

Apologetics Glossary (We probably won't be using all these terms.)

a posteriori – Latin, “from later.” This is where knowledge is possible only subsequent, or posterior, to certain sensory experiences, in addition to the use of reason (empirical). *A posteriori* knowledge stems from experience or observation and so cannot be known beforehand by pure reason or conceptual analysis (e.g., design).

a priori – Latin, “from earlier.” This is where knowledge is possible independently of, or prior to, any experience, and requires only the use of reason/rational concepts (non-empirical). A proposition is known *a priori* when it is known without employing empirical observations or experience. Arguably, one may know *a priori* that there cannot be a square circle.

agency – the capacity for humans to make choices and to impose those choices on the world.

agnosticism – From the Greek *a + ginoskein*, meaning “to not know.” An agnostic about God is someone who claims not to know whether or not God exists.

akrasia – Greek, “without power.” *Akrasia* refers to weakness of the will. One has *akrasia* when one knows an action is morally required but lacks the will power or resolve to perform the act.

anthropic fine-tuning – The universe appears to have been fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent, interactive life.

anthropic principle – Any observed properties of the universe which may at first appear astonishingly improbable can only be seen in their true perspective after we have accounted for the fact that certain properties could not be observed by us, since we can only observe properties which are compatible with our own existence.

apologetics – That branch of Christian theology devoted to providing a rational justification for Christianity's truth claims. A defense of the truth of a position or religion (cf., 1 Peter 3:15-16). For Christians, apologetics names the practice of setting forth reasons for accepting the Christian faith. It is a theoretical discipline with practical application.

argument – a reason or set of reasons given with the aim of persuading others that an action or idea is right or wrong; it does *not* mean quarrelsome.

aseity – From the Latin *aseitas*, meaning “from or by oneself (or itself).” A being has aseity if its very nature is existence or if the ground of its existence is part of its essence. In theism, God possesses aseity because God's existence is not derived from any external source.

atheism – From the Greek, meaning “without God.” Atheism is the denial that there is a God.

Bayes' theorem –
$$\Pr Pr (E) = \frac{\Pr Pr (H) \times \Pr(E|H)}{\Pr Pr (H) \times \Pr Pr (H) + \Pr Pr (\neg H) \times \Pr(E|\neg H)}$$
 This says that if *e* is not certainly false, then the probability that *h* is true given that *e* is true is equal to the probability that *h* is true times the probability that *e* is true given that *h* is true divided by the probability that *e* is true.

causal powers – tendencies, capacities, or propensities belonging to an agent that can cause or produce an effect. That which brings something into being or changes it in some way. causal powers are really distinct from the substances that have them as entities distinct from the things that have them. properties whose nature consists entirely in giving rise to effects of a certain kind when their bearers are in the right circumstances.

cognitive faculties – the powers or faculties of capacities whereby we have knowledge or form belief: memory, perception, reason, *a priori* intuition, mathematical and logical intuition, induction, maybe others.

- compatibilism** – The belief that freedom of the human will is compatible with the all-determining power of God.
- compossible** – possible in coexistence with something else.
- contingent being** – This is being that derives and depends on its existence from something else. It could fail to exist. A state of affairs is contingent if it does not obtain or does not necessarily obtain. “The cat is on the mat” is contingent as it is not a necessary truth that any cat is on any mat.
- cosmological argument** – God is the best explanation for the origin of the universe. This is an argument for theism based on the contingency of the cosmos. The cosmological argument holds that without a necessarily-existing (not contingent) being, the existence of a contingent cosmos is unexplained and we must posit an infinity of contingent explanations.
- creation theology** – Theology based on the belief that God is the singular Creator, the greatest possible creative source of being, and ultimate cause of all being, upholding its existence.
- dark energy** – A hypothesized form of energy that permeates all of space and tends to increase the rate of expansion of the universe. It appears to be associated with the lambda term in the Einstein equation.
- dark matter** – A hypothetical form of matter of unknown composition that does not emit or reflect enough electromagnetic radiation to be observed directly, but whose presence can be inferred from gravitational effects on visible matter.
- deductive argument** – An argument involving necessary entailment. From the thesis “No humans are immortal,” one may deduce, “No immortal is human.” If the premises are true, the conclusion follows necessarily. A sound deductive argument possesses true premises and valid logic.
- defeater** – a belief that is held to be incompatible with another belief, so that one of the beliefs cannot be rationally held given the other and, consequently, must be given up. These contrary inferential arguments that undermine a particular belief are called defeaters.
- Deism** – The tradition believing that the cosmos is created by God, but God is not revealed through miracles in human history and does not play an active, sustaining role in creation. The universe is like a clock that God wound up and now stands back from uninvolved.
- divine simplicity** – God is not composed of constituent parts.
- doctrine** – a belief, theory, or set of beliefs, esp. political or religious, taught and accepted by a particular group.
- dual warrant** – Christian belief is warranted by the self-authenticating work of the Holy Spirit, and it is also warranted by sound arguments for a Creator/Designer of the universe or evidence for the historical credibility of the NT records of the Jesus’ life.
- epistemology** – From the Greek *epistēmē*, meaning “knowledge.” Epistemology is the study of or theories about knowledge. One may also use the term “epistemic” as an adjective to refer to that which pertains to knowledge; e.g., do we have epistemic access to the will of God? In epistemology one also studies theories of evidence, justification, and warrant. What are the possible modes or ways of knowing the world, ourselves, morality and the divine?
- evil** – the absence of the good where the good should be.
- ex nihilo** – Latin for “out of nothing.” This phrase is used to assert that creation is not “co-eternal” with God (in opposition to pantheism and panentheism). Rather, God created the universe out of nothing.

ex nihilo nihil fit – Latin for “out of nothing, nothing comes.” If this precept holds, something has always existed rather than there being a time in the past when there was nothing.

existentialism – A philosophical movement that emphasizes subjectivity, individuality, and the freedom and responsibility of the self; a mood or school of thought that was highly critical of essentialism and the search for an abstract, universal “human nature,” focusing instead on the plight of the concrete individual in his or her quest for authenticity, that is, responsibility (as opposed to anonymity) for one’s actions and values. Existentialists typically ascribed a radical freedom to individuals, and they often wrote of angst or anxiety in the face of death and meaninglessness, questioning why they had been “thrown” into existence. Many considered “nothingness” to be a basic category.

Euthyphro dilemma – A dilemma found in Plato’s dialogue Euthyphro, in which Socrates asks Euthyphro, “Is the good loved by the gods because it is good, or is it good because it is loved by the gods?”

fallacy – any sort of mistake in reasoning or inference (essentially, anything that causes an argument to go wrong).

false dilemma – a type of informal fallacy in which something is falsely claimed to be an “either/or” situation, when in fact there is at least one additional option.

fundamental constants – these are constants or forces of whose values describe and condition the physical state of affairs of the universe [e.g., α (the fine structure constant, or electromagnetic interaction), α_G (gravitation), α_w (the weak force), α_s (the strong force), and m_p/m_e (the ratio between the mass of a proton and the mass of an electron)]. When one assigns different values to these constants or forces, one discovers that the proportion of observable universes, that is to say, universes capable of supporting intelligent life, is shockingly small.

God – God is the greatest possible being, maximally perfect. God is the necessary, infinite, eternal, uncaused, self-existent, ontologically independent, personal, ultimate Creator of everything, possessing the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties. For Christianity in particular, God is the One, True, Living, God who reigns as Sovereign King from eternity in three Persons of one substance: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory.

great-making property – This is any property, or attribute, or characteristic, or quality which it is intrinsically good to have, any property which endows its bearer with some measure of value, or greatness, or metaphysical stature, regardless of external circumstances (e.g., omnibenevolence, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence). The key idea here is of course that of intrinsic goodness. By contrast, extrinsic goodness has to do with value determined by external relations or outward circumstances.

ground of being – the identification of God as *being* itself (Paul Tillich held this belief).

immaterial – not composed of matter.

incompatibilism – The belief that true human freedom is not consistent with the belief that God determines all things.

incorporeal – not possessing a body.

indefinite – having a beginning and moving toward infinity as a boundary but never reaching it.

inductive argument – An argument of which the premises may be true and the logical inferences valid, but the conclusion still be false; the conclusion is plausible or probably, but not necessary. Reasoning is inductive when it proceeds from specific cases to a general conclusion.

infinite – have no beginning or end.

infinite regress – a causal relationship transmitted through an indefinite number of terms in a series, with no term that begins the causal chain (going back through a chain forever).

instantiation – the representation of an idea in the form of an instance or example of it.

intrinsic defeater-defeater – a belief that is so powerfully warranted that it defeats the putative defeater brought against it without any need of additional beliefs to come to the rescue (e.g., being solidly accused of a crime you didn't commit, yet knowing you're innocent).

intuition – From the Latin *intueri*, “to look at.” Some philosophers claim to know certain truths, especially in ethics, by intuition rather than through discursive reasoning. Some philosophers claim that intuitive knowledge can be gained by recognizing some truths as self-evident (A is A) and not due to an inference from some deeper, additional set of known truths.

knowledge – true, justified or warranted belief. It is privileged belief, more than just a guess.

law of noncontradiction – Something cannot be true and false in the same sense at the same time.

logic – reasoning conducted or assessed according to strict principles of validity and the laws of inference.

materialism – The belief that matter is all that exists. Hence, this view holds that all events are ultimately explainable on the basis of physical (“matter”) cause-effect relations.

metamorphosis – to change form.

metaphysics – Literally, beyond physics. Metaphysics is the speculative attempt to conceive of all things together in a grand explanatory scheme. These are theories of what exists. Some use the term to designate entities that are posited beyond empirical observation, but such usage is not standard. Metaphysics is difficult to escape. Even to claim, “I doubt the reliability of metaphysics” makes a claim about what exists (the self and doubt, for starters).

modal logic – Entailments involving propositions that are possible, necessary, or impossible. One claim in modal logic is that if X is possibly necessary, X is necessarily necessary. In philosophy of religion, modal logic is most often used in debates over the ontological argument.

moral argument – God provides the best explanation of objective moral values and duties. A family of arguments that variously urge that certain features of human moral experience are best accommodated on a theistic worldview. In particular, the common claim is that moral realism, the view that there are objective or mind-independent moral facts, calls for theistic metaphysical or epistemological underpinnings.

moral duties – Is something right or wrong? This has to do with moral *obligation*, what we *ought* or *ought not* do.

moral values – Is something good or bad? This has to do with worth.

naturalism – The belief that all events can be explained by appealing to laws and forces of nature. Therefore, adherents of naturalism deny that God (if He exists) exercises any discernable influence in the world.

natural theology – Reflection and argument on the natural world to learn about God's nature and will. Creation or nature testifies to a Creator (cf., Romans 1).

necessary being – being that could not fail to exist. things that exist necessarily exist by a necessity of their own nature. it belongs to their very nature to exist.

negative apologetics – answers objections and challenges to Christian belief.

nihilism – the rejection of all religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless. is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy.

objective truth – truth that is independent of a person's opinion.

Ockham's razor – From the original Latin phrase *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, meaning "Entities [or explanations] are not to be multiplied beyond necessity."

omnibeneficence – God is the very paradigm of goodness; it is impossible for God to do evil. God is love.

omnipotence – God can do anything; there is nothing that God can't do. Nothing external to God can constrain Him.

omnipresence – God is everywhere *freely* present. God is not confined to space. He is not necessarily spatially located. He is aware of and causally active at every point of space. He is both immanent and transcendent.

omniscience – God knows everything; there is nothing that God doesn't know.

ontological argument – God is the best explanation for why there is anything at all. Arguments for the existence of God based on the concept of God as maximally excellent or unsurpassably great. There are different versions of this form of argument, but most argue for the existence of God from the idea or concept of God. If successful, the argument would establish the actual existence of God based on reflection on concepts and ideas, and not on an *a posteriori* examination of the contingency and ordered nature of the cosmos.

ontology – From the Greek *ontos* (being) + *logia* (study of). The study of conceptions of reality, existence and the nature of being. One engages in ontology in the course of inquiring into what exists, and the result of this inquiry (when successful) is called an ontology.

oscillating models – Each expansion phase is preceded and succeeded by a contraction phase; universe in concertina-like fashion exists beginninglessly and endlessly. Big Crunch.

panentheism – this From the Greek *pan* + *en* + *theos*, meaning "everything in God" (cf. Acts 17:28). The belief that everything is in God and that the world and God are mutually dependent, although God transcends the world. God is not identical with the universe (as in pantheism) because God is more than the universe, but the universe is coeternal with God.

pantheism – From the Greek *pan* + *theos*, meaning "God is everything." The belief that everything is God and the world is a mode of God's being. This view identifies the cosmos completely with God. All that is, is divine.

paradox – a statement or sentiment that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense, and yet is perhaps true in fact, or a statement that is actually self-contradictory (and therefore false) even though it appears true.

perfect being theology – God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties. God is the greatest possible being, possessing maximal perfection, of Whom none greater can be conceived.

personal – God is personal in the sense that He possesses will, rationality, emotion, and consciousness.

physicalism – The thesis that everything is physical or can be reduced to the physical.

physical necessity – necessity according to the laws of physics.

pluralism – The belief that there are many roads to God. According to this view, it is presumptuous for anyone to claim that Jesus (or any other “savior” figure) is the one true way to God for all people. The term is sometimes used descriptively to designate the presence of variety (e.g., the U.S. is a pluralistic society) and sometimes normatively (e.g., salvation or enlightenment may be found in multiple religions).

positive apologetics – offers a polite, positive case for the Faith.

possible worlds semantics – a maximal description of reality, or a way reality might be. This is a maximum possible state of affairs. In philosophical discussions of whether ours is the best possible world, the debate is over whether there could not be an alternative, maximum possible state of affairs. Our world is both possible and actual, but (arguably) there are other possible worlds that may have been actualized.

postmortem evangelism – Some evangelicals believe in a postmortem (after death) opportunity for people, who had no chance to do so in life, to develop or reject faith in Christ.

premises – the basic statement upon whose truth an argument is based; a basis, stated or assumed, on which reasoning proceeds; an idea or theory on which a statement or action is based. Premises are the propositions in a deductive argument. Essentially, it is a claim that is a reason for, or objection against, some other claim.

presentism – The view that only the present exists. Theistic presentists hold that God is temporal, existing in the present moment and is not timelessly eternal.

presupposition – An assumed belief that is not argued for but is related to the argument as a necessary condition for its validity or coherence.

principle of alternative possibilities (PAP) – the belief that an agent is morally responsible for an action only if that person could have done otherwise.

principle of sufficient reason (PSR) – there must be a reason or rational explanation for the existence of one state of affairs rather than another.

probability calculus – a measure or estimate of the degree of confidence (see Bayes’ theorem) one may have in the occurrence of an event, measured on a scale from zero (impossibility) to one (certainty), see Bayes’ theorem. It may be defined as the proportion of favorable outcomes to the total number of possibilities if these are indifferent (mathematical probability), or the proportion observed in a sample (empirical probability).

proper basicity – beliefs that are not inferred from other beliefs but are nonetheless rational (e.g., belief in the past and other minds).

properties – an attribute or abstraction characterizing an object, but distinct from the object which possesses it. Properties (also called ‘attributes,’ ‘qualities,’ ‘features,’ ‘characteristics,’ ‘types’) are those entities that can be predicated of things or, in other words, attributed to them. Moreover, properties are entities that things are said to bear, possess or exemplify. For example, if we say that that thing over there is an apple and is red, we are presumably attributing the properties *red* and *apple* to it, and, if the attribution is veridical, the thing in question exemplifies this property.

proposition – the content or meaning of an assertion or declarative sentence, which is capable of being either true or false.

qualia – Qualities or sensations, like redness or pain, considered independently of their effects on behavior and from whatever physical circumstances that give rise to them.

question-begging – an informal fallacy that pertains to whether a person's only reason for believing in a premise is that he already believes in the conclusion. notice one could believe in a premise because he believes in the conclusion and this would not be question-begging unless that reason for believing were the only reason.

rational – from the Latin word *rationalis*, meaning reasonable or logical. If you're rational, you do things based on logic, as opposed to impulse or whimsy.

redemption – the notion that in Christ, God has bought back and rescued His creation.

relativism – The conviction that humans are so conditioned by their social experiences and biological makeup that they can never know absolute truth. All truth claims are relative to the person making them.

secular humanists – People who believe that human welfare is the ultimate good and that humans have the power and responsibility to determine their own future.

secularism – the belief that religion should not be involved with the ordinary social and political activities of a country; it is indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations; it is a worldview that leaves no room for the supernatural, miracles, divine revelation, or God.

sensus divinitatis – Latin for “sense of the divine.” The implanted, natural sense of the divine. Due to the Fall, the *sensus divinitatis* has been damaged and deformed, its deliverances muted. Moreover, our affections have been skewed, so that we resist what deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis* remain, being self-centered rather than God-centered.

solipsism – the theory that only the self exists, or can be proved to exist; the extreme form of skepticism which denies the possibility of any knowledge other than of one's own existence.

sound argument – An argument is sound if the premises of the argument are true and the conclusion follows from the premises by the logical rules of inference.

spaceless – God is not necessarily spatially located (consider His existence sans creation).

standard model – A cosmological model of the expanding universe according to which the universe originated from a singular point of near-infinite density. The Big Bang theory.

steady state model – The universe is in a state of cosmic expansion, but as the galaxies recede, new matter is drawn into being *ex nihilo* in the voids created by the galactic recession.

straw man fallacy – Substituting a person's actual position or argument with a weak, distorted, exaggerated, or misrepresented version of the position of the argument.

string theory – An incomplete but popular approach to theoretical physics, whose building blocks were originally one-dimensional extended objects called strings, rather than the point particles that form the basis for the standard model of particle physics. It now generally assumes that space-time has ten or eleven dimensions, but many of them are rolled up to be invisible to us.

subjective truth – truth relative to some other thing or perspective.

teleological argument – God provides the best explanation for the fine-tuning of the universe. This argument begins with the premise that the world exhibits intelligent purpose, order, or other marks of design, and it proceeds to the conclusion that there must be or probably is a divine intelligence, a supreme designer, to account for the observed or perceived intelligent purpose or order.

Theism – this is the belief that God is the transcendent creator of the world (compatible with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the belief in a personal God).

Theodicy – an attempt to reconcile the existence of evil or suffering in the world with the belief in an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent God.

timelessness – the quality of being without time.

tolerance – being longsuffering with error; respecting everyone's right to an opinion without respecting every opinion as right.

true belief – knowledge that lacks or needs justification. Even justified true belief (JTB) has problems, and although most agree that each element of this tripartite theory is *necessary* for knowledge, they do not seem collectively to be *sufficient*, as justified true belief might be disconnected from fact; for example: Imagine that we are seeking water on a hot day. We suddenly see water, or so we think. In fact, we are not seeing water but a mirage, but when we reach the spot, we are fortunate and find water right there under a rock. Can we say that we had genuine knowledge of water? The answer seems to be negative, for we were just fortunate. In general, the claim that in order to know something we must be able to know that we know it, that is, to justify our justification, is an epistemological principle which should be rejected.

truth – That which corresponds to reality.

vacuum fluctuation models – Within the vacuum of the wider Universe, fluctuations occur which grow into mini-universes.

veridical – from the Latin word *veridicus*, which itself is from two other Latin words: *verus*, meaning “true,” and *dicere*, meaning “to say.” This is an experience, perception, or interpretation that accurately represents and corresponds to reality; truth-conveying experience.

verificationism – (also known as the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning or the Verification Principle) is the doctrine that a proposition is only cognitively meaningful if it can be definitively and conclusively determined to be either true or false (i.e. verifiable or falsifiable). Verificationism is often used to rule out as meaningless much of the traditional debate in areas of Philosophy of Religion, Metaphysics, and Ethics, because many philosophical debates are made over the truth of unverifiable sentences.

warrant – knowledge that comes from cognitive faculties functioning in an appropriate environment as God intended them to.