

*Between One Faith and Another:
Engaging Conversations on the
World's Great Religions*

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Is Any Religion More True Than Another?

In today's globalized society, religion is deeply intertwined with issues we see on the news, in our workplaces, and in everyday life. How do we know which religion is true, and is there any way to make talking about religion less contentious? *Between One Faith and Another* helps readers work through these questions of comparative religion in a creative thought experiment from Peter Kreeft. In the book, Kreeft uses a Socratic dialogue format to make sense of the world's major religions, providing an engaging way for thinking fairly and critically about competing religious beliefs.

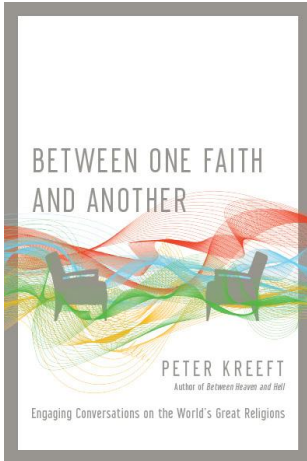
Kreeft introduces the fictional characters of Thomas Keptic, a logical, nonreligious exclusivist, and Bea Lever, an open-hearted inclusivist, who are students in Professor Fesser's course on world religions. Fesser is a neutral, scholarly inclusivist, who mediates his students' discussions as they explore the content and distinctive claims of the world's great faiths.

In their dialogue, Thomas, Bea, and Professor Fesser cover the following subjects:

- The plausibility of major religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Zen, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- The distinctive claims of these major religions
- How religions might relate to each other and to what extent exclusivism or inclusivism makes sense

"Peter Kreeft has employed his personal gift for lively and erudite dialogue to present some of the most difficult issues in the philosophy of religion in a way that will charm, entice, and instruct even readers who are completely new to the subject," says J. Budziszewski, author of *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Virtue Ethics*. "No one else could have written this remarkable book."

Kreeft (PhD, Fordham University) is professor of philosophy at Boston College, where he has taught since 1965. A popular lecturer, he has also taught at many other colleges, seminaries, and educational institutions in the eastern United States. Kreeft has written more than fifty books, including *The Best Things in Life*, *The Journey*, *How to Win the Culture War*, and *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (with Ronald Tacelli).



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Thomas and Bea Dialogue on Hinduism's Claims of Mystical Experience

Thomas: Well, that class was a lot more interesting than I thought it would be.

Bea: Why did you think it wouldn't be?

Thomas: I guess I was thinking it would be about the caste system and sacred cows and monkeys and gods and goddesses and fakirs doing magical rope tricks and walking on hot coals. Instead, we get a course in the psychology of Hindu mysticism.

Bea: So you find mysticism more interesting than magic?

Thomas: Yes.

Bea: Why?

Thomas: Oh, don't get me wrong. Not because I believe it. In fact, I think it's even more unbelievable than the magic tricks. It amounts to believing that there is indeed a God, a single, eternal, perfect being—and it's you! "*Tat tvam asi*"—"that art thou." Wow. Is there anything you could possibly say that's more unbelievable than that?

Bea: If you find it so unbelievable, why do you find it interesting?

Thomas: Precisely because it's so unbelievable. A little bit of insanity is boring, but that much is fascinating. A hundred pieces of junk is boring, but a mountain of junk a thousand feet high is fascinating. And at the top of that mountain you find that you are God! Wow.

Bea: What did you think of the roads up the mountain, the four yogas?

Thomas: Oh, I don't doubt you can find some good psychology there. Thousands of years of exploring the inner world while the West was exploring the outer world—that has to pay off somehow. Especially the four personality types that the four yogas are designed for—that sounds a little like the Myers-Briggs scheme. In fact it also sounds like the four temperaments or the "four humors" that the seventeenth-century pioneers of modern psychology inherited from the medievals. I was surprised the professor didn't make that connection. Do you know the four humors?

Bea: Yeah, we went over them in Shakespeare class.

Thomas: How did your professor explain them?

Bea: In terms of different reaction times. "Melancholic" people react to stimuli slowly, and thoughtfully, and they also change their reactions slowly. They chew on things. "Sanguine" people react to stimuli quickly and they also change their reactions quickly. They're social lions, great at parties. "Choleric" people react quickly—they can make quick decisions, so



they tend to be leaders—and they stick to their decisions for a long time. They can be stubborn and courageous; they don't change quickly. They make good warriors and leaders. And "phlegmatic" people react slowly and change quickly. They're careful and patient with new things but they're also open minded and experimental. They make good scientists.

Thomas: That makes perfect sense. Because *jnana* yoga is yoga for the melancholic, for the intellectuals; and *bhakti* yoga is for the sanguine, for the social lions, for "people people"; and *karma* yoga is for the choleric, for workaholics and leaders with strong egos; and *raja* yoga is for the phlegmatic, for the slow, patient, careful scientist who wants to survey the whole field and do all the data. Take away the mystical religious dimension and that's a useful classification of personality types. Primitive, of course, but pretty faithful to the facts, I'd say.

Bea: So the only thing you find wrong with this religion is its religion.

Thomas: Yeah, that's pretty much it.

Bea: What did you think of the Hindu psychology of "the four wants of man"?

Thomas: I liked that too, up to the fourth one, anyway. We all want pleasure; and then it's power; and then we mature to altruism and social service and duty and compassion and giving to others. But the fourth want—that's just ridiculous. I don't find in myself any desire for *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda*: infinite life, infinite understanding, and infinite joy. Yet Hindus claim that's in everybody, not just in mystics. Well, I'm living disproof of that. I'm somebody, and I'm not that.

Bea: As I said, the only thing you find wrong with this religion is its religion.

Thomas: Do *you* believe that stuff? I thought you were a Christian.

Bea: I am. But that doesn't mean "that stuff" can't be true too. It could be both/and instead of either/or.

Thomas: The psychology, maybe, but certainly not the theology.

Bea: Why not?

Thomas: Just about every reason you could possibly think of.

Bea: Such as?

Thomas: Well, let's list them off. One: Hindus believe in many gods as well as one. Two: Their supreme god is Brahman, and he's sort of everything in general and therefore nothing in particular. Pantheism. Their God has no *personality*. Three: Brahman has a dark side. He is equally Vishnu and Shiva, the Creator and the Destroyer. Four: God didn't create the world, he just dreamed it. Matter and time aren't really real. Five: The reason he did it is just play, *lila*. No purpose. And six: He keeps doing it over and over forever: the *kalpa* cycles, Brahman's endless dreaming and waking. History doesn't go anywhere. Seven: Instead of the Last Judgment and the possibility of hell as well as heaven, you just reincarnate until you're



enlightened, and then you're in heaven. There is no eternal hell. I gotta admit that's a plus for Hinduism. An automatic eternal fire insurance policy. Eight: Karma, fatalism instead of free will. Nine: This god doesn't have a divine son who became a man and died to satisfy his father's wrath against us poor sinners. Ten: We're really all one big soul, Atman. We're not individuals, just lumps in a big tapioca pudding. Eleven: After death we reincarnate. A kind of cosmic recycling. Twelve, the biggie: *Tat tvam asi*. Deep down, you are Atman, and Atman is Brahman; therefore you are Brahman. You are God. That's the craziest one of all.

Bea: Why?

Thomas: Just imagine: If a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim went up to his clergyman and said he just had a mystical experience and discovered that he was God, the clergyman would send for the inquisitors or the witch hunters or the shrinks, depending on the century. But if a Hindu said that to his guru, the guru would say, "Congratulations. You finally found out." And what amazes me most is how you can say you believe all the Christian stuff is true and now you're saying that all that Hindu stuff can be true too, as if you've never heard of logic and the law of non-contradiction.

Bea: That's very neat and simple, Thomas, that list. But religion isn't neat and simple because reality isn't neat and simple, and religion is about reality.

Thomas: Wow! A syllogism. You actually argued in a syllogism. Congratulations. But you just gave a good argument *against* religion instead of for it.

Bea: How do you figure that, logic twister?

Thomas: You said reality isn't neat, right?

Bea: Yes.

Thomas: That's your way of saying it isn't logical, right?

Bea: Yes.

Thomas: Well, there's your mistake. Because reality *is* logical, and if religion isn't logical, as you admit it isn't, then it's not real. That's a syllogism too.

Bea: So there's nothing that's not logical, is that what you're saying?

Thomas: That's what I'm saying.

Bea: Am I real?

Thomas: I certainly think so.

Bea: Am I logical?

Thomas: No. But . . .

Bea: Then not everything that's real is logical.



BOOK EXCERPT

Thomas: Oh, Bea, that's just a trick with words. You're using the word *logical* ambiguously. You don't think logically but logic can explain you. You don't understand logic but logic understands you.

Bea: Oh, so logic *understands* things now? Does logic watch over you? It sounds like it's your daddy – or your God. Do you say your prayers to logic every night?

Thomas: Okay, I used a word ambiguously, just as you did. But this arguing about logic is silly. We should be arguing about *religion*.

Bea: Yes, we should.

Thomas: And don't you agree that when we argue we ought to argue logically and not commit fallacies like the ambiguities both of us just committed?

Bea: Of course . . .

Thomas: So let's do it. I just gave you twelve logical contradictions between two of the religions of the world: Christianity and Hinduism. You say that both religions can be true. I say they contradict each other. I also say that they're both false. Two truths can't contradict each other but two falsehoods can. But let's forget whether they're true or false for now; just show me that they don't contradict each other.

Bea: Fine. Maybe I can open your closed mind a little bit anyway, though I doubt it.

– Taken from chapter three, "*Hinduism: The Claims of Mystical Experience*"