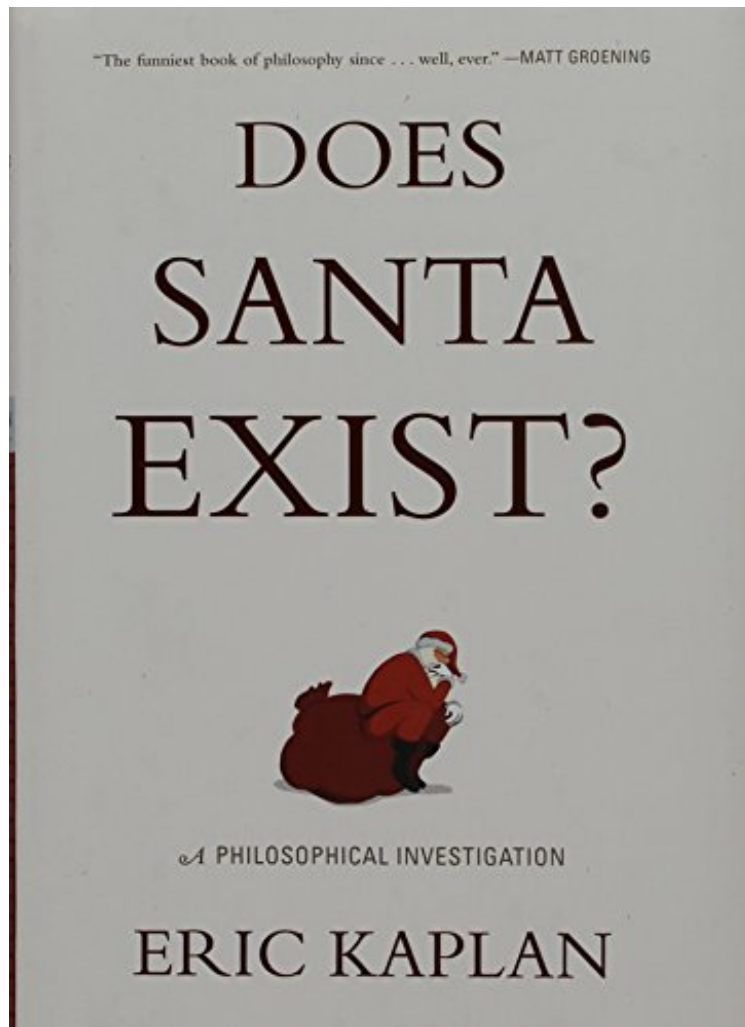


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## Does Santa Exist?: A Philosophical Investigation

*Eric Kaplan*

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**Eric Kaplan : Does Santa Exist?: A Philosophical Investigation** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Does Santa Exist?: A Philosophical Investigation:

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful. A wild ride through philosophy, science, and mysticism By N.S. Palmer Does Santa exist? Well, what does the question mean -- and what does it mean to you? On his way to an answer, Kaplan takes the reader on a wild ride through philosophy, science, mysticism, and mortality. He glides effortlessly from the Santa story to important questions in logic, ethics, psychology, and the social function of myth. His cast of characters includes not only Santa Claus, but ancient Greek philosophers, medieval Jewish mystics, 20th-century Cambridge dons, cranky Harvard academics, and the Buddha. He takes on hedonism, neuroscience, passion, self-fulfilling beliefs, folklore, and how to stay sane even though married. It's definitely not your grandfather's philosophy book. In the end, Kaplan's journey is almost Talmudic. It's less about reaching a definite conclusion -- does Santa exist

or doesn't he? -- than it is about looking at the issue from every interesting angle and seeing what we find. He does finally take a position about Santa's existence, but I won't spoil it by telling you. The real conclusion, if any, is this: That thinking about life and simply living it are not contradictory, but complementary. Logic and intuition, contemplating eternity and being in the moment, are different sides of the same thing; and we do ourselves a disservice if we embrace either to the exclusion of the other. Thus, the answer to one of Kaplan's own questions, "Should we engage with reality, or feel, or think about it?", is "Yes." We are both mortal and immortal; limited and infinite; bound to this instant of time, and free to soar beyond eternity. When you understand that, then you've understood Kaplan's book. In his own *Philosophical Investigations* (which oddly make no mention of Santa), Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote that "I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking, but if possible, to stimulate them to have thoughts of their own." Kaplan succeeds spectacularly. I'll be thinking about the ideas in his book for quite a while. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Insightful, deep and fun By Fernando Mora It's a great and insightful book. Like good philosophical texts it does not provide answers but but good questions. Really easy to digest, fun and deep. As a high school philosophy teacher I recommend it for those who seek answers for the purpose and grounds of our beliefs. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I love the humor By Ian M. There are humorous parts, but also a lot of very heavy philosophy topics. I love the humor, and not the philosophy as much as I thought I would. I will update my review when I finish reading the book entirely.

A humorous philosophical investigation into the existence of Santa from a co-executive producer of *The Big Bang Theory*. Metaphysics isn't ordinarily much of a laughing matter. But in the hands of acclaimed comedy writer and scholar Eric Kaplan, a search for the truth about old St. Nick becomes a deeply insightful, laugh-out-loud discussion of the way some things exist but may not really be there. Just like Santa and his reindeer. Even after we outgrow the jolly fellow, the essential paradox persists: There are some things we dearly believe in that are not universally acknowledged as real. In *Does Santa Exist?* Kaplan shows how philosophy giants Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein strove to smooth over this uncomfortable meeting of the real and unreal and failed. From there he turns to mysticism's attempts to resolve such paradoxes, surveying Buddhism, Taoism, early Christianity, Theosophy, and even the philosophers at UC Berkeley under whom he studied. Finally, this brilliant comic writer alights on surprise comedy as the ultimate resolution of the fundamental paradoxes of life, using examples from *The Big Bang Theory*, Monty Python's cheese shop sketch, and many other pop-culture sources. Finally Kaplan delves deeper into what this means, from how our physical brains work to his own personal confrontations with life's biggest questions: If we're all going to die, what's the point of anything? What is a perfect moment? What can you say about God? Or Santa?

Praise for *Does Santa Exist?: A Philosophical Investigation* "A witty, provocative, and profound exploration of reality, meaning, morality, and yes, Santa Claus." -- *The Huffington Post* "Kaplan's deadpan style lets you read this as a serious philosophical treatise -- but you can also take it as a well-done farce." -- *New York Post* "Kaplan's investigation into the ontology of Santa Claus is erudite, readable and exceedingly funny." -- *Kirkus* "Eric Kaplan's *Does Santa Exist?* is the funniest book of philosophy since...well, ever." -- Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons* and *Futurama* and author of *Life in Hell* "If you can put this book down, you should see a doctor. Kaplan's message burrows into the mind, beats up a few beliefs and then leaves with a triumphant bang." -- Michael Gazzaniga, Professor of Psychology University of California Santa Barbara, Director of the SAGE Center for the Study of the Mind, and Founder of the Cognitive Neuroscience Society "Exceptionally interesting, rigorous and I found it not only weirdly funny but deeply moving." -- Hubert Dreyfus, Professor of Philosophy, University of California Berkeley, Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences "This is truly a book that I wish I had written. Eric brings great clarity of thought to some of the deepest questions of the mind and our understanding of the world. And he's really funny." -- Daniel Levitin, *New York Times* Bestselling author of *This is Your Brain on Music*, Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Neuroscience at McGill University, Dean of Arts and Humanities, Minerva Schools at KGI "Eric Kaplan is more than a talented comedy writer. He is a deep soul, an intellectual master, and a brilliant communicator of the subtleties of the intersections between faith and logic. He will have you laughing, thinking harder than you've ever thought, and falling in love with the process of intellectual exploration all over again. A masterpiece." -- Mayim Bialik, PhD (neuroscience, UCLA), actress known for her roles as Blossom Russo in *Blossom* and Dr. Amy Farrah Fowler in *The Big Bang Theory* "I'm not sure I've ever read a more peculiar book. Fortunately, it's also smart, wise, charming, lucid, entertaining, big-hearted and maybe even profound." -- Kurt Andersen, *New York Times* Bestselling author of *Heyday*, host of *Studio 360*, and former editor of *Harvard Lampoon* "Kaplan finds just the right balance between rigor and humor, seriousness and irreverence. You learn something (even about Santa), you laugh out loud, and you can't help but enjoy the mixture of philosophy and edgy jokes. This book is not just clever and a very engaging read, it's intelligent. I can't wait for his next piece, presumably on the Easter Bunny." David Poeppel, Professor of Psychology and Neural Science New York University "Eric Kaplan's engaging book explores the big questions we need to find more time for, like: what should we believe, what makes us happy, and how should we react to suffering and death. In a clear, non-polemical style, he moves effortlessly between philosophy, neuroscience, ethics, and religion. His contrast between rationality, mysticism,

and humor as responses to life's conflicts is especially original and convincing. I plan to work this book into my course "Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion."-John Morreall, Professor of Religious Studies, College of William Mary, author of *Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion and Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*"One of the most enjoyable and thought-provoking books I've ever read. Eric Kaplan will convince you that comedy provides as much insight as logic or mysticism into the fundamental nature of reality."- Sean Carroll, theoretical physicist at Caltech and author of *The Particle at the End of the Universe*About the Author ERIC KAPLAN is a co-executive producer of (and writer for) the CBS sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. Previously he wrote for the *Late Show with David Letterman*, *Futurama* (for which he won an Emmy Award), and *Flight of the Conchords*. Kaplan graduated from Harvard and is currently completing his PhD dissertation in philosophy at UC Berkeley.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.A NOTE TO THE READER This book has three titles designed by the writer to appeal to three different audiences, but as luck would have it, all three look the same in contemporary written English, viz.: Does Santa Exist? The first title, *Does Santa Exist?*, with the words stressed more or less equally, is for readers who would like to consider whether or not the kindly, bearded gift giver exists. The second title, *Does Santa Exist?*, should be read with a rising stress on the final word, sort of like this: *Does Santa Exist?* This title is a lure for readers who would like to know whether, if Santa does do anything in the ontological line, that thing he does qualifies as existing. Their interest, in other words, lies less in Santa and more in the concept of existence. The third title, *Does Santa Exist?*, should be read as the conclusion of the following very short little dialogue on the relationship between science and faith: A: Just because something is not part of scientific discourse doesn't mean it can't still exist. B: Really? Does Santa Exist?! For readers drawn to this title, the question *Does Santa Exist?* should be pronounced as if it is a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the claim that things exist that are beyond the ken of science. Their chief interest in this book, presuming they have any, is as a consideration of whether or not that *reductio* argument is valid. ELK INTRODUCTION My Son, His Friends Mother, and Two Explanations The ontology of Santa Claus didn't impinge on my life until my son, Ari, was in kindergarten. Ari did not believe in Santa Claus. He was supposed to go to the zoo in early December with his friend Schuyler, and Schuyler's mother, Tammi, called me up and said she didn't want her son to go because there were reindeer there, and reindeer, she felt, would lead to a discussion of Santa Claus. Tammi's son, Schuyler, did believe in Santa Claus: He was still firmly a sweet child and not yet in sour and rebellious teenager territory, and she wanted him, at least for a while, to stay that way. So Tammi wanted to cancel the playdate to ensure that Ari would not tell her son, There is no Santa here just your parents, and shake his belief. I found this a troubling interaction because I thought Tammi was sacrificing her son's friendship with Ari, who was real, in order to preserve his relationship with Santa Claus, who was not. Why was I so sure he didn't exist? Not because I've never seen him I've never seen Israeli supermodel Bar Refaeli and she exists, or at least did as of this writing. And not because if I went to the North Pole, I wouldn't see him and his elves just a lot of snow and ice and so forth because there are any number of explanations that would square with that. Santa might emit a field from his beard that makes people miss him, the elves might have a machine that causes light to bend, or I could have met him and then been convinced by Mrs. Claus to undergo brain surgery that erased my memory. No, the real reason, I'm sure, is that nobody had ever told me he did, and belief in Santa Claus did not fit in with a number of other things I knew to be true e.g., reindeer don't fly, toys come from the store, etc. I told this story to my daughter and she said, I believe in Santa Claus. I also asked her if she believed in the Easter bunny and she said, Yes. I'm a kid, so I believe in everything. I told this story to my wife, who is a psychologist raised in Communist Romania, and she said something along the lines of American parents lie to their children about this stupidity, and then the children grow up and find out their parents lied to them. No wonder American children are screwed up. I remained puzzled by Tammi's behavior. I could think of two possible solutions: THE LIAR EXPLANATION For some reason back in the past, American children were taught to believe in Santa Claus probably because their parents thought it was a good way to scare them into being good. When the children grew up and stopped believing in Santa Claus, they decided it would be a good idea to trick their children into believing. So society is basically divided into two groups of people the liars and the lied to. The liars have motivations ranging from the benevolent (parents presumably) to the self-interested (the sellers of Christmas merchandise, American politicians who want a national myth that will unite a nation of immigrants). Let's be blunt and call this the LIAR story. I've observed evidence that the LIAR story is true. I work in Hollywood, which pumps a lot of images and stories out into the consciousness of the globe. When we were writing an episode of a television show called *The Big Bang Theory*, in which the character Sheldon kills Santa Claus in a *Dungeons and Dragons* game, one of the writers wanted to be sure that our story left the existence of Santa Claus open, because his kids were going to watch the show and they believed in Santa Claus. Of course, since he was a writer for a U.S. sitcom that is supported by commercials, his benevolent motivations for lying meshed with the less benevolent motivations of our advertisers. THE CRAZY EXPLANATION Another solution to the puzzle was that something in Tammi's mind is divided or dissociated. So, according to this theory, it's possible that a part of Tammi's mind does believe in Santa Claus. She doesn't talk about it when she talks to other adults, but when alone with her child, she believes. The part of Tammi that believes in Santa might not even be a part that has access to her mouth. So she might never say, I believe in Santa Claus, but she is disposed to have dreams, fantasies, and feelings related to Saint Nick. As a consequence, she is uncomfortable with

having her son lose faith in Santa Claus because some system in her brain believes too. How can one person believe and not believe in Santa Claus? If you are a strong proponent of the conspiracy story, you may not believe this is the case; you might think that if she ever does confess to Santa belief, she is just lying. After all, she buys toys at the store; how can she honestly maintain they come down the chimney? But people believe different things at different times and in different contexts. Let's imagine Tammi goes home and goes to bed. As she drifts off to sleep, she hears a voice in her head, one that sounds like her own. It says, Santa does exist. I remember waiting for him to come. How do I know he didn't? Yes, part of me thinks he didn't come and never will, but why should I listen to that part? Tammi has a couple of different Tammis inside her. She has the Tammi who once believed in Santa but now buys toys from the store, and she has the Tammi who still does believe in Santa. This Tammi feels good when she thinks about Santa and angry when she thinks about Eric not believing in Santa. This Tammi can effortlessly respond to Santa images and Santa television shows and songs about Santa. Tammi's self could be divided; she could be more than one of her Tammis at the same time; that is, she could have one voice in her head that says, Of course Santa Claus does not exist, and another voice that says, I hope he brings me something good! Or her self could be divided across time. That is, she could make fun of Santa Claus all year long until Christmas season and then talk during Christmas as if she does believe in the jolly old saint. Since it invokes voices in the head, let us call this, uncharitably, the CRAZY explanation. The LIAR and the CRAZY explanations are similar on a deep level because while LIAR appeals to dissociation on the interpersonal level, CRAZY appeals to dissociation on the intrapersonal level. Societies run by conspiracies built on lies are schizophrenic; crazy people lie to themselves. In the CRAZY explanation, there is some kind of disunity within Tammi; there is a part of her that believes and a part that doesn't believe. In the LIAR explanation, there is a disunity in America; there is a part that believes and a part that doesn't believe. And in both, there is something sort of screwed up about the relationship among these parts. You can even switch the explanations. You can say that Tammi is lying to herself, or that America is a little crazy on the subject of Santa Claus. Is the LIAR or the CRAZY explanation correct? Versions of both of them are found throughout rationalist critiques of religion and scientific accounts of human behavior in general. For example: Marxism Liar. Priests lie to people to keep the powerful in power: There'll be pie in the sky when you die. Psychoanalysis Crazy. People's minds create irrational beliefs to defend against all the psychic pressure they're under, what with death and wanting to sleep with their mothers and so on. Neurobiology Crazy. People have evolved modules in their brains that perceive humans as existing because it was evolutionarily important to know if somebody was in your cave with you. When we think Santa exists, it's because that chunk of nerve tissue is firing when we don't need it to, just as hay fever comes when our sneeze reflex is triggered by some antigen that's not really sneeze-worthy. Meme Theory Liar because crazy. Memes are programs of cultural DNA; they replicate if and only if they force us to believe them and spread them. In discussions like this, we are usually ready to have our beliefs challenged and to hear the experts lay down some science. However, one thing science can't do is tell us what stand to take on science as an approach to reality and the rest of our lives. Some scientists and philosophers of science will deny this and say that of course science tells us how we should approach our lives and the rest of reality. Obviously, science tells us we should do it scientifically. But when they're saying that, they're not doing science; they're doing science journalism, or maybe science advocacy. Science doesn't tell us what we should think about science. To see how this is so, all you have to do is take any of those explanations above—Marxist, psychoanalytical, neurobiological, or meme—and apply it to itself. Thus, Marxists believe in Marxism only because it's in their class interests to do so; psychoanalysts believe in psychoanalysis only as a defense against anxiety; neuroscientists believe in neuroscience only because their brains have evolved to see causation; and meme theorists believe in memes only because the meme complex called meme theory has hijacked their brains and made them replicate it. These theories all explain themselves just as much as they explain Santa Claus. So it can't be the case that just because something has a supposedly scientific explanation, we should stop believing in it, or we would stop believing in scientific explanations. These theories explain themselves and they explain Santa Claus. How to go on vis--vis the theories or vis--vis Santa Claus once we realize that isn't a scientific question anymore. You can compare the role of an intellectual theory to the role of money. A textbook in economics or finance may tell you how to go on if you want to make a lot of money, but it won't tell you how to decide how important money should be in our lives. That's a question we can debate and consider positions, all the way from making all our choices based on the financial upside to ignoring money and wandering America as hippies; or we can stake out an intermediate position. Similarly with science, we can embrace it totally, ignore it, or live our lives somewhere in between. You might think it's obvious that if Tammi says she believes in Santa, she is crazy or lying, and back up your argument by the correct points that crazy people don't know they're crazy, and liars usually lie about whether they're lying. But there are two intertwined problems with this approach: one is ethical and the other is epistemological. First Problem (Ethical): It is obnoxious and rude to go around accusing the parents of our kids, friends, and other people of being crazy and liars. Tammi doesn't seem to be lying; she has her son's best interests at heart or at least seems to. Second Problem (Epistemological): This is summed up in the old joke in which one Anglican priest explains the meaning of orthodoxy to another one: My doxy is orthodoxy, your doxy is heterodoxy (doxy is an old word for a prostitute). The point of the joke is that sane and truthful need to be defined in such a way that we can tell who is crazy and lying without smuggling in our own other beliefs. Otherwise, saying

you're crazy to believe in Santa Claus is just like saying Santa Claus does not exist! in a louder, more hectoring tone of voice. It's a personal attack masquerading as a psychological explanation. If we assume that Santa Claus doesn't exist, we might be able to argue that Tammi is crazy, but we can't use the fact that she's crazy to prove Santa doesn't exist. Maybe though there is a more direct route to proving Santa doesn't exist. If we want to know if Santa Claus exists, couldn't we just look out there and see if there is an object in the world that corresponds to my belief? But what does it mean for a belief to correspond to a thing? Is it a clear idea or just a fuzzy metaphor that's too murky to illuminate what exists and what doesn't? Consider the following thought experiment: Imagine a field so big we can play the biggest game of red rover in history in it. Imagine we could open up our skull and have all the beliefs get out and stand on one side of the field, holding arms. On the other side of the field stand all the things. One by one, the beliefs call out what they are about. When the belief in Africa calls out his name, I'm a belief in Africa! the actual object Africa raises its hand, and they go off to a side field labeled TRUE BELIEFS. Bees! I'm a belief in bees! Great! We are bees! And they go off together. I'm a belief in the planet Neptune! I am the planet Neptune! Let's get a drink! And off they would go paired up. At the end of the day, a few beliefs would be left standing on their side of the field. They raise their hands: I'm a belief in the lost continent of Atlantis! And nothing answers on the other side. There is no lost continent of Atlantis. I'm a belief in pixies! No answer. There are no pixies. I'm a belief in Santa Claus! No answer because there is no Santa Claus. The belief in Santa Claus is wrong because there is no Santa Claus to correspond to it. The first problem is that our beliefs don't separate themselves into little bits. How would we count beliefs? Is my belief that Africa exists a superbelief made up of beliefs in all the people, countries, and animals that I believe are in Africa? Or is it part of a larger belief that the world is divided into landmasses? Or a still larger belief that there are such things as physical objects of which Africa is an instance? All and none. My beliefs form a web or, better yet, a world. If anything corresponds to anything, it is the whole assemblage of beliefs, all linking arms, who correspond to the whole assemblage of facts, all linking arms. My mind corresponds to the world as a whole. But there's a much more serious problem. When we imagine playing our game, we imagine that we ourselves are standing in the field somehow adjudicating the game. We are looking at the beliefs on one side of the field and the things on the other. But when we look at a thing and see it, that is just another way of saying we believe that that thing exists. There is no way to step outside ourselves and examine the world and our beliefs from the side. Consider this classic sketch that illustrates epistemology: What is inside that head that looks like an apple? It's just a bunch of atoms, or if you prefer, neurons and glial cells, or if you prefer, an organ consisting of a prefrontal cortex, a cerebellum, the periaqueductal gray, the hippocampus, and so forth; but there is nothing in there that looks like an apple. And when can we stand where the picture invites us to stand looking at the belief and the apple from the side? Never. We have to be within our beliefs, developing them. We can't examine beliefs and apples separately and figure out if the beliefs match the apples, because the beliefs and the apples are part of a single phenomenon. They evolve together, much as flowers and bees eyes do. That's why I'd like to formulate the issue of Santa Claus as one of resolving an internal tension within a self, and an external tension between one self and others. It lets us get at the issue that there is something a bit funny about believing in Santa Claus without appealing to murky notions of correspondence between the content of internal beliefs and external reality. This book is about things we are not sure we believe, half believe, believe sometimes but not always, maybe hope we believe but don't as much as we want to, maybe wish to stop believing but are not sure who we would be if we did. I want to investigate what the best attitude is to take toward these things, both personally and as a community, and to see if we can come up with something better than screaming at each other (or at the recalcitrant parts of ourselves) you're a liar! and you're crazy! If Santa Claus is that for you, fine. If you happen not to believe in Santa Claus, maybe because some wise-ass kid like my son told you that he doesn't exist, pick something you believe in but isn't universally acknowledged as real. I would suggest the point of your life and, in fact, everything. Your life will end someday, and so will everything else given that, what is the point of doing anything at all? Some answer that it's doing what God wants, but why does His life have a point, and if it doesn't, how can his point-free life give a point to yours? Some think the point of life is to reproduce our genes, but that seems just as far-fetched. Supposing that in a distant galaxy, there was a wormhole with the feature that anything you shoot in one end would be shot out the other end duplicated a trillion trillion trillion trillion times. We wouldn't drop everything and mount an expedition to shoot a human skin cell into the wormhole, even though it would reproduce our genes better than we ever could, because it would be pointless! So duplication of our genes is not inherently pointless, and is certainly not the point of anything else. Some people think the point of their life comes from the fact that they freely chose it. On first blush, this idea has a certain macho charm, but if you think about it for a couple of seconds, you'll see its problematic too. If I can give my life a point by willing it at 2:00 P.M., then I can will it to have a different point at 2:01 P.M. My life could be a succession of acts of will, but what would be the point of those acts? And what would tempt me to want one point rather than another? If I'm imposing a point on my whole life, what makes that act of imposition mine and not just a random event? My point right now is not that any of these answers to the question What's the point? is right or wrong, but just that none of them is uncontroversial or provable. If you're like most people, I would guess you don't have a single firm answer to the question What is the point of your life? and that you oscillate among several, so whatever your answer is functions as your own personal Santa Claus. PART 1 LOGIC 1 This Title Doesn't Describe What's in This

Chapter If we cant just stand outside ourselves and inspect our beliefs and the objects of the world and see if they correspond, what should we do? Logicians argue that the minimum requirement for being a successful thinker is to avoid contradiction. That is, we shouldnt say of the same thing that it is A and not A. We shouldnt say that Mount Everest is a mountain and it is not a mountain. Why not? If we say that, we havent successfully said anything! Is it a mountain or not? our listeners are entitled to ask. We have, in the literal meaning of contradiction, spoken against ourselves. We noticed that Tammis attitude toward Santa Claus was contradictoryshe believed in him and she didnt. The path of logic views contradiction as a problem that needs solving and gives us a set of tools for thinking more clearly that can get us out of our fix. Logic goes back at least to the sixth century B.C.E., and it seems to have sprung up simultaneously in Greece, China, and India. It makes sense that it arose in these particular civilizations and not in Egypt or Mexico because these were all places where a farmer who worshiped one god, had one set of laws, and danced a certain way would meet up and do business with a farmer who worshiped a different god, had different laws, and danced a different way. None of these civilizations at the time had a monolithic empire in charge who could just impose one citys gods, laws, and dances on everybody else. So they had to figure out a way to talk together and work together. Im calling it a path because logic is something that we choose to make part of our lives because we want it to do something for us. It has to be that way because logic is not the sort of thing that wants things for itself. Either logic is our tool or it is somehow part of the structure of reality, but if it is part of the structure of reality, then by all accounts it is doing just fine on it own. Logic is not irritated, sad, depressed, or disappointed in us for being illogical or irrational. It is not your mother. Logic is just hanging out, available for us if we need it. So either logic is a construct that we design for our purposes or it is an aspect of reality that we are able to tap into for our purpose, but in either case it has a purpose. Whats the purpose? Aristotle, a philosopher whose influence on Western (and Muslim) thought was so great that for a thousand years he was simply called The Philosopher, said that the essence of logic is the law of self-contradiction. Nothing can be A and not A at the same time and in the same respect. So logics purpose is to take us from a situation in which we are at odds with ourselves to one where we are consistent with ourselves. It is a path from a certain kind of cognitive dissociation, or disequilibrium, to one of harmony and clarity. If we state our beliefs clearly, and weed out the bad contradictory ones by means of investigation and further clarification, we will ultimately reach the goal of having no inconsistent beliefs. We will know what exists and what doesnt exist, for example. We will be self-consistent. Here is an example of how this is supposed to work: George is friends with Eddie, and one day Eddie shoplifts. The shopkeeper asks George if Eddie stole anything. George is torn in two directions: between loyalty to his friend on the one hand, and loyalty to whats right and wrong on the other. Lets imagine the following dialogue between George and a logician: Logician: Youre in quite a fix, son. George: And how, Logician! Can you help me? Logician: Well, first lets define your problem. Do you think People should turn in people who commit crimes is true? George: I sure do. Logician: And do you think People should protect their friends is true? George: Assuredly! Logician: But since Eddie is both your friend and a person who committed a crime, you believe both George should turn in Eddie and George should protect Eddie. Thats a contradiction. George: You said it! What should I do? Logician: Define your terms and examine your premises. What is a crime? George: Breaking the law. Logician: Is it really true that people should always turn in people who commit crimes? What if you were in Nazi Germany and a friend of yours was breaking the law by sheltering a Jew do you think you should turn him in? George: No. Logician: Then its not true that People should always turn in people who commit crimes. So you can protect your friend and still be a good person. Contradiction resolved! George: Thanks, logician! Of course this could have gone the other way. The logician could have pointed out a problem with the generalization that good people always support their friends, referencing good people who sometimes turn in their friends when the friends are bad. Or he could have applied the analytic X-ray to the concept of support maybe the way good people support their friends is by turning them in when they commit crimes so they can receive help before they get in deeper trouble. What all these have in common is that they give George a path from a situation of contradiction to one of consistency. Sometimes logic works amazingly well to resolve our problems. For example, in one of the dialogues of Plato, a sophist\* is deliberately confusing a dog owner by using the following argument: 1. You have a dog. 2. Your dog has puppies. 3. If A has B, and B has C, then A has C. 4. The only animal that can have puppies is a dog. 5. You have puppies. (follows from 1, 2, 3) 6. You are a dog. (follows from 4, 5) I should point out that the person in the dialogue is not a dog. He is a human.\* But, luckily for him, the sophists reasoning is logically fallacious. Just because you have a dog and she has puppies doesnt mean that you are a dog. Why not? Because the word have is being used in two different ways: (a) to have ownership of and (b) to give birth to. Once we realize that these are two different concepts that just happen to be expressed by the same word, we can see that this argument is unsound. The sense in which you have a dog in 1 is not the sense in which your dog has puppies in 2, and while 3 might be true of ownership in certain legal contexts, its not true of the relationship of giving birth. So logic saves the day. It gets us out of some conceptual tangles. It is awesome. Go, logic. Sometimes, though, logic is worse than useless. When we clean up all our statements and we know the answers to all the hard questions like When do you betray a friend? When do good people commit crimes? What exactly does support mean? we will still have some questions left that are impossible to resolve by means of logic. These are the so-called logical paradoxes sentences that, logically speaking, must be both true and false. Heres one: This sentence is false. If the

sentence is false, then the sentence is true. If the sentence is true, then it is false. If we want to go through our beliefs and use logic to clarify them, this sentence will always be a problem. In other words, none of the techniques that helped us deal with the problem of George, Eddie, and shoplifting is available to us, because the only words in this sentence are very basic, bread-and-butter logical words. When the Logicians tried to put math on the basis of set theory, a whole other group of paradoxes became important, the so-called set-theoretical paradoxes. Here's one: There are a lot of different kinds of adjectives. Some of them, like English, describe themselves. Because English is an English word. But others, like long, don't describe themselves. Because long isn't a long word. Let's invent an adjective self-describing to describe words that describe themselves, and another one non-self-describing to describe words that don't. Some examples of self-describing words are adjectival, polysyllabic, and consonant-containing. Some examples of non-self-describing words are Chinese, incomprehensible, and vowel-less.