

# **Death of God vs. God is not Dead: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

The discourse surrounding the "Death of God" and "God is not Dead" claim about God's continued existence represent a profound intersection of philosophical inquiry and theological debate. This research paper explores these contrasting perspectives from historical and contemporary perspectives. Explores their philosophical investigations and theological implications. Based on an analytical methodology, the study engages in a textual analysis of seminal works such as the theological responses of other atheistic philosophers based on Nietzsche's "Death of God" statement. Theoretical frameworks including existentialism, nihilism and various theological paradigms are used to examine various interpretations and critiques. Through a comparative analysis, this article seeks to uncover recurring themes, arguments, and evolving interpretations across different philosophical and theological contexts. Through an intellectual synthesis of primary texts, secondary literature, this research identifies key themes and implications for contemporary philosophy of religion and theology. Finally, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the enduring debate between "God's death" and "God's not dead" perspectives and directs inquiry into their importance in shaping broader intellectual and religious discourse.

**Keywords – Death of God, God is not Dead, Nietzsche, Existentialism, Theology**

## 1. Introduction

The concept of the "Death" of God was first presented through the theology of William Blake, a mystic (**Altizer and Hamilton 2022**). Friedrich Nietzsche introduced the theme of God is dead in his philosophical poem in the text of **Gay Science (Nietzsche 2001, 120)**. This means that modern people can no longer use the idea of God presented in Christian theology as omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and timeless. This postmodern theology, also known as radical atheist theology, advocates secularism and the abandonment of traditional belief. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, philosophers, theologians and writers tried to launch a "God is dead" movement, which did not gain widespread influence. (**Elwell 2001, 326**). "God is not dead" movement has also been created through this concept. The Death of God movement was culturally influential as many still accepted that God knew and was involved in the affairs of humanity. (**Carlson 2023**). However, that human beings can decide whether or not God knows or exists through the investigations offered by both movements.

The concept of "Death of God" in philosophy and theology refers to a deep theological and existential crisis characterized by the loss or perceived incoherence of the traditional idea of God. This concept, initiated by Friedrich Nietzsche, was adopted in the mid-20th century by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and later by Gabriel Vahanian, Paul Van Buren, Dorothy Soule, William Hamilton, John Robinson, Thomas J. Altizer, Mark C. Taylor, John D. Caputo, Peter Rollins, and Rabbi Richard L. Rubenstein (**Gundry 2001, 327**). This concept was further developed by Rubenstein in his (**Rubenstein 1966, 1**).

A number of basic dimensions can be identified in the main philosophical investigations of the concept of the "Death of God".

- Nietzsche - famously declared that "God is dead" in his works "The Gay Science" and "The Speck Zarathustra". (William, 2007)
- Existential and Philosophical Dimensions – Existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus have explored the concept of "Death of God" in terms of

human existence and the search for meaning in a universe without divine purpose or guidance. (**Gillespie 2016**)

- Theological Radicalism - In these circles, the "Death of God" theology emerged primarily from Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton argued in the 1960s that the traditional understanding of God was outdated. (**Fiddes 1992**)
- Implications - Traditional religious frameworks of God's existence are being challenged in the face of modern scientific advances, questions of secularism and existence. (**Leiter 2019**)
- Responses and Criticism - The concept of the "Death of God" has generated considerable debate and criticism in theological circles and among philosophers. They argue that the movement ignores the enduring importance of religious experience and dismisses the power of diverse religious traditions that continue to thrive despite secularizing trends (**Renoe 2021**).

Overall, the concept of "Death of God" represents a critical moment in modern philosophical and theological discourse, challenging traditional religious beliefs and inviting deep reflection on faith, meaning, and human existence in a secular age.

The assertion that "God is not Dead" serves as a counterargument to the influential proclamation of the "Death of God" by the 19th-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. While Nietzsche's declaration symbolized the collapse of traditional religious values in the face of modernity, the "God is not Dead" stance represents a resilient affirmation of the divine's enduring relevance in contemporary thought and society (**Schudel 2008**). This perspective argues that, contrary to Nietzsche's view, belief in God remains a vital and meaningful aspect of human existence, providing moral guidance, existential purpose, and a foundation for community (**Hassall 2017, 50-51**).

The "God is not Dead" argument is rooted in theological, philosophical, and cultural frameworks that resist the notion that modernity has rendered religious belief obsolete (**Brauer 2007, 30**). This perspective is often supported by contemporary theologians, philosophers, and religious movements who seek to reinterpret and reinvigorate the concept

of God in ways that address modern challenges while retaining the core tenets of faith (Lawrence-Hart and Deezia 2023, 244).

## 2. Literature Review

I argue that in creative theological inquiry into the human imagination that the death of God has occurred, the thought must be explored only through a philosophical foundation that includes negative theology. It is the kind of sublime reflection on the phenomena of the world that God's death calls forth and draws into the void that opens. God's death is only a metaphysical event that opens up a metaphysical space. But if such happens, it will be impossible to understand what the consequences will be. Therefore, it is important to understand it through a brief literature review.

- Nietzsche, F. (1882). *The Gay Science* (Book III). Retrieved from Project Gutenberg. Nietzsche's declaration of the "Death of God" signifies the decline of absolute metaphysical and moral values in modernity.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1946). *Existentialism is Humanism*. Yale University Press. Sartre's existentialist perspective aligns with Nietzsche's view, emphasizing the human responsibility to create meaning in a godless world.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press. Lyotard's work discusses how the "Death of God" contributes to the fragmentation of grand narratives, including religious ones.
- Barth, K. (1932). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Oxford University Press. Barth argues for a return to the foundational religious experience and the reaffirmation of God's transcendence.
- Whitehead, A. N., & Cobb, J. B. (1967). *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Free Press. Process theology provides a framework for understanding God's involvement in the world, countering the "Death of God" with an evolving conception of divinity.
- Moltmann, J. (1964). *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. SCM Press. Moltmann offers a perspective that counters the nihilistic implications of the "Death of God" by emphasizing hope and future fulfillment.
- Dawkins, R. (2006). *The God Delusion*. Houghton Mifflin. Dawkins critiques religious belief from an atheistic perspective, contributing to the modern discourse on the "Death of God."

- Plantinga, A. (2000). *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford University Press. Plantinga defends the rationality of religious belief against atheistic critiques, providing a counterpoint to the "Death of God."

### **3. Methodology**

For this research article, a qualitative analysis was deemed appropriate to investigate the "Death of God" and "God is Not Dead" from both philosophical and theological perspectives. This method facilitates the use of textual, argumentative, and semantic analysis. The research approach employed was comparative analysis. By comparing the arguments for "Death of God" and "God is Not Dead," I scrutinized the primary texts, philosophical arguments, and theological positions associated with each perspective. Historical contextualization was utilized to review the evolution of the "Death of God" debate and its implications on contemporary thought. To conduct this research review, I have searched and selected relevant articles from 1992 to 2024. Additionally, I analyzed how various theological traditions engage with and counter the notion of the Death of God. This methodology enabled a comprehensive and rigorous examination of the opposing viewpoints, integrating philosophical insights and theological reflections to enhance the analysis presented in this research paper. Consequently, this approach provided a deeper understanding of the complexities and implications inherent in these divergent perspectives. I conducted an on-site literature survey to search for articles. In addition, Google search was also used to analyze the review of the article.

### **4. Results**

By philosophically examining the differences between the two perspectives, it is possible to understand the current state of this debate based on the criticisms in each perspective. Analyzing this foundation of the "The Death of God" and "God is not dead" perspectives yield several key findings that highlight the philosophical and theological tension between these two views.

- **Impact of the "Death of God" Perspective:**

The "The Death of God" perspective, pioneered as an ideology by William Blake and popularized by Nietzsche, has had a profound influence on modern thought, especially

existentialism. It has challenged traditional religious teachings, questioning the existence of absolute moral authority and the relevance of religious belief in a secular age (**William 2024**). This perspective has led to a focus on human autonomy, individualism, and the idea that meaning must be created by individuals rather than derived from a divine source.

- **Resilience of the “God's Not Dead” Perspective:**

Despite the influence of the “The Death of God” narrative, the “God is not dead” perspective has shown considerable resilience. This view has been upheld by contemporary theologians and philosophers who argue that the concept of God is relevant by offering moral guidance, purpose in existence, and a basis for community (**Charette 2017**). The proofs of the arguments for the existence of God that we encounter in philosophy depend on the logical premise that there are no proofs for the arguments that God does not exist. As such, this perspective often reinterprets the idea of God. Presents a more dynamic, relational, and evolving understanding of the divine that resonates with modern sensibilities.

- **Cultural and Social Influences:**

Both perspectives have deeply influenced cultural and social dynamics. Here, social and cultural influence should be focused primarily through sociology and anthropology. The reason for this is that the existence of God is accepted as a basic foundation of these two subjects. Sociologically, religious authority contributes directly to the existence of society. Functionalists try to show its influence on social structure and social organization. However, the conflict theory rejects that premise. Structuralism explains its structural significance. Anthropologically, religion is central to people's lives in many cultures of the world. More than eight out of ten people around the world can identify with a religious group (**The Global Religious Landscape 2012**). However, it is also true that the number of people who say they have no religion is increasing day by day. There are many people in the world now who, some Roman Catholics as well as followers of many other religions, are working to maintain their second religious belief (**Sherwood 2018**). This is an important reminder that, like culture, religions are highly dynamic and subject to constant changes of interpretation and allegiance. Anthropology offers a unique perspective for the

study of religious beliefs, how people think about the supernatural, and how these beliefs inspire values and behaviors that contribute to the lives of individuals and communities. No theory or vocabulary can fully capture the richness of religious diversity in the world today. But cultural anthropology provides a toolkit for understanding the emotional, social, and spiritual contributions of religion to the human experience (**Tausch 2017**). Culturally, the "The Death of God" has contributed to the rise of secularism and the questioning of traditional values, while the "God is not dead" movement has led to a renewal of religious thought and practice. The debate between these perspectives also influences art, literature and public discourse, particularly in contexts where communities seek to reassert their spiritual identities. It shapes how individuals and societies conceive meaning, purpose, and morality.

## **5. Discussion**

The implications of these findings are significant, affecting various areas of philosophy, theology, and cultural discourse.

- **Philosophical Implications:**

The "death of God" perspective has pushed philosophical inquiry into new realms. It challenges the notion of universal truths, especially in the realms of existentialism and postmodernism. It also encourages the search for subjective meaning and individual freedom. This has led to a more pluralistic and fragmented view of morality and ethics (**Smick 2013, 711-712**). On the other hand, the "God is not dead" perspective provides a counter-narrative that reaffirms the existence of objective moral values grounded in the divine. It presents a philosophical framework that attempts to reconcile faith with reason, suggesting that faith in God can coexist with modern scientific and intellectual advances (**Bubbio 2024**).

- **Theological Implications:**

The "Death of God" theory has prompted theologians to rethink and sometimes reconstruct their understanding of God. This has created direct effects on some of the teachings of traditional theology and has also led to the emergence of new theological theories. Or try to

redefine God in a way that is consistent with contemporary challenges (**Tan 2020**). That is clear when examining the contemporary theories that have been presented through neo-Thomistic approaches. On the other hand, the "God is not dead" position has revived efforts to articulate a theology that speaks to the modern situation without abandoning basic religious principles. This includes new interpretations of divine infallibility, the role of God in history, and the relevance of religious ritual and community life (**Filippo 2006**).

- **Cultural and Social Implications:**

The cultural implications of these perspectives are vast. "Death of God" has contributed greatly to the rise of secular humanism. People are seen as the ultimate source of meaning and value. This has influenced everything from educational systems to political ideologies, promoting a worldview that prioritizes human autonomy and rationality (**Steffen 2022**). In contrast, the "God is not dead" perspective continues to inspire faith-based spiritual renewal and social justice movements. It has fostered communities trying to maintain their religious identities in a secular world. Contributes to a global conversation about the role of religion in public life.

- **Investigating the interaction between the two perspectives:**

The tension between these two perspectives creates a dynamic interplay that continues to shape contemporary thought. While the "death of God" perspective challenges believers to reconsider the basis of their faith, the "God is not dead" argument offers a response that attempts to demonstrate the divine's enduring relevance. This ongoing debate highlights the complexity of modern belief systems in which secular and religious worldviews coexist, compete, and influence each other in multiple ways.

Accordingly, the discussion of "God is dead" versus "God is not dead" views emphasize the deep philosophical and theological challenges posed by each view. While the "death of God" theory questions the very basis of religious belief, the "God is not dead" perspective offers a compelling counter-narrative that reaffirms the importance of the divine in a rapidly changing world. The implications of this debate extend beyond the academic level,

influencing the cultural, social, and personal dimensions of life, ensuring that dialogue between these perspectives remains an important part of contemporary discourse.

## **6. Conclusion**

Exploring the “death of God” versus “God is not dead” perspectives reveal a complex and multifaceted dialogue that deeply shapes both philosophical and theological fields. This research underscores the enduring significance of Nietzsche's provocative statement and its reverberations throughout modern thought. By comparing atheistic interpretations of Nietzsche's statement with theological responses, this study illustrates the constant tension between illustration and the search for meaning in a post-theistic world.

By applying existentialist and nihilist frameworks along with various theological paradigms, this article has uncovered recurring themes of the crisis of meaning, the redefinition of human identity, and the ongoing relevance of religious discourse in a secular age. Comparative analysis of primary texts and secondary literature has shown that the concept of the death of God represents a radical break with traditional metaphysics, and the claim that "God is not dead" continues to present a strong counter-narrative that seeks to preserve the transcendental dimension.

Finally, the debate between death and the existence of God is not merely a historical artifact but remains an important area of inquiry that shapes contemporary discussions in the philosophy of religion and theology. The nuanced insights gained through this research highlight the importance of these perspectives in navigating the existential and spiritual challenges of the modern world. By engaging with these competing narratives, scholars and thinkers are better equipped to address fundamental questions about divinity, morality, and human purpose in an increasingly secular society. Accordingly, philosophical understanding must be built to gain a comprehensive knowledge of these future visions and thereby maintain a correct foundation. The reason for this is that it is essential to build philosophical knowledge to overcome the setbacks that occur in presenting solutions to such confusion in the study of theology alone.

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