

# T. Scott Ferguson

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## EDUCATION

**Ph.D.** Philosophy of Religion, University of Chicago, 2008-2019

**Dissertation:** *The Needs of Reason: Kant, Metaphysics, and the Proofs for the Existence of God*

Doctoral Committee: Jean-Luc Marion, Karl Ameriks, William Schweiker

### Qualifying Examinations

Modern Philosophy of Religion (Jean-Luc Marion)

20<sup>th</sup> Century Continental Philosophy of Religion (Arnold Davidson)

Metaphysics (Dan Arnold)

History of Criticism and Literary Theory (Françoise Meltzer)

**M.A.** Divinity, University of Chicago, 2006-08

**B.A.** Religious Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2001-05

## RESEARCH INTERESTS

**AOS:** Philosophy of Religion; Kant; Early Modern Philosophy

**AOC:** Contemporary European Philosophy, esp. Phenomenology; History of Philosophy

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

### University of Chicago

Instructor, "Philosophical Perspectives 3," Spring 2019

Instructor, "Philosophical Perspectives 1," Fall 2018

Lector, "Writing for Research," Summer 2018

Writing Intern, "Philosophical Perspectives 1-3," multiple sequences from Fall 2014 to Winter 2018

Teaching Assistant, "Reading Descartes's *Meditationes de prima Philosophia*" (taught by Jean-Luc Marion), Spring 2016

Teaching Assistant, "Introduction to Phenomenology: Husserl" (taught by Jean-Luc Marion), Spring 2015

Teaching Assistant, "Introduction to Phenomenology 2: Contemporary Debates on Phenomenality and Givenness" (taught by Jean-Luc Marion), Spring 2013

Teaching Assistant, "Introduction to Phenomenology: Heidegger, *Being and Time*" (taught by Jean-Luc Marion), Spring 2012

## RELATED EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant to Jean-Luc Marion, 2009-Present

Co-Organizer for The Chicago Philosophy Meetup on Meetup.com, 2010-Present

Co-Leader (with Tucker McKinney and Daniel Rodriguez Navas), *Being and Time* Undergraduate Reading Group, Winter and Spring 2013

University of Chicago Divinity School Area Assistant, 2008-2010  
Math and Reading Tutor at STRIVE Tutoring in Hyde Park, Summer 2008

## **PRESENTATIONS**

- “Descartes, Boyle, and (Early) Kant on Physico-Theology and the Existence of God.”  
University of Chicago Philosophy of Religion Workshop, October 2017
- “The Proof from Ontology: God as Ontological Presupposition in Early Kant.” Harvard  
Divinity School Graduate Conference on Religion, October 2013
- “Truth and Order; or, Why Isn’t Spinoza an Idealist?” University of Chicago Early Modern  
Philosophy Workshop, January 2013
- “Syllogism (Plato, *Theaetetus* 184-187).” University of Chicago Philosophy of Religion  
Workshop, October 2012
- “On Behalf of the Cynic (for John Haugeland).” University of Chicago Contemporary  
European Philosophy Workshop, February 2011
- “Music: Some Phenomenological Remarks.” University of Chicago Contemporary European  
Philosophy Workshop, February 2009
- “On Spinoza’s Identification of Appetite and Desire.” University of Chicago Early Modern  
Philosophy Workshop, May 2008
- “‘Whence Then Am I?’: Proofs of God and the Problem of the Subject in Kant.” McGill-  
CREOR Graduate Students’ Conference, March 2008
- Response to Gavin Arnall, “Sartre: Free to and Responsible for Producing Jargon.”  
University of Chicago Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, February 2008
- Response to Dawn Chow, “An Ideal Spinoza.” University of Chicago Early Modern  
Philosophy Workshop, January 2008

## **LANGUAGES**

Reading knowledge of French, German, Greek, Latin, Japanese, and Spanish

## ***The Needs of Reason: Kant, Metaphysics, and the Proofs for the Existence of God (Abstract)***

Although the theistic proofs have long maintained a strange preeminence in popular considerations of religion and even in professional philosophy up to the present day - to the point that concepts such as “religion,” “God,” etc. still tend to be read through the influence of the proofs, and through rational theology more broadly - the standard explanation for why they were developed and continue to be deployed, namely apologetics in defense of a particular faith, is inadequate. Historically speaking, the proofs only came to prominence and took a central place in philosophy after Descartes and in connection to metaphysics, i.e. to the project of securing human knowledge in its foundations. The question of why the proofs are “around” clearly points to their connection to metaphysics, but it has still never been adequately answered.

This study answers the question by way of rereading Kant and the tradition leading up to him. Kant’s critical project in the “Ideal” and elsewhere, rightly understood, was not to attack the proofs but to determine their sources, limits, and motivations, and to thereby lead them back to their appropriate roles within reason. Yet Kant’s critical approach to the proofs cannot be understood without the context of the early modern history of the proofs and the quarter-century of Kant’s pre-critical writings on the same subject, particularly the 1763 *Beweisgrund*; nor can it be understood without a basic inquiry into exactly what it would mean to “prove the existence of God.” This study first presents the history of each proof (Cartesian, ontological, contingency, and cosmological) discussed in the *Beweisgrund* from Descartes onwards, and then tries to analyze the proofs independently - particularly through Aristotle, Descartes, Heidegger, and Marion. I argue that all of the proofs save the Cartesian (later to take the name “ontological” from one of the other proofs) have what Heidegger calls an *ontotheological* structure: “God” is used to secure the comprehensibility of a particular realm of being.

The crucial turn in the critical period lies in Kant’s moral proof, which - despite having its own ontotheology - is made *practical* through the structure of what Kant calls “faith.” Faith is not a theoretical stance - it can actually conflict with the agent’s explicit beliefs - but rather the *practical assumption* of something (here, God) which is the condition for the end of one’s action. This study then shows that Kant rehabilitates *all* of the precritical proofs (save one) via this very same practical faith, while the Cartesian/ontological becomes the particular “mark” of speculative theology’s basic (but necessary) error. But this turns out to be not so much a transformation of the proofs as a recognition of what their proper role was from the beginning. The proofs in their old, explicitly theoretical form only “mistake need for insight,” doing so because the theoretical level of discourse demands justifications of their own kind. The proofs thus amount to theoretical *symptoms* (ultimately illegitimate at that level) of a deeper “need of reason” to secure the practical approach (in the sciences, in morality, etc.) to various entities in their various modes of being via the assumption of God’s existence; Heidegger’s “ontotheology” amounts to a special case of Kantian faith.

Although many excellent books have been written on the history or the validity of the proofs, and indeed on Kant's philosophy of religion, this is the first effort I know of (since Kant himself) to use Kant's position to trace the proofs back to metaphysics and then ground that metaphysics in practical conduct. It should provide helpful conceptual clarifications for religious studies and theology (which still often rely on the concepts of rational theology), as well as a correction for philosophy of religion. It also suggests the broader research question concerning the extent to which other metaphysical topics and problems can be traced back to practical needs, in Kantian fashion or otherwise.