still ask, in explaining the world’s existence, why the Platonic God, the creative force of value, obtains. John Leslie and Nicholas Rescher argue for the Axiological explanation by contending that only through the world’s value can one provide an ultimate explanation for existence; they view Axiological facts as necessary and not apt for further explanations. However, value facts should not be regarded as inexplicable. Just as many necessary facts have explanations, so too might facts of value be further explained. Despite this, I argue that value facts can be self-
explanatory: The fact that all valuable things exist is itself among valuable things. So, if our world exists because of its value, then all other valuable worlds must exist. The Axiological explanation, so interpreted, does not fall into explanatory regress; neither is it a brute, inexplicable fact. By virtue of its explanatory power, therefore, one might prefer the Axiological explanation to other explanations of existence. To be sure, the benefit of self-explanation is not the only reason for accepting the Axiological explanation. Independent evidence, such as the fine-tuning for intelligent life, confirms that value might explain why the world exists.

Mousa Mohammadian - University of Notre Dame, New York, USA

Explanatory Consistency and Natural Selection: On Nagasawa’s Problem of Evil for Atheists

Traditionally, the problem of evil has been raised against theism. Recently, Nagasawa (2018) has offered a version of the problem of evil for atheists that is called the existential problem of systematic evil. This problem is based on an incompatibility between the problem of systematic evil and existential optimism. According to the former, the biological system of the world is “evil”—i.e., it involves intense and undesired pain and suffering. Moreover, this evil is caused by the cruel nature of evolution by natural selection and hence it is systematic and fundamental. According to existential optimism, the world is generally good and we should be happy that we live in the world. Nagasawa argues that that existential optimism, a widely embraced worldview that is endorsed by many atheists, is incompatible with the problem of systematic evil, especially because we know that our life depends, nomologically, on the evil biological system.

In this paper, I argue that this alleged incompatibility is merely apparent and further naturalistic analyses can easily solve it.  
• First, I show that existential optimism doesn’t include any doxastic attitudes towards the world and should be only understood in terms of non-doxastic attitudes towards life. To argue for this claim, I use Nagasawa’s own evidence for atheists’ existential optimism.
• Second, by analyzing some major psychological studies about optimism and happiness, I provide an empirical equivalent for existential optimism. Here, there is some good news for Nagasawa: his claim that existential optimism is a widely held worldview enjoys empirical support. However, I argue that the non-doxastic attitudes that constitute existential optimism have adaptive value and are not caused by any belief, let alone a belief that might be incompatible with the problem of systematic evil.
• Thirdly, relying on this empirical evidence, I argue for two types of compatibility between the problem of systematic evil and existential optimism. First, Existential optimism is pragmatically (and even morally) compatible with the existence of systematic evil in the world—it doesn’t cause any evil and alleviates our pain and suffering. And second, the existence of systematic evil and the existence of existential optimism have explanatory compatibility, namely, they have one common explanans.

Juan Diego Morales - University of Cartagena, Colombia

The Ecology of the Knowledge of God

Different religious traditions, beliefs, and experiences claim to have epistemic contact with the ultimate and supreme source of reality, on which everything else depends. But this epistemic claim has encountered, among other important obstacles, a main problem in the multiplicity and, at first sight, incompatibility of their different accounts. Most religious mystics and practitioners refer to the ultimate nature of reality from apparently contradictory perspectives: among others, as the ultimate
emptiness of nirvana, as the vast impersonal consciousness in which everyone participates, or as the infinitely perfect creator. Even personal or theistic religions, although affirming the omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and all goodness of this supreme being, explain him/her through diverse and potentially conflicting accounts: as a great immaterial mind, as a merciful father, an immutable and impassible agent, a king or master who should be worshiped with awe and reverence, the playful sweetest little boy, the love of his associates by whom he is controlled, and even the paramour of many girls and married women. Furthermore, sometimes this being is considered as three divine persons or as a divine couple.

Most of the proposals that have tried resolve the problem coincide in favoring either the veridical contact with the supreme reality or the diversity of the accounts. Some authors argue about the former insofar as they affirm that such diversity only concerns the different linguistic forms which try to describe the same reality that is experienced beyond our concepts (Smart 1999, Smith 1987). In such a case, there can be a mystic experiential contact with that reality, but we cannot validly say whether it is an emptiness, a perfect father, or the highest cupid of the beings. From a Kantian perspective, other authors articulate the phenomenon in terms of a unique reality that is multiply experienced and conceptualized, but that ends up being a noumenon that is beyond our knowledge (Hick 1984, 2004). Others go beyond this and argue that the diversity not only applies to our concepts and experiences but to their objects (Katz 1978), which implies that different religious traditions do not speak about the same reality or that, if they suppose to do so, they end up being mostly false (Alston 1991, Plantinga 2000).

The purpose of this presentation is to propose an integrationist framework that can overcome the dilemma by giving validity to both the veridical contact and the multiple perspective of the religious approaches to divinity. A picture under which the supreme being can be experienced and understood, following the mystics’ own words, in infinite and inexhaustible ways (Gellman 1997): as a merciful father, as a majestic king, as a supreme cupid, and even as a divine person who can also have sacred impersonal features. Borrowing Santos’ term of the ecology of knowledge (2016, 2018), I call this integrationist framework the ecology of the knowledge of god which is based on the idea of an active, embodied, extended (Ryle 1949, Wittgenstein PI, OC, Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991, Clark & Chalmers 1998, Gallagher 2020), multiple, and essentially limited (Santos 2016, 2018) account of experience and knowledge, understanding the diverse religious traditions as sets of embodied and practical knowledges that try to grasp different features and dimensions of the same ultimate reality, constituting an epistemological ecology of multiple, interactive, and potentially complementary accounts.

Ana Maria Correa Moreira da Silva - University of Brasilia, Brazil

A metaphysical conception of the relation between time and eternity as basis for the Theory of Resurrection in Death

My work investigates a metaphysical conception of the relation between time and eternity as basis for the Theory of Resurrection in Death, according to which the individual resurrection occurs immediately after death, when time ceases to exist. According to this hypothesis of Christian theology, at the moment of death, a person, as an integrated unit of body and soul, leaves the dimension of space-time and moves into the dimension of eternity, in which there is no time interval. For this reason there is for her no intermediate state, understood as the waiting time for individual resurrection, to occur only at the end of times, in the so-called Universal Judgment. In "Naherwartung, Auferstehung, Unsterblichkeit" (1982), Gisberg Greshake and Gerhard Lohfink defend the immediate resurrection, based on a new eschatological model that establishes a vertical polarity between time and eternity, in which eternity crosses all points of the long timeline of human
history. In this model, the eschatological future of Humanity takes place at the death of each individual, regardless of when in history the individual lived, lives or will live. It presupposes an atemporal concept of eternity, as the dimension of an atemporal God for whom all events happen simultaneously. In this model God is eternal in the sense of being timeless, and not everlasting. It rests on a kind of incommensurability between physical time and divine eternity, through an equivocal notion of simultaneity that relates the completeness (Vollendung) of the individual history to the completeness of universal history.

In "Time and Eternity" (1991), Brian Leftow defends the timelessness of God, together with a relation of simultaneity between an eternal entity and a temporal entity, or between two eternal entities, which are located in the same timeless reference frame of eternity. Leftow provides a simultaneity relation linking time and eternity without positing a relation of ET-simultaneity, as made by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann in their paper "Eternity" (1981). Accordingly, all events occur simultaneously in the same “eternal present” of God, which does not imply that they occur simultaneously in time. So, the same event is present and actual in the eternal reference frame, although, in one of the temporal reference frames it may no longer be present or it may not yet be present.

I analyze to what extent the simultaneity relation developed by Leftow can remove the apparent paradox that underlie the coincidence between the individual eschatology and the universal eschatology, as one of the main tenets of the Theory of Resurrection in Death.

**Masahiro Morioka - Waseda University, Japan**

*Is Birth Negation Held by Atheistic Antinatalists a Kind of Religious Belief?*

Is coming into existence wrong? Should everyone refrain from procreating? Many antinatalists answer “yes” to both questions. There are two types of antinatalism that I would like to consider: the negation of one’s having been born, or “birth negation,” and the negation of giving birth, or “procreation negation.” While antinatalism in the latter sense appeared in the 20th century and is becoming popular in this century, antinatalism in the former sense existed in ancient Greece and ancient India, and has long influenced philosophy and religion in both the East and the West. Antinatalists argue that not coming into existence is preferable to coming into existence—that is, looking toward the past, one’s not having been born would have been preferable to one’s having been born, and looking toward the future, not giving birth to a child would be preferable to giving birth. One of the most popular types of antinatalism today is based on a “pain avoidance theory,” which argues that (1) if a person comes into existence, she feels at least some pain as she grows, (2) but if she does not come into existence, then no pain occurs, (3) so not coming into existence would be preferable to coming into existence.

Many current antinatalists are atheists. Let us focus our attention on the atheists’ evaluation of an individual’s having been born. They believe that no one who shares the same identity with them could exist before their birth. The state before birth was a state of complete nothing; they compare their current lives with the state of nothing before birth, and conclude that the latter would be preferable to coming into existence.

This sounds very strange to me. Is it really possible for them to prefer, from the bottom of their heart, the state that they believe they cannot categorically experience? With regard to the world that existed 500 million years ago, we can imagine a hypothetical person who experienced that world, so saying that we prefer the world that would have been experienced by that hypothetical person makes complete sense. However, with regard to the state before birth, in the atheist view,
there is no one who could experience it even in a hypothetical sense, so it is strange for someone to prefer such a state. The same can be applied to the world after death, but while preferring death can be meaningfully interpreted as an aspiration to escape this world, preferring not to have been born cannot lead to such clear worldly actions.

This may suggest that birth negation, as posited by atheists, could be a kind of religious belief in the sense that they actually believe in the positive value of a state that completely transcends our experienced world, which could only be compared with religious ideas such as nirvana and eternal life found in traditional religions. These are just a few preliminary ideas on this topic, and I would like to exchange opinions with the other participants.

Rasoul Namazi - Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany

Leo Strauss on Philosophy and Atheism

As one of the most influential as well as controversial historians of philosophy, Leo Strauss’s perspective on the history of thought is intimately connected with one of his most fundamental ideas: the unavoidable conflict between reason and revelation or philosophy and religion. Subscribing to the idea that there is an irremediable conflict between “Athens” and “Jerusalem,” most of Strauss’s historical studies on the major figures of the history of philosophy, from Plato, Aristotile, Maimonides, Alfarabi, and Averroes to Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, consist of showing that all these philosophers, even when they publicly claimed to be believers, were in fact atheists and did not subscribe to any religious tradition. Although Strauss’s historiographical claims have understandably attracted much critical attention from other historians, insufficient attention has been paid to the underlying reason on the basis of which he made such a controversial claim. Why did Strauss believe in the fundamental opposition of philosophy and religion? What specific philosophical contradictions exist, in Strauss’s view, between the basic premises of rational thought and those of a religious view? Why did Strauss believe that all philosophic thought is fundamentally atheistic? In this paper, I will try to respond to these questions by relying on Strauss’s unpublished and published writings. I will trace Strauss’s thesis about the contradiction of philosophy and religion to his claims about the importance of necessity in philosophical thought on the one hand, and the fundamental character of divine omnipotence, providence, and legislation in religious thought on the other.

Steven Nemes - Grand Canyon University, USA

Michel Henry, Dumitru Staniloae, and the world as God’s “body”

Christianity understands both the human self and the world in relation to God, and it says that He can be encountered in both domains, in subjectivity and in objectivity. In the self: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16). In the world: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). But it is not easy to understand how this can be possible. On the one hand, there is the fact that locating the experience of God in the inner realm of subjectivity could seem to turn God into a mere feeling which may come and go, so that one is left wondering whether it really was Him one felt. On the other hand, locating God in the sphere of objectivity would seem to make the experience of God dependent upon the strength of the “proofs” by which one comes to understand His existence as the cause of everything visible. One’s faith in God could only be as strong as one’s arguments, and these will always be subject to endless dialectic and debate. This is a problem which strikes at the very heart of Christian doctrine, since it speaks
with confidence, not tentatively, about the accessibility of God in both domains.

The challenge taken up here is that of interpreting the relation between subjectivity and objectivity in such a way that the teaching of Christianity about the accessibility of God in both domains can be made intelligible. This will be done by means of a corrective synthesis of insights found in the writings of the French phenomenologist Michel Henry and the Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae. On the one hand, Henry presents a compelling account of the accessibility of God in the domain of subjectivity in accordance with his phenomenology of life. At the same time, his conception of the world has been subjected to serious theological critique. It seems to have no Christian significance for him at all. On the other hand, Staniloae presents a theologically rich interpretation of the created world as the medium in which a dialog takes place between God and human beings. But his natural theological argumentation, through which the world is put in relation to God as its cause, leaves something to be desired. These two visions can be synthesized and the lacunae filled through an interpretation of the world as the “body” of God. Just as, for human beings, the body is the visible medium through which the invisible life of a person is communicated to others, so also the world itself is the “body” by means of which God communicates visibly with those whom He has engendered in His own Life. In this way, the human being and the world are put in intimate connection with God from the very point of their geneses.

Emmanuel Ofuasia - Lagos State University, Nigeria

The Panentheistic Relationship between the Supreme Being and other Gods in African Traditional Religion: The Traditional Yorùbá Example

The researches of the first generation scholars of African traditional religion have provided an unfair, unreliable and uncharitable misrepresentation of the religious of cultures of pre-colonial Africans. Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, J.B. Danquah are guilty of this charge as they offer that the religious cultures of traditional Africa are monotheistic in outlook. This misleading presentation is further strengthened when the Yorùbá Bible first appeared thanks to the translation of Samuel Ajayi Crowther where Esu, one of the primordial divinities in traditional Yorùbá pantheon was smuggled in as the Satan/Devil that is replete in the Islamic and Judeo-Christian revelations. In spite of the recent scholarly efforts to the effect that this is not the case, owing to an improved rendition that shows the lack of antagonism in the relationship between the Supreme Being and other Gods, the monotheistic misrepresentation continues to invade the works of some contemporary African scholars. Basing my assessment on traditional Yorùbá, via the method of conversational philosophy, I foreground that panentheism is the appropriate theistic belief that undergirds the theology. I contend against the submissions of John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu; Omotade Adegbindin; and Akinola Adebowale. Whereas the first two merely attempt to model the relationship between the Supreme Being in traditional Yorùbá theology, Olódùmarè and other deities after the Judeo-Christian pattern, the last two are even bolder to foray into the Ifá literary corpus of the Yorùbá to provide a misleading presentation of some Ifá verses toward their monotheistic stance. My research shows that all these scholars have not been able to present a fair and reliable assessment of the panentheistic character concerning the relationship between Supreme Being and other deities among Africans. The principal aim of this research, therefore, is to correct these anomalies.

Noam Oren - The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Isreal

Religious obligation to have faith and the (dis)ability to decide to believe
Many streams of the Abrahamic religions endorse a religious obligation to have faith. That is, in all of these religions, there is the idea that there is a religious obligation to believe in certain propositions - from the existence of God, to the occurrence of certain historical events. While there are references to the religious obligation to have faith in each religion, which exist from the earliest of days, the extensive writing regarding these obligations became more apparent in the Middle Ages. A clear example of this can be found in the writings of Maimonides. Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish philosophers and Halachic (Jewish legal) authorities in the Middle Ages, begins his great Halachic book with a clear command to believe 'that there is a First Being'.

This command, and other commands regarding faith, that can be found in the writings of additional religious thinkers, raise a significant philosophical question, because it is not clear that you can decide to believe in propositions. If so, there seems to be no point in a religious commandment about faith. In fact, there are three claims that seem impossible to accept together. They are:

1. There is a religious obligation to have faith
2. If there is a religious obligation to have faith, then one can decide to believe
3. One cannot decide to believe.

It seems reasonable that any theist from the Abrahamic religions would want to accept these three claims. The first claim, that there is an obligation to have faith, is simply an almost obvious fact in all these religious traditions. The second claim, that if there is a religious obligation to have faith, then one can decide to believe, also seems plausible because it is not reasonable to think the God would command us to do things we are unable to decide to do (or in the conventional wording within the ethical context – 'Ought implies can').

The third claim, that One cannot decide to believe, also sounds plausible and nearly unanimously held by contemporary analytic philosophers. In the contemporary literature, there are two types of arguments for this claim - an analytical argument and an empirical-phenomenological argument. The analytical argument, articulated best by Bernard Williams, suggests that there is a contradiction in the idea of 'deciding to believe'. The empirical-phenomenological argument, that William Alston presents, suggests that the fact that one cannot decide to believe is simply a psychological fact about human beings, that each person can easily realize for himself. Alston does not deny Williams' analytical claim, but he is also unwilling to commit to it. Either way, it seems that the option to decide to believe is not available to us.

In my lecture I would like to review the problem under discussion and examine the various solutions proposed by philosophers of religion and theologians - from the Middle Ages through contemporary analytical philosophy. In short, the main solutions that I will explore are the solutions that attempt to reject one of the claims, or solutions that argue that religious belief is not a propositional belief, but rather something else (such as acceptance, make-belief, aspect seeing etc.).

Ben Page - University of Oxford, UK

*Timelessness a`la Leftow*

Whilst God’s timelessness is a view that has come under scrutiny of late, there are several different ways to model what it is for God to be timeless. Brian Leftow has offered such a view in numerous places, and this talk will concern his work on this. Sadly some have failed to understand Leftow’s view, with this sometimes being acknowledged explicitly in the literature. My first aim is to help those with such difficulties, and explicate the key aspects of Leftow’s view by drawing parallels to other areas in philosophy. The second aim is similar to the first, since I will show that at least many
of the major criticisms that have been levelled to Leftow’s view fail to do any real damage to the essential aspects of the view overall. All they do is remove some justification Leftow gives for some of the moves he makes, and thus Leftow’s view in its essentials remains intact. That people think more is achieved by these objections shows that they to fail to understand the essential aspects of Leftow’s model.

Kenneth Lee Pearce - Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Minimal Explanatory Theism Requires Grounding Indeterminism

Cosmological arguments maintain that a (unique) being standing outside the natural world must be posited in order to provide a complete explanation of the natural world. Without assuming that this being has any of the other traditional divine attributes of Western monotheism, I will call this being ‘God’, and I will call the view that such a being exists ‘minimal explanatory theism’ (MET).

The commitments of MET are quite minimal. Indeed, there are forms of MET that some philosophers might hesitate to call ‘theism’. All that MET requires is that the natural world is completely explicable in terms of some (one) being that stands outside it.

In spite of how minimal MET is, I argue that it has a surprising metaphysical consequence: grounding indeterminism. I use the term ‘grounding’ in a very broad sense for the relation or family of relations whereby more fundamental things give rise to less fundamental things. The standard view in the grounding literature is grounding necessitarianism, which holds that grounds metaphysically necessitate the facts or entities they ground. The denial of this standard view is known as ‘grounding contingentism’. However, most grounding contingentists still accept that the totality of fundamental facts necessitates the totality of the non-fundamental facts. In other words, they hold that the ground could have grounded something different only if the circumstances had been somehow different. Grounding indeterminism is the more radical thesis that the same ground could have grounded something different (or perhaps nothing at all) in the very same circumstances. This is the thesis that, I will argue, follows from MET.

Like all philosophical arguments, my argument will rely on some controversial premises. However, these controversial premises are premises about explanation and about the structure of the natural world. I will make no assumptions about the nature of God beyond those contained in MET.

The argument proceeds in two stages. In the first stage, I argue that the kind of explanation involved in MET must be understood as a grounding explanation and not a causal explanation. This stage of the argument proceeds primarily by arguing that causation must be understood as part of the internal structure of the natural world, and hence no causal explanation could serve as an explanation of the natural world as a whole. In the second stage, I argue that the ultimate explanans in MET must be the existence and nature of God (whatever God’s nature might be). Yet, in order for this explanation to be satisfying, the proponent of MET must hold that God—having the very same nature—could have grounded a world that was different in various ways. Hence, the explanation given by MET must involve grounding indeterminism.

Miguel Ángel Romero Ramírez - Universidad Sergio Arboleda, Colombia

The nature of God and the Eternal truths

‘The Origin of Eternal Truths’ has received much attention from scholars discussing about creation metaphysics and the relationship between Judeo-Christian revelation and current science. Taking
this discussion, I propose a minimalist interpretation of eternal truths, reduced to the first principles (FP). My principal aim here is both to sustain that the FP co-exist necessarily in the Divine Nature, but they are freely concreated in the created nature, quoad se; and consequently, I argue that their nondemonstrative necessary evidence, quoad nos, is a free act of the goodness of God, and therefore that is a sufficient reason for praising Him. All of that is based on the argument about the emergence of the first principles with the very being, a theory I ascribe to a certain Aristotelian reading on creation in Aquinas, not to an iconic Neoplatonist one.

James Dominic Rooney, OP - Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), Rome, Italy

To be a ‘Buddhist Theist’

Buddhism is a philosophical tradition that, at its origin, was familiar with various conceptions of the divine, including Hindu variants of theistic belief. The tradition set itself decidedly against theism, especially against belief in a personal God who would be the ultimate origin of all being, with the development of complex arguments against the existence of God. Further, the wider metaphysical commitments of all schools of Buddhism to the ultimate non-existence of any permanent substance-like entity would appear to entail a rejection of the God of classical theism. In that sense, Buddhism of all schools embraces an unambiguously atheistic metaphysics. I do not aim to revise this apparent conclusion. Instead, I propose that the positive metaphysical conclusions reached by some Buddhist schools in the Mahayana tradition, especially Huayan and later Chan schools, present a vision of reality that would ground an argument for the existence of God requiring only slight modifications to the Buddhist picture. While Buddhists might not accept these modifications, such an argument would be independently interesting because it would be a species of cosmological argument that only requires appeal to what an Aristotelian would term formal causal dependence, rather than (as is typical) an efficient causal series.

Andre Leo Rusavuk - University of Birmingham, UK

The Puzzle of Divine Luck

Philosophers interested in gaining a better understanding of the divine nature have explored God’s relationship to time, space, creation, morality, sin, and the like; largely unexplored is God’s relationship to luck. Luck seems ineliminable from the lives of human beings, but is God, who is traditionally conceived of as the greatest possible being, subject to luck? On the one hand, some theists might think that God is not subject to luck as finite, frail, and contingent beings are; subjection to luck would threaten divine greatness. These theists will be attracted to what I call the Perfect Immunity Thesis (PIT): necessarily, God is not subject to any luck. I offer two motivations for endorsing PIT, one from divine perfections and the other from divine universal causality. On the other hand, some theists might think that there are varieties of luck inescapable even for God; although PIT is false, exposure to luck wouldn’t threaten divine greatness. So there are good reasons in support of each position, and this generates what I call the puzzle of divine luck.

In this paper, I defend one side of the puzzle of divine luck and offer an argument that entails the falsity of PIT. Specifically, I argue that if God possesses libertarian free will and some of his actions are indeterministically caused, then God is subject to present luck i.e., luck present at or around the moment of action. This is because indeterminism in the causal pathway leading to action opens the door to luck and diminishes control. I argue that the cross-world difference between some divine undetermined actions cannot be contrastively explained and thus they seem partly a matter of luck. Since what occurs as a matter of luck is beyond the agent’s control, God’s control over his actions is diminished. Along the way, I consider various routes that attempt to eliminate luck from divine
actions, but I contend they all fail. If God is subject to present luck, then his perfect immunity is jeopardized and thus PIT is false. However, I offer two alternative theses to PIT that theists might find attractive, but these theses are not without costs.

Arthur Henrique Soares dos Santos – UFPA, Brazil

Reformed Epistemology, evidentialism and the Kalam Cosmological Argument

The Reformed Epistemology developed by Alvin Plantinga seeks to make, based on John Calvin’s sensus divinitatis, a defence that belief in God can be properly basic with respect to justification and to warrant. Thus, the religion philosopher defends that theistic believer do not need evidential reasons for his belief in God. However, the Plantinga’s epistemological defence is limited by the absence of positive reasons in favor of theistic belief. Therefore, this work aims to relate the Reformed Epistemology to an evidentialist defence of theistic belief. For this, will be particularly analysed the Kalam Cosmological Argument, defended by William Lane Craig as an important part of his natural theology, considering its virtues as well as the main objections to Craig’s defence of the argument. It is intended, consequently, to demonstrate how the evidentialism can contribute substantially to Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology, strengthening the defence of belief in God.

Joshua Reginald Sijwuade - London School of Theology, UK

A Sketch of a Fundamental Explanation

In this paper, I seek to assess the extent to which Theism, the claim that there is a God, can provide a true fundamental explanation for the existence of certain entities within the layered structure of reality. More precisely, I seek to utilise the explanatory framework of Richard Swinburne and resituate it within a new philosophical context—that of the field of contemporary metaphysics—which will enable me to develop a true fundamental explanation for the existence of the non-fundamental entities that fill up the various levels of the layered structure of reality. And thus, given the truth of this type of explanation, we will have one more good reason to believe in the existence of God.

Asheel Singh - University of Johannesburg, South Africa

The ‘God’ of Advaita Vedanta

This paper aims to offer English-speaking scholars of philosophy of religion conceptual clarity on the ‘God’ of Advaita Vedanta. Many contemporary treatments of this ancient school of Indian philosophy consider it to be pantheistic or panentheistic. Others argue, not unreasonably, that Advaita Vedanta is incoherent. In contrast, I argue that Advaita Vedanta is non-theistic, and that it is, in fact, perfectly coherent, showing why it should be considered a strength of the view that it explicitly recognises that any ultimate truth about the nature of God would necessarily be beyond our capacity to apprehend that truth.

In order to present this argument, I show how the current confusion can be traced back to at least two fundamental errors. The first is a class of category mistake stemming from a misunderstanding about how the Advaitin thinks we should properly orient our investigations into the nature of God in the light of the non-dual—but dual tiered!—metaphysical framework underwriting his philosophy. The second is an under-appreciation of the essential role radical humility should play (and does play, to the Advaitin) in such investigations.
In order to avoid making the first error, I argue that we need to understand the crucial distinction Advaita Vedanta makes between created reality and the Ultimate Knower of (at least) that reality. The former can be understood as the intelligible universe; the latter is ineluctably ineffable. According to Advaita Vedanta, ‘God’ is the Ultimate Knower (Purusha), and all sentient creatures are sites of knowing through which this Ultimate Knower apprehends created reality (prakriti). Crucially, this Ultimate Knower is you, for the Advaitin believes that Consciousness is the ground of Being, and that the phenomenal world (Sa?ara) is a kind of illusion (maya) that falls away in mystical experience, revealing the one foundational Self (Brahman). Failures to recognise the primacy of this distinction lead to the class of category error in which attributes germane to prakriti are, through mistaken acts of superimposition (adhyasa), thrust upon the attributeless (Nirgu?a)—i.e., ‘God’.

This leads to the second error, and how to avoid making it. I argue for a reading of Advaita Vedanta in which concepts like ‘theism’, ‘pantheism’, etc.—and even ‘God’—are judged to be wholly inappropriate for apprehending the Advaitin Ultimate Reality. Indeed, such a move, even the most determined philosophers must accept, is futile—we cannot know the mind of God, to use Stephen Hawking’s influential phrase, through reason or standard empirical enquiry; we can only know that God is not quite this, and not quite that (neti neti). To the Advaitin, then, God is necessarily shrouded behind a ‘cloud of unknowing’. As my use of this phrase suggests, and as I discuss, there are important links that can be drawn between Advaita Vedanta and esoteric schools of Judeo-Christian thought. Coming to know the nature of ‘God’—your nature—as sat-cit-ananda (truth, consciousness, bliss), is a supersensual sort of ‘knowing’ outside the domain of philosophy, or, indeed, ordinary waking consciousness itself.

Vahid Sohrabifar - University of Religions and Denominations, Iran

Is God all-merciful?

One of the fundamental beliefs about God in Abrahamic religions is that God is all-merciful. This attribute is discussed in a variety of ways, for example about the nature of mercy and meaning of merciful God or the compatibility of believing in a merciful God while there are many evils and sufferings in the world.

I want to look at the attribute from another perspective. All-merciful is probably the most attractive attribute of God in religious traditions that along with all-powerful and all-knowing make the perfect being. Moreover, some of the key religious ideas (e.g. unconditional love of God) are rooted in this attribute. I want to critically evaluate this attribute based on an explanation in Islamic philosophy. One of the arguments in Islamic philosophy for the existence of God is Imkan wa Wujub (argument from contingency and necessity). Based on this Ontological argument, God is a /the necessary being that is all-perfect. There is no goodness and perfection missed in his being. If it is sound, then one of the perfect and positive attributes of God is all-merciful, because God has/is all the perfection and certainly, mercy is one of them.

I think there is a mostly neglected anthropocentric step. A necessary being with all the perfect attributes doesn’t entail the all-merciful God unless a human mind adds this premise that mercy is a positive and perfect attribute. Considering that God is beyond our concepts and imaginations, it is not permissible to impose our human categories on the notion of God. In other words, it is only from a human perspective that mercy is a positive and valuable attribute and this human perspective falls short to add this attribute for an independent perfect being that is not confined to the boundaries of human minds.
Does it mean that God is not merciful? No. I think it is difficult for reason to prove such attribute but if there are some other trustworthy sources (e.g. scriptures or mystical experiences) that can show that God is merciful in a way that is close to our conception of mercy, we can regard this attribute for God.

Ori Z Soltes - Georgetown University, USA

*Sufism, God, and Fethullah Gulen*

This paper will begin by considering why and how mysticism in the Abrahamic traditions lends itself to a uniquely universal understanding of God and the diverse paths of engaging divinity, ultimately focusing specifically on Sufism—Muslim mysticism—and in particular, some of the thinking of two of Sufism’s most important representatives: Ibn ‘Arabi and Rumi.

The discussion will then turn to the teaching, preaching, and multitudinous writings of the Turkish cleric, Fethullah Gulen, who began as an Imam with a limited focus—on Turkey and the need to revive its Muslim identity—but, as he became more conversant with an ever-expanding world of thinkers, from Socrates to Einstein, became particularly drawn to and ultimately expert in the varied paths of Sufism. Such a focus did what it had done for Ibn ‘Arabi and Rumi: engender a deeper intensity of Islamic thinking on the one hand while simultaneously and paradoxically providing the instrument for an ever-increasing sense of universalism.

Thus the further shape of this paper’s narrative will explore Gulen’s sense that to seek God’s innermost depth—the divine mysterion—to love and be filled with God; then one must love all of creation. And the key to perfecting this world to bring it closer to God’s reality is an all-embracing view of one’s fellow humans, regardless of culture, nation, ethnicity, or form of faith; to seek oneness with God one must engage in continuous dialogue across religious, ethnic, national, and cultural lines. Gulen’s teachings, moreover, are insistently pro-active: that we don’t merely theorize about these issues, but that we turn our thoughts and words in actions. This has inspired a movement across 170 countries of hizmet—service—to humankind through schools, social services, and cultural programs that connect humanity to God by connecting us to each other across sectarian boundaries.

Gregory Richard Peter Stacey - Leeds Trinity University, UK

*The Inimitable Ontological Argument*

Extant ontological arguments win few converts to theism. Although modern modal ontological arguments (MOA’s) avoid some flaws of earlier ontological arguments (e.g. ambiguity, invalidity, or the undefended assumption that existence is a first-order property), it is often claimed that MOA’s are question-begging or otherwise dialectically ineffective. Their key premise -- that God possibly exists in all possible worlds (vel sim.) -- is alleged to have little appeal to non-theists. It is likewise widely suggested that like other ontological arguments, MOA’s are subject to absurd parody.

In this paper, I outline a new version of the MOA: the “Inimitable Argument”. Unlike extant MOA’s, the Inimitable Argument begins with a traditional but highly controversial characterisation of God as “Unlimited Being”. On this and other related accounts of God’s nature, God is inimitable: He cannot be adequately represented by any non-divine entity or entities. If it is meaningful to describe God as Unlimited Being, I argue that one can construct an ontological argument which makes controversial metaphysical assumptions, but which avoids the common objections levelled against MOA’s mentioned above.
In short, the Inimitable Argument which I develop contends that according to broadly Platonist accounts of modality, it is plausible (i) that God exists in some possible world, (ii) that God’s existence in any possible world requires grounding, and (iii) that God’s existence in any possible world cannot (given divine immutability) be grounded by the existence or properties of any non-divine entity/entities. Accordingly, it is plausible that God exists. Further, because according to the Inimitable Argument God’s existence follows from His peculiar property of inimitability, I argue that the Inimitable Argument is more difficult to parody than existing MOA’s. I conclude the paper by exploring the Inimitable Argument’s persuasive value for non-theists.

Jordan Lee Steffaniak - University of Birmingham, UK

*The Metaphysics of Relations and Classical Christian Theism: A Call for Clarification*

Much of Classical Christian Theism rests on the metaphysics of relations. For example, Steven Duby in a recent work grounds the nature of God as simple in him having mixed relations and grounds his existence as Trinity in having real relations. Yet a thorough treatment of what these terms metaphysically mean is lacking from his book that is dedicated to metaphysical contemplation—as it is often lacking from recent theological work on the doctrine of God as a whole (particularly in Protestant circles), no matter the conclusions. Moreover, even among those contemporary Protestants steeped in scholasticism, such as Duby, their terminology regarding differing relations is oftentimes surprisingly slippery. The concepts morph into meaning different things in the span of only a few pages, causing confusion for the philosophically uninitiated. While there is a vast and illustrious tradition on relations, it is missing from contemporary Protestant literature. Therefore, I intend to examine Duby’s definitions and usage of relations before offering a taxonomy of the metaphysics of relations sans theology before finally offering a critique of Duby’s usage. This examination will provide clarity into the metaphysical concept of relations and hopefully serve further resourcing for theology. Instead of relations proceeding as vaguely undefined dark terms, they will have more defined content.

Matvey Sysoev - Voronezh State Medical University named after N.N. Burdenko, Russia

*Naturalistic priority monism and theism*

The paper offers an attempt at a solution of too narrow an understanding of pantheism, namely the problem I call spatial analogy. It is a way of thinking about the relationship between God, Cosmos and Human, in which Human is a spatial part of Cosmos, and therefore, of God. It is precisely because of the spatial analogy that the following formulations of pantheism come out: God is “the mereological sum of all things”, “the total of things”, “the thing of which all things are parts”. The World or the Universe, if they are considered as a combination of matter, are also not free from this analogy. Human in this system is inside God, like a cell that makes up the body. This feature simplifies and limits the theistic component, because God becomes simply the largest object or the organism, but it is still object or the organism among many others. The paper offers an example of pantheistic metaphysics in which the only object is God as the Oneness of all existing attributes, and all other things, events and properties are combinations of individual attributes of God. From a naturalistic perspective, an attribute is most conveniently understood not as a single property, but as a relation. The paper proposes that such a relation should be regarded as the fundamental unit from which all things are composed. Three basic categories - perception, volition and causation - can be reflected within this basic relation. A sketch of a system in which a naturalistic metaphysics would be realised, God would have a unique ontological status and all the above basic categories would be taken into account, is proposed.
Dar Triffon-Reshef - University of Notre Dame

Depending on God: The Case for Power and Manifestation

In this paper, I aim to present and support the idea that the relation between God and the universe is one of a power to its manifestation. I approach this endeavor through a familiar tension between two central theistic doctrines: that the universe fully depends on God, on the one hand, and that God entirely transcends the universe, on the other. I argue that, unlike the alternatives, the relation of a power to its manifestation is an instance of both dependence and transcendence; given some central theistic motivations to embrace each of the doctrines, the fact that this conception of the relation between God and the universe allows for a coherent adherence to both, stands to support it.

Since the tension between the doctrines, while familiar, is seldom discussed in the literature, I begin by supplying it with a clear framework and articulating where the tension is supposed to lie. Thus equipped, I proceed to put forward my suggestion, illustrating how it provides a model under which both doctrines can be true.

The idea is that God is a power, the universe its manifestation. Every portion of the universe manifests God, God manifests Himself through the universe. By way of analogy, think of how a musical talent is manifested in a musical composition. It is through the existence of the composition that the talent gains corporeality or is realized, and further, the specific intrinsic nature of the composition – the notes, intervals, scale, etc., and the relations between them – manifest a talentful creation (or a talent-less one – depending on the nature of the talent). The composition is, somewhat poetically, a corporeal image of the talent. Thus the composition depends on the talent for its existence and nature, yet the talent and the composition share no part, and neither is a constituent, a mode, a mentality, or a constitution of the other; they seem to lack even a possible sharing of properties. In the same way, the thought is that God is a power manifested in the universe, grounding both its existence and its nature while being entirely transcendent to it.

The argumentation commences with a defense of the idea that a power is apt to play the metaphysical theoretical role of God - the idea that possibly there are independent powers, that is, powers not possessed by anything, and the activation of which depends on no enablers, disablers, or stimuli conditions. The argumentation concludes with a (brief) defense of the idea that a power is apt to play the theistic theoretical role of God – the idea that a power can be a perfect, free, omnipotent, omnipresent, perhaps even a willing and loving being.

Jamie B. Turner - Ibn Haldun University, Turkey

Knowledge of God by way of His Signs

According to Medieval Islamic theologian Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya, knowledge of God’s existence is principally attained through what he coins, an “istidlal bi’l-ayat” or simply, an “inference through signs”. The idea is roughly that, in creating the world, God has set it up in such a way that built into its very fabric, are natural (theistic) signs (ayat) which act as instigations for theistic knowledge. For Ibn Taymiyya, not only is this the Islamic—and crucially, Qur’anic—natural theological method by which God is known, par excellence, it is the way in which the religious believer attains not merely recognition of God, but the inclination to worship Him. Ibn Taymiyya argues that this “natural” (fi?ri) inference from theistic signs to theistic belief, rests on the moral and cognitive virtues inherent in man’s very constitution or disposition (fi?ra), which, when maintained, will culminate in theistic
knowledge. However, Ibn Taymiyya stresses that through the recognition of natural theistic signs in the universe, God’s existence is proven, that is, His particular nature rather than an abstract concept of a Necessary Being say, stripped from distinct knowable qualities: His signs point to Him individually and prove His essential nature as the One Being, Wise and Merciful, upon whom all else depends.

In more recent times however, philosophers like C. Stephen Evans and John Cottingham, have suggested that theistic belief elicited from theistic natural signs, only enables the believer to achieve some vague or ambiguous concept of theism. Evans argues that, given the diverse conceptions of God evident throughout human history, knowledge of God by way of theistic signs, looks somewhat unreliable, thus perhaps one has to defer to additional evidence in order not to succumb to an undercutting defeater of sorts. Cottingham also points out that, human experience encompasses features of great joy, beauty and love. Yet, at the same time, also evil, tragedy and viciousness. Thus, one might think that the moral features of God cannot be known by way of theistic signs, all of which of course runs contrary to Ibn Taymiyya’s more optimistic understanding of theistic knowledge by way of theistic signs. So, is there a way to salvage Ibn Taymiyya’s approach?

Drawing on recent work on the value of religious experience in the context of deflecting potential defeaters for one’s theistic beliefs, and within the framework of a proper functionalist epistemology (which I argue to be broadly consistent with Taymiyyan epistemology), this paper argues that knowledge of God in full can be achieved by way of theistic natural signs. Crucially, the paper attempts to outline how a theistic belief by way of theistic signs, in a morally perfect being, can be warranted such that it is sufficient for knowledge, and yet, warrant cannot be achieved such that it is sufficient for knowledge, for theistic beliefs in a God who has evil qualities. Therefore, demonstrating that knowledge of God as a wholly Good Being upon whom all depends, can be warranted by way of theistic natural signs without moral ambiguity.

Hans Van Eyghen - Tilburg University, Netherlands

The Existence of Deities

The argument from religious experience (AFRE) is one of the most widely discussed arguments for the existence of God. Contrary to most other theistic arguments, the argument can be adapted slightly to argue for the existence of non-creator gods or other supernatural beings. While the existence of such beings is rarely discussed in contemporary philosophy of religion, worship of such being is central to adherents of non-western traditions like Vaishnava Hinduism, Shinto or African traditional religions. These beings are usually regarded as intermediary beings, having an elevated status beyond humans but a lower status than God (or the gods). In my paper, I investigate whether the AFRE can be extended to argue for intermediary supernatural beings.

I focus on Swinburne’s account of the AFRE. Swinburne argues that, like other perceptual experiences, religious experiences deserve an innocent until proven guilty status. Swinburne acknowledges that the principle (principle of credulity) can be extended to other supernatural beings like Poseidon, but adds that the overall case for such beings is (far) less strong. He also suggests that belief in such beings is more easily defeated than belief in God (Swinburne 2004).

In order to extend the AFRE, I will take a closer look at possible defeaters against the principle of credulity and argue that perceptual experiences of intermediary beings are, in general, not defeated. I look at the following defeating conditions:

(1) The perception proved to be of a kind that proved not to be genuine perceptions in the past
I argue that (3-5) pose different challenges for putative experiences of intermediary being. Nonetheless, I think the challenges can be overcome. Intermediary beings are usually not regarded as omnipresent but are not bound by the same limits of locality that hold for humans. Intermediary beings usually do not have the ability to cause experiences through secondary means like a creator God can. I argue that there is little in recent scientific accounts of religious perception (e.g.: Barrett 2007; Boyer 2002) that gives us reason to think that intermediary beings cannot be the primary cause of experiences.

I argue that experiences of intermediary beings are less vulnerable to (5) because they usually have attributes that are more clearly distinguishable than those of God.

Michael Thomas Williams - Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria

Can God be a Disembodied Creator? A Sixteenth Century South Indian Critique of Nyaya Rational Theology

In this paper, I will discuss a critique of rational theology found in the works of the Madhva philosopher Vyasatirtha (1460–1539). Vyasatirtha was the leader of the Madhva tradition in the early sixteenth century, and a powerful figure in the South Indian Vijayanagara Empire.

Despite being a devotee of the god Viṣṇu-Narayana, Vyasatirtha denied that the existence of god can be known through reasoning/formal inferences, as members of the Nyaya tradition maintain. As a Vedantin, Vyasatirtha held rather that the existence of god can only be known through a proper interpretation of scripture, and he developed on the work of his Madhva predecessors to prove the limits of inferential reasoning based on empirical evidence.

In his Tarkatattava, Vyasatirtha laid out a detailed case to prove that Ga?gesa’s inferences are riddled with formal fallacies, and wholly inconclusive when it comes to proving the existence of god. The arguments in the Isvaravada form one of the most sophisticated critiques of Navya-Nyaya rational theology ever written, and Vyasatirtha’s arguments came to exert a deep influence over the work of leading intellectuals inside and outside of the Madhva tradition in the centuries after his death.

In this paper, I will use my own translation of the Sanskrit text to reconstruct how Vyasatirtha critiques the Nyaya theory that god does not require a physical body to form the universe in each cycle of transmigratory existence. Vyasatirtha argues that the theory is incompatible with the facts of our experience, and devoted a large part of the Isvaravada of the Tarkatattava to proving that empirical evidence rules out the possibility of inferring the existence of a disembodied agent. As I will discuss in the paper, these discussions led him to address larger epistemological questions surrounding the nature and scope of inferential reasoning.

Davide Andrea Zappulli - University of Oslo, Norway
Theology as Semiology: Kukai’s View of the Deity as Language

In many religions, we find the idea that the deity or deities created the universe through language. However, rarer is the view that they are language. This paper has the twofold goal of arguing through textual evidence that the latter is the view of Kukai (774-835CE)—the founder of Shingon Buddhism—and explaining it in terms familiar to analytic philosophers. Kukai makes two central claims: 1) that reality is the unfolding sermon of the universal Buddha Dainichi (hereafter, 'the deity'); 2) that reality is the deity's body. I will begin by interpreting the first of these tenets, which takes the form that all entities are monji ??, signs of the deity's language that reveal ultimate truth to sentient beings. Then, I will turn to the second tenet and argue with textual evidence that it is better characterised as the claim that reality is the deity's body-mind. This will require a detour into Kukai's metaphysics, in which the relationship between consciousness and matter is conceived as non-dual. I will then conclude that the deity's sermon is not simply identical to the deity's body: it is identical to the deity simpliciter. Finally, I will make some remarks on the connections between human's and the deity's language, suggesting that Kukai's view puts us in a position to know many truths about the deity. The paper aims to contribute to contemporary research in the analytic philosophy of religion—especially to research on pantheism and panentheism—by bringing a new and underrepresented voice to the debate.

Mohammad Saleh Zarepour – University of Birmingham, UK

On the Varieties of Finitism

Defenders of the Kalam Cosmological Argument appeal to the so-called Hilbert’s Hotel argument to establish the finitude of the past based on the impossibility of actual infinites. Their opponents argue that if the universe cannot be beginningless because of the impossibility of actual infinites, then, for the same reason, it cannot be endless either. Discussing four different senses of the existence of an actual infinite, I criticize both sides of the debate by showing, on the one hand, that the Hilbert’s Hotel argument is not powerful enough to rule out the possibility of the infinitude of the past and, on the other hand, that the soundness of the argument for the finitude of the future from the impossibility of actual infinites is independent from the soundness of the parallel argument for the finitude of the past.

John Zhao - University of Macau, Macau

The Buddha in the Mirror of Blue Cliff Record

Within Buddhism, 'Buddha' is often regarded as the perfect being and property. The understandings of 'Buddha' varies among Buddhist traditions. The literature of Gong ans (Japanese koan) vividly shows the Chinese Chan (Zen) Master's epistemic approaches in answering the question 'What is the Buddha?' Composed in China during the Song Dynasty (960-1276 C.E.), when Chan literature reached its zenith of development, the Blue Cliff Record (Chinese Biyanlu, Japanese Hekiganroku) is widely considered as one of the most important gong an records in Chan Buddhism. I investigate the epistemic justifications underling these gong ans in addressing three questions: Why is the Buddha ultimately pure and mirror-like? Why is the Buddha this mind which is not distinct from sentient things? How could sentient beings learn or experience the Buddha?