



Aquinas and the Razor

**Descartes argues that God saves us from skepticism.
This leads to our next question...**



DILEMMA #3

Does God exist?



Important Concepts

Metaphysics is the philosophical study of the nature of reality, dealing with questions like:

what is free will and do humans have it? (stay tuned)

What is space/time? (math competency required)

What is God? (logic competency required)

What is causation? (math competency required)

What is essentially human? (basic bio competency required)

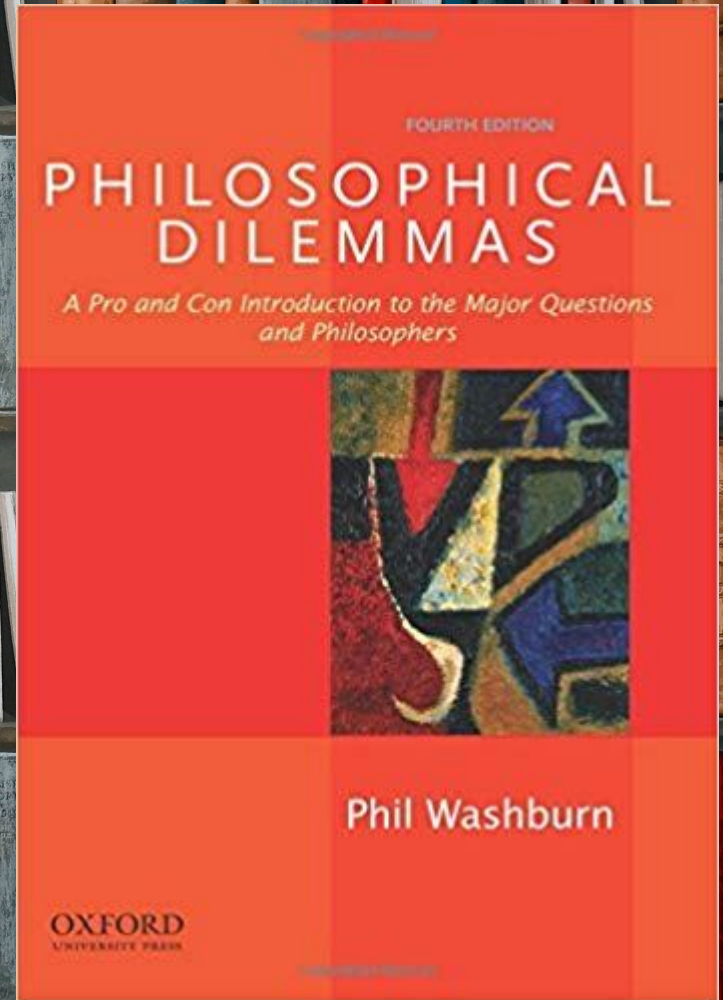
In other words, it studies what reality is like (or what things would be like if they were real).

Ontology is a subfield of metaphysics that focuses on what sorts of things exist, ie ontology picks out the things that are in reality.

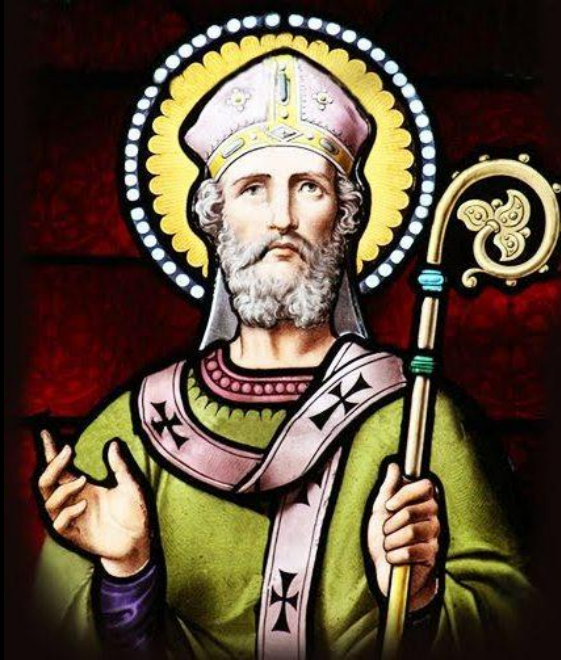
Scholasticism is a style of philosophy

where the philosopher in question:

- a. firmly accepts the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and
- b. uses the tools of Philosophy to try to deepen his/her own understanding of his/her faith.



Person of Interest: St. Anselm of Canterbury



Occupation:

Benedictine monk, philosopher,
theologian

Notable Accomplishments:

Founder of scholasticism
Ontological Argument

Notable Works:

Monologion, 1076
Proslogion, 1078

Anselm's Definition of God

Anselm defines **God** as something than which nothing greater can be conceived.

The Ontological Argument for God's Existence (Plantinga's Version)

1. God exists in the mind but not in reality. (Assumption for *reductio*)
2. Existing in reality is greater than existing in the mind alone. (Premise)
3. A being with all God's properties plus existence in reality can be conceived. (Premise)
4. A being with all God's properties plus existence in reality is greater than God. (From (1) and (2))
5. A being greater than God can be conceived. (From (3) and (4))
6. It is false that a being greater than God can be conceived. (From definition of "God"; contradicts (5).)
7. Hence, it is false that God exists in the understanding but not in reality. (From (1), (5), (6), which refutes (1).)
8. God exists in the understanding. (Premise, to which even the Fool agrees.)
9. Hence God exists in the understanding AND in reality. (From (7), (8).)

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Objections

Objection: Definition of “God”

This argument hinges on using a very specific definition of God. In fact, it would fall apart if we used a different definition.

Objection: Substitution











**You can prove anything exists with this argument.
Just substitute the word “God” with anything else.**



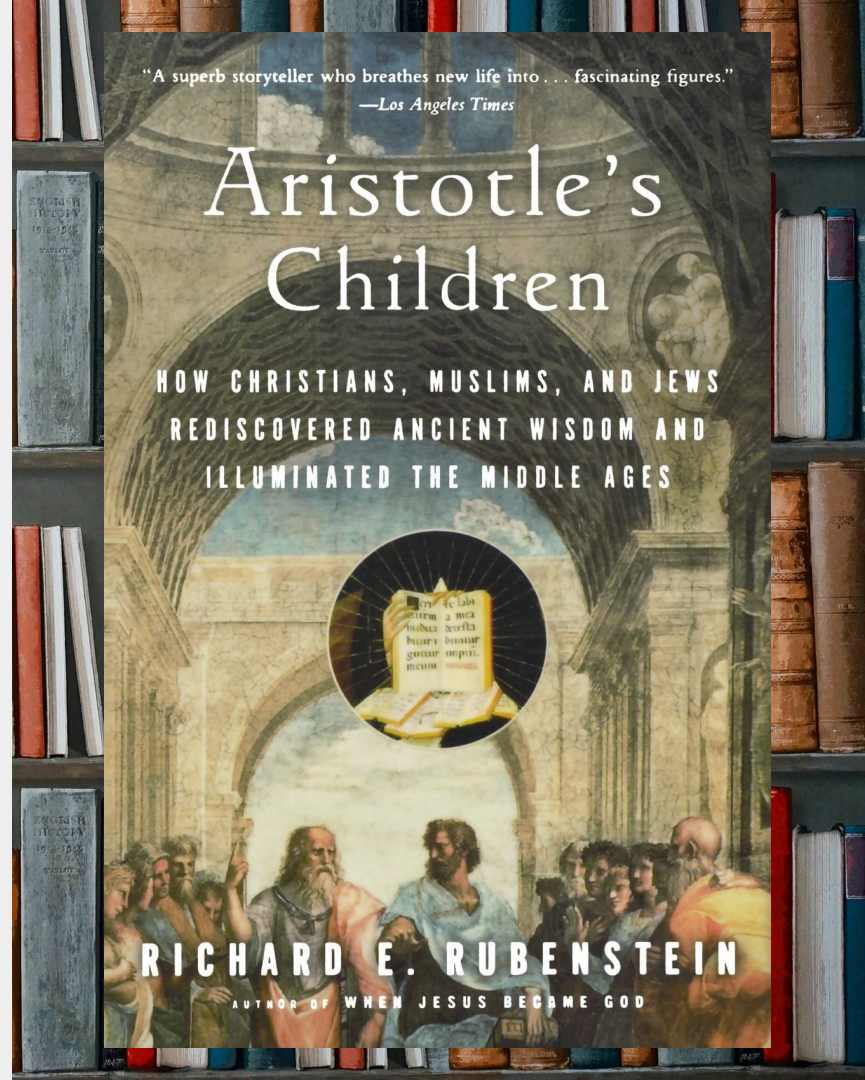
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A being than which
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Although these arguments seem silly by modern standards, Anselm is using Aristotelian-type reasoning which is only beginning to be rediscovered in Europe having been slowly forgotten during the long fall of the Western Roman Empire...



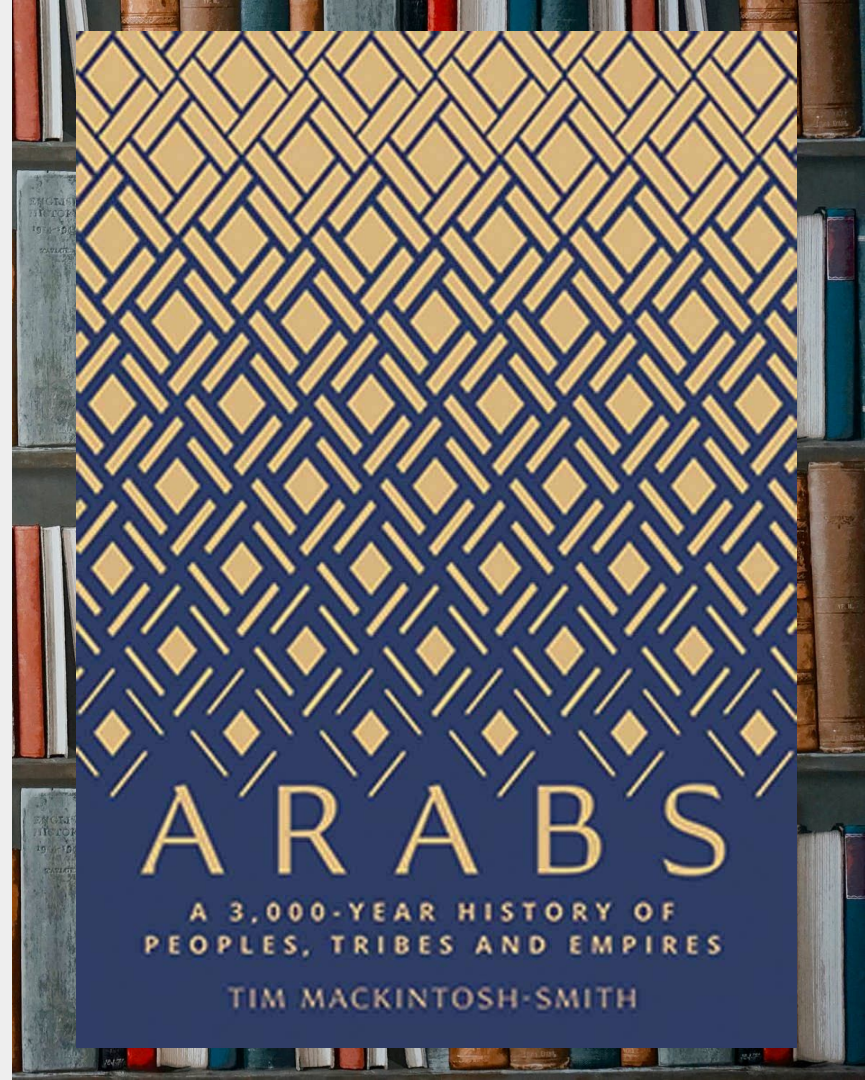
Storytime!

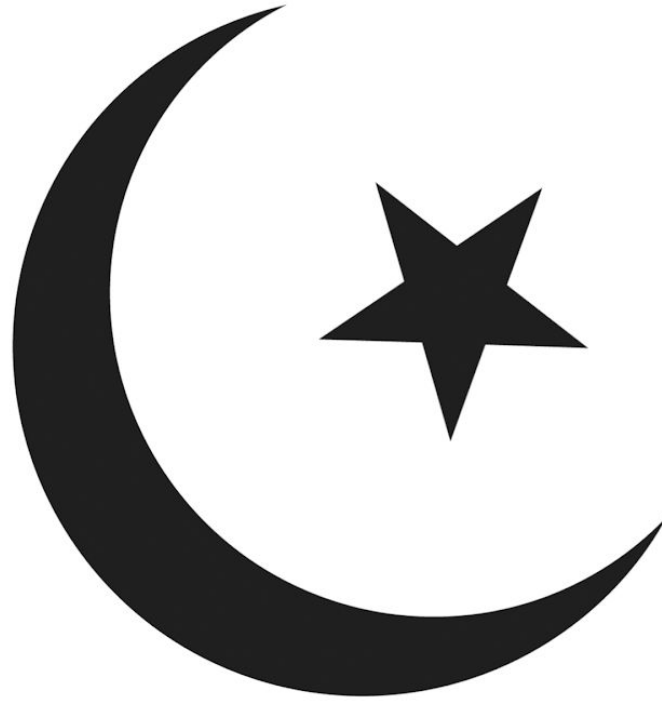




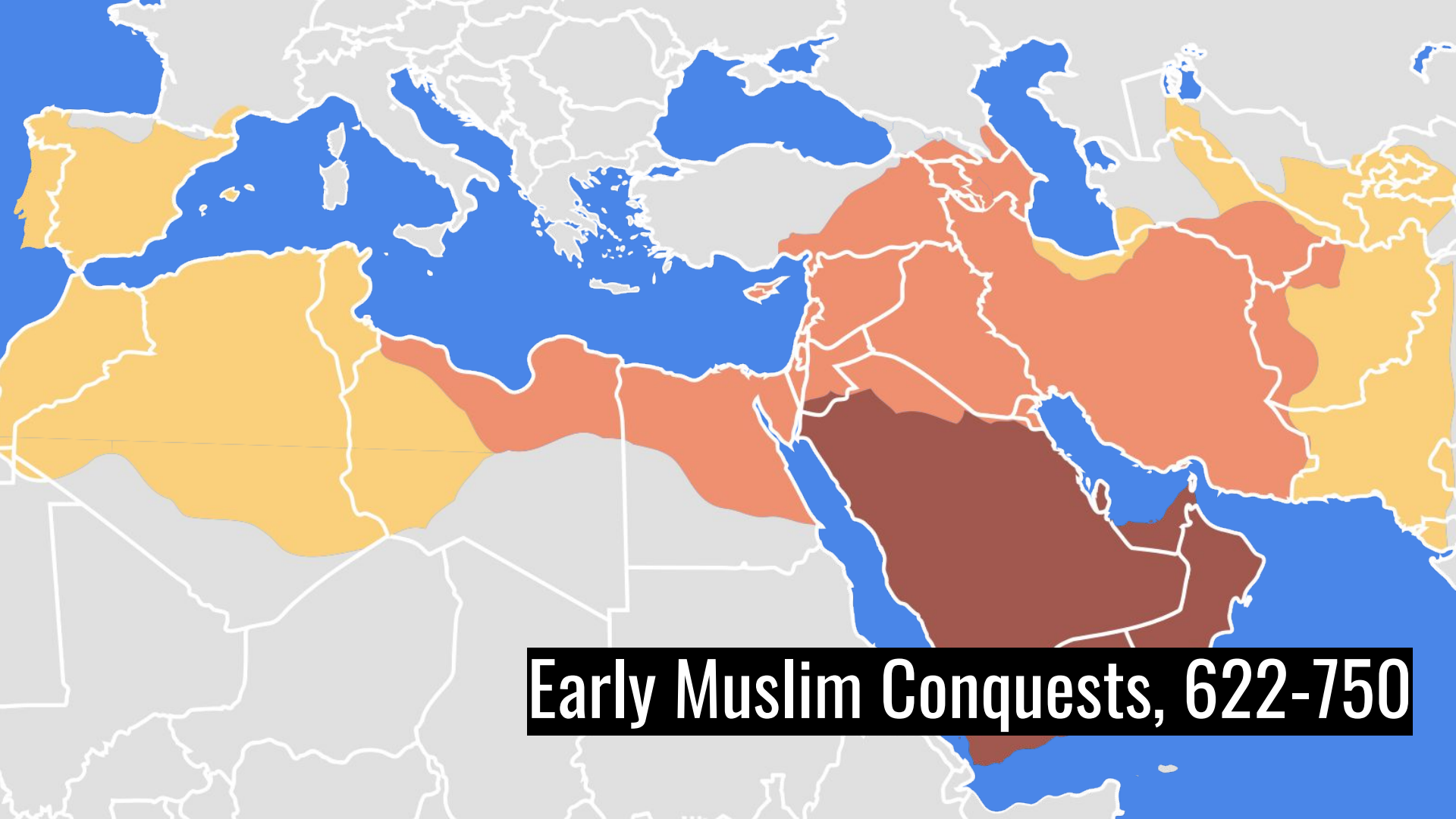
Fall of the Western Roman Empire, 476 CE

The nomadic tribes of the northern Arabian peninsula were progressively unified into a meta-ethnicity first by a shared language (particularly its high form, which was used for poetry) and then eventually by religion (see Mackintosh-Smith 2019).





Muhammad, 570-632



Early Muslim Conquests, 622-750



Sassanid (or Sasanian) Persian Empire, 224-651



Pope Urban II calls for the First Crusade, 1095



Acre falls to the Mamluks, 1291

Person of Interest: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)



Occupation:

Dominican friar, philosopher,
theologian

Notable Accomplishments:

Just War Theory
The Five Ways

Notable Work:

Summa Theologica, 1485

Natural Theology

Natural theology is a type of inquiry into the nature of God that:

- a. seeks to establish the existence of a supernatural deity (i.e., God) by
- b. pointing to some natural phenomenon which
- c. purportedly cannot be explained absent the existence of a supernatural deity.



“[T]he middle years of the thirteenth century, when St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) was developing his system, marked the height of the attempt to harmonize faith with reason.

Where previously the traditional outlook, represented by the Augustinians, had regarded all true knowledge as the result of God illuminating the soul, Aquinas made all human knowledge begin with sense perception...

St. Thomas’s system was the culmination of the effort to fuse the natural and the supernatural into a comprehensive outlook, in which one was complementary to the other” (Leff 1956: 31).

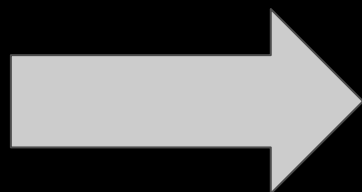
The Argument from Efficient Causes

1. Every existing thing has a cause.
2. Hence, every cause itself has a cause.
3. This creates an infinite chain of causation.
4. But in order for an effect to exist, the cause must exist.
5. Therefore, if the first cause in a series of causes doesn't exist, then nothing exists.
6. But things do exist.
7. Therefore, there must have been an uncaused First Cause.





EVERYTHING HAS A CAUSE!



LITERALLY EVERYTHING



Objections to the Temporal Interpretation

#1

If sound, this argument would establish the existence of some mysterious “first cause”, but it does not establish the present existence of the first cause.

Maybe the first cause
stopped existing...







This argument is invalid...

#2

**If everything has a cause,
then God must have a cause
too.**

**In other words, premise 1
and the conclusion
contradict each other.**



The Argument from Efficient Causes

1. Every existing thing has a cause.



7. Therefore, there must have been an uncaused First Cause.

#3

The **brute fact view** is the view that the universe simply exists and requires no explanation.
I.e., premise 1 is false.



Aquinas:

No, no, no.

You misunderstand me.

**I don't mean that God is the
First Cause in a temporal
sense, i.e., as in a linear
sequence of events.**

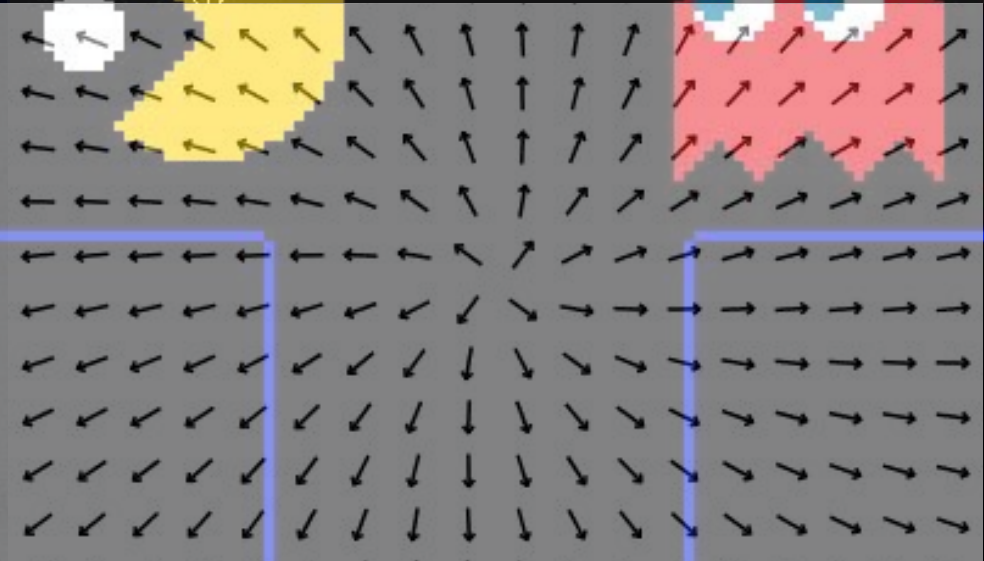
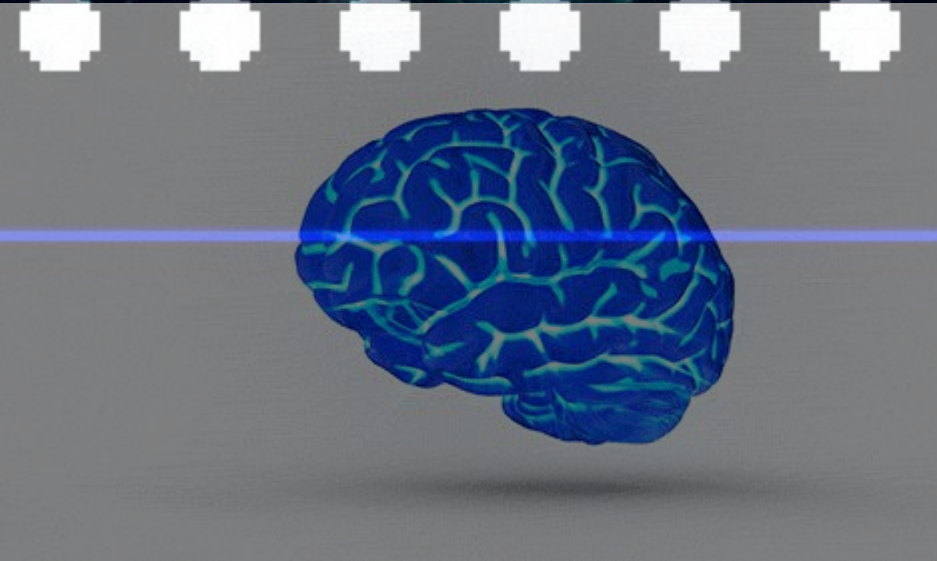


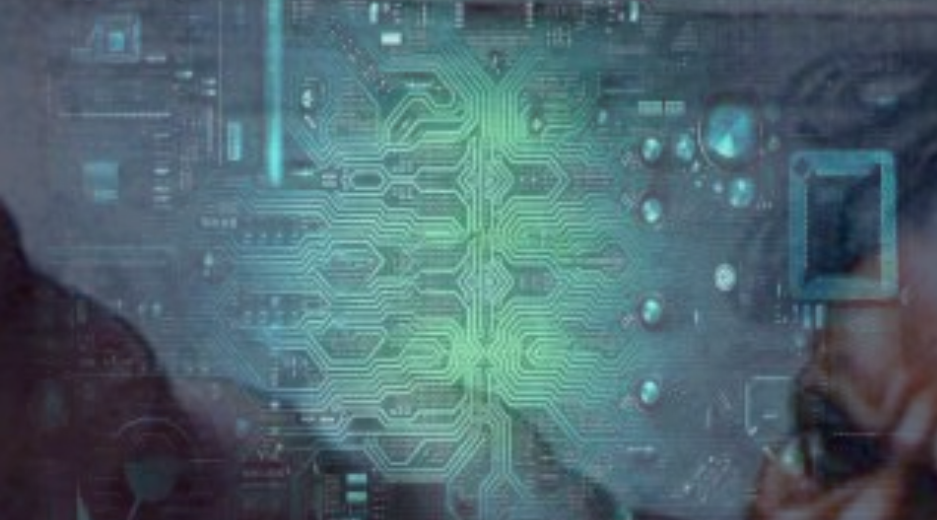
I mean causation in a hierarchical sense.

There must exist a being which sustains all other causal activity.

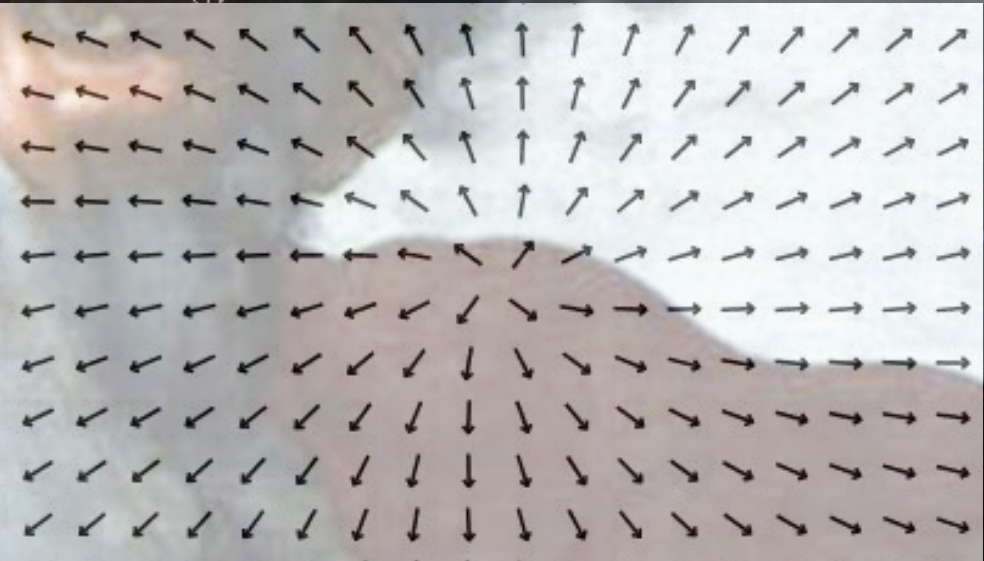
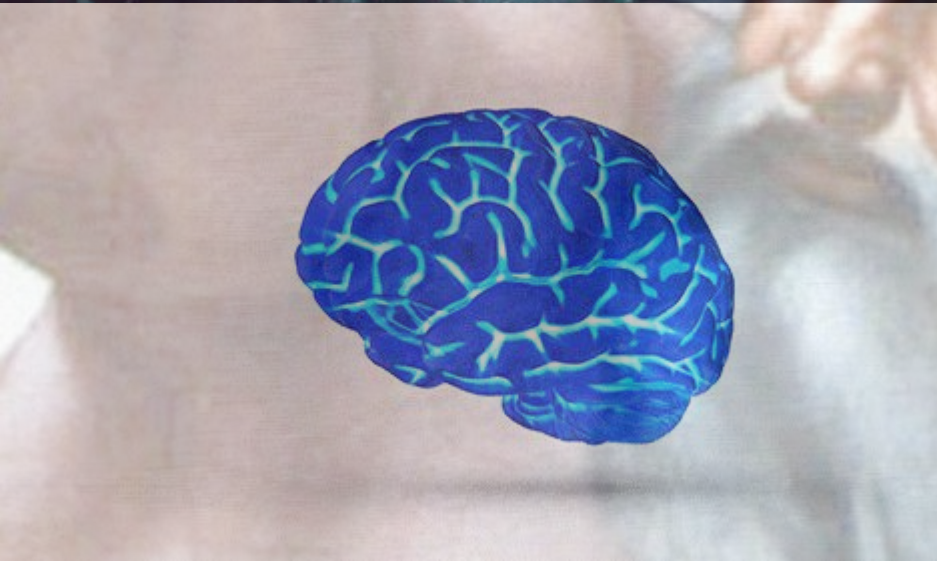


```
    }).done(function(response) {  
      for (var i = 0; i < response.length; i++) {  
        var layer = L.marker(  
          [response[i].latitude, response[i].longitude]  
          // ,{icon: myIcon}  
        );  
        layer.addTo(group);  
  
        layer.bindPopup(  
          "<p>" + "Species: " + response[i].species + "<br>"  
          "<p>" + "Description: " + response[i].description + "<br>"  
          "<p>" + "Seen at: " + response[i].latitude + " " + response[i].longitude + "<br>"  
          "<p>" + "On: " + response[i].sighted_at + "</p>"  
        );  
      }  
    });  
    $('#select').change(function() {  
      species = this.value;  
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  });  
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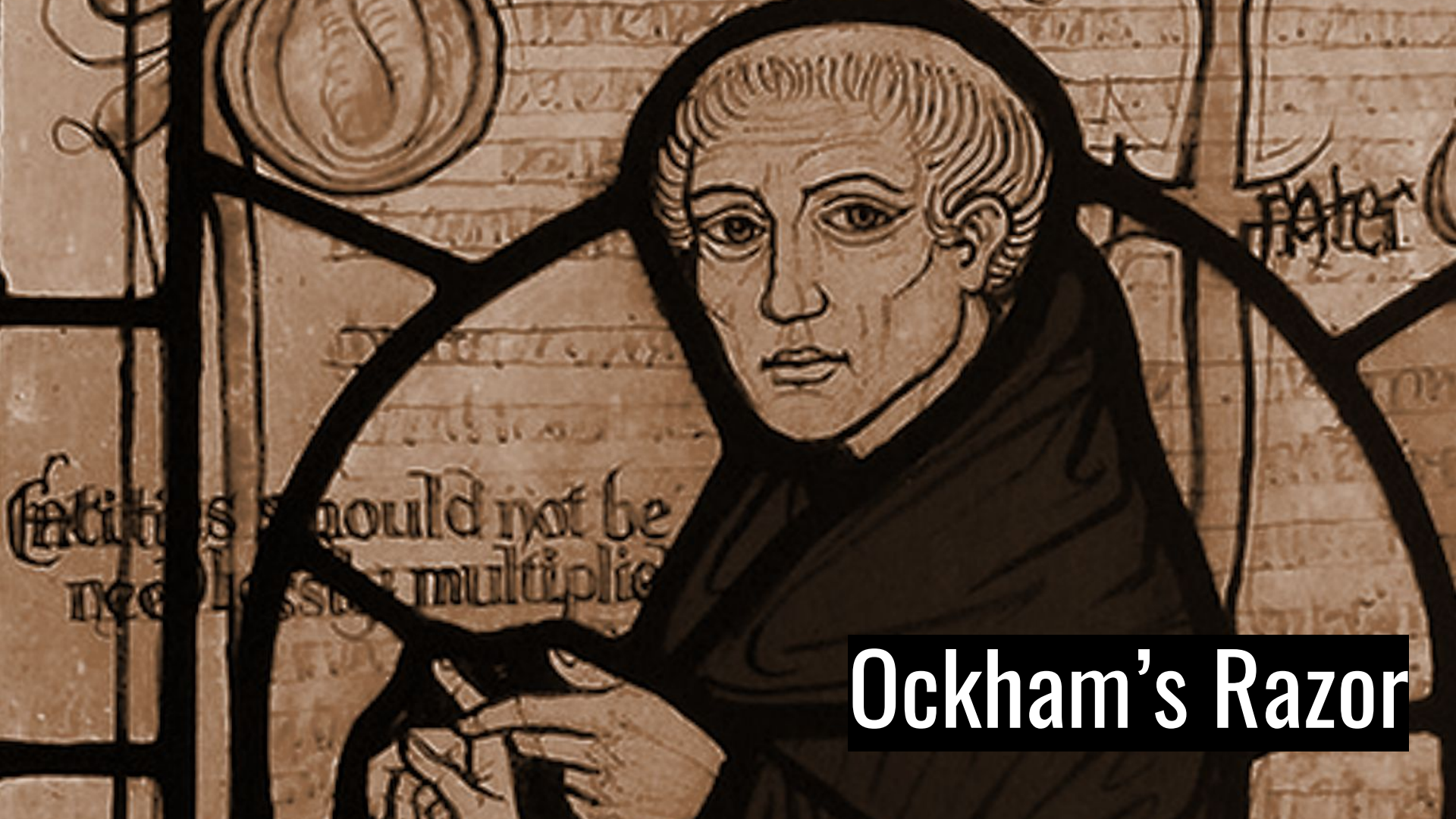




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Objection to the Hierarchical Interpretation



Entities should not be
needed unless multiplied

Ockham's Razor

Person of Interest: William of Ockham



Occupation:

Franciscan friar

Philosopher

theologian

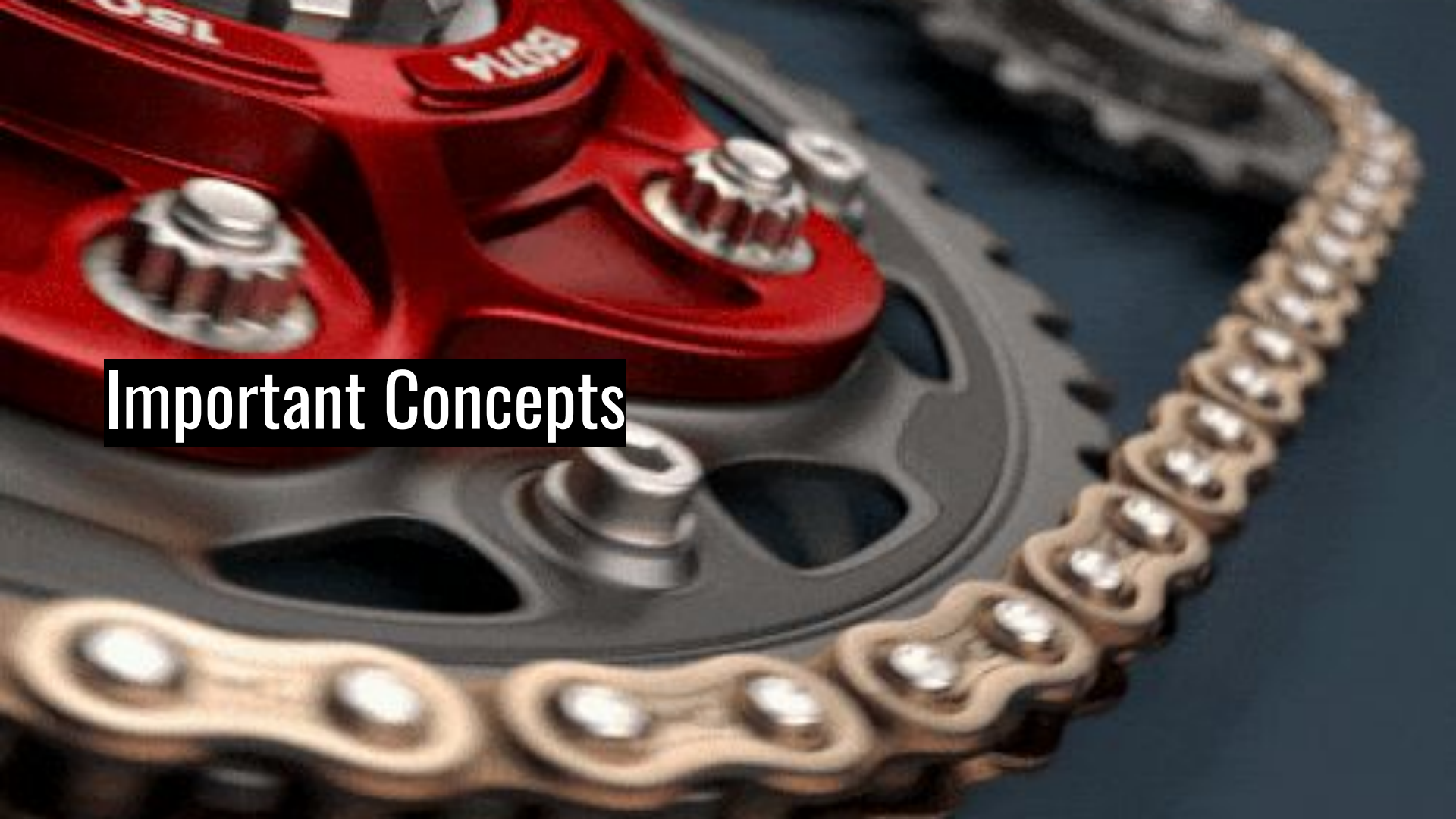
Notable Accomplishments:

Contributions to logic

Principle of Parsimony, aka

Ockham's Razor

Years Active: 1317–1347



Important Concepts

Ockham's Razor, a.k.a. The Principle of Parsimony, is the principle that states that given competing theories/explanations, if there is equal explanatory power (i.e., if the theories explain the phenomenon in question equally well), one should select the one with the fewest assumptions.

Argument from Ockham's Razor



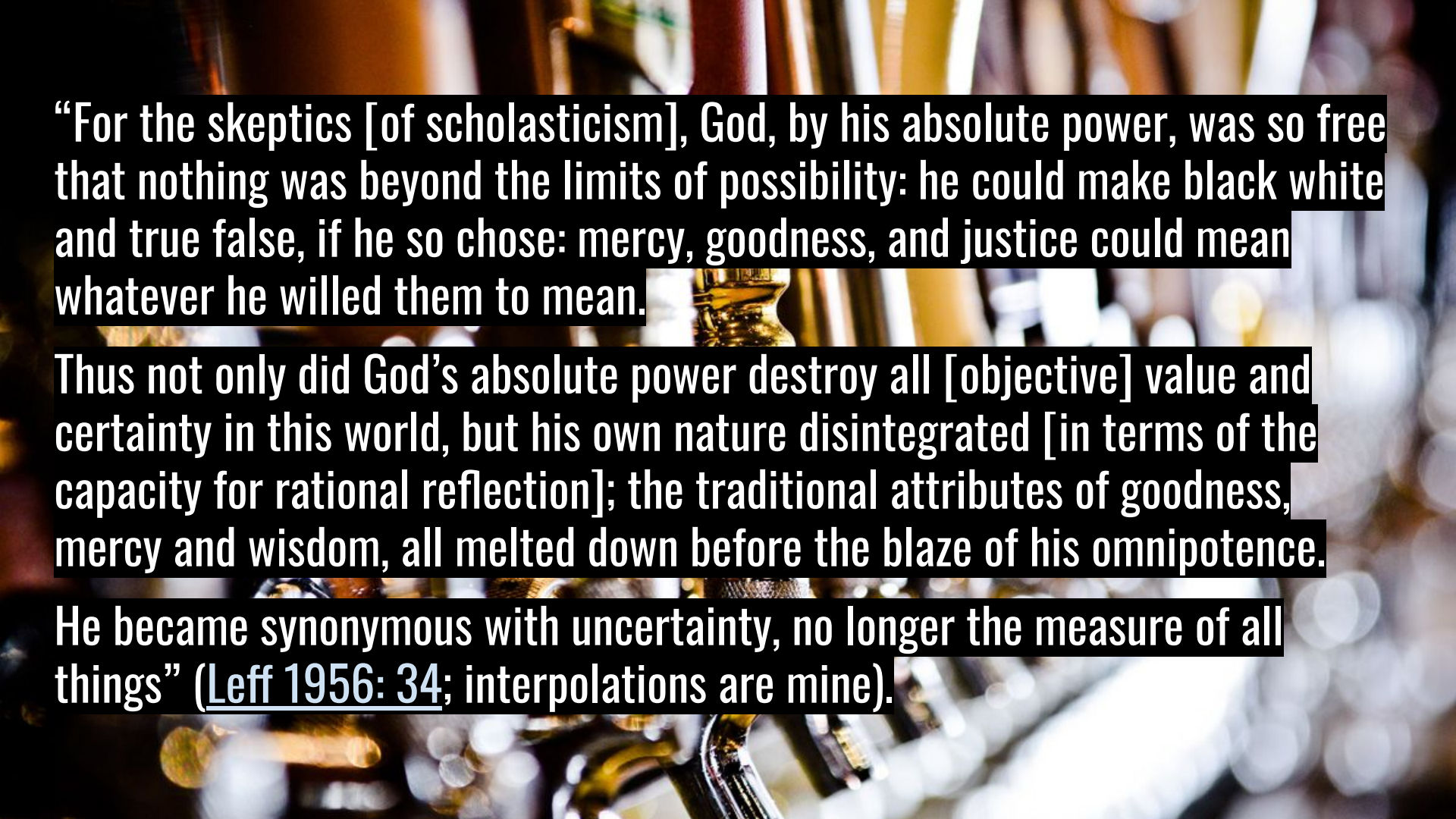


“Duns Scotus (d. 1308) gave open expression to the rejection of reason from questions of faith.

God, he held, was so free and his ways so unknowable they could not be assessed by human means.

Accordingly there could be no place for analogy or causality in discussing him; he was beyond all calculation.

Duns, in the great emphasis he placed on God's freedom, put theology outside the reach of reason” (Leff 1956: 32).



“For the skeptics [of scholasticism], God, by his absolute power, was so free that nothing was beyond the limits of possibility: he could make black white and true false, if he so chose: mercy, goodness, and justice could mean whatever he willed them to mean.

Thus not only did God’s absolute power destroy all [objective] value and certainty in this world, but his own nature disintegrated [in terms of the capacity for rational reflection]; the traditional attributes of goodness, mercy and wisdom, all melted down before the blaze of his omnipotence.

He became synonymous with uncertainty, no longer the measure of all things” (Leff 1956: 34; interpolations are mine).

In other words, since God is all-powerful, He could change anything at anytime, including our methods of human reasoning and logic itself.

Human reason and logic are insufficient to understand a being this powerful.

Since all arguments are grounded by human reason and logic, they are insufficient to argue for the existence of God, let alone an understanding of Him.

Ockham's View...

Fideism is the view that belief in God is a matter of faith alone.

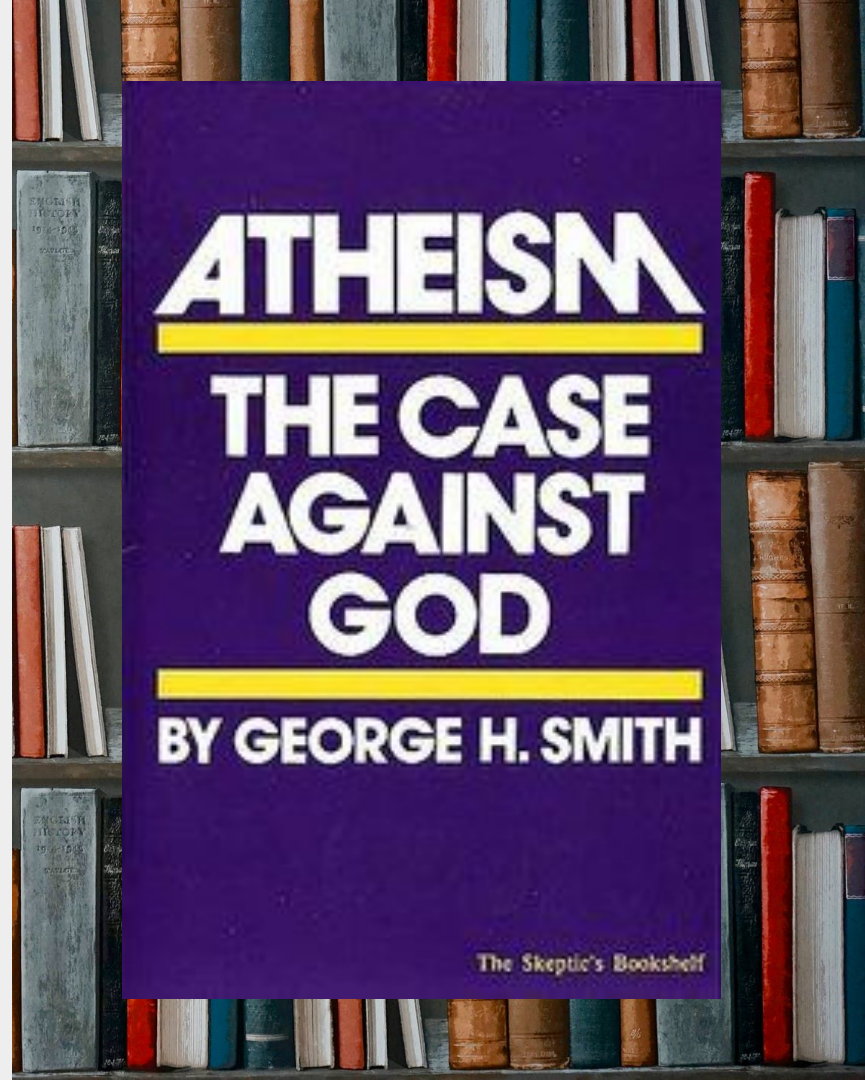
Any attempt to prove God's existence is futile.

Although Ockham was a believer, today atheists use Ockham's Razor more decisively. Here is one such argument:

A supernatural being is, by definition, a being which cannot be accurately explained by natural causes. I.e, it defies any possible explanation.

To posit the supernatural as an explanation for some natural phenomenon explains nothing.

The only tenable explanations would have to be purely natural explanations, not supernatural (see Smith 1989, especially chapter 8).





+ GOD

“[T]he work of Occam marked the end of the mediaeval dominance of Scholasticism. Thenceforward philosophy was more able to press home its enquiries free from the obligation to reach conclusions foreordained by theology...

The task of the Middle Ages was accomplished; the ground was prepared for the Renaissance, with humanism, art, practical discovery, and the beginnings of natural science, as its characteristic glories.

With the passing of the universal supremacy of Scholasticism we turn a new page in history” (Dampier 1961: 94-5).

