

# A Taxonomy of Religions

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Religions									
Theistic								Atheistic	
Monotheistic							Polytheistic		
Christianity				Judaism	Islam	Other			
Catholicism	Protestantism			Other					
	Baptist		Other						
	Southern Baptist	Other							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

DEFINITIONS:

- A religion is **theistic** when it posits (i.e., assumes as a fact; postulates) the existence of at least one personal god.
- A religion is **atheistic** when it does not posit the existence of at least one personal god.
- A religion is **monotheistic** when it posits the existence of exactly one personal god.
- A religion is **polytheistic** when it posits the existence of more than one personal god.

NOTES:

- This is a taxonomy of *religions*. Religions have *adherents*. Not every person is religious, obviously, and, as the taxonomy shows, some people who *are* religious are atheistic. Atheists divide into two categories: those, such as Jainists and Buddhists, who are religious (category 10 on the taxonomy) and those who are not religious.
- The taxonomy is *jointly exhaustive* (meaning that every religion goes in one of its 10 categories) and *mutually exclusive* (meaning that no religion goes in more than one of its 10 categories). Not all taxonomies are jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive, but this one is. I made it so by the way I defined terms and by the way I used residuary (“other”) categories.
- For any set of objects, there are, in principle, many ways to carve it up—that is, many taxonomies of it. Taxonomies are neither true nor false; they are only more or less useful for various purposes.
- Other names for a taxonomy are “typology,” “classification scheme,” and “intellectual framework.”
- The focus of this course is *theistic* religions, and specifically *monotheism*. We will rarely go “below” monotheism on the taxonomy, so if you are a Christian (for example), you should not expect a discussion of your distinctively Christian beliefs. Perhaps a better name for the course would be “Philosophy of Monotheism.”
- I thank my former colleague, Tim Mahoney, for constructive comments on this taxonomy.