God

This article is about the term "God" in the context of monotheism and henotheism. For the general polytheistic concept, see Deity. For other uses, see God (disambiguation).

Part of a series on

God

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Monotheism · Panentheism · Pantheism

Specific conceptions

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God is a [deity](#) in [theistic](#) and [deistic](#) [religions](#) and other [belief systems](#), representing either the *sole* deity in [monotheism](#), or a *principal* deity in [polytheism](#).[1]

God is most often conceived of as the [supernatural](#) [creator](#) and overseer of the [universe](#). [Theologians](#) have ascribed a variety of attributes to the many different [conceptions of God](#). The most common among these include [omniscience](#), [omnipotence](#), [omnipresence](#), [omnibenevolence](#) (perfect [goodness](#)), [divine simplicity](#), and eternal and necessary existence. God has also been conceived as being [incorporeal](#), a [personal](#) being, the source of all [moral obligation](#), and the "greatest conceivable existent".[1] These attributes were all supported to varying degrees by the early [Jewish](#), [Christian](#) and [Muslim](#) theologian philosophers, including [Maimonides](#),[2] [Augustine of Hippo](#),[2] and [Al-Ghazali](#),[3] respectively. Many notable [medieval philosophers](#) developed [arguments for the existence of God](#).[3] Many notable philosophers and intellectuals have, by contrast, developed arguments *against* the existence of God.

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Etymology and usage

The earliest written form of the Germanic word *god* comes from the 6th century Christian Codex Argenteus. The English word itself is derived from the Proto-Germanic * *guđan*. Most linguists agree that the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European form * ǵhu-tó-m was based on the root * ǵhau(ə)-, which meant either "to call" or "to invoke".[4] The Germanic words for *god* were originally neuter—applying to both genders—but during the process of the Christianization of the Germanic peoples from their indigenous Germanic paganism, the word became a masculine syntactic form.[5]

The capitalized form *God* was first used in Wulfila's Gothic translation of the New Testament, to represent the Greek *Theos*. In the English language, the capitalization continues to represent a distinction between monotheistic "God" and "gods" in polytheism.[6][7] In spite of significant differences between religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, the Bahá'í Faith, and Judaism, the term "God" remains an English translation common to all. The name may signify any related or similar monotheistic deities, such as the early monotheism of Akhenaten and Zoroastrianism.

Names of God

Conceptions of God can vary widely, but the word God in English—and its counterparts in other languages, such as Latinate *Deus*, Greek Θεός, Slavic *Bog*, Sanskrit *Ishvara*, or Arabic *Allah*—are normally used for any and all conceptions. The same holds for Hebrew *El*, but in Judaism, God is also given a proper name, the tetragrammaton (usually reconstructed as *Yahweh* or YHWH), believed to be a mark of the religion's henotheistic origins. In many translations of the Bible, when the word "LORD" is in all capitals, it signifies that the word represents the tetragrammaton.[8] God may also be given a proper name in monotheistic currents of Hinduism which emphasize the personal nature of God, with early references to his name as Krishna-Vasudeva in Bhagavata or later Vishnu and Hari.[9]

It is difficult to draw a line between proper names and epitheta of God, such as the names and titles of Jesus in the New Testament, the names of God in the Qur'an, and the various lists of the thousand names of Hindu gods and List of titles and names of Krishna in Vaishnavism.

Throughout the Bible there are many names for God that portray his nature and character. One of them is *elohim*[10][11], which has been argued to mean "strong one"[*citation needed*], among other things, although the etymology is debated and obscure. Another one is *El Shaddai*, meaning "God Almighty".[12] A third notable name is *El Elyon*, which means "The Most High God".[13]

Conceptions of God

Detail of Sistine Chapel fresco *Creation of the Sun and Moon* by Michelangelo (completed in 1512).

Conceptions of God vary widely. Theologians and philosophers have studied countless conceptions of God since the dawn of civilization. The Abrahamic conceptions of God include the trinitarian view of Christians, the Kabbalistic definition of Jewish mysticism, and the Islamic concept of God. The dharmic religions differ in their view of the divine: views of God in Hinduism vary by region, sect, and caste, ranging from monotheistic to polytheistic to atheistic; the view of God in Buddhism is almost non-theist. In modern times, some more abstract concepts have been developed, such as process theology and open theism. Conceptions of God held by individual believers vary so widely that there is no clear consensus on the nature of God.[14] The contemporaneous French philosopher Michel Henry has however proposed a phenomenological approach and definition of God as phenomenological essence of Life.[15]

Existence of God

Many arguments which attempt to prove or disprove the existence of God have been proposed by philosophers, theologians, and other thinkers for many centuries. In philosophical terminology, such arguments concern schools of thought on the epistemology of the ontology of God.

There are many philosophical issues concerning the existence of God. Some definitions of God are sometimes nonspecific, while other definitions can be self-contradictory. Arguments for the existence of God typically include metaphysical, empirical, inductive, and subjective types, while others revolve around holes in evolutionary theory and order and complexity in the world. Arguments against the existence of God typically include empirical, deductive, and inductive types. Conclusions reached include: "God does not exist" (strong atheism); "God almost certainly does not exist"[16] (*de facto* atheism); "no one knows whether God exists"

(agnosticism); "God exists, but this cannot be proven or disproven" (theism); and "God exists and this can be proven" (theism). There are numerous variations on these positions.

Theological approaches

Main article: Theology

Theologians and philosophers have ascribed a number of attributes to God, including omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, perfect goodness, divine simplicity, and eternal and necessary existence. God has been described as incorporeal, a personal being, the source of all moral obligation, and the greatest conceivable being existent.[1] These attributes were all claimed to varying degrees by the early Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars, including St Augustine,[2] Al-Ghazali,[3] and Maimonides.[2]

Many medieval philosophers developed arguments for the existence of God,[3] while attempting to comprehend the precise implications of God's attributes. Reconciling some of those attributes generated important philosophical problems and debates. For example, God's omniscience implies that God knows how free agents will choose to act. If God does know this, their apparent free will might be illusory, or foreknowledge does not imply predestination; and if God does not know it, God is not omniscient.[17]

The last centuries of philosophy have seen vigorous questions regarding the arguments for God's existence raised by such philosophers as Immanuel Kant, David Hume and Antony Flew, although Kant held that the argument from morality was valid. The theist response has been either to contend, like Alvin Plantinga, that faith is "properly basic"; or to take, like Richard Swinburne, the evidentialist position.[18] Some theists agree that none of the arguments for God's existence are compelling, but argue that faith is not a product of reason, but requires risk. There would be no risk, they say, if the arguments for God's existence were as solid as the laws of logic, a position summed up by Pascal as: "The heart has reasons which reason knows not of."[19]

Most major religions hold God not as a metaphor, but a being that influences our day-to-day existences. Many believers allow for the existence of other, less powerful spiritual beings, and give them names such as angels, saints, djinni, demons, and devas.

Theism and Deism

Theism generally holds that God exists realistically, objectively, and independently of human thought; that God created and sustains everything; that God is omnipotent and eternal; personal and interacting with the universe through for example religious experience and the prayers of humans.[20] It holds that God is both transcendent and immanent; thus, God is simultaneously infinite and in some way present in the affairs of the world.[21] Not all theists subscribe to all the above propositions, but usually a fair number of them, c.f., family resemblance.[20] Catholic theology holds that God is infinitely simple and is not involuntarily subject to time. Most theists hold that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, although this belief raises questions about God's responsibility for evil and suffering in the world. Some theists ascribe to God a self-conscious or purposeful limiting of omnipotence, omniscience, or benevolence. Open Theism, by

contrast, asserts that, due to the nature of time, God's omniscience does not mean the deity can predict the future. "Theism" is sometimes used to refer in general to any belief in a god or gods, i.e., monotheism or polytheism.[22][23]

Deism holds that God is wholly transcendent: God exists, but does not intervene in the world beyond what was necessary to create it.[21] In this view, God is not anthropomorphic, and does not literally answer prayers or cause miracles to occur. Common in Deism is a belief that God has no interest in humanity and may not even be aware of humanity. Pandeism and Panendeism, respectively, combine Deism with the Pantheistic or Panentheistic beliefs discussed below.

History of monotheism

Main article: Monotheism
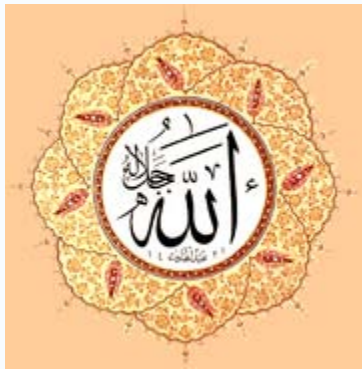
The Name of God written in Arabic calligraphy by 17th century Ottoman artist Hâfız Osman. In Islam, it is considered a sin to anthropomorphize God.

Some writers such as Karen Armstrong believe that the concept of monotheism sees a gradual development out of notions of henotheism and monolatrism. In the Ancient Near East, each city had a local patron deity, such as Shamash at Larsa or Sin at Ur. The first claims of global supremacy of a specific god date to the Late Bronze Age, with Akhenaten's *Great Hymn to the Aten*, and, depending on dating issues, Zoroaster's Gathas to Ahura Mazda. Currents of monism or monotheism emerge in Vedic India in the same period, with e.g. the Nasadiya Sukta. Philosophical monotheism and the associated concept of absolute good and evil emerges in Classical Antiquity, notably with Plato (c.f. Euthyphro dilemma), elaborated into the idea of The One in Neoplatonism.

According to The Oxford Companion To World Mythology, "The lack of cohesion among early Hebrews made monotheism – even monolatry, the exclusive worship of one god among many – an impossibility...And even then it can be argued that the firm establishment of monotheism in Judaism required the rabbinical or Talmudic process of the first century B.C.E. to the sixth century C.E.".[24] In Islamic theology, a person who spontaneously "discovers" monotheism is called a *ḥanīf*, the original *ḥanīf* being Abraham.

Austrian anthropologist [Wilhelm Schmidt](#) in the 1910s postulated an *[Urmonotheismus](#)*, "original" or "primitive monotheism", a thesis now widely rejected in [comparative religion](#) but still occasionally defended in [creationist](#) circles.

Monotheism and pantheism

[Monotheists](#) hold that there is only one god, and may claim that the one true god is worshiped in different religions under different names. The view that all theists actually worship the same god, whether they know it or not, is especially emphasized in [Hinduism](#)[25] and [Sikhism](#).[26] Adherents of different religions, however, generally disagree as to how to best [worship](#) God and what is [God's plan](#) for mankind, if there is one. There are different approaches to reconciling the contradictory claims of monotheistic religions. One view is taken by exclusivists, who believe they are the [chosen people](#) or have exclusive access to [absolute truth](#), generally through [revelation](#) or encounter with the Divine, which adherents of other religions do not. Another view is [religious pluralism](#). A pluralist typically believes that his religion is the right one, but does not deny the partial truth of other religions. An example of a pluralist view in Christianity is [supersessionism](#), i.e., the belief that one's religion is the fulfillment of previous religions. A third approach is [relativistic inclusivism](#), where everybody is seen as equally right; an example in Christianity is [universalism](#): the doctrine that [salvation](#) is eventually available for everyone. A fourth approach is [syncretism](#), mixing different elements from different religions. An example of syncretism is the [New Age](#) movement.

[Pantheism](#) holds that God is the universe and the universe is God, whereas [Panentheism](#) holds that God contains, but is not identical to, the Universe; the distinctions between the two are subtle. It is also the view of the [Liberal Catholic Church](#), [Theosophy](#), some views of Hinduism except [Vaishnavism](#) which believes in [panentheism](#), Sikhism, some divisions of [Buddhism](#), some divisions of [Neopaganism](#) and [Taoism](#), along with many varying denominations and individuals within denominations. [Kabbalah](#), Jewish mysticism, paints a pantheistic/panentheistic view of God — which has wide acceptance in [Hasidic Judaism](#), particularly from their founder [The Baal Shem Tov](#) — but only as an addition to the Jewish view of a personal god, not in the original pantheistic sense that denies or limits persona to God.

Dystheism and nontheism

[Dystheism](#), related to [theodicy](#) is a form of theism which holds that God is either not wholly good or is fully malevolent as a consequence of the [problem of evil](#). One such example would be [Satanism](#) or the [Devil](#).

[Nontheism](#) holds that the universe can be explained without any reference to the supernatural, or to a supernatural being. Some non-theists avoid the concept of God, whilst accepting that it is significant to many; other non-theists understand God as a symbol of human values and aspirations. Many schools of [Buddhism](#) may be considered non-theistic.

Scientific positions regarding God

See also: [Evolutionary origin of religions](#) and [Evolutionary psychology of religion](#)

[Stephen Jay Gould](#) proposed an approach dividing the world of philosophy into what he called "[non-overlapping magisteria](#)" (NOMA). In this view, questions of the [supernatural](#), such as those relating to the [existence](#) and [nature](#) of God, are [non](#)-[empirical](#) and are the proper domain of [theology](#). The methods of science should then be used to answer any empirical question about the natural world, and theology should be used to answer questions about ultimate meaning and moral value. In this view, the perceived lack of any empirical footprint from the magisterium of the supernatural onto natural events makes science the sole player in the natural world.[27]

Another view, advanced by [Richard Dawkins](#), is that the existence of God is an empirical question, on the grounds that "a universe with a god would be a completely different kind of universe from one without, and it would be a scientific difference."[16]

[Carl Sagan](#) argued that the doctrine of a Creator of the Universe was difficult to prove or disprove and that the only conceivable scientific discovery that could challenge it would be an infinitely old universe.[28]

Anthropomorphism

See also: [Anthropomorphism](#)

[Pascal Boyer](#) argues that while there is a wide array of supernatural concepts found around the world, in general, supernatural beings tend to behave much like people. The construction of gods and spirits like persons is one of the best known traits of religion. He cites examples from [Greek Mythology](#), which is, in his opinion, more like a modern soap opera than other religious systems.[29] [Bertrand du Castel](#) and [Timothy Jurgensen](#) demonstrate through formalization that Boyer's explanatory model matches physics' [epistemology](#) in positing not directly observable entities as intermediaries.[30] [Anthropologist](#) [Stewart Guthrie](#) contends that people project human features onto non-human aspects of the world because it makes those aspects more familiar. [Sigmund Freud](#) also suggested that god concepts are projections of one's father.[31]

Likewise, [Émile Durkheim](#) was one of the earliest to suggest that gods represent an extension of human social life to include supernatural beings. In line with this reasoning, psychologist [Matt Rossano](#) contends that when humans began living in larger groups, they may have created gods as a means of enforcing morality. In small groups, morality can be enforced by social forces such as gossip or reputation. However it is much harder to enforce morality using social forces in much larger groups. He indicates that by including ever watchful gods and spirits, humans discovered an effective strategy for restraining selfishness and building more cooperative groups.[32]

Distribution of belief in God

Main article: [List of religious populations](#)
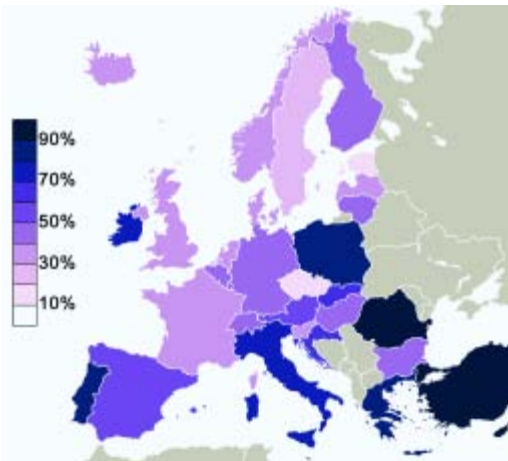
The percentage of population in European countries who responded in a 2005 census that they "believe there is a God". Countries with [Eastern Orthodox](#) (ie: [Greece](#), [Romania](#), etc.) or [Muslim](#) (Turkey) majorities tend to poll highest.

As of 2000, approximately 53% of the world's population identifies with one of the three Abrahamic religions (33% Christian, 20% Islam, <1% Judaism), 6% with Buddhism, 13% with Hinduism, 6% with [traditional Chinese religion](#), 7% with various other religions, and less than 15% as non-religious. Most of these religious beliefs involve a god or gods.[33]

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Notes

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2. ^ *a b c d* Edwards, Paul. "God and the philosophers" in Honderich, Ted. (ed)*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1995.
3. ^ *a b c d* Platinga, Alvin. "God, Arguments for the Existence of," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Routledge, 2000.
4. ^ The ulterior etymology is disputed. Apart from the unlikely hypothesis of adoption from a foreign tongue, the OTeut. "ghuba" implies as its preTeut-type either "*ghodho-m" or "*ghodto-m". The former does not appear to admit of explanation; but the latter would represent the neut. pple. of a root "gheu-". There are two Aryan roots of the required form ("*g,heu-" with palatal aspirate) one with meaning 'to invoke' (Skr. "hu") the other 'to pour, to offer sacrifice' (Skr "hu", Gr. χεηι;ν, OE "geotàn" Yete v). OED Compact Edition, G, p. 267
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6. ^ Webster's New World Dictionary; "god n. ME < OE, akin to Ger gott, Goth guth, prob. < IE base * ĝhau-, to call out to, invoke > Sans havaté, (he) calls upon; 1. any of various beings

conceived of as supernatural, immortal, and having special powers over the lives and affairs of people and the course of nature; deity, esp. a male deity: typically considered objects of worship; 2. an image that is worshiped; idol 3. a person or thing deified or excessively honored and admired; 4. [G-] in monotheistic religions, the creator and ruler of the universe, regarded as eternal, infinite, all-powerful, and all-knowing; Supreme Being; the Almighty

7. **^** Dictionary.com

; "God /gɒd/ noun: 1. the one Supreme Being, the creator and ruler of the universe. 2. the Supreme Being considered with reference to a particular attribute. 3. (lowercase) one of several deities, esp. a male deity, presiding over some portion of worldly affairs. 4. (often lowercase) a supreme being according to some particular conception: the god of mercy. 5. Christian Science. the Supreme Being, understood as Life, Truth, Love, Mind, Soul, Spirit, Principle. 6. (lowercase) an image of a deity; an idol. 7. (lowercase) any deified person or object. 8. (often lowercase) Gods, Theater. 8a. the upper balcony in a theater. 8b. the spectators in this part of the balcony.

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10. **^** Isa. 45:18; 54:5; Jer. 32:27; Gen. 1:1; Deut. 5:23; 8:15; Ps. 68:7
11. **^** Bible Gateway, http://www.biblegateway.com/. . .

12. **^** Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; Ex. 6:31; Ps. 91:1, 2
13. **^** Gen. 14:19; Ps. 9:2; Dan. 7:18, 22, 25
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26. **^** Sri Granth: Sri Guru Granth Sahib

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