

# Glossary

## ***A posteriori***

A Latin phrase meaning 'from what comes after'. Philosophers use it to apply to knowledge which is known through experience.

## ***A priori***

A Latin phrase meaning 'from what comes before'. Philosophers use it to apply to knowledge that is gained irrespective of experience, simply by reasoning.

## **Analogy**

The act of comparing one thing with another that shares similar characteristics, to help a person learn about the first thing. For example, if you say a person is 'as cunning as a fox', you are explaining something about how cunning and crafty the person is. Thomas Aquinas divided analogy into two types:

- 1 **Proportion** – telling us the extent to which a thing corresponds to what it should be
- 2 **Attribution** – telling us about the qualities of a particular thing.

## **Analytic**

The concept of the subject is contained in the predicate, where the predicate is the part of the sentence which follows after the subject, e.g. triangles have three sides.

## **Animism**

Refers to the belief that spirits give life of some sort to both living creatures and objects. Animism is not a religion but Freud believed Animism led to the development of religion.

## **Anthropic principle**

The principle that humans should take into account the constraints that human existence itself imposes on the types of universe that we believe could support human life: the only type of universe we believe capable of supporting human life is the type we occupy.

**Arbitrary**

A decision that is not based on a reason, or the result of rational decision-making.

**Archetype**

An initial model or idea from which later ideas and models of the same thing are all derived.

**Archetype – Jung**

Jung used the word ‘archetype’ to refer to symbolic forms that all people share in their collective unconscious. These archetypes are very old and inherited from generation to generation. The archetypes generate images in the conscious mind.

**Assumption**

A belief or statement which is accepted without being supported by evidence or argument.

**Atman**

A Sanskrit word that means ‘inner-self’ or ‘soul’. Atman is the *true* self of an individual beyond identification with phenomena, the essence of an individual. In order to attain liberation from *samsara*, a human being must acquire self-knowledge, which is to realise that a person’s true self (*atman*) is identical with the transcendent self Brahman.

**Authority**

When applied to religious experience, the word ‘authority’ indicates that the person who has the religious experience has some new insight or knowledge about the world and God’s relationship with the world. This gives them authority. Many authors argue that authority is limited to the individual who has the experience; it is not about authority and power over other people.

**Autonomy**

Liberty to follow one’s will; personal freedom. Used in philosophy to refer to a person who is able to exercise free will to make decisions. It literally means self-governing. If you are autonomous you are able to use reason to make your own free choices.

**Bias**

Unfairly favouring one person or group above another.

**Big Bang**

The essential idea of the Big Bang is that the universe has expanded from a primordial hot and dense initial condition at some finite time in the past and continues to expand.

**Body**

In Aristotle’s thinking ‘the body’ refers to the matter that a living creature is made of.

**Capitalism**

A form of economic development whose goal is the acquisition of wealth. The word 'capital' refers to the amount of monetary wealth an individual or company possesses.

**Cause**

That which produces an effect; that which gives rise to any action, phenomenon, or condition. In philosophy this concept is often linked to the so-called Four Causes of Aristotle.

**The Cave**

A famous analogy written by Plato which he uses to explain some parts of his theory of Forms.

**Contingent**

Philosophers use the word contingent to mean that something is not immortal but depends on something else for its existence. For example, human beings are caused to exist by their parents. They do not just exist. So, philosophers would say human beings are contingent beings.

***Creatio ex nihilo***

This phrase is Latin for '*creation out of nothing*'. It is often used by Christians to communicate the idea that God created the universe out of nothing. God creating the world as described in the Genesis creation stories is often described as being an act of creation '*out of nothing*'.

**Creator**

A title applied to God. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition it refers to God creating the world as recorded in the Bible, for example in Genesis 1–3, Psalm 8 or Job 38.

**Cumulative argument**

A philosophical argument that is built up with many different arguments and pieces of evidence. A conclusion based on probability is then drawn from all the pieces of evidence. In modern philosophy of religion it is popular to create a cumulative argument for God's existence using the separate different arguments.

**Decalogue**

Another term for the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.

**Deism**

Belief in a God who starts the world off or creates it and then leaves it to run by itself. This view makes God completely separate from, and not involved with, his creation. Also, simply the principle of the universe, but not the one humans have a relationship with.

**Deist**

A person who believes that God starts the universe off with one creative act but then effectively left the universe to run without acting in it.

**Deontological**

Philosophical theories which hold that the morality of an act is not totally dependent on its consequences. It is the science of duty; that branch of knowledge which deals with moral obligations; ethics.

**Deviant**

A person who chooses not to obey social rules.

**Direct religious experiences**

Refer to events where God reveals her/himself directly to the person having the experience. The religious experience is not chosen or willed by the person; the person experiences or observes God in some way.

**Disembodied existence**

The idea that a soul can exist separately from its body. Disembodied existence relies on a dualistic view of personhood.

**Divine inspiration**

Refers to the belief among Christians that God inspired the writers of the books of the Bible. It may also refer to other faiths where texts are seen as being 'inspired' rather than as in Islam where the Qur'an is viewed as divine revelation.

**Dualism**

The view that a human person consists of two distinct elements: the mind/soul and the body. The mind/soul is immaterial whereas the body is physical.

**Effect**

The result of a *cause*. For example, the *cause* of a football flying through the air would be the person who kicked it. The *effect* is the result of the action – in this case the ball moving. For more information about *cause* and *effect* see the section on Aristotle.

**Ego**

Freud's name for the part of the mind which is shaped by and organises 'external influences' such as traumas, bereavements, education and upbringing.

**Equivocal language**

The use of the same word to mean completely different things when applied to different objects. For example, the word *banger* can mean: (1) a sausage; (2) a firework; (3) an old car in poor condition.

**The Fall**

Refers to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and their disobeying of God. It may be read in Genesis 2: 4 to 3: 1 of the Bible.

**Falsification**

The philosophical theory that an assertion is meaningless if there is no way in which it can be falsified. For example, 'Elves live in the forest but they only come out when no one is looking'.

**Form**

By 'Form' Plato meant the idea of something. For example, if you say 'Look! There's a cat', you have some idea of what a cat is and you can recognise lots of different types of cats. All the different types of cats embody the Form of a cat, some set of characteristics that resemble the idea of what a cat is. The Form of anything is not physical but the eternal idea of what a thing is.

**Form of the Good**

The highest of all the Forms. Plato said it was also the source of the other Forms.

**The Four Causes**

*The Material Cause* – what a thing is made of.

*The Efficient Cause* – the agent or cause of the thing coming to exist as it is. The existence of a painting or work of art is brought about by the artist who makes it. The artist is the efficient cause.

*The Formal Cause* – what makes the thing recognisable: its structure, shape and activity.

*The Final Cause* – The ultimate reason why the thing exists.

**Free will**

The ability to make one's own decisions and choose freely between different possible courses of action.

**Genesis 1–3**

The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Christian Bible and Jewish Torah. Chapters 1–2 contain two different accounts of the creation of the world by God, and the Fall is in Chapter 3.

**God as judge**

A common image of God throughout the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament. In the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25: 31–46), God is pictured as a king judging people, separating the good from the bad. The good go to heaven, the bad to hell.

**God as lawgiver**

An image of God commonly used in the Bible, for example when God reveals the Ten Commandments to the Israelites on Mount Sinai.

**Grammar**

The field of linguistics that covers the rules governing the use of language.

**Hume, David**

A famous eighteenth-century philosopher whose writings are still important today in debates about God's nature and existence. In his work David Hume presented a set of philosophical arguments against the existence of miracles.

**Hysteria**

The word used by Freud to refer to a range of illnesses that would today be described as mental illnesses, which while they may have physical symptoms (e.g. obsessions) may have no identifiable physical cause.

**Id**

Freud's name for the part of the mind in which human instincts such as desire and appetite are based.

**Immanent**

Used to express the idea that God is involved and active in the world. Religious people may often talk of God being experienced through other people or in a miracle. These are examples of occasions when God is immanent.

**Incoherent**

A philosophical argument which fails because it is illogical.

**Indirect religious experiences**

Experiences, thoughts or feelings about God that are prompted by events in daily life, for example observing the stars in the sky and having thoughts about the greatness of God the Creator.

**Ineffable**

Used to refer to experiences which it is beyond human powers and abilities to fully describe and communicate. In particular, it is used to describe the fact that God is entirely distinct from physical objects and it goes beyond human ability to describe God accurately.

**Infallible**

Used by religious believers to indicate that a teaching does not contain any error or possibility of error.

**Inference**

The philosophical word for a conclusion that is reached through a process of reasoning in an argument.

**Infinite**

Refers to something which has neither a beginning nor an end. Most commonly the idea of infinity is used in mathematics to describe series of numbers that have no beginning or end. For example, the series . . . -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3 . . . could continue without end.

**Intelligent Design**

A theory suggesting that the universe shows evidence that it is created by God. Often Intelligent Design is closely linked to Creationism. This is quite different however from Paley's Teleological (Design) Argument.

**Irreducible complexity**

Meaning that objects and organisms in the world are so complex that the complexity of these things cannot be explained by the blind process of evolution.

**Karma**

In Hinduism, the law of cause and effect.

**Libido – Freud**

Refers to the desires of a person and their need to be satisfied. Freud was referring to more than just sexual desire. The libido, according to Freud, develops with the person.

**Libido – Jung**

Jung used the word 'libido' to mean psychic energy – it is the energy in the mind (*psyche*) which could be either potential or dynamic. For mental health there needed to be a balance in libido between the unconscious and conscious mind.

**Life after death**

The belief that human life continues in some fashion post mortem.

**Lourdes**

A Roman Catholic shrine in the south of France to which thousands of people go on pilgrimage. St Bernadette saw a vision of the Virgin Mary there and discovered a stream in the cave (Grotto) in the mountain. Many people who have bathed in the waters of the Grotto have been healed. Some of these healings have been declared to be miracles by the Roman Catholic Church.

**Materialism**

The view that human beings are physical beings rather than consisting of a physical body and an immaterial soul.

**Miracle**

This word has a great variety of possible meanings. Some uses of the word 'miracle' are given below:

- A lucky event
- A coincidence
- A sign pointing to God
- An event that breaks the law of nature
- An event that reveals God
- A natural event that is given a special meaning by someone
- God's direct intervention in history.

**Monism**

The belief that human beings are a single unity of body and mind. The mind's existence is dependent on the body.

**Mystical experience**

Used in many ways by writers on religious experience. In general, it is used to refer to religious experiences where God is revealed directly and the person having the experience is passive. William James identified four characteristics that are typical of mystical and other religious experiences: noetic, passive, transient and ineffable.

**Myth**

A story which communicates the values and/or ultimate beliefs of a culture or society.

**Natural laws**

When discussing the teleological argument, this phrase refers to physical laws of science such as gravity. It must not be confused with the ethical theory called natural (moral) law.

**Natural selection**

The phrase coined by Charles Darwin to explain his idea that: 'if variations useful to any organic being ever do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterised will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life; and for the strong principle of inheritance, these will tend to produce offspring similarly characterised' (in M. Palmer, *The Question of God*).

**Necessary**

The word used in philosophy to say that something has to be that way and cannot be any different (e.g. if a philosopher was discussing necessary existence he or she would be talking about something which has to exist and could not fail to exist).



**Necessary being**

A phrase used in philosophy of religion to refer to something which always exists and cannot fail to exist. Usually it is a phrase that philosophers apply to God.

Anselm stated that God is a 'necessary being' by which he meant God is a being that must exist and it is impossible for God not to exist.

**Neurosis**

By 'neurosis' Freud meant the symptoms of mental illness caused by a repressed traumatic experience resurfacing in the conscious mind in a different way.

**Noetic**

Refers to something which gives knowledge, such as a revelation from God in which God reveals something.

**Non-propositional revelation**

Refers to the idea that God does not reveal facts or truths to people; instead the religious believer recognises God acting in human history and human experience. For example, a religious believer may come to see God in a beautiful natural scene; the scene reveals truths about God to the person observing it.

**Oedipus Complex**

Refers to Freud's belief that young boys aged around 5 years old are sexually attracted to their mothers and resent their fathers' presence. As the boy develops, these feelings are repressed and disappear out of fear that the father will take revenge on the son.

**Omnibenevolence**

Used as title for God to say that God is 'good'. Means that God always wills goodness or good things towards people, or all-loving.

**Omnipotent**

Means infinite or unlimited power. It is a philosophical word often used to describe God.

**Omnipresent**

*All-present*. It is used in philosophy as a quality for God to refer to God being present throughout every part of creation.

**Omniscient**

Means infinite knowledge. Most philosophers today use the word as a quality for God to indicate that God knows everything it is logically possible to know.

**Original sin**

A reference to the first sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden and its effects, according to traditional Christian beliefs.

**Passive**

Describes the common state of a person who has a religious experience. Often people do not seek out or will religious experiences; instead the experience happens to them – they are passive.

**Perfection**

A philosophical term used to indicate the goodness of God. To be perfect means that you lack nothing and could not be better in any way. God is said to be perfect, as God is totally good and could not be more 'good'.

**Petitionary prayer**

A prayer that makes a particular request of God.

**Postulate**

Kant uses the word postulate to mean 'assuming as true for the purposes of argument or set forward as a plausible hypothesis'.

**Predicate**

A quality or property of a subject expressed in a sentence.

**Prime mover**

The unchanging cause of all that exists. Sometimes this is extended to suggest that the prime mover is God.

**Privation**

Privation means that something is lacking a particular thing that it should have. Augustine gave the example of 'blindness'. He called this a privation, because if you are blind it means that you are unable to see – in other words, you lack the attribute of 'sight'. Augustine uses this in his theodicy.

**Profane**

Something that is not sacred, i.e. the everyday.

**Propositional revelation**

Refers to God directly revealing truths to people.

**Providence**

A word used in Christian theology to refer to God's goodness and continuing activity in the world for the benefit of creation.

**Quantum mechanics**

Refers to the physical understanding of the universe developed in the early twentieth century by the physicists Werner Heisenberg, Paul Dirac and Erwin Schrödinger. Quantum mechanics showed that when it comes to tiny particles (smaller than electrons in atoms) they do not have a definite

position and speed. Instead the tiny particles behave in unpredictable ways. Another way to put this is: some of the basic laws of nature are not fixed laws as Hume thought, but are laws which show that the physical behaviour of particles is a matter of probabilities not certainty.

### **Reductio ad absurdum**

‘Reduction to absurdity’ is a common form of argument which aims to demonstrate that a statement is true by showing that a false, untenable, or absurd result follows from denying it, or to demonstrate that a statement is false by showing that a false, untenable, or absurd result follows from its acceptance.

### **Reincarnation or rebirth**

The belief that the soul of a person is reincarnated after death. Its status in the next life depends on the conduct of the incarnated soul in its previous existence. Belief in reincarnation is associated with Hinduism and other eastern religions.

### **Resurrection**

Refers to the belief that life continues after death through the existence of the person, body and soul, in a new but distinct form of life. Resurrection is a feature of Jewish, Christian and Muslim beliefs.

### **Revelation**

Refers to any act in which God is revealed to human beings. The characteristic of revelation is that it reveals knowledge of God/God’s nature. In Christianity there are two types of revelation:

- 1 Propositional revelation
- 2 Non-propositional revelation.

### **Samsara**

The cycle of birth, death and rebirth in Hindu belief. The *atman* (*jiva*) is reincarnated as a human or other life form depending on the conduct of its last incarnation.

### **Social fact**

A type of behaviour or action that is either socially compulsory or unacceptable. For example, blowing your nose in public is unacceptable in some cultures – this is a social fact.

### **Soul**

Aristotle defined the soul, or *psychē* (ψυχή), as the ‘first actuality’ of a naturally organised body, and argued against it having a separate existence from the physical body. In Aristotle’s view, the primary activity, or full actualisation, of a living thing is its soul.

**Summum bonum**

Literally means the highest good. In Kant's moral thinking the *summum bonum* is the final goal or aim of all moral actions. For Kant the *summum bonum* is the act of both doing your moral duty and willing that doing your duty is rewarded with (or results in) a state of happiness and fulfilment.

**Super-ego**

The name in Freud's model of the mind for the part of the ego with which humans reason and make decisions. Freud emphasised the way in which parental influence and values mould the super-ego and leave their mark on it.

**Symbol**

Used in religious thought to indicate something which points people to God and also presents something about God to people.

**Syntax**

The study of the principles and rules for constructing sentences.

**Synthetic**

Refers to a proposition or statement the truth or falsity of which has to be verified through experience. Predicates of synthetic propositions are not intrinsic to the subject of the proposition (e.g. the car is green – this may or may not be true).

**Teleological**

An argument relating to the study of ultimate causes in nature or a study of actions relating them to the ends.

**Telos**

The Greek word for 'end' or 'result' of a process or course of action.

**Theism**

Refers to belief in a God who creates the world and continues to sustain it and be involved with it. This is the traditional view of God held by the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

**Theodicy**

A philosophical attempt to solve the problem of evil.

**Totem**

A sacred thing; that is, a totem is set apart from and different from things in ordinary life.

**Transcendent**

Used to express the idea that God is separate from and completely distinct and different from the physical world. Transcendence also indicates that

God is beyond human comprehension and is completely 'other' (different from us).

**Transience**

Refers to the fact that religious experiences are experiences which are temporary. The experiences do not last for ever.

**Univocal language**

Words have the same meaning when applied to different objects or things (e.g. Liz is fat, Mark is fat, the pig is fat).

**Verbal inspiration**

Refers to the divine origins or authorship of every word in the Bible. According to this view, God effectively dictates the books of the Bible by divine inspiration.

**Verification**

Refers to the concept of demonstrating the truth or falsity of a statement of fact using empirical evidence. Statements that cannot be assessed, such as 'Martians visit Earth when no one is watching', are described as 'meaningless'.

**Vision**

An event in which God, or something about God, is seen or observed. Visions are usually divided into three types: corporeal, intellectual and imaginative.

**Worldview**

A summary of the beliefs and values a person holds about the universe and their place in it. For example, a Christian worldview includes the belief that the universe is a creation of God.