

Edexcel A-level Religious Studies

Philosophy of Religion

Your exam will be on the following topics:

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| Philosophical Issues | Design argument Cosmological argument Ontological argument |
| Religious Experience | Nature of religious experience Influence of religious experience |
| Evil and Suffering | Problem of evil and suffering* Theodicies |
| Religious language | Analogy and symbol Verification and falsification** Language games |
| Scholars | Context to the critique Copleston vs. Russell* |
| Development of religious belief | Life after death Issues in life after death Religion and Science |

***Your question 3(a) and 3(b) are on the following anthology extracts:**

(1) Mitchell B (ed) – *The Philosophy of Religion*, 1st edition, J Mackie – Chapter 5 Evil and Omnipotence, pp.92-104 (Oxford University Press, 1977) ISBN 9780198750185

(2) Mitchell B (ed) – *The Philosophy of Religion*, 1st edition, Flew A, Hare R M – Chapter 1 Theology and Falsification: A Symposium, pp. 13-18 (Oxford University Press, 1976) ISBN 9780198750185

(3) Mitchell B (ed) – *The Philosophy of Religion*, 1st edition, Flew A, Mitchell B – Chapter 1 Theology and Falsification: A Symposium, pp.18-22 (Oxford University Press, 1976) ISBN 9780198750185

(4) www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/p20.htm (Russell B and Copleston F – The Existence of God)

Additional study materials are available for your anthologies

Key terms

Inductive: Given the circumstances, the conclusion becomes a statement of what is the most probable. Therefore, one can agree with the premises, yet still disagree with the conclusion. The premises support the conclusion, but don't make it necessary.

A posteriori: "After the fact". A Posteriori arguments are ones based on evidence which already exists. The argument is post evidence. A posteriori statements do not contain the conclusion, but argue to a conclusion based on evidence.

Synthetic: The truth can only be determined by experience and observation. The truth is not in the definition of the subject, it needs to be proven.

Deductive: Given the premises there can be no other conclusion. The conclusion is implied the premises, and the conclusion is necessary.

A priori: "Before the fact". An argument that does not require evidence to be true. It is 'prior to the fact'. All the statements of an a priori argument lead to a necessary logical conclusion

Analytic: "Truth by definition". The truth is in the definition of the subject. For example: "My father is male".

PEQs

Evaluate the view that the cosmological / ontological / design argument provides the most convincing argument for the existence of God

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of religious experience as an argument for the existence of God

Evaluate the view that evil and suffering prove that God does not exist

Evaluate the view that religious language can be meaningful

Evaluate the atheist critiques of religion

Evaluate the view that there is life after death

Evaluate the strengths of miracles as providing evidence for the existence of God

Unit 1: Philosophical Issues

1.1. The design (teleological) argument

a) Inductive reasoning, a posteriori types of arguments, interpretation of experience.

b) Types of order and regularity, role of analogy, cumulative effect of evidence, anthropic principle, regularities of co-presence and regularities of succession.

c) Strengths and weaknesses of Design Arguments: probability rather than proof, alternative interpretations, including evolution and deism. Challenges to the argument.

d) Philosophical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues in the philosophy of religion.

With reference to the ideas of W Paley and D Hume.

Key Scholars:

- **Aquinas** – 5 Ways
- **Paley** – Watchmaker
- **F. R Tennant** – Anthropic
- **Hume** - criticisms

Inductive reasoning: Given the circumstances, the conclusion becomes a statement of what is the most probable. Therefore, one can agree with the premises, yet still disagree with the conclusion. The premises support the conclusion, but don't make it necessary.

A posteriori: "After the fact". A Posteriori arguments are ones based on evidence which already exists. The argument is post evidence. A posteriori statements do not contain the conclusion, but argue to a conclusion based on evidence.

Burden of Proof: Who has to prove that they are correct? Who has to carry the burden of proof?

- Does the Theist have to prove that God exists through design?
- Or does the atheist have to explain the universe through scientific means?
- Is science capable of eventually explaining all facts about the universe?

Interpreting experience

We tend to think of experience as the best authority when it comes to knowledge, but there are many problems. E.g. hoaxes, illusions, hallucinations, ambiguous experiences that can be interpreted in different ways.

"Ambiguous" means "having more than one meaning" or "open to more than one interpretation". If an experience is ambiguous, then there's more than one way to interpret what it means and you may never be able to "get to the bottom of it".

The idea that the universe is "religiously ambiguous" (Hick) means that both believers and non-believers may be drawing valid conclusions from the Design Argument because it all boils down to how you interpret your experiences: some people experience design, others don't. In some people, the universe "evokes" a religious response - they are struck by the appearance of design and order. It may "sustain" a religious response, reassuring them of God's existence even when they are faced with evil and suffering. But non-believers perceive the same events completely differently.

Links to Kant – phenomenal and noumenal realities. Can only know God through perceptions and interpretations (phenomenal).

Types of order and regularity

- **Regularity:** the world seems to work in accordance with "laws of nature" that don't vary and which make things predictable. Where do these laws come from? Why are they consistent and understandable?
- **Benefit:** the structure of the world makes life possible, particularly human life. Gravity, atmosphere, ecosystems, all of these are just right to support life on this planet. This requires many conditions to be met - and they are met. Is that just luck?
- **Purpose:** more controversially, the universe (to many people) seems to be working towards an end or purpose; everything seems to be in place to bring about human life so that we can understand the cosmos and perhaps one day explore it.
- **Beauty:** again controversially, the universe seems to be more than just functional or beneficial: it's actually beautiful! It excites feelings of awe and wonder. To many people, this suggests it's got a meaning and purpose behind it.

Telos – Design and Purpose provides evidence for the existence of God

1. There is beneficial order in the universe that works towards an end or a purpose.
2. A beneficial order could not happen by chance
3. Many objects do not have the intelligence to work toward a purpose
4. Non-rational beings act in ways that are beneficial (e.g. animal migration)
5. Therefore something must be directing them which does have intelligence
6. Therefore God exists as the explanation

Aquinas' Five Ways (the fifth one is teleological)

Regularity of how the universe works points to a designer. There is beneficial order; things in the universe work towards an end or purpose, just as the arrow flying through the sky is given its purpose by the archer who fires it. This couldn't have happened by chance. God exists as the explanation of beneficial order.

1. All natural occurrences show evidence of design
2. This suggests that there is a being that directs all things
3. Things that lack knowledge cannot achieve anything unless directed by a thing with knowledge
4. There is therefore an intelligent being that directs everyone towards a purpose
5. For Aquinas, this being is God

"Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God" (Aquinas).

William Paley: 'Natural Theology'

Paley presents his own form of the teleological argument. There are two parts to his argument:

1. Design qua purpose – the universe was designed to fulfil a **purpose**
2. Design qua regularity – the universe behaves according to some **order**

Paley's Watch (design qua purpose):

A man walks across a heath and finds a rock. He attributes the existence of the rock to nature. He walks further and stumbles across a watch. After some examination he concludes that its purpose is to measure time. Due to the complexities of the watch, he concludes that it is impossible to suppose that the watch had come about without the agency of a 'watch maker.'

The watch is like the universe – it is too complex to have just happened by chance. It is impossible therefore to suppose that the universe had come about without the agency of a 'universe maker' – God.

Argument from Analogy. Watch requires a watchmaker, universe requires a universe maker. Complexity and intricacy of the watch suggest it was designed.

Analogy: it moves from our experience of things in the world to try to explain that the evidence we find shows intelligent design which leads to the conclusion that God exists.

Paley also uses the human eye as evidence of design qua purpose.

Design qua regularity:

There is evidence for a creator in the regularity of the universe. The relationships between the planets and the effect of gravity could not have come about without a designing principle at work – God. For example, if gravity was slightly stronger or weaker the universe would not exist today; the inference being that there is a calculating being who purposefully created the universe according to a well-constructed plan.

The universe is complex and regular: e.g. DNA, the fact that we are a perfect distance from the sun, exact make up chemicals to support life on earth. The universe appears to behave according to some order or rule – points to a mechanical universe.

David Hunt's parable of the shipwreck

Two men are shipwrecked on a desert island. They find a factory that is operating and producing goods, but there is no one operating it. One man thinks that this means that the island is inhabited, but the other thinks it is a coincidence. They then find a watch, that one man thinks means the island is inhabited, but the other thinks it came to be there by chance. This links to the Teleological argument because the watch and the factory cannot be by chance, they have not randomly come into being on their own, and they have had a cause or designer. This is the concept of the Teleological argument.

F.R. Tennant and design (aesthetic argument)

Anthropic Principle: The conditions of earth are so uniquely designed to support human life. The universe appears to have been fine-tuned for our existence.

Strong anthropic principle: the universe was designed explicitly for the purpose of supporting human life.

Criticisms: The strong anthropic principle is too simplistic. It's anthropocentric – puts humans at the centre of things. Gets things the wrong way wrong – we evolved to "fit in" to the universe, so of course it's a suitable place to live!

Weak anthropic principle: if even the slightest part of the universe were any different (e.g. distance from the sun) human life would not exist.

As we look out into the Universe and identify the many accidents of physics and astronomy that have worked together for our benefit, it almost seems as if the Universe must in some sense have known that we were coming - F. R. Tennant

Aesthetic argument: humans possess **the ability to appreciate beauty** but this is **not required for the development of life** (natural selection) and therefore is the **product of a divine designer**.

- “Intelligibility of the universe to humans” – the universe’s order and regularity (laws) can all be unravelled by our scientific investigations
- Existence of morality – we can tell difference between good and bad
- Emergence of humans – evolution progressed to produce humans who are able to appreciate universe’s beauty and look for goodness.

Criticisms of Aesthetic principle: confuses cause with effect. We would find the universe beautiful whatever it looked like!

Swinburne: probability / cumulative effect of evidence

Evidence of design and order increases the probability of the existence of God. Given the size of the universe, how does it behave in such an ordered way? The probability that he exists is greater than the probability that he doesn’t.

Existence of the universe, ordering, consciousness, human opportunities to do good, pattern of history, miracles, religious experience: all increase the probability of the universe being designed.

- **Criticisms** of probability is that Swinburne presumes it exists for the sake of humanity, could be any creature. Also he is conceding that other possibilities exist too.

Ockham’s Razor: in an argument, the answer with the fewest assumptions would be the most correct. Or, put more simply, the simplest answer is invariably the most correct. Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily. Some would claim that God is the ‘simplest’ explanation for the existence of the universe

- **Strengths:** Swinburne said “If we **can** explain the many bits of the universe by one simple being which keeps them in existence, **we should do so** – even if we cannot explain the existence of that simple being.” Regularities of co-presence / succession
- **Criticism** of Ockham’s razor: John Hick believed that the atheistic option that ‘the universe is just there’ is simpler than the cosmological argument

Swinburne: regularities of co-presence vs. regularities of succession

Swinburne suggests that there are two types of regularity in the universe:

1. Regularities of co-presence (spatial order)
2. Regularities of succession (temporal order)

Regularities of co-presence refers to the tendency for things to turn up together in orderly patterns. This sort of regularity is very striking in nature. People who point out the complexity of the eye or an ecosystem like a rainforest or the fact that a woodpecker’s tongue wraps round its brain to stop itself getting concussion from pecking at trees are pointing out spatial order - regularities of co-presence.

This sort of spatial order can be very impressive and seems to lie behind Aquinas’ idea of beneficial order and Paley’s watch analogy.

However, Swinburne does not regard regularities of co-presence as particularly convincing examples of design. Spatial order *CAN* come about by chance. If you throw a stack of books in the air then they *COULD* all land in a stack in alphabetical order. Infinite monkey theorem – if you give a monkey a typewriter and let it bash away randomly for an infinite period of time, eventually it would type the complete works of Shakespeare, by chance.

Swinburne is more impressed by a different type of order: temporal order or regularities of succession. This refers to orderly processes that **operate the same way every time**. In other words, **the laws of nature**. Most examples of order consist of both types of regularity. For example, a watch consists of regularities of co-presence (all the cogs and springs in the right position) and succession (the laws of physics which make it all work).

Things like the eye and the woodpecker’s tongue consist of regularities of co-presence (all the parts being exactly how they need to be), there are still the laws of biology and chemistry that make them work. Even if the theory of evolution explains the regularities of co-presence in the woodpecker’s tongue or the human eye, **evolution itself is one of the regularities of succession that make the universe so ordered**.

Swinburne’s idea of regularities of succession points towards fine-tuning and the anthropic principle. It is also a response to **David Hume’s** problem of induction. Hume points out that we have no rational basis for expecting the future to resemble the past, other than out of habit and custom. Swinburne is agreeing, but drawing a rather different conclusion from Hume. Swinburne is suggesting that the fact that there seem to be natural laws and that we can engage in inductive reasoning about them is another one of those “suspicious” things that point

The thought experiment: Two people return to their long neglected garden. Although the garden looks wild, there are still many flowers blooming. One of them says, “There must be a gardener at work here.” The other replies, “I don’t think so.” To see who is right, they examine the garden carefully and ask the neighbors, who have never seen anyone at work. They also research what happens to gardens that are left without care. “You see,” says the skeptic, “there is no gardener.” The believer replies, “This gardener is invisible, and if we look more carefully we will find evidence that he comes, unseen and unheard.” The other one maintains there is no gardener. Can this dispute ever be settled?

Significance: It’s pretty clear that this is an analogy about the existence of God and how a theist and non-theist might see this differently. A theist might see design, an atheist does not. The question is to what extent we can see some features of reality as evidence for or against God’s existence. Is it really a dispute about facts, or two different ways at looking at the world, as a garden or a wilderness?

towards the universe being designed.

Strengths of the Design argument

- Fred Hoyle's strength –the likelihood of the world happening by chance i.e. evolution is the same likelihood as a hurricane passing through a scrapyard and assembling a Boeing 747
- Empirical evidence supports design as we see it in migratory patterns of Whales and sunflowers. It is difficult to deny the presence of order and complexity in the universe.
- A posteriori information supports design as we can see things such as the bacterial flagellum
- As it is inductive it makes it likely there is a designer to explain design and this is supported by the fine tuning argument which states there is a delicate balance of conditions required for life on earth therefore a designer is the best explanation. Inductive reasoning begins with experience which may be universal (i.e. everyone has had it) or it may at least be testable and leads to a reasoned and justifiable conclusion.
- The use of analogy (the watchmaker – the archer) in this argument makes it understandable to us: it moves from something within our experience to try to explain something beyond it (the designing of the universe); the argument is simple and straightforward to follow.
- The argument is not necessarily incompatible with evolution and Big Bang: both of these processes could be part of the design of the universe – use of anthropic principle.
- The concept of God as designer reinforces the idea that God is involved in the history of the universe and is therefore omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent.
- When joined with other proofs for God's existence (cosmological, ontological, moral etc) the design argument strengthens the probability of the existence of God. This is Swinburne's **cumulative** argument.

Criticisms of the Design argument

"**God of the gaps**" is a term used to describe observations of theological perspectives in which gaps in scientific knowledge are taken to be evidence or proof of God's existence.

Hume's criticisms

- Arguments from analogy fail. We cannot compare objects in our world to a universe
- Why not a team of designers? Or apprentice God. "Rude first draft of an infant deity".
- Why not created by spiders? If we were spiders we would imagine the world created by a spider. Anthropomorphising God
- Design is illusion. We look backwards and assume design rather than the world becoming more ordered by change over time.
- Only proves that there is design – nothing more

Kant's criticisms

- The design argument depended on the assumption that there is design in the universe, that there is regularity, order and purpose in the universe
- Kant argued that the universe may be in chaos but, because of the way our minds organise experiences, the world around us appears to be ordered
- We impose design on the world ourselves and cannot be certain of the reality of the situation.

Ayer (criticism from language)

- To speak of a designed universe is meaningless because unless we could say what it would be like without design we cannot reach the conclusion that it is designed
- The universe would look the same to us whether it was designed or not. Without the right conditions etc. there would be no humans here to comment that it was designed!

Darwin / Dawkins

- Evolution / Natural Selection – Scientific shows that design came about through natural process.
- Blind Watchmaker – Dawkins – Selfish Gene – No overarching purpose. A blind, unconscious process. All human behaviour can be explained through need to reproduce DNA.
- Geneticist Steve Jones described the evolutionary process as: 'a series of successful mistakes'

Problem of evil and suffering

- John Stuart Mill: the designer of the universe might be loving, but he is seriously limited in power
- "If the maker of the world can do all that he will, he wills misery and there is no escaping that conclusion"
- Examples of poor design: pointless existence of appendix in humans, existence of unnecessary wings in flightless birds, genetic disorders etc.

1.2. The Cosmological argument

a) Inductive reasoning, a posteriori types of arguments.

b) Principle of sufficient reason, explanation, interpretation of experience, movement, cause and effect, contingency, infinite regress, first cause, necessary existence, Kalam version.

c) Strengths and weaknesses of Cosmological Arguments: probability rather than proof, brute fact, debates about infinite regress, necessary existence and God as a necessary being. Challenges to the argument.

d) Philosophical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues in the philosophy of religion.

With reference to the ideas of Aquinas and D Hume, I Kant.

Inductive reasoning: Given the circumstances, the conclusion becomes a statement of what is the most probable. Therefore, one can agree with the premises, yet still disagree with the conclusion. The premises support the conclusion, but don't make it necessary.

A posteriori: "After the fact". A Posteriori arguments are ones based on evidence which already exists. The argument is post evidence. A posteriori statements do not contain the conclusion, but argue to a conclusion based on evidence.

The Cosmological Argument is based on the claim that everything existing in the universe exists because it **was caused by something else**; that 'something' was itself also caused by something else. However, it is necessary for something to have started this all off – something which did not and was not itself caused/created, a **first or uncaused cause**. That 'something' is God.

The universe cannot be self-causing, as it is a sum of its **contingent** parts (depends on something else for existence). Therefore only the existence of a first, necessary, uncaused cause can explain its origin.

Based on an instinctive assumption that nothing can exist without having something else for its own existence; everything needs a reason and cause.

Plato and Aristotle: first cause, 'prime mover', 'unmoved mover'. Aristotle: Everything has an efficient cause, "since nothing can come from nothing", chain of contingent events, 'reductio ad absurdum' couldn't have gone on infinitely, all changes in the universe must come from an ultimate source, the 'Unmoved Mover', not reliant on anything else.

Necessary – must exist; existence is within itself

Contingent – depends on something else for existence

The Simple Cosmological Argument:

(1) Everything that exists has a cause of its existence.

(2) The universe exists.

Therefore:

(3) The universe has a cause of its existence.

(4) If the universe has a cause of its existence, then that cause is God.

Therefore:

(5) God exists.

Thomas Aquinas: Five Ways (first three are cosmological)

Motion: All things are moved by others, and that mover is moved by something else. You cannot have an infinite chain (infinite regress: a sequence of reasoning or justification which can never come to an end), so there must be an unmoved mover. Motion means going from a state of potential to actual – it's about changing rather than motion. Things change and they don't change themselves. They change because of something else making them change.

Causation: All things are caused and since nothing can be its own cause (logically impossible) there must be a first cause (uncaused cause) on which all others depend. Cause and effect – everything has a cause and finds its origin in something else.

Contingency: Everything which we can point to is dependent upon factors beyond itself and thus is contingent. These factors demand an ultimate explanation in the form of a necessary being, dependent on nothing outside itself. Everything depends on something else, either for its motion or its cause or simply for its existence. Nothing stands alone.

Gottfried Leibniz

Principle of sufficient reason

- "Nothing takes place without sufficient reason"
- "Why is there something rather than nothing"

- We require explanations and reasons (**FULL**, not partial) for things existing – to establish **why** there is something rather than nothing
- Agrees with Aquinas that we cannot have '**infinite regress**' as we wouldn't get to a complete explanation
- Man has not been able to find reason for the universe's existence within the universe itself – so the great cause must be outside of it.
- We need the idea of God as an explanation because no other explanation is "sufficient". No other explanation **EVER COULD BE** sufficient. There's no possibility of some scientific breakthrough coming along and giving us a better explanation, because scientific explanations are always proximate explanations for the universe, not sufficient.

J L Mackie

Mackie illustrated infinite regress with the example of a train. Each carriage pulls the one behind it, but it wouldn't get anywhere without an engine. God is like the engine. God is the first cause of the train's movement. God is like an engine that powers the train in order for it to move, without requiring something else to act upon it. This analogy demonstrates the principle of dependency in the cosmological argument and the rejection of infinite regress.

Richard Swinburne

Swinburne focuses on the wonder of there being anything in existence at all. Nothing ever existing is a much more likely, logical state of affairs than for a universe to exist, therefore we need an explanation.

"A may be explained by B, and B by C, but in the end there will be one object on whom all other objects depend".

Frederick Copleston

Copleston developed Aquinas's five ways, attempting to clarify and explain them further.

Famously supported Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God in a BBC radio debate with Bertrand Russell in 1948 – **SEE ANTHOLOGY**.

Copleston said that the Cosmological argument defines such a being that must exist (and cannot NOT exist).

All objects in the universe are contingent. The universe is the sum of its objects. Therefore the sum (the universe) must be contingent. The thing that created the universe cannot be contingent, otherwise there would be an infinite chain of regress (not logically possible). Therefore the thing that created the universe must have necessary existence. The only thing powerful enough to have necessary existence is God. Therefore God exists.

Kalam argument: al Ghazali

al Ghazali argued that 'actual infinities' are impossible. It then follows that the universe cannot be infinite. The universe must have had a beginning and cause of its existence. This would be **God**.

What distinguishes the kalam cosmological argument from other forms of cosmological argument is that it rests on the idea that the universe has a beginning in time (therefore supported by the Big Bang). Modal forms of the cosmological argument are consistent with the universe having an infinite past. According to the kalam cosmological argument, however, it is precisely because the universe is thought to have a beginning in time that its existence is thought to stand in need of explanation.

This argument has the following logical structure:

(1) Everything that has a beginning of its existence has a cause of its existence.

(2) The universe has a beginning of its existence.

Therefore:

(3) The universe has a cause of its existence.

(4) If the universe has a cause of its existence then that cause is God.

Therefore:

(5) God exists.

Advocates of the kalam cosmological argument claim that it is impossible that the universe has an infinite past. An actual infinite cannot be formed. History, or the collection of all events in time, is made up by sequentially adding one event after the other. It can never be an *actual* infinite. As we are constantly adding events to time, time cannot be infinite as you cannot add to infinity. In support of this claim, modern advocates of the argument often appeal to modern science, specifically to the Big Bang theory. Modern science, they say, has established that the universe began with the Big Bang. Other proponents use mathematics to show that infinity is impossible.

William Lane Craig

WLC recently restored the popularity of the Kalam argument. William Lane Craig added an extra statement to the cosmological argument, that the creation of the universe must have been a personal choice on behalf of the creator.

William Lane Craig admits that there could be things that are potentially (not actually) infinite. A potential infinity exists when something can be added to indefinitely, without end. So if the universe has a beginning point, it's possible for it to carry on existing for an infinite amount of time "into the future". We wouldn't have to traverse an infinite amount of time to find ourselves living in the present: the past is finite, the future is potentially infinite.

Strengths of the Cosmological argument

- The argument emphasises the 'otherness' of God and does not fall foul of anthropomorphism or making God 'too small'.
- In fitting with the God of revealed theology, i.e. the great creator of mankind and the universe (Genesis 1, John 1), it does not tell us a great deal about God, but the argument appears to be a perfectly acceptable answer for many.
- As it is a posteriori we can see motion and cause in nature
- Empirical evidence supports causation as something real for example birth of animals in nature
- As an inductive argument it makes it likely that there is a cause as whatever science provides as an explanation we can always ask 'what caused that?'
- Hilbert's hotel thought experiment suggests infinity is problematic strengthening Aquinas' rejection of infinite regress

Debates about infinite regress

Infinite regress is the idea of a process going back into the past with no beginning. Several versions of the Cosmological Argument (Motion and Causality) make it one of their premises that infinite regress is impossible.

Infinite regress is certainly unimaginable - we can't imagine something existing forever with no beginning. However, God is also unimaginable. Just because something can't be imagined doesn't mean it's impossible.

The idea of an infinite set of things (an "actual infinity") produces absurd conclusions.

Actual infinities are paradoxical by showing that actual infinity cannot be traversed (crossed). For example, if you set off on an infinite journey, you would never get to your destination. If you tried to count to infinity, you would never get there. In the same way, if the past is actually infinite, the present would never have happened, because an infinite amount of time must have passed - this is traversing an actual infinity, which is impossible. Therefore, the past cannot be infinite.

Criticisms of the Cosmological argument

Hume's criticisms:

- The notion of **necessary beings** is incoherent – there is no being, the non-existence of which is inconceivable.
- Even if there is such a being, why do we have to say it is the God of Classical Theism?
- Aquinas is guilty of an '**inductive leap**' in logic which the premises do not lead to (i.e. He moves from establishing the need for an uncaused causer, to identifying this as God).
- If '**God**' can be a necessarily existent being then such a thing is possible – why can't the universe be one?
- The argument *starts* with the assumption that there is a God – this is supposed to be the thing it is trying to prove!
- Hume disagrees with arguments that start with something within our experience then move on to reach conclusions about things outside of our experience.

Kant's criticisms:

- Kant attacks the idea of God as a Necessary Being
- God is part of the Noumenon but as humans we only ever experience Phenomenon. So no matter how much causation or contingency or motion we see going on in the universe around us, we can't draw any conclusions about what God is really like
- We can't go from empirical observations to metaphysical conclusions

Russell's criticisms:

- Even if specific things in the universe need an explanation; why does the universe as a whole? We should not move from the specific to the general.
- Some things are 'just there' and require no explanation – the universe is one such case. This is called a **brute fact** (opposed to principle of sufficient reason)
- It is not possible to reach an 'adequate explanation'

General criticisms:

- How can God not have a cause? What caused God?
- Isn't this an exception to the argument's 'rule' (that all things must have a cause)?
- The argument only works for those who are satisfied that God Himself requires no explanation.
- God is not explained by the argument – only postulated as an explanation (probability rather than proof)
- Can't the Big Bang Theory be an explanation in itself?
- Why can't there be an infinite series of causes?
- Aquinas misunderstands infinite regress as a very long chain of causes. It is an infinite chain with no beginning and therefore requiring no cause
- Inductive argument means that God is a *probable* conclusion, there is not definite *proof*

| | Infinite regress? | Supported by "Big Bang"? | Inductive proof? | Who caused God? | Not the Bible God? |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Movement | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Causation | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Contingency | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Kalam | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| PSR | | | | | ✓ |

1.3. The Ontological argument

a) *A priori* compared to a *posteriori* types of arguments, deductive reasoning, not evidence based but understanding of concept of 'God' as an analytic proposition.

b) Definitions of 'God', necessary existence, aseity.

c) Strengths and weaknesses of the Ontological Arguments: concept of proof compared to probability, debates about 'existence' and predicates. Challenges to the argument.

d) Philosophical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues in the philosophy of religion.

With reference to the ideas of Anselm and B Russell.

Key Scholars:

- Anselm – TTWNGCBC
- Descartes – Trademark
- Plantinga – Possible World

A priori – Before the fact. A proposition that can be true through logic. E.g. the apple I am going to eat for lunch is a fruit. You can know God cognitively before experience. Describes things we can know independently of facts – know through pure logic, without evidence.

Ontology – Study of existence

Analytic – defines God into existence. Statement is true by virtue of the meaning of the terms involved. Logic tells you it's true. E.g. the red house is red. Critics say analytic statements don't tell us anything about the real world – you can't define something into existence.

Deductive – if the premise is that God is maximally great and existence is a feature of greatness are true, then the conclusion must be true. Starts with incontrovertible premises and draws valid conclusions from them. The conclusions are valid if the premises are sound. The conclusion follows from the premises *necessarily* – if the premises are true then the conclusion must follow.

Necessary – does not depend on anything else to exist / be true. To deny it would be a contradiction. It cannot be false. E.g. 2+2=4

Definitions

God is a **necessary being**. Necessary existence is a special sort of existence. The technical term for it is **ASEITY**. A being that exists necessarily has to exist – a necessary being cannot not-exist.

A thing has necessary existence if its non-existence would have been impossible.

Anselm suggests that God is necessary because he is not contingent. Contingent objects *might not have existed* because they are dependent (contingent) upon something else for their existence. Necessary existence is the opposite of contingent existence.

Plantinga expresses aseity using the idea of 'maximal greatness' – a being with maximum greatness will exist in every possible world.

Critics argue that aseity is something that has just been invented by theists to win an argument. However, there is biblical evidence of God's necessary existence. When God appears to Moses in the burning bush he says "I am that I am" (Exodus 3:14). God seems to be claiming for himself a special sort of existence or being - that he exists in a way which no other creature exists; indeed, God seems to be saying he's the only being who can really, truly be said to exist at all.

Problems with necessary existence: Hume says the idea of necessary existence isn't coherent – "Whatever we conceive as existence, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction". It is possible to conceive of God not existing (and still being thinking of God). So God does not exist necessarily if we can imagine a world without him.

Counter argument: Other philosophers think Hume has made a mistake here. It might be possible (i.e. imaginable) for God not to exist, but there is a difference between metaphysical and epistemic possibility. God's existence might still be necessary, regardless of our epistemic uncertainty. Imagining a world without God in it doesn't show that God's necessary existence is impossible.

Anselm's Ontological arguments

The argument 1:

- P1. God is the greatest possible being (nothing greater can be conceived)
- P2 God exists only in the imagination
- P3. If God exists in the mind alone, then a greater being could exist in the mind AND in reality
- C1. This being would then be greater than God
- P4. Either P1 or P2 must be false, but P1 cannot be false, so P2 must be false instead.
- C2. Therefore, God exists both in the mind AND in reality.

The argument 2:

- 1. A being than which none greater can be conceived must also exist in reality.
- 2. Failure to exist in reality would be failure to be a being than which none greater can be conceived.
- 3. Thus a being than which none greater can be conceived must exist, and we call this being God.

That than which nothing greater can be conceived. Existence in reality is greater than in the mind

Failure to exist in reality would not make God the greatest being – Existence as a predicate of God. Existence is part of something's perfection. A perfect thing must necessarily exist.

After Anselm came up with the ontological argument, it was rejected by many philosophers. Aquinas rejected it, saying we cannot have a conception of God's perfect essence in our minds. Descartes supported it, arguing a perfect being must possess all perfections and existence is a perfection. Hume and Kant both rejected it, explaining why definitions cannot create realities. Existence is not a predicate. Normal Malcolm and Alvin Plantinga returned to the argument in the 1960s and restated it in a way that avoids the criticisms from Hume, Kant and Russell.

Descartes

"A certain perfection" – God is perfect, existence is a perfection

Argument 1:

- 1. The idea of God is the idea of a supremely perfect being
- 2. A supremely perfect being has all perfections
- 3. Existence is a perfection
- 4. A supremely perfect being has the perfection of existence
- 5. It is impossible to think of God as not existing
- 6. Therefore, God exists.

Descartes is saying that talking about a "non-existent perfect being" is like talking about "a triangle with less than three sides". If it didn't exist, it wouldn't be a perfect being, just like it wouldn't be a triangle. A perfect being has to exist!

Argument 2:

- 1. I exist
- 2. In my mind, I have the concept of a perfect being
- 3. As an imperfect being, I could not have conjured up the concept of a perfect being
- 4. The concept of a perfect being must have come originated from the perfect being itself
- 5. A perfect being must be perfect in order to be perfect
- 6. Therefore a perfect being exists.

Plantinga

Another American philosopher and famous defender of Christian beliefs, Alvin Plantinga, developed the ontological argument further in his book *The Nature of Necessity* (1974). He used a type of thinking called "modal logic" which involves imagining alternative possible worlds.

For example, although our world is a possible world, there is another possible world in which Alvin Plantinga became a farmer rather than a philosopher.

If God can exist in one possible world, then God actually exists in all possible worlds, as God has necessary existence - (Possible World Theory / Modal logic)

P1: There is a possible world in which there exists a being with maximal greatness.

P2: A being has maximal greatness in a world only if it exists in every possible world.

C: A being of maximal greatness ("God") must exist in this world, the actual world

Plantinga's argument has been described as the 'Victorious' Ontological Argument, but what does it really prove? Atheists will just deny P1 - that there can be no being of 'maximal greatness' in any possible world. In other words, they will say that God's existence is impossible. However, this is no small claim to make and marks a shift in the debate from atheists claiming there's a lack of a posteriori proof that God exists to the claim that God's existence is a priori impossible, which doesn't strike everybody as such a reasonable position. Plantinga admits that his argument doesn't prove that God exists, but claims that it does show that belief in God is "reasonable".

Strengths of the Ontological argument

- First premise (that than which nothing greater can be conceived) can be true for the atheist and the believer
- As it is deductive if the premises are true the conclusion must be: holds out the hope of a proof
- Consistent with the God of classical theism and philosophically interesting as an exercise in a priori analytic logic.
- The argument is one from necessity. The argument does not rely on contingent evidence to find its proof for God (like the cosmological and teleological argument). To deny God's existence would be absurd, if you agree with the premises of the argument
- As a form of logic, the argument is sound, and is still debated to this day

Criticisms of the Ontological argument

Gaunilo

A perfect island must have existence as a predicate – No island exists. If Anselm's argument was true, than anything that you can imagine to be perfect must exist.

Gaunilo pointed out that Anselm's argument could be used to prove the existence of ANYTHING - and therefore proves the existence of NOTHING. Gaunilo invited Anselm to imagine the most perfect island imaginable. The same logic concludes that this perfect island must exist, because there would be a logical contradiction if it didn't. But we know the perfect island doesn't exist, so the argument must be invalid.

Response: God is the only perfect being to which the ontological argument might apply. Islands are limited and defective things, which is why no one can agree on what a perfect island would be like.

Kant

"A hundred real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers" – Existence is not a predicate (a term that defines or describes a subject). It does not change the definition of the object. If you add "and exists" to an object, it doesn't add anything to your understanding of the concept of the pile of coins.

Kant's objection to the ontological argument is that you can't define something into existence. I could define my bank account as containing millions of pounds but no amount of analysing my definition of 'my bank account' would make me a millionaire. I have to go to an ATM and check the balance of my account and see if it is accurate. Similarly, a definition of God must be checked with reality to see if it is correct.

1. Negation is not a contradiction: e.g. Descartes' triangle. Kant agrees you cannot deny the predicate and keep the subject. However you can deny the predicate AND the subject both at once (no three-sidedness AND no triangle)
2. Existence is not a predicate: Kant denies that existence is a predicate in the way that "roundness" or "greenness" are predicates. He argues that, when you state that something exists, you are not adding another predicate to its definition. Instead, you are claiming that this definition can be checked in the real world.

Response to Kant: Peter Van Inwagen argues that while ordinary existence isn't a predicate, "necessary existence" is.

Moore

A) Some tigers do not growl

B) Some tigers do not exist

Moore shows existence used as a predicate is meaningless. This just goes to show that the phrases "does exist" and "doesn't exist" aren't the same as other predicates and we can confuse ourselves if we ignore this difference.

Russell

A) "All cows have tails and exist"

B) "All unicorns have tails and exist"

Grammatically identical sentences convey different truths.

Russell believes that all ontological arguments are "cases of bad grammar" – they make a linguistic mistake without realising it, which is why they only appear to prove God's existence.

The linguistic mistake involves subjects and predicates. The subject is the thing the statement is about (God) and the predicates are additional information about the subject. For example, common predicates associated with God are "all-powerful", "all-knowing", "a spirit" and "perfectly good".

The ontological argument seems to treat "exists" as one of God's predicates. It argues that, in order to be perfect or the greatest thing conceivable, God must possess all the good predicates and existence would be one of them. If God lacked a predicate, like power or wisdom, he would be less perfect or less great; similarly, if he lacks existence God is less perfect too.

He suggests that "existence", instead of being a predicate, indicates that something is INSTANTIATED in the world of time and space. "Instantiate" means there are instances or examples of something. Russell points out that these two sentences effectively tell us the same thing:

- A. Cows are brown
- B. Cows are brown and exist

BUT: Russell's criticisms only succeeds in refuting Descartes and Anselm's versions of the ontological argument. Plantinga, Malcolm don't involve existence as a predicate. Also Russell is just trying to define God out of existence, which is doing what he accuses the argument of doing.

Thomas Aquinas rejected, arguing that we cannot have a conception of God's perfect essence in our minds.

Criticisms from language

Ayer uses Kant's analytic-synthetic distinction. For Ayer, there were only three ways to use language:

1. Synthetic statements, which are factual and can be proved or disproved with evidence
2. Analytic statements, which don't tell us about the world, just the meanings of words
3. Nonsense or meaningless statements

Religious people usually hold that "God exists" is a fact about reality. If the statement expresses a fact, then the statement "God exists" is not analytic. If "God exists" isn't analytic, then it must be either synthetic or nonsense. If the statement "God exists" is synthetic, then it can be verified or falsified empirically; in other words, there must be observations that lend support to the existence of God or refute it. But observations do not verify or falsify the claim "God exists". If no observations verify or falsify the claim "God exists," then the claim is simply nonsense.

The Verification Principle assumes that analytic statements don't tell us facts about the world. They just tell us what words mean. If "God exists" is an analytic statement then it can never tell us facts about God. You can't define God into existence. You need empirical evidence to show things exist.

Unit 2: The nature and influence of religious experience

2.1. The nature of religious experience

a) Context of religious experience across religious traditions, range of definitions related to belief in God and/or ultimate reality, theistic and monistic views, ineffability, noetic, transience, passivity.

b) Types: conversion, prayer, meditation, mysticism, numinous. Relationship between religious experience and propositional and non-propositional revelation.

c) Alternative explanations, physiological and naturalistic interpretations, objectivist and subjectivist views.

With reference to the ideas of W James and R Otto.

A religious experience is an encounter with the divine. It is a non-empirical occurrence that brings with it an awareness of something beyond ourselves.

- **Direct:** immediate, personal experience of God by the experienter
- **Indirect:** experience of God's action or creation (immanence)
- **Individual:** occurring to individuals in private
- **Corporate:** occurring to a large group of individuals simultaneously. (e.g. the Toronto blessing or the miracle of Fatima)

Context of religious experience across religious traditions

Christianity

- Christian doctrine generally maintains that God dwells in all Christians and that they can experience God directly through belief in Jesus
- Christian mysticism aspires to apprehend spiritual truths inaccessible through intellectual means, typically by emulation of Christ

Islam

- While all Muslims believe that they are on the pathway to God and will become close to God in Paradise – after death and after the "Final Judgment" – Sufis believe that it is possible to become close to God and to experience this closeness while one is alive

Range of definitions related to belief in God and / or ultimate reality

Naturalistic explanations- Non-supernatural explanations of religious experience

Prayer- the act of having a conversation with the ultimate being.

Occam's razor- the principle that says we should prefer the most economical explanation.

Conversion- an experience in which someone changes their faith or gains faith.

Psychological explanations- Physiological interpretations explain religious experience using biology

Passivity- The quality of being out of control of the experience.

Objectivist explanations- The objectivist view is that religious experiences are experiences of something real.

Transience- The quality of the experience not lasting very long: being temporary.

Propositional revelation- the idea of God passing on a set of factual knowledge to humans.

Noetic- The quality of a religious experience in which experienters learn something new.

Non-propositional revelation- the idea of ultimate truths being non-factual. Instead, they are perspectives or points of view.

Ineffability- the inability to describe a religious experience in words.

Numinous- the feeling of being in the presence of something greater.

Theistic views- Theism is the belief that the divine is a personal being

Mysticism- "Non-sensuous and non-intellectual union with the divine." Walter Stace

Monistic views- the belief that everything is god.

Meditation- a devotional exercise of or leading to contemplation.

Theistic and monistic views

Theism

- Theism is the idea that God is a personal being but the relationship with God isn't sought out.
- This divine being can be supra-personal. This is the idea that God is not human, but spiritual. (Does not have a sex or gender).
- Agency- God makes decisions and plans for humanity
- God is a moral agent that wants to do good.
- Religious experience's are a revelation of God as it is an encounter with a divine being.

Monism

- Monism is the belief that God is everything
- God is **impersonal-** He does not have a **personhood**.

- The appearance of the world is an illusion as it's all just God.
- There is the idea that there is only one universal truth. Humans have to seek this out themselves; it is not revealed.
- Humans have to detach themselves from material things in order to pursue this truth e.g. meditation
- **LINK:** Monistic tradition is stronger in Eastern Religion e.g. Hinduism and Buddhism

William James

Talks about mysticism.

James believed that it was religious experiences that came first and that organised religions and religious dogma grew up around this. He also said that God does exist as "he produces real effects", i.e. religious experiences.

William James explains four different aspects of a mystical religious experience. These experiences can also be extrovert (where one looks out to see God in the world) or introvert (where you look within yourself and find their personal identity merged with the divine unity).

- **Ineffability:** The state of feeling that defies description. The experience cannot be described in words. It has to be directly experienced and cannot be transferred or imparted to others. An ineffable experience is like a feeling and no feeling can be understood by someone who has not experienced it.
- **Noetic Quality:** Revelations of universal and eternal truth. Mystical experiences give rise to knowledge; those that experience them learn something. They are states of insight in which truths are intuitively realised or felt to be true even though they cannot be described. They usually carry an authority with them that affects the way the person acts thereafter.
- **Transiency:** a brief but profoundly important experience. Mystical states cannot go on for very long. Except in rare cases, the longest they last is 30 minutes, at most they last is an hour or two. Often it can become hard to remember the experience properly, although this can be helped if the experience is repeated later.
- **Passivity:** a feeling of being taken over by a superior authority. Once the experience begins it is beyond the person's control. This is true even when the person concerned has invited the experience by going through some of the mental or physical preparations described in manuals of mysticism. The will of the experiencer becomes passive: the mystic does not control the experience- the experience controls the mystic.

James argues that spiritual communion have psychological benefits, e.g. a zest for life, 'lyrical enchantment' or inspiration to do good deeds.

The point of mystical experiences is that God meets the individual 'on the basis of his personal concerns'.

Evaluation of James

Although God exists factually, God is not the being described by Judeo-Christian teaching. James does not set out his ideas of God in one clear place but speaks about Him throughout his works. He claims that God may not be omnipotent, so is likely to be finite rather than infinite. God doesn't have to be a single entity but a collection of God-like selves. God interacts with humans so is probably temporal.

Otto

Talks about Numinous experiences

"Mysterium" – wholly other, experienced with blank wonder, stupor

"Tremendum" – provokes terror because of overwhelming power

"Fascinans" – merciful and gracious, potent charm, attractiveness in spite of fear

- A feeling of deep, inner peace
- A certainty that everything will turn out for the good
- A sense of the need to help others
- A belief that love is at the centre of everything
- A sense of joy
- Great emotional intensity

'God establishes himself in the interior of this soul in such a way, that when I return to myself, it is wholly impossible for me to doubt that I have been in God and God in me.' Saint Teresa of Avila

Martin Buber

- I-It (relationships humans have with impersonal objects)
- I-You (relationships humans have with humans)

Religious experience is **I-You** as it is a relationship with a being – God.

Your relationship between you and God is not of that between you and an object, but one between two individual personal consciousnesses and should be understood that way.

If you try to rationalise and I-You encounter then it stops being one and becomes an I-It relationship.

Criticisms of Buber:

1. Encounters as an I-You may not be right
2. 'Experience of' presupposes knowledge
3. Experiencing something isn't the same as knowing

Schliermacher

Key aspect of religious experience was that it did not depend on religious doctrine, but on faith and real human experience.

All religions offer a part in the greater picture, and religious experience from all religions speak of different aspects of God.

Types of religious experience

Richard Swinburne says there are 5 different types of religious experience. The first two are public and the next three are private:

1. You see God's action in a public object or scene. E.g. the sunset is the 'hand of God'
2. A breach of natural law – e.g. miracles
3. A personal experience that can mostly be described through normal language
4. A personal experience that cannot be described using normal language (ineffable). E.g. mystical experiences that can only be explained by negatives or metaphor
5. No specific experience but more of a constant or regular feeling that God is simply 'there'

Conversion: an experience in which someone changes their faith or gains faith.

An example of this is St Paul who converted to Christianity after having a vision of light.

Prayer: the act of having a conversation with the ultimate being.

An example of this is anyone who prays.

Meditation: a devotional exercise of or leading to contemplation.

An example of this is the Buddha who is said to have reached enlightenment through meditation.

Mysticism: "non-sensuous and non-intellectual union with the divine"

Walter Stace was a philosopher who was particularly interested in mystical experiences. He defined them as above and said that they were:

- Nothing to do with mystery or the occult.
- Nothing to do with 'parapsychological phenomena', such as telepathy, telekinesis, clairvoyance and precognition.

As visions and voices both include sensory experiences, according to Stace's definition of a mystical experience, voices and visions cannot be mystical experiences.

"they involve the apprehension of an ultimate non-sensuous unity in all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate. In other words, it entirely transcends our sensory-intellectual consciousness"

Relationship between religious experience and propositional and non-propositional revelation

General revelation is available to everyone. It is the way God (or universal truths) are revealed in the natural world. Christians call this sort of revelation "natural theology".

Special revelation comes directly from the divine. It isn't available to ordinary people. Religious experience would be a source of special revelation but so are religious scriptures and sacred texts.

Propositional Revelation

In the theistic tradition, revelation has usually been understood propositionally. A proposition is a factual statement, so propositional revelation is the idea of God passing on a set of factual knowledge to humans:

1. Knowledge about God's own nature, such as the fact that he is the Creator and will judge people after they die
2. Knowledge about God's commandments, such as not to murder or commit adultery
3. Knowledge about the future, such as God's plans and promises
4. Knowledge about the present, such as how events going on at the moment are part of God's plan

A person who receives these sorts of propositions from God (especially 3. and 4.) is termed a "prophet" and "prophecy" means receiving this knowledge from God and passing it on to other people (prophecy isn't limited to predicting the future).

According to this propositional view, faith can be seen as "*belief that*" - a Christian is someone who believes *that* there is a God, believes *that* Jesus was God's son, believes *that* Jesus rose from the dead. In order to accept God's revelation, people need to accept certain propositions as being factually true.

Propositional revelation helps make sense of some religious narratives.

- Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt might have been just another Bronze Age migration, but Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush reveals *that* it is part of God's plan that the Israelites should live in the 'Promised Land' and worship him there.
- Jesus' crucifixion might have been the horrible death of any Jewish rebel against the Roman Empire, but Christ's appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus reveals *that* Christ is the Lord whose death and resurrection saves humanity from sin.
- Other religious scriptures consist entirely of propositional revelation:
 - The Quran doesn't contain any sort of story or narrative: it is a set of propositions about God and mankind revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Jibril (Gabriel)
 - Parts of the Old Testament consist entirely of laws that were revealed to Moses by God, including the Ten Commandments

Issues with Propositional Revelation: Interactionism

Interactionism is the question of how God, who is a spirit, can interact with human beings in order to pass on factual information to them. This is particularly difficult to answer if God is believed to be an Eternal God (outside of time and space) and a Necessary Being (utterly non-contingent).

- How can a timeless spirit become visible to a person, let alone talk to them or pass on books of writing or spoken words?
- If God needs to communicate with people, this suggests he is contingent on them (if Moses or Paul hadn't been present at the time, God couldn't have revealed himself to them in that way)

One solution is the idea of amanuensis, a word that means "copier" or "secretary". This is the belief that God dictates propositional revelation directly into the thoughts of a human being. It's therefore a human prophet who writes down or speaks aloud the revelation, but God is speaking 'through' them.

However, this doesn't really solve the problem of interactionism. Just how can a spirit "take over" the brain of a physical being? Doesn't this make God even more contingent, because he needs the brain (and mouth - or perhaps writing hand and pen and ink) of a human in order to reveal himself? Moreover, if this is possible, how is it different from "possession" or mind-control, which seems to be a violation of human freewill?

Issues with Propositional Revelation: Freewill

The idea that humans have freewill is particularly important in the theist tradition. How humans use (or misuse) their freewill is the thing God judges them on, which affects whether they go to heaven or hell. Freewill is crucial to solutions to the **Problem of Evil & Suffering**. These solutions claim that God would rather allow evil and suffering to take place than prevent them by overruling human freedom.

Propositional revelation seems to contradict the idea of human freewill, especially the amanuensis theory. If God can overrule human freewill and control our minds and actions in order to pass on his views about homosexuality, why doesn't he do it to prevent genocide or torture?

Issues with Propositional Revelation: Corruption vs Continuity

Even if we accept that there is a way for God to interact with human beings without compromising their freewill, there's the question of whether the factual information gets recorded and transmitted accurately. Is there continuity in revelation or has it been corrupted?

Given that religious experiences are ineffable (indescribable), can we be confident the propositional revelation has been explained accurately? This is a problem if limited human language is being used to describe an infinite and eternal God

Over time, the propositional revelation must be copied and re-copied as books deteriorate, or else passed on by word-of-mouth once the original prophet dies, or just remembered accurately by the prophet himself. Given how faulty human memory is, how easy it is to make mistakes when copying something and how important documents tend to get lost, we can't be confident about this.

On top of this, there's the risk of deliberate fraud, when people later try and change the revealed propositions to say what they want them to say.

Of course, God could use his omnipotent power to ensure that the propositional revelation is passed on accurately and transmitted in an uncorrupted way. This is the teaching of the Catholic Church: the Holy Spirit does not allow the Church to fall into error. (this is called the infallibility of the Church's teaching); Protestant Christians believe the revelation in the Bible is inerrant (without flaws).

However, this brings back the problem of interactionism and freewill in a more forceful way, for now God is not violating human freewill *just once* by revealing himself, but *continuously*, by protecting his revelation from being corrupted by human choices again and again down through the centuries.

This isn't just a problem for revelation in the theistic tradition. The Buddha predicted that the truth of his teachings would be corrupted over time. Some Buddhists believe this has already happened and await a new Buddha (the Maitriya Buddha) who will renew the dhamma (teachings).

Non-Propositional Revelation

In the monistic tradition, revelation has usually been understood non-propositionally. A proposition is a factual statement, so non-propositional revelation is the idea of ultimate truths being non-factual. Instead, they are perspectives or points of view.

The Buddha experienced Enlightenment, but what he passed on to his followers was advice and guidance for experiencing Enlightenment for themselves, not a set of facts about what Enlightenment is like

In the theistic tradition, liberal believers since the Enlightenment have adopted a non-propositional understanding of revelation. One of these was **Friedrich Schleiermacher**, who argued that religious experiences are feelings that have to be made sense of later. **Martin Buber** argued that religious experiences are I-Thou encounters with a divine person, not a set of facts. This personalist approach to religious experience leads to different conclusions from propositional revelation:

1. God's own nature is known by encountering God and reflecting on this encounter
2. God's commandments are worked out based on what encountering God felt like
3. Knowledge about the future can only be an inspired guess
4. Knowledge about the present can be an insight into the way the world works, not a factual explanation

Religious scriptures therefore consist of human beings trying to write about God or universal truths from their *own* perspective. They are therefore human documents, not divine objects. They need to be interpreted, not blindly followed.

'Belief In' rather than 'Belief That'

According to this non-propositional view, faith can be seen as "*belief in*" - a Christian is someone who believes *in* God's goodness, believes *in* Jesus's love and self-sacrifice, believes *in* love and hope triumphing over death. In order to accept God's revelation, people don't need to accept certain propositions as being factually true - they need to believe in the values those revelations represent.

Many religious believers say that non-propositional faith (belief *in* God) is more important than propositional faith (belief *that* God exists). They point out that even the Devil believes *that* God exists. In the Bible, demons recognise *that* Jesus is the Son of God, but they don't believe *in* him by accepting him as their Lord.

Non-propositional revelation helps make sense of some religious narratives that are problematic if we treat them propositionally:

In the Bible, there are atrocities and commandments that are morally repugnant to many people today (such as murdering war prisoners or putting homosexuals to death).

These represent biases of the writers, not facts about God. We should look past them to the "big picture" about God

The Bible and other sacred texts describe social arrangements that are outdated, like owning slaves, women as inferior people, rule by kings and warlords and the banning of eating certain foods or using certain medicines. These interpretations of the divine made sense to the writers, but don't make sense now, and should be revised.

Issues with Non-Propositional Revelation: Interactionism & Freewill

Understanding revelation non-propositionally solves most of the problems of freewill and interactionism. Humans encounter the divine then choose for themselves what it means, how to express it, what words to use and how it should be applied to life.

Example: Moses could have ignored the burning bush as a plant that had caught fire in the summer heat. Instead, he saw in the flames the suffering of his people, but in the plant itself their resilience, with roots going back to Abraham. He felt proud of those roots and convinced that the God of his ancestors still cared for his people. Inspired, he set out to free them from slavery and, when asked why, said, "*God spoke to me from the burning bush*".

Example: Paul could have dismissed his fainting fit on the road to Damascus, but felt it was something more. In his moment of weakness, the Christian teachings about love made sense to him. When he was helped to reach the city, he felt his dependency on God's love. He felt guilty for persecuting the Christians who, he now saw, understood God better than he. He resolved to change his life and explained his decision saying, "*I met Christ on the road to Damascus*".

Issues with Non-Propositional Revelation: Corruption vs Continuity

Understanding revelation non-propositionally removes *some* of the problems of corruption vs continuity, but creates others.

On the one hand, the original person who had the religious experience has no particular authority: we don't need to accept *their* interpretation of what it meant. This means revelation can be re-interpreted to fit the present day.

Martin Luther King Jr. re-interpreted Moses' encounters with God in his speeches, but applied them to the oppression of African-Americans in the USA in the 1960s.

But on the other hand, if we are completely free to interpret revelation in any way we like, then religious revelations lose all their meaning and significance. There's no way of knowing which interpretation is correct, or even just which one to prefer.

This could be seen as an admission that it's impossible to take a *completely* non-propositional view of revelation. If we regard revelation as a religious truth, we are agreeing to at least *one* proposition about it: that it comes from God and has divine authority. If we don't accept this, then why would we bother basing our values and behaviour on it?

The Second Vatican Council published *Verbum Dei* which proclaimed that Catholics need to understand their faith both propositionally AND non-propositionally.

Alternative explanations: physiological and naturalistic interpretations

Temporal Lobe Epilepsy: a condition of the brain that makes people have experiences that sound like religious experiences.

Persinger's helmet: a helmet that can induce experiences that seem like religious experiences in the brain of the wearer.

Drug-induced experiences: Some people claim that religious experiences are due to the experient taking drugs, often psychedelics, William James did not see a problem with calling drug induced experiences as real religious experiences.

Fasting/hallucinations: Some such as Bertrand Russel have said that religious experiences often happen in people who are fasting but we know that fasting can cause hallucinations so the experiences are probably just hallucinations. This is an argument using the principle of occam's razor.

Alternative explanations, objectivist and subjectivist views

Objectivist: The objectivist view is that religious experiences are experiences of something real. An objectivist would argue that religious experience does count as proof for the existence of God.

Subjectivist: Religious experiences can be true and meaningful for the experient but not necessarily for anyone else.

2.2. Influence of religious experience as an argument for the existence of God

a) *Inductive reasoning based on evidence, the link between appearances, how things seem, how things really are and conclusions drawn from experience about reality and existence. Principles of testimony and credulity, the value and role of testimony to religious experience.*

With reference to the ideas of R Swinburne and J Hick.

b) *Strengths and weaknesses of religious experience as an argument for the existence of God: experiences influenced by the religious context of the believer, religious experiences interpreted as any other sensory experiences, complexity of interpretations, issues of probability and proof as relating to the argument, nature of God, including transcendent and immanent, limitations of language, lack of uniformity of experiences, refinements of and challenges to the argument.*

With reference to the ideas of M Persinger and R Dawkins.

Inductive reasoning based on evidence

Inductive reasoning is concluding from a cumulative body of empirical evidence for a conclusion that the same thing must occur again given the same circumstances.

Inductive Argument - Experience of X indicates the reality of X / Experience of God indicates the reality of God / It is possible to experience God / God exists. Swinburne says that religious experiences show God to be a loving and personal God who would seek to reveal himself to humanity as an act of love and to enable people to bring about good. Religious experiences can be felt empirically and interpreted non-empirically through our 'religious sense'. **However**, can be criticised because an inductive argument only makes something *probable*, not *necessary*

The link between appearances, how things seem, how things really are and conclusions drawn from experience about reality and existence

Science uses empirical evidence to draw universal conclusions. However our senses can be very faulty, for example, we see optical illusions in a way which they do not actually exist or one might see a tower from afar and believe it to be cylindrical only to move closer and find out that it is cuboid. Therefore, some people argue that we cannot trust our senses.

Principles of testimony and credulity

Swinburne develops an argument for the existence of God based on religious experience. His basic conclusion: 'On our total evidence, theism is more probable than not'.

- **Cumulative Argument** - The sheer weight of testimony of religious experience would point to the existence of God. The cumulative argument states that you have to take into account all arguments for religious experience rather than one single argument alone. **Swinburne**: while it may be possible to isolate each element of 'proof' offered and find problems with it, such elements have far greater cumulative worth. **Flew** dismissed this approach: 'If one leaky bucket will not hold water that is no reason to think that ten can.'
- **Testimony** - **Swinburne** states that since so many people have experience of what *seems to them* to be God, then we should be inclined to believe them. We do not doubt the basic facts of the world, even though they are mostly based on testimony from others. Unless we have evidence to the contrary, then we should believe that things are as they seem to be.
- **Credulity** - According to Swinburne, there are only three types of evidence that should be taken as rendering someone's testimony unreliable:
 1. The circumstances surrounding the experience are unreliable (e.g. the use of hallucinatory drugs)
 2. There is evidence to show that they are lying
 3. The experience can be explained in terms other than God.

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The value and role of testimony to religious experience

The only way that religious experience can be understood by those who have not had a religious experience is through testimony. People put different value on testimony, some insist (like Swinburne) that we should trust people as they are generally trustworthy, other want to be able to repeat experiences in order to test their validity.

Hick on religious experience

Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis claims that:

1. There is one divine reality, the Real, which is the ultimate source of all religious experience
2. No religious tradition has direct perception of the Real
3. Each religious tradition represents the Real as they experience it
4. The Real transcends all descriptions

Hick uses an analogy from science to explain this. He suggests that theism (which views the Real as a divine person) and monism (which views the Real as universal truths) might be the same thing in the end, just like: "the two ways of conceiving and registering light, namely as waves and as particles" - John Hick

Hick also uses the parable of the blind men and the elephant to show that we are all experiencing differing parts of the same universal truth.

The problem with this is that there are very clear inconsistencies between different religions. Surely a personal God and impersonal universal truths are OPPOSITE ideas?

If the Pluralistic Hypothesis is true, then Kant is right and nobody really has a direct experience of the divine. Everyone "clothes" the divine in symbols, images and forms that are personally or culturally meaningful to them. However, Hick believes the divine does in fact exist and subjective religious experience is as close as we can get to its objective noumenal reality.

Hick also believes that the universe is 'religiously ambiguous', meaning both believers and non-believers may be drawing valid conclusions from religious experiences because it all boils down to how you interpret your experiences: some people experience the presence of a personal God, others apprehend universal truths, others just experience the natural world.

The Parable of the Celestial City reflects many of Hick's ideas: the universe is religiously ambiguous so both the believer and the non-believer have good reasons to think as they do; God is epistemically distant so there is no clear indication whether the "moments of refreshment and delight" (religious experiences) are accidental or not, or why there is "hardship and danger" (evil and suffering).

Strengths and weaknesses of religious experience as an argument for the existence of God

Experiences influenced by the religious context of the believer: people have experiences of different religious figures depending on their faith- if they were genuine everyone would have similar experiences.

Religious experiences interpreted as any other sensory experiences: The Argument from Religious Experience has a key premise that, if people experience things, they probably exist. This involves experiencing things through the five senses (sensory experience). But is God experienced through the five senses?

Complexity of interpretations: There will always be a problem with interpreting religious experiences as most people do not have the experience themselves.

Issues of probability and proof as relating to the argument: Inductive reasoning faces the Problem of Induction, which was expressed by **David Hume**. This is the problem that an inductive conclusion can always be overturned by a later experience.

Nature of God, including transcendent and immanent: If God is transcendent then how can He interact with the physical universe, if god is Immanent then how can He have been the creator?

Limitations of language: William James wants to say that experiences are ineffable but if one can't truly describe them how can one say that they are truly a religious experience?

Lack of uniformity of experiences: Similar to context, if all the experiences can from the same God then surely they would all be the same kind of experience but they are not.

Criticisms of religious experience

Freud - Religion is a way to cope with a chaotic and frightening world. Religion is merely a 'neurotic illness'

Marx - "Religion is the Opium of the People" Religion simply serves to maintain this system at the expense of the people

Hume - "There is not to be found in all of history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education and learning, as to secure us against all delusion"

Culturally specific – it's a human construction and is related to culture, e.g. experiences of Hindu God are far more common in Hindu culture

Persinger- If you can create religious experiences in people by making them where the God helmet then surely this is proof that these experiences are not from God but are neurological changes in the brain.

Dawkins

- No such thing as religious experience, just merely an expression of someone's psychological needs. It's only convincing to the person having the experience.
- Dawkins criticizes religious beliefs based on "personal experiences" because he thinks we are easily fooled to think we see or hear what is not really there.
- Dawkins states that any walk through an insane asylum would show the visitor all the people who believe they are Napoleon, think everyone is plotting against them as well as people with hallucinations from illnesses like schizophrenia. Dawkins compares religious experiences with psychosis and compares religious experience with mental illness.
- Dawkins believes all religious experiences have a naturalistic interpretation
- He argues that the brain creates our perception of sights and sounds in the world outside our own heads but that sometimes it does its job too well and fools us
- Suggests that Darwin's theory of evolution explains religious experiences – natural selection might explain them: "There was something built into the human brain by natural selection which was once useful and which now manifests itself under civilised conditions as religion" - Richard Dawkins. E.g. Brains that can cope with danger by imagining it can be controlled might lead people to imagine there are spirits that can be bargained with or prayed to and this leads to worshipping gods

Criticisms of Dawkins:

- There are many religious experiences which are NOT illusory (Swinburne 'special considerations')
- Guilty of circular reasoning – assumes that it's very unlikely God exists, which means it's very unlikely religious experiences are true, and concedes that religious experiences don't prove God exists.

Michael Persinger

- Michael Persinger is a cognitive neuroscience researcher who agrees that the temporal lobes have a significant role in religious experiences, and argues that religious experiences are no more than the brain responding to external stimuli.
- Persinger claims that by stimulating the temporal lobes with a unique machine he can artificially induce in almost anyone a moment that feels just like a genuine religious experience.
- Persinger has developed a helmet which produced weak magnetic fields across the hemispheres of the brain, specifically the temporal lobe.
- Over 900 people who have taken part in the experiments claim to have had some form of 'religious' experience.
- It is thought that this happens because when under the influence of the helmet, the brain is deprived of the self-stimulation and sensory input that is required for it to define itself as being distinct from the rest of the world; the brain 'defaults' to a sense of infinity.
- This sense of self expands to fill whatever the brain can sense, and what it senses is the world, so the experience of the self simply expands to fill the perception of the world itself.
- One experiences becoming 'one with the universe.'
- However, as soon as the electromagnetic field is turned off then the experiences cease.
- Persinger has been able to reproduce this by electrically suppressing activity in the superior parietal lobe using his helmet.
- When he performed this experiment on Tibetan monks and the Franciscan nun, they all reported that the experiment was identical to what they experience in their own meditative practice.

Responses to the criticisms

Religious believers may argue that it is perfectly acceptable to be able to induce religious experiences, in fact it must be possible as God needs to reach people through some part of their physical body and it happens to be the brain, therefore if you stimulate the brain in the right way you would have an experience of God. This answers TLE, Persinger and drug induced states.

Can religious experience show that God probably exists?

| Yes | No |
|---|--|
| <p>Many people are more likely to believe something if it has been experienced. Our experience of God is the best evidence we have that God exists.</p> <p>Richard Swinburne's principle of credulity states "<i>If it seems to a subject that X is present, then probably X is present; what one seems to perceive probably is so</i>" Therefore, if person believes God was present we should accept what a person experiences unless you can prove otherwise.</p> <p>Swinburne's principle of testimony Swinburne appeals to a basic rational and verifiable idea - that people usually tell the truth. The principle of testimony suggests that I should accept your statement of what you experienced unless I can demonstrate positive grounds showing it to be</p> | <p>The finite cannot experience the infinite which means it is impossible for a human to experience God. God is not material, He has no body therefore it is impossible to prove the existence of something we cannot experience.</p> <p>Religious experiences are regarded as subjective because no objective criteria can be applied to them in order to judge to their authenticity. A subjective experience cannot be offered as 'scientific'; that is, as empirical or intellectual proof which means we can't prove God's existence.</p> <p>Individuals rather than groups undergo religious experiences. As a result, we only have one person's testimony as to what has happened. We</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>mistaken.</p> <p>William James observes that religious experiences tend to have a profound effect on the lives of people and even whole societies, implying that such effects cannot reasonably be attributed to hallucinations. Instead, it is much more reasonable to believe that a real God is responsible for religious experiences than to attribute the profound effects of those experiences to a mere imaginary being.</p> <p>James also argues that all normal persons have religious experience and, since experience is the final arbiter of truth, then God — as the object of religious experiences — must be accepted as factually true.</p> <p>There are a countless number of people throughout the world claiming to have had a religious experience. For many, the sheer amount of testimony is proof that God is responsible for the experience and therefore probably exists.</p> | <p>cannot corroborate the account so cannot accept if it is true.</p> <p>In many cases, drugs or alcohol can produce very similar effects to a religious experience. We also have physiological problems such as temporal lobe epilepsy. Therefore, it is difficult to prove the source of the experience to be God.</p> <p>People argue that just as you can encounter a table, you can also encounter God, but the two are very different. E.g. God is not material, nor does he have a definite location. Also, claims can be checked of encounters with objects, but when the object is God, they are not verifiable.</p> |
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Unit 3: Problems of Evil and Suffering

3.1. Problem of Evil and Suffering

The nature of the problem across a range of religious traditions, types of evil and suffering, moral and non-moral. The challenge to religious belief posed by the inconsistency of the nature of God and the evident existence of evil and suffering challenging belief in the existence of God.

With reference to the ideas of D Hume and J Mackie.

ANTHOLOGY: J Mackie – Evil and Omnipotence

Types of evil and suffering

Natural (or non-moral or "surd") evil - suffering caused by events that have nothing to do with humans, and which are to do with the way the world is, e.g., natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, floods or earthquakes

Moral (or human) evil - suffering caused by humans acting in a way that is considered morally wrong e.g., bullying, murder, rape, theft or terrorism

In the 21st century, the theory of global warming reveals a link between careless or wasteful human activity and natural disasters: by burning fossil fuels, we increase the likelihood of storms and flooding. Similarly, poor land use increases the risk of famine and drought and building on flood plains and faults puts people at risk of floods and earthquake. The 2011 Fukushima Disaster occurred when a tsunami hit the Japanese coast, causing the nuclear reactor at Fukushima to leak, exposing thousands of people to dangerous radiation.

This suggests the line between natural and moral evil may be blurred. In a world where humans used the environment responsibly and fed and housed themselves in a better way, the amount of death and suffering due to nature might be much reduced. However, there would still be accidents, disease and animal attacks, as well as ageing itself.

The logical problem of evil

The Logical Problem of Evil argues that the existence of any sort of evil or suffering in the universe leads to the conclusion that the God of theism is contradictory.

However there are solutions to the logical problem of evil (e.g. process theology). "Contradictory" doesn't mean "non-existent". The Logical Problem of Evil is a challenge to religious believers to refine or change their understanding of God - it's not an argument that God doesn't exist.

The evidential problem of evil

John Stuart Mill proposes the Evidential Problem of Evil which admits that there might be reasons why God would allow the existence of some evil, but argues that the amount of evil and suffering in the world is excessive. This argument was supported more recently by William Rowe.

These are what Paul Draper calls "gratuitous evils" - evils which don't seem to contribute towards a greater good or don't seem like necessary by-products of something good. Of course, there might be reasons for gratuitous evils too - but they're not obvious.

Common examples of gratuitous evils are:

- The suffering of children, who are too innocent to deserve punishment but too immature to learn moral lessons from suffering
- The suffering of animals, who have no moral sense at all (as far as we can tell)

Some religions avoid the Problem of Evil by defining God in such a way as to avoid inconsistency:

- If God is not morally good - or at least, not good in the sense that humans understand it - then he might not wish to end suffering or undo evil. This applies to Hinduism where what humans call "evil" is Shiva, the god of destruction who brings necessary change. This idea is also implied in the story of Job and in some interpretations of Islam, where God is seen as beyond human understanding and incomprehensible to humans.
- If God is not omnipotent (or if omnipotence doesn't mean the power to do illogical things), then ending suffering might contradict something else that God wants, such as bringing about a world of free-willed creatures. This is a common argument in Christianity, which has a tradition of understanding God's omnipotence in a more limited sense.
- If God doesn't exist, then there's no Problem in the first place. Buddhism is a religion with no God.

What is the problem of evil?

NIHILISTS – There is no purpose to the world, therefore no good or evil, just things that happen. Evolution and natural selection means we need to preserve our own safety which makes certain actions deemed good or bad. There are no moral truths, just things that benefit us or don't.

MONISTS – Evil does not exist. God, nature and the universe are all synonymous for monists. Evil is an illusion, as we are not capable of understanding God.

Epicurus

“God either wishes to take away evils and is unable; or he is able and is unwilling,”

Mackie’s Inconsistent Triad →

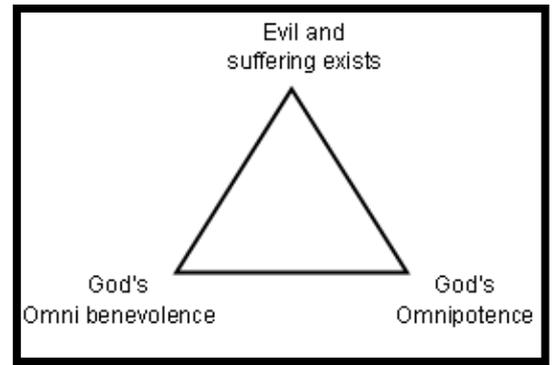
At most two sides can be true at any one time. The various sides cannot be reconciled with each other.

1. God is omnipotent (all-powerful)
2. God is omnibenevolent (morally perfect)
3. Evil exists

Mackie argues that these propositions are inconsistent; if two are true, the third must be false.

You can express the problem as a logical argument like this:

- P1 There is a being who possesses omnipotence and perfect goodness
- P2 A perfectly good being wishes to remove evil and an omnipotent being possess the power to do whatever it wishes
- P3 There is evil
- C1 P3 is impossible if P1 and P2 are true
- C2 Therefore either P1 is false or P2 is false
- P3 P2 is just an analysis of the meaning of goodness and omnipotence and cannot be false
- C3 Therefore P1 is false



The challenge that the problem of evil presents to the theist:

- **God is not perfectly good** – his failure to act shows he is not all-loving
- **God is not all powerful** – God is incapable of destroying evil, puts a limit on his power
- **God is not all-loving** – maybe God is not all loving

Mackie adds two other propositions that make the Logical Problem of Evil more compelling:

- A good being always opposes evil as far as it can
- If something is omnipotent it can do anything

Both of these principles seem self-evident at first glance, but not all believers agree with them. Many Christians (such as Thomas Aquinas) reject the idea that omnipotence means the power to do anything - only "any POSSIBLE thing", which sets some important limits on God. Other believers claim that a good being might not necessarily wish to remove evil; a good being might be interested in something more than people being happy, such as freewill.

A common solution to the logical problem of evil is **free will**. Mackie asks how can this count as a solution to the problem of evil, given that God created the freewilled creatures? A theist’s reply is that it is better that God made us with freewill and not as robots who behave like a machine. An all-powerful, good God would make a world in which human beings have freewill and can *choose* kindness over cruelty.

Mackie questions why God didn’t create us so that we always choose good over evil of our own freewill.

Mackie argues that the debate about freewill exposes a contradiction in the very idea of an omnipotent God – *Can an omnipotent being make things which he cannot subsequently control?* (Mackie).

Has Mackie disproved God using the problem of evil?

YES

Mackie has stated the **Logical Problem of Evil** in very lucid terms. He has drawn attention to the fact that all the "solutions" to the Problem involve surrendering one of the definitions of God (his omnipotence or his goodness). Even the **Freewill Defence** fails because an omnipotent God should be able to create free creatures who do not choose evil.

Freewill itself is **incoherent**, because it must either mean **random behaviour** (which is not determined in advance but cannot be chosen) or else it means actions **proceeding from character** (in which case God is ultimately responsible for creating such characters). In any event, the idea that God creates something he cannot predict or control only shows that **omnipotence is also an incoherent idea**.

NO

Mackie is mistaken when he claims that freewill is compatible with God determining how people will act. Freewill and determinism are **incompatible**. Free will is the "**ability to do other than what one in fact does**" but if our actions are determined, then freewill becomes contradictory. Therefore it's impossible for God to determine how free creatures act.

God might be aware all human behaviour without determining it and making it unfree if God exists **outside of time** - in which case our 'future' is God's present. This raises questions about what it means for an **eternal being** to act or choose, but it fits in with the **Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS)** and the idea of God as a **Necessary Being**, which are important in other areas like the **Design, Cosmological and Ontological Arguments**.

Hume

Hume understood the significance of the Problem of Evil as a proof that God does not exist. He called it THE ROCK OF ATHEISM.

His book *Dialogues concerning natural religion* takes the form of a play in which three characters debate religion:

- DEMEA offers a the view that evil helps us become more moral
- CLEANTHES defends the goodness of God
- PHILO is a sceptic who argues against both of the others, that evil and suffering are incompatible with the existence of God. Philo represents Hume's real views.

Through Philo's words, Hume restates the Logical Problem of Evil as it was first put forward by the Greek philosopher Epicurus: the existence of evil is incompatible with a morally perfect and omnipotent deity. Hume considers natural evil (in particular, the horrific behaviour of insects) and moral evil (such as "oppression, injustice, contempt, contumely, violence, sedition, war, calumny, treachery, fraud"). He then asks

IS HE [GOD] WILLING TO PREVENT EVIL, BUT NOT ABLE? THEN IS HE IMPOTENT. IS HE ABLE, BUT NOT WILLING? THEN IS HE MALEVOLENT. IS HE BOTH ABLE AND WILLING? WHENCE THEN IS EVIL? - PHILO

Philo spells the problem out in more detail. He argues that God's omnipotence is incompatible with evil:

WHATEVER HE WILLS IS EXECUTED: BUT NEITHER MAN NOR ANY OTHER ANIMAL ARE HAPPY: THEREFORE HE DOES NOT WILL THEIR HAPPINESS - PHILO

He also sees a contradiction between an omniscient God and the existence of evil:

HE IS NEVER MISTAKEN IN CHOOSING THE MEANS TO ANY END: BUT THE COURSE OF NATURE TENDS NOT TO HUMAN OR ANIMAL FELICITY: THEREFORE IT IS NOT ESTABLISHED FOR THAT PURPOSE - PHILO

Philo believes that this is a sound a priori argument against the existence of God:

NOTHING CAN SHAKE THE SOLIDITY OF THIS REASONING, SO SHORT, SO CLEAR, SO DECISIVE - PHILO

However, Philo is willing for the sake of argument to "allow, that pain or misery in man is compatible with infinite power and goodness in the deity". In other words, though he thinks the Logical Problem of Evil is unanswerable, he is more interested in discussing the Evidential Problem of Evil.

Hume presents evidential problem of evil by looking at prior probability – he asks if a stranger arrives in our world with no preconceptions about what to expect, would they look at it and conclude it to be the work of a good God?

Hume concludes that the Stranger to our world would NOT decide it was designed by a good God - that conclusion seems unlikely and has low prior probability.

Philo gives the example of someone being shown a house full of imperfections (e.g. the roof leaks, there are holes in the walls, the stairs are unsafe). The explanation for each flaw is that it prevents an even more disastrous structural flaw (e.g. the leaky roof stops the fire hazard in the kitchen). Someone viewing a house like this would be surprised to learn that it was designed by a great architect. Philo uses this analogy to show that we ought to be sceptical of the idea that the world was designed by a perfect being.

Has Hume disproved God using the problem of evil?

YES

Hume establishes that the **Logical Problem of Evil** is an *a priori* (from definition) proof that God cannot exist because his characteristics contradict each other. If God existed, there would not be evil, but since there is evil, God (as religious believers define him) cannot exist.

Hume uses the **Evidential Problem of Evil** to show that, even if God isn't impossible, he's still **very unlikely**. The idea of the "Stranger" visiting our world illustrates that **no one would conclude that God exists** purely from considering the evidence. There are many ways in which the universe **could contain less suffering** and which don't involve any sort of logical contradiction or loss of goodness.

NO

Hume (as Philo) asserts the **Logical Problem of Evil** but doesn't defend it. He ends up proposing a form of **Deism** - that God exists, but without the moral perfection ascribed to him by traditional religion. There are many **theodicies** (solutions) which explain why God might **permit** evil.

Hume deliberately **ignores doctrine-based theodicies** and doesn't consider the **Afterlife**, the **Fall** or the activity of **Satan** - but these are very important theodicies for most religious believers. Moreover, Hume concentrates almost exclusively on happiness (defined as a lack of physical suffering), but a good God might be more concerned with other things (like **freewill** or **soul-making**).

The nature of the problem across a range of religious traditions

Judaism: the Sufferings of Job

In Judaism, God is also seen as a divine person who is morally perfect. There is less emphasis on God's love but more on his covenant (agreement) with the Jewish people: God blesses and protects his people and they serve and worship him alone. God is just and merciful towards non-Jews as well.

The Hebrew Bible (and Christian Old Testament) describes the story of Job, who is tormented by Satan with God's permission. Job loses his wealth and his family and suffers disfiguring diseases.

Job never loses his faith in God, but he is convinced God has treated him unfairly.

At the end of the story, God appears in the form of a lightning storm and reveals himself to Job as a numinous being who is beyond human understanding. Job repents for questioning God's ways and God rewards Job for his faith with health, wealth and happiness.

There are many different interpretations of the story of Job. One of its main messages is that the sort of intellectual solutions to the Problem of Evil put forward by Job's friends (who argue that Job's sufferings are a punishment for his sins) don't work. Job's response to suffering is not to understand it intellectually, but to embrace it and worship God. However, this conclusion - that suffering cannot be understood except through faith - is not very attractive to philosophers.

Islam: God's Absolute Sovereignty

In the Islamic tradition, God (Allah) is a divine person who is morally perfect. However, there is a greater emphasis on God's omnipotence and sovereignty - his complete control over everything that happens. The world operates according to the divine plan, although we might not understand it. Even things as small as a mosquito have a part in that plan.

Some Muslim thinkers argue that everything proceeds from God - even evil and suffering - but others argue that evil is largely the responsibility of human beings.

CORRUPTION HAS APPEARED IN THE EARTH BECAUSE OF WHAT THE HANDS OF MAN HAVE WROUGHT - THE QURAN 30: 41

Most Muslims take a mixed view: humans are responsible for much evil, through their own selfishness or ignorance; however, some hardships are seen as a punishment for the collective wrongs of a people and others are a means of purification for individuals, so that they can repent what they've done wrong. Muslims believe God sends prophets and messengers to guide humans in a proper way of life that would reduce suffering, if only we followed it..

Because God is just, there is an afterlife and those who do good works will have their reward but those who do evil will suffer the consequences. This means that, even if God appears to be allowing evil, he will take back control and assert his sovereignty in the end.

The Islamic solution can pose a problem for philosophers, since it suggests that God's goodness is not understandable in human terms. In the Islamic tradition, God has absolute omnipotence and isn't limited to doing only what is logically possible; this makes it hard to analyse evil in relation to God because God can be morally good and yet cause evil things to happen (it sounds illogical, but logic doesn't apply to God).

Hinduism: Suffering is Karma

Hinduism has many different traditions, but most of them do not focus on a single divine person who is the creator of the universe and is responsible for what happens.

Hinduism is usually a monist religion, in which positive and negative forces are different aspects of God: Brahma creates and Vishnu preserves but Shiva destroys so that Brahma can create anew.

This Hindu tradition therefore regards much natural evil as an expression of God - it is Shiva, the Lord of the Dance, who brings death and destruction so that there can be new life.

In Hinduism, there is also a belief in karma and reincarnation. Karma ("action") is the consequence of our previous behaviour (perhaps in previous lives) playing out in our current life. Therefore, a lot of things that appear to be natural evil (like disease, disability, hunger or just bad luck) are in fact the karma produced by our own wickedness in the past. After we die, we are reincarnated and the karma from our old life affects the next one.

The idea of karma completely blurs the distinction between natural and moral evil that is so clear in the theistic traditions. Many things that seem like accidents or natural disasters may in fact be caused by moral evil.

In Hinduism there is an inevitability to evil and suffering. However, goodness and growth comes out of evil and suffering so, viewed this way, evil is not really evil at all.

Hinduism largely avoids the Problem of Evil, but creates other problems. If evil, suffering and destruction are just as much an expression of God as goodness, happiness and love, which should we fight against evil? Why not embrace it?

3.2. Theodicies and solutions to the problem of suffering

- a) *Belief that creation was good; evil and suffering is a privation of good due to the fall of the angels and man because of the misuse of free will, soul-deciding, significance of reconciliation.*
- b) *Belief that creation is a mix of good and evil linked to the vale of soul making theodicy, including free will defence, best of all possible worlds, epistemic distance, eschatological justification.*
- c) *Process theodicy: God is not responsible for evil and suffering, but he is co-sufferer and cannot coerce the free will of human agents.*
- d) *Strengths and weaknesses of theodicies and solutions: compatibility or otherwise with modern views about origins of life, nature of God, innocent suffering, hypothesis of life after death.*

With reference to the ideas of Augustine and Irenaeus.

A justification of God in the face of evil and suffering is a THEODICY. The word "theodicy" was coined by the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz in the 17th century, but the idea of theodicies goes back to ancient times.

Leibniz - A theodicy must...

- not attempt to give other reasons why God exists
- not deny the reality of evil
- not suggest that one should give up faith

A theodicy must offer a convincing reason why it is a better state of affairs by God not removing evil than if he did remove evil.

Three types of theodicy:

1. Punitive or penitential theodicies (suffering sent by the gods as a punishment for human wickedness)
2. Practical or spiritual theodicies (evil and suffering are not there to be understood, they are there to be embraced – in suffering there is an encounter with God and a deepening of faith, e.g. Job). However this is not a philosophical solution – why is there any need to deepen faith through suffering?
3. Philosophical theodicies (try to make logical sense of evil and suffering)

There is also the freewill defence, which isn't a "solution" but a 'defence' against the evidential problem of evil's conclusion that belief in God is irrational in a world that contains so much suffering.

Evil having a purpose

Is the existence of evil in the world explained as a form of punishment for wrongdoing?

For example, the story of Job. Job's suffering were unconnected with his deeds. Yet belief and faith was what mattered. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand" (Job 38:4).

Many people believe evil being a punishment from God is in keeping with the concept of God.

However... is this just? How can you justify the death of innocent people through this definition of evil?

Belief that creation is good – privation of good

The privation theory of evil is that evil does not really exist. Evil is really a privation (absence) of good. Analogies to support this:

- Light and dark: light is a real force but darkness is not; darkness is just what you have when you don't have enough light
- Heat and cold
- Health and sicknesses
- Kindness and cruelty

Privation theory makes the assumption that existence is the ultimate form of goodness, so anything that exists has some goodness to it. Therefore, only God is perfectly good, since he is the source of all existence - but even the Devil is not entirely evil, since (if he exists) he has at least some goodness. Absolute evil would be absolute non-existence, therefore pure evil cannot exist.

One objection to privation theory is that it seems to contain the assumption that evil is the basic state of the universe. Good exists through God's constant effort and everything has a tendency to lapse back into evil and non-existence without God's input.

Some of the analogies don't work – e.g. sickness isn't just the absence of health, it's often the presence of another sort of life.

Why can't the universe be innately evil – goodness might be a privation of evil? After all, most of the universe is empty and utterly hostile to life. Life and intelligence and happiness seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Misuse of freewill (Augustinian theodicy)

For privation theory to work, there needs to be an explanation for how a good Creation could go badly wrong. Theists like Augustine of Hippo point to the misuse of freewill by God's creatures.

Genesis 3 describes how the first humans are tempted to break God's rule. As a punishment, are expelled from Paradise. This rebellion against God and conflict between God and his creatures is called "the Fall".

According to this view, humans are now Fallen creatures - our wicked impulses are much stronger than they were when God created us and our desire to do good is much weaker; it's harder for us to resist the temptation to do wrong. Moreover, Fallen humans seem to be frailer creatures than the ones God originally created - more susceptible to pain and sickness for example. The sin of Adam is present in all human beings and we share a collective guilt for his sins.

| Strengths of Augustinian theodicy | Weaknesses of Augustinian theodicy |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clears God of responsibility for evil because evil is committed by humans using freewill to rebel against God • God is loving because he sent Jesus to earth so that all who believed in him could be absolved of sin and repair the bridge between man and God | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can a perfectly created world go wrong? Evil must have appeared from nowhere • If humans had the ability to disobey God, knowledge of good and evil must already have existed. • Evolution showed that the world has become more ordered over time, rather than the opposite due to man destroying creation with evil. We have evolved more morals as we live, rather than losing them. Suffering is an essential part of our survival • If hell exists, surely God must have known something would have gone wrong? Why is hell part of the creation? This suggests an angry, malicious God |

The misuse of freewill by humans explains a lot of [moral evil](#), but it doesn't explain [natural evil](#) so well.

A related explanation is that humans are not the only creatures in the universe that misuse their freewill. **Angels** are supposed to be freewilled creatures and the Bible describes a "war in heaven" in which rebel angels, led by Lucifer (later known as Satan) turn against God.

Lucifer is motivated by pride - a sin that doesn't require any outside cause or temptation. In Christian tradition, the serpent who tempts Adam and Eve is really Lucifer, continuing his war against God by trying to ruin God's Creation.

Taken together, the corruption of humans and angels are ideas that support privation theory. Because these are ideas that come from [revelation](#) (the Bible, possibly [religious experience](#)), rather than reason alone, they are ideas that will only be persuasive for people who are already religious believers and not for most atheists. However, they do make up a solution to the Logical Problem of Evil and a response to the Evidential Problem of Evil.

Soul-deciding

If God is omniscient, then he knows the future choices of his freewilled creatures in advance. Does this make him responsible for the privation of goodness their misuse of freewill causes?

[Augustine of Hippo](#) argues that, before the Creation of the world, God foresees every creature's choices and decides those creatures will go to heaven or hell based on their choices. This is known as PREDESTINATION.

Soul-deciding involves the idea that humans decide their own fate by exercising freewill, but also that God is deciding their fate when he creates them. Souls that go to hell deserve their punishment, because their sins really were their own choices, but they also enable God to demonstrate his justice and moral perfection, because he always knows what his creatures will do and judges them for it.

The idea of soul-deciding tries to preserve both the significance of freewill AND God's omnipotence. It does this because:

1. humans freely choose to sin; but
2. God knows what they are going to do and treats them according to strict justice

Many critics feel there is a deep contradiction here.

1. If humans freely choose to sin, how can God know what they are going to do beforehand?
2. If God knows what they are going to do, how can they freely choose to do it?

Significance of reconciliation

The theory of privation seems to paint God as a cold and merciless character. He creates imperfect humans who Fall, then he punishes them with an eternity in Hell. Even if we accept the logic of the argument, it still makes God's justice seem to be lacking in compassion.

Fortunately, there's a way out of this. In the Christian tradition, God offers reconciliation to humans - a chance to start over. God doesn't **have** to do this: his Justice is perfect and he's entirely in the right. However, because God is loving and compassionate, he offers sinners a chance to be redeemed (taken back into paradise).

God does this by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to die on behalf of sinful humans. Christians differ on exactly what Christ's death means and how it brings about reconciliation between sinful humans and a morally perfect God. They do agree that humans are reconciled with God as a result of this. Some Christians argue that humans must make a deliberate decision to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour - others

believe this reconciliation can be accomplished by membership of the church (usually beginning with baptism as a baby).

Because of this, Christians believe they will be admitted to heaven **despite** their sins.

Belief that creation is a mix of good and evil – “vale of soul-making”

Irenaean Theodicy

States that God is responsible for evil but that is justified as it benefits human development.

The Irenaean Theodicy rests on an early incarnation of possible world theory. It states that this world must be the ‘**best of all possible worlds**’.

Two stages of creation of humans:

1. Image of God: we are brought into this world as intelligent but immature beings with the capacity to achieve perfection
2. Likeness of God: by developing over a long period of time, we would grow into the likeness of God – perfect moral and spiritual beings

IMAGE OF GOD → LIKENESS OF GOD

God couldn’t have created us perfectly because attaining the ‘likeness of God’ must have the willing cooperation of the human individual. Therefore God had to give us freewill to choose to act in the likeness of God. Therefore God had to allow evil and suffering as it is part of his plan for humanity; it enables us to develop the characteristics needed for perfection.

ESCHATOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION: God cannot intervene otherwise our freedom to choose will be lost.

1. The existence of evil clearly exists
2. Humans are made with the potential to be like God but suffering is a way of forming our souls
3. This is the best possible world there can be, as the evil is outweighed by God giving us the opportunity to be good.

John Hick’s Soul-making

John Hick takes Keats' soul-making phrase and uses it to explain how evil and suffering help people develop into more moral, holy and spiritual people. The world is a place (a 'vale') where souls are strengthened and improved, so that they can be ready for heaven.

The idea behind this theodicy is that God deliberately creates a world with some evil and the potential for suffering in it. God does this because he wants his freewilled creatures to grow and change. In particular, he wants them to develop morally.

Developed the Irenaean theodicy claiming that emotions and actions based on freewill were greater than if we were programmed to do them.

It is possible that God could create a perfect world where everyone was good, but then goodness would be without value. If God wants humans to be genuinely loving then God was right to let humans have the freedom to develop this love for themselves.

Hick admits that this makes God partly responsible for the evil in the world. However he argues that God has good reason for allowing evil to stay and it doesn't count against his goodness. God has to allow humans to develop themselves because when a person develops qualities overcoming temptations and challenges, these are “intrinsically more valuable than virtues created within him ready made without effort on his own part” - **John Hick**.

Hick is arguing that a world with creatures who have achieved goodness through their own effort is a better world than one without moral effort - and that God always creates the best world.

| Strengths of Irenaean theodicy | Weaknesses of Irenaean theodicy |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the best possible world (Modalism) – this is the best possible world there can be, as the evil is outweighed by God giving us the opportunity to be good • Evil is justified to benefit human development • The Soul-Making Theodicy is an attractive one because it presents God as a loving parent who wants his children to learn and grow on their own, rather than as a ruler and dictator who demands obedience with threats. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couldn’t we have longer lives to achieve perfection? • Does suffering lead to genuine human challenges? Do extremes of suffering produce chances to improve? • It justifies natural evil as something good • People who have suffered are often made worse by their experiences • People can develop good qualities without suffering • How long will this process of human development take? When will it end? • Can mentally disturbed people be accountable for their evil actions? • Evil appears to be a randomly occurring event. Why do some suffer and others not? • Evil is sometimes excessive, leaving people embittered and making them morally worse, not morally better. Gratuitous evils do not seem to benefit anybody. |

Epistemic Distance

Linked to the Soul-Making Theodicy is the idea of the "hiddenness" of God, which [John Hick](#) calls epistemic distance. Hick argues that God could have created humans so that they were automatically aware of his divine power, but if God had done this then humans would have no freedom. God has set this "epistemic distance" (or 'knowledge gap') so that humans are not constantly aware of God. Feeling themselves to be alone in the universe, humans have to make choices for themselves. Humans have to seek God through faith but have the freedom of choice as to whether they worship or turn away from God.

The best of all possible worlds

A different approach is to recognise that the world is a mixture of good and evil, but that it is an optimal mixture, bringing about the most possible good for the least amount of evil.

Gottfried Leibniz developed the [Principle of Sufficient Reason \(PSR\)](#), which states that there should be a complete explanation for any state of affairs. Since this world exists, there must be a reason for God having created it (rather than creating a different possible world). Since God is perfect, it follows that God must have created *this* world because it is "*the best of all possible worlds*".

Leibniz is well aware that this world has many unpleasant features. However, it doesn't have to be a **perfect** world, just the best **POSSIBLE** world - the best world out of all the worlds God could possibly have created.

Leibniz points out that, although some features of the world (like volcanoes) might be very undesirable, we don't know if it's possible to create a world without those features - or at least, without losing certain other features, which are very desirable indeed. For example, volcanoes bring up minerals from deep in the earth which fertilise the soil on the surface. If the world had no volcanoes, it would have less fertile soil and more famine and starvation. Leibniz argues that we just don't know enough about how everything is interconnected to say with certainty that this world could be better than it is.

HOWEVER, it is not hard to think of examples of design in the world that could be corrected without upsetting the balance of the world, e.g. appendices, wisdom teeth.

Eschatological justification

Religious believers claim that evil and suffering are only for a finite time. God will bring an end to evil. God will judge evil, compensate those that have suffered and put their suffering perspective so that they understand it properly.

The Soul-Making Theodicy depends on the afterlife. This is partly because only a supremely good future in Heaven can justify the suffering some people endure on earth. In addition, [John Hick](#) recognises that the journey towards moral perfection is rarely "*completed in the life of the individual*" (except perhaps for a few people who are recognised as saints). If life ends at death, God's purpose of bringing about perfect creatures would fail. But an omnipotent being cannot fail to bring about its purposes, so there must be an afterlife.

Process theology / theodicy

- **Immutability:** God is unchanging and in a constant unchanging state.
- **Eternal:** God is eternal and has always existed and will always exist
- **Impassable:** God cannot be affected by things outside God's influence.

Process theology was originally proposed by [Alfred North Whitehead](#) (1861-1947) then developed by [Charles Hartshorne](#) (1897-2000).

According to Process Theology, God is connected to the physical world, not transcendent in the way that Thomas Aquinas believed. Process Theology is PANENTHEISM. Panentheism is belief in a God who is part of the physical universe AND exists beyond it.

Process theology leads to [process theodicy](#) because it offers a solution to the problem of evil.

GOD IS NOT OMNIPOTENT - God created the world, God is still bound by natural laws.

Maximal power not unlimited power. Power possessed to the logical limit.

Discord (evil) is a natural part of the process. - The world and God are synonymous.

God does not have the power to stop evil as he is not in control of the natural process. God does have a responsibility as God started the natural processes.

- God is not omnipotent or moral perfect and so could not create a perfect universe - just a universe with the POTENTIAL for future perfection; this explains NATURAL EVIL
- Similarly, he could not create perfect humans - just humans with the potential for perfection; this explains MORAL EVIL
- Since God is imperfect, he sometimes causes evil and suffering - or fails to prevent evil and suffering

God as a "fellow sufferer"

Process Theology argues that there must be "*real relations*" in God. A "*relational*" God is a God who can have real relations with other beings - who can love and pity, hold hopes and be disappointed, can condemn and forgive.

Whitehead argues that a relational God actually cares for humans, not in a detached philosophical way but sharing their joys and sorrows.

This is the idea of a God who can suffer and feel pleasure - and therefore understands human suffering and pleasure. It links to Christian teachings because God suffers as Jesus, on the Cross, and is therefore part of all human suffering.

Criticisms of Process theodicies

- Is it even a theodicy?
- It is elitist. Many suffer but few gain.
- The God of classical theism is necessary for it to be God.
- Should you worship a less than perfect being?
- There is no promise of heaven, or respite, no idea that the innocent will be rewarded in the next life.
- If good has outweighed evil, does that give any comfort to people who have suffered?

MACKIE'S CRITIQUE (anthology)

1. Evil exists
2. The best possible world would be free of all evil
3. A good God would want to actualise the best possible world
4. An almighty God would be able to actualise the best possible world
5. Therefore there is no good and almighty God

Mackie examines the four solutions to the problem of evil and finds them all unsatisfactory. Concludes it is not possible to logically dismiss the problem of evil.

**See additional anthology study guide for more on Mackie.*

Unit 4: Religious Language

Philosophy of language primary concern is the relationship between language and the reality of world as it is, and for whether unverifiable statements about the world can also be meaningful.

Cognitive (or realist) - Language that deals with factual statements that can be proved to be either true or false.

Non-Cognitive (or anti-realist) - Language which deals with statements that are not meant to be taken factually, but understood as: myths, symbols or moral commands.

The problem is one of meaning. If we are to believe in God or some other aspect of religion, we can only do this if we can use language to talk about it in a meaningful way. If talk of God is nonsense then the idea of God is nonsense. **If God cannot be described then there may be little scope for belief.**

Another area or problem on which you tend to get exam question is analogy and / or symbol. We are looking at attempts to say that religious language *can* be used meaningfully, only not in a direct or simplistically descriptive sense. Philosophers like Aquinas and Tillich try to show how language might *relate* to God.

4.1 Analogy and Symbol

a) *Analogy: via negativa, knowledge about God may be gained by what God is not like, univocal language and problems of anthropomorphism, equivocal language and problems of attribution, significance of proportional similarities and dissimilarities.*

With reference to the ideas of Aquinas.

b) *Symbol: types of symbol across a range of religious traditions, distinction between signs and symbols, symbols identifying and participating in a concept. Problems interpreting symbols and their limited application to a particular faith context.*

With reference to the ideas of P Tillich.

Analogy

Via Negativa

You can explain what God is like by saying what he is not like. You cannot use positive terms for God. By ruling out what he is not, we will discover what he is – principle of negation.

Supporters say it avoids the pitfalls of using inadequate human language to describe the qualities of God – it is easier to say what he is not.

Criticisms: Such an approach means we cannot describe God in factual terms, because it means reducing the divinity of God to the level of human language. Believers always want to speak positively about God and insist that speaking of him in terms of negation fails to say anything meaningful about him at all.

Univocal language

Language meaning exactly the same thing in all situations.

Using words in the everyday sense in every case. We can understand religious statements because we understand the everyday sense of the words used. The word used has been used for the exact same reasons. So speaking of love and God's love would have the same connotation. Makes God understandable.

Example: 'God's omnipotence' can be understood because we understand the meaning of the words 'all' and 'powerful' in their everyday sense.

Hume: "Wisdom, thought, design, knowledge- these we justly ascribe to him because those words are honourable among men, and we have no other language by which we can express our adoration of him"

Problems with univocal language

Anthropomorphism: If we refer to God in the same way as humans then we can't differentiate between the two. Can this be right?

Aquinas wrote in Summa Theologica: "But no name belongs to God in the same sense that it belongs to creatures; for instance, wisdom in creatures is a quality, but not in God."

If we say 'that lesson was good' then 'good' means something different from saying 'God is good' since God is perfect and infinite.

Equivocal language

Equivocal language: the same word is used with a totally different meaning, or in a vague or ambiguous way.

Language meaning different things in different situations. E.g. gay can mean happy or homosexual.

Example: God's love is a different thing to human love.

Problems with equivocal language

Aquinas: "Neither, on the other hand, are names applied to God and creatures in a purely equivocal sense, as some have said. Because if that were so, it follows that from creatures nothing could be known or demonstrated about God at all; for the reasoning would always be exposed to the fallacy of equivocation."

This is called the problem of **attribution**.

Significance of proportional similarities and dissimilarities

"Analogies are proportional similarities which also acknowledge dissimilar features" Burrell.

AQUINAS: First argued that religious language is not univocal or equivocal, but **analogous**. All the goodness and love in humanity came from God and, therefore, God and humanity are 'analogously related' to him.

An analogy is an attempt to explain the meaning of something by comparison with an example more familiar to us.

Aquinas was concerned by the problem of explaining God in human language; God is supposedly perfect and infinite, so he might defy description.

"Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like... Therefore, there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection, and this we call God"

Since God is the cause of good things in humanity, we can use the description 'good' of both God and humans but, as the cause of human goodness, God's goodness is greater.

A famous analogy is Paley's watchmaker. He explains the purpose of the universe by comparing its design to an intricate mechanism. So, he argued, God is like a watchmaker. For Aquinas, such comparisons were needed for all talk of God.

To make an analogy we would be saying that God is not just like us, but nor is he nothing like us and our world. By finding appropriate language, Aquinas thought we could say broadly what God is like. This would give us partial but justifiable knowledge of God.

But Aquinas' theory only works if we take God for granted – it assumes God exists.

Analogy of proportionality and attribution

Analogy of proportionality: All good qualities belong infinitely to God and, in proportion, to humans. All humans possess God's qualities because we are created in his image. Yet because God is perfect, we have his qualities in a lesser proportion.

Analogy of attribution: God is the cause of all good things in humans; therefore, God's attributes are simply a higher level of our own. If God made the world then we could expect the world to reflect God in some way, so we would be justified in drawing analogies between the world and God. John Hick used upwards analogies: the faithfulness of a dog, the faithfulness of humans, the faithfulness of God.

Criticisms of analogy

- We could criticise Aquinas' claims about proportionate analogy, since we may dispute whether humans were really created in the image of God (e.g. Dawkins / evolution)
- Is the evil in our world also an analogy to God?
- The object we are drawing analogy to cannot be verified
- Swinburne criticises Aquinas for producing an unnecessary theory. He claims that we *can* speak of God and humans as 'good' univocally, it is just that God and humans possess goodness in different ways. It is still the same essential quality, even though God is perfect and humans are not

Symbol

Tillich took a different approach in attempting to show that religious language can be meaningful. He focused on the manner in which symbols may affect humans.

A symbol is something that **identifies** a concept that it is referring to and also **participates** in the meaning of that concept.

Signs: provide information.

Paul Tillich in Systematic Theology: symbol is a positive way of expressing the nature of God in terms of "that which concerns us ultimately"

"Symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate because it transcends the capacity of any finite reality to express it directly"

TILlich - Symbols are not signs. Both of these point to something beyond themselves, but only symbols '**participate**' in what they point to. E.g. a road sign just points to a fact about a road, whereas a symbolic flag participates in the power of the king or the nation.

1. They point to something beyond themselves
2. They participate in that to which they point,
3. They open up levels of reality which otherwise are closed to us
4. They open up dimensions of the soul which correspond to those aspects of reality.

Types of symbol

The Christian cross. It is not just a marker for Christianity but it also makes a powerful statement. It draws Christians to participate in what they see as the reality of the messiah. It reminds Christians of Jesus' sacrifice and the redemption it brings. Yet it is also a prompt for prayer, worship and meditation. This means that Christians take an active interest in the cross, which is what Tillich thought that symbolism was all about.

Problems interpreting symbols

The main problem is that symbols can be open to different interpretations, as a result they can become:

- The original meaning is lost or trivialised.
- They can change the focus of worship.
- Outdated
- Hick argues that the idea of 'participating' in a symbol is unclear – e.g. the flag, in what sense does it really do something?
- Since Tillich's symbols are not literally true, William Alston feels that they could have no meaningful impact on us. They could not send us to heaven or hell, for example

4.2 Verification and falsification debates

a) *Context of Logical Positivism and the Vienna Circle, analytic and synthetic statements, implications for the claim that religious language is meaningless; view that religious claims are false because nothing can count against them; 'blik's' as unfalsifiable ways of framing our interpretation of the world compared to beliefs that are significant articles of faith which may be significantly challenged but not easily abandoned.*

b) *Strengths and weakness of these approaches, including realist and anti-realist views and eschatological verification.*

With reference to the ideas of A J Ayer and B Mitchell.

ANTHOLOGIES:

(2) Mitchell B (ed) – The Philosophy of Religion, 1st edition, Flew A, Hare R M – Chapter 1 Theology and Falsification: A Symposium, pp. 13-18 (Oxford University Press, 1976)

(3) Mitchell B (ed) – The Philosophy of Religion, 1st edition, Flew A, Mitchell B – Chapter 1 Theology and Falsification: A Symposium, pp.18-22 (Oxford University Press, 1976)

Context of logical positivism and the Vienna Circle

The Vienna Circle was a group of early twentieth-century philosophers who sought to reconceptualize empiricism by means of their interpretation of then recent advances in sciences. Their radically anti-metaphysical stance was supported by promoting empiricism and mathematics.

The Vienna Circle's theories were constantly changing. In spite (or perhaps because) of this, they helped to provide the blueprint for analytical philosophy of science as meta-theory—a "second-order" reflection of "first-order" sciences. While the Vienna Circle's early form of logical positivism is far less popular than it used, it had a profound effect on the understanding of philosophy ever since

Influenced by Wittgenstein, who suggested that meaningful language is connected with the things we know from our senses. The Logical Positivists caught onto this idea and used it to challenge religion: how could religious language link with sense experience?

Verification: Ayer

Analytic and Synthetic statements (Ayer)

Verification means checking a statement to see if it's true. The Verification Principle states that: "a statement which cannot be conclusively verified... is simply devoid of meaning".

Analytic statements: true by virtue of their meaning, by definition, e.g. $2+2=4$.

Synthetic statements: true by how their meaning relates to the world, confirmed by the senses, e.g. I can see that it's fish for lunch on Tuesday.

Implications for the claim that religious language is meaningless

Ayer thought that religious claims are non-cognitive and impossible to verify, so they are meaningless. He does not say they are false, it's more that they cannot really tell us anything at all.

E.g. "God is all loving and all powerful" – not analytically verifiable, not synthetically verifiable, therefore for Ayer it's meaningless.

"No sentence which describes the nature of a transcendent God can possess any literal significance".

Strengths of verification

- Saves wasted time discussing God
- We often regard verification and falsification as ways of distinguishing between sense and nonsense
- Supports the design argument for God's existence because it is based on a posteriori evidence
- Supports the claim of an afterlife and religious experience

A problem in verification

However, the idea of Verification Principle faces a number of serious problems – how much can we *really* verify? E.g. did King Harold die at the battle of Hastings? We can look at some historical records which say he did, but we cannot (a) observe it ourselves or (b) subject the hypothesis to any new or further forms of testing.

Weak verification principle

To get around this problem, Ayer developed the weak verification principle. Instead of checking every bit of knowledge with our logic or senses, he suggested that we might know things by setting up sensible standards for evidence – eye-witness accounts, multiple sources, etc.

Criticisms of verification

- How much can we *really* verify? For example: did King Harold die at the battle of Hastings? We can look at some historical records which say he did, but we cannot (a) observe it ourselves, or (b) subject the hypothesis to any new or further forms of testing. Perhaps a lot of what we take for knowledge defies strict verification.
- **John Hick**: God might be verifiable *in principle*. Convincing evidence is not apparent now, but it could be in the future. 'Eschatological verification'.
- **Richard Swinburne**: there are propositions which no-one knows how to verify but still are not meaningless. No observation could ever establish this as truth, but it's not meaningless (incomprehensible, gibberish).
- **The Verification Principle might contradict itself**. The claim that a statement is only meaningful if it can be verified analytically or synthetically *cannot* itself be verified analytically or synthetically.
- There are many terms that are metaphysical (such as love and beauty) which do have meaning for the users and the effects of these metaphysical terms can be seen through one's actions (empirically)
- **Vardy** argues that the fact that you can't verify it doesn't mean that it is meaningless
- It is not consistent with modern science as many scientific statements such as atoms or forces are not verifiable
- **Keith Ward** reasoned that God's existence can, in principle, be verified since God himself can verify his own existence

Eschatological verification

Eschatological verification describes a process whereby a proposition can be verified after death. A proposition such as "there is an afterlife" is verifiable if true but not falsifiable if false (if it's false, the individual will not know it's false, because they have no state of being).

John Hick: "Two men are travelling together along a road. One of them believes that it leads to the Celestial City, the other that it leads nowhere. But since this is the only road there is, both must travel it. Neither has been this way before, therefore neither is able to say what they will find around each corner. During their journey they meet with moments of refreshment and delight, and with moments of hardship and danger. All the time one of them thinks of his journey as a pilgrimage to the Celestial City ... The other, however, believes none of this, and sees their journey as an unavoidable and aimless ramble ... Yet, when they turn the last corner, it will be apparent that one of them has been right all the time and the other wrong..."

Falsification: Anthony Flew

This is the inverse of verification: Flew claimed that any positive claim we might also assumes that we deny its negation. If I say that school work is fun, I am also saying that school work is not, not fun.

A statement can only have meaning if you know what it is that would prove the statement false.

Anthony Flew: The problem with religious language is that it often implies that it could never be falsified: "I know that God loves me in a special and mysterious way which no-one may question or disprove". If God is just a mystery, then we are not using language in a constructive, meaningful way.

Flew argued that language is only meaningful if we can conceive of some evidence which might count against it. It's only meaningful to say that school work is fun because students *might* be able to show contradictory information: boring research projects or a limited syllabus.

The problem with God talk is that it often implies that it could never be falsified: "I know that God loves me a special and mysterious way which no one may question or disprove". If God is just a mystery, then we are not using language in a constructive, meaningful way.

Falsification and Bliks (Hare)

The philosopher Hare took up the idea of falsification and used it to describe certain beliefs which he called 'bliks'.

A blik is a non-rational belief which could never be falsified (disproved). For example, let us say that a student is convinced that his philosophy teacher is trying to kill him but, as his friends point out, there's no evidence at all that this is the case. The student may say that this teacher is so clever that he would never leave any evidence of any kind. Bliks are not necessarily untrue (some are sane and some insane), but they are groundless.

Hick responds to Hare by arguing that there are reasons behind religious beliefs: experiences, Scripture, etc. He also objects that there is no way to distinguish between sane or insane bliks, and the judgement that religion is insane could only ever be arbitrary.

Basil Mitchell's criticisms of falsification

Basil Mitchell objects to the idea that religious claims are groundless 'bliks'. He argues that religious claims are grounded in some facts and that the faithful do allow that evidence may stand against what they believe. They recognise, for example, the problem of evil. However, they do not allow that belief can or should be verified in a simple manner.

Religious claims are grounded in some facts and that the faithful do allow that evidence may stand against what they believe.

Mitchell draws a parable of a man claiming to be the leader of a resistance movement – it seems that he supports the fight but sometimes seems to help the enemy. One could choose to trust him despite the contrary evidence. So with God: one could trust in God while recognising the contrary evidence: that he allows evil and suffering, or disbelief.

Analogy of the resistance fighter – it seems he supports the fight but sometimes seems to help the enemy. One could choose to trust him despite the contrary evidence. So with God: one could trust in God while recognising the contrary evidence: that he allows evil and suffering, or disbelief.

4.3 Language games

a) Critique of picture theory, functional uses of language in the context of a form of life. Non-cognitive interpretation of language and criteria of coherence in the relevant language game, highlights the distinctive character of religious language, significance of fideism in this context – language can only be understood in the context of faith.

With reference to the ideas of L Wittgenstein and D Phillips.

Critique of picture theory

Wittgenstein in the Tractatus.

Picture theory: Picture theory of language states that statements are meaningful if they can be defined or pictured in the real world.

The aim of the theory was to set out an account of what sentences mean and give us a way of distinguishing sense from nonsense. The theory says *the function of language is to allow us to picture things*.

This is what influenced the Vienna Circle.

Functional uses of language

Much later in his career, years after he had influenced the logical positivists, Wittgenstein changed his views on how language works.

He became much less focused on the truth or falsity of language and focused on the uses language can be put to.

He argued that words have no objective reference points; they simply reflect systems of behaviour.

For religious language, he thought that **function** might be more important than meaning.

Language games

In Philosophical Investigations: Wittgenstein argued that language works through a series of 'language games'. That is, meaning only comes out of context; we have to know what 'game' that our terms are participating in.

He then went on to say that problems in philosophy may occur through misunderstanding that words can be used in different language games. The problems are not really inherent in the words themselves.

For Wittgenstein, meaning is all about observing convention – just like in a game. There's a right way and a wrong way to do things.

So with religion – there might be conventional or unconventional ways to talk about God.

Language games and religion

The theory of language games could be important because of the connection it makes with the 'coherence theory of truth'. This is the view that statements are true if they fit with other statements and beliefs which are internally consistent.

One could argue that the 'game' of religious language cannot be criticised because internally it is coherent and intelligible. Religious views fit with other religious views. Perhaps religion is just a 'language game', and it will all make sense if we just participate.

The danger of this is that it could be too relativistic, allowing *any* claims to be equally valid. It also doesn't explain *how* we could challenge truth claims.

Furthermore, it's not quite clear whether Wittgenstein thought of religion as a 'language game'.

D Z Phillips

One philosopher who has applied Wittgenstein's theory to religious belief is D.Z. Phillips.

Phillips takes on the idea that religion is a language game, extending this to the claim that religion cannot be either grounded or criticised in reason – it is a system all of its own.

For Phillips, the 'reality' of God or religion does not lie in the abstract issue of whether God exists, but instead is located in the words and practice of religion. What God is, is defined by the language game of faith.

Just as in the general games of life, we do not require an abstract justification to work out 'what they are all about', so too with religion: we have to take part to find out.

Fideism

The doctrine that knowledge depends on faith or revelation. Faith is independent of reason. Therefore language can only be understood in the context of faith.

Religion is a self-contained—and primarily expressive—enterprise, governed by its own internal logic or "grammar". This view—commonly called Wittgensteinian fideism—states:

- (1) that religion is logically cut off from other aspects of life;
- (2) that religious concepts and discourse are essentially self-referential; and
- (3) that religion cannot be criticized from an external (i.e., non-religious) point of view.

Strengths of language games

- Makes a connection with the 'coherence theory of truth' – statements are true if they fit with other statements and beliefs which are internally consistent
- 'Game' of religious language cannot be criticised because internally it is coherent and intelligible

Weaknesses of Wittgenstein / Phillips

- Controversial as they reject the popular view that language can be objective and scientific.
- Too relativistic, allowing any claims to be equally valid. How do we challenge truth claims?
- Wittgenstein implies that our language can never convey truth in an absolute sense
- Wittgenstein's theory implies that there could be no progress in philosophical debates, which are based on misunderstandings of language.
- Phillips claims Wittgenstein's arguments support his view of religion, but arguably this leads to irrationalism and blind faith. Why should believers be allowed to say that the game of religious language requires no justification? This could be used to justify extremism and superstition.
- Wittgenstein not clear on whether religion was a language game

Unit 5: Works of Scholars

5.1 Context to critiques of religious belief and points for discussion

- a) *Respective strengths and weaknesses of religious beliefs.*
- b) *Alternative explanations, issues of probability and postmodern interpretations of religion.*
- c) *Key terms, types of atheism and agnosticism.*

With reference to the ideas of R Dawkins and M Westphal.

Key terms

Weak atheism: Simple scepticism about the existence of God

Strong atheism: Stating explicitly that God does not exist. Strong Atheism could also be expressed as anti-theism

Agnosticism: holds that it is not possible to know whether God exists, or to know his nature. Agnosticism does not deny the possibility of knowledge leading to belief, but does not state what form this knowledge would take.

Agnosticism partly began with David Hume. David Hume brought around the idea of positive knowledge, that we can only know what is regular, observable sequences and connections.

It did not imply causes, powers, natures, essences or purpose. This was the disassociation of science from metaphysics. Science and philosophy grew to have different aims and began to answer different questions that the other could not answer.

The basis of atheism

Atheists may adopt their position for several reasons, including:

- The view that there is no such being to whom the description 'God' can be given (criticism from language)
- Experiences of God can be accounted for in other ways
- Evil and suffering
- Dislike or distrust of organised religion
- The view that belief in God only serves to support those who are emotionally weak
- Contradictory teachings and lack of coherence

Burden of Proof

Many atheists adopt the position that the burden of proof lies with the theist to prove that, despite the lack of evidence to support the existence of God and the wealth of evidence that appears to count against it, God exists.

However, theists who are confident in their position say the onus is on the atheist to demonstrate why it is easier to argue in favour of the non-existence of God.

The problem can be set out in several ways, where X represents God:

- If X cannot be proved to exist, then X does not exist
- If X cannot be proved to exist, then X cannot be proved to exist
- If X cannot be proved to not exist, then X must exist
- If X cannot be proved to not exist, the X may exist

Critiques of religious beliefs

Functional Explanation: Describes the function that religion has in society, which may have nothing to do with the existence of God.

Projection Explanation: Describes the way in which humans project their fears, anxieties and unconscious feelings on to an object of worship.

EMILE DURKHEIM used a functional explanation of religion, saying that it serves to preserve and unite the community. Religion is a force that creates a moral obligation in the individual to adhere to families demands. Belief in God creates a unified social system which believes that it owes its being to God – this discourages change and explains phenomena that otherwise make little sense.

- Criticisms: Religious believers distinguish between membership of their religious community and belief in God – their primary loyalty is to God. The theory does not explain how religious believers are sometimes prepared to go against the norms of society, e.g. Martin Luther King.

KARL MARX gave a projection interpretation of religion, explaining it as a way of shoring up capitalism and keeping individuals satisfied. God is the 'opium of the masses' – an invention of the human mind in order to satisfy emotional needs and used by the ruling classes to dominate and oppress their subjects by offering them an illusion of escape.

- Took a sociological critique of religion
- Believed that by religion placing a 'Divine' (and non-existent) power at the top of the hierarchy led to a solid power structure and social dominance
- Believed religion was a mere 'smoke screen' or 'opiate' for religious believers who were stopped from rebelling or revolting.
- Religion claims the structures were 'natural order' given by God
- Therefore, the exploited end up co-operating with the rich and the powerful.
- Religion all rests on the thought of heaven which is comforting

Criticisms of Marx: In most societies, separation of church and state is far greater than Marx assumed. Liberation theology proves that Marxism and Christianity can be blended to create a society for the oppressed without rejecting belief in God.

DAWKINS is a fervent "anti-theist". He wants people to stop believing in God based on the following arguments:

1. God is not necessary (Darwinian argument)
2. Faith claims of religion are a retreat from an evidence-based quest for the truth
3. The issue of purpose and significance lies in humanity itself
4. The virus of religion – religion leads to evil, extremism and terror

Melvin Tinker opposes Dawkins – says he displays the characteristics of a 'scientific fundamentalist'. He counters Dawkins' claim that religious beliefs are 'memes', saying that ideas can be changed, genes cannot. He also accuses Dawkins of "ontological reductionism" – our sole purpose is *not* just to pass on our DNA (as Dawkins claims), we have other purposes too.

KIERKEGAARD didn't like the way in which the middles and advantaged classes assumed that they were favoured by God and his natural order.

- Offered a religious criticism of Christianity.
- He didn't like the way in which the middles and advantaged classes assumed that they were favoured by God and his natural order.
- That confuses the imperfect and limited human society with the ultimate.
- Christianity suggests we just have to be good Christians
- But this contrasts the life of Jesus who regularly criticised the establishment.

NIETZSCHE

- Religion is based on the slave revolt in morals.
- The weak (the religious believers) want to get revenge on the powerful.
- By linking up with the priests (the powerful) poor people could vent their frustration through religion
- This gives them a false sense of satisfaction – as though they are superior to the rich and strong
- God exists to punish the enemies (the strong)
- So it actually stops the 'slaves' from reaching their potential.
- Religion restricts humanity from reaching its full potential

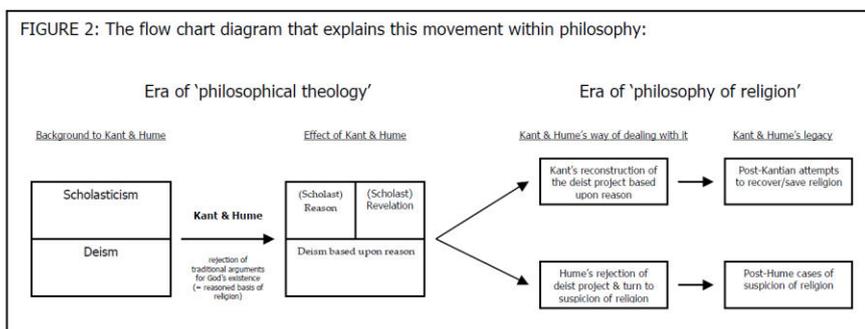
HUME

- Hume represented a shift in modern philosophy which did not accept traditional Christianity
- Hume thought religion was inherently flawed. The motives behind being religious may be flawed, thought Hume
- Political/power and eschatological motives mean people are simply adhering to religion for selfish reasons
- But Hume doesn't think that believers aren't aware that they are in fact for selfish reasons
- You could mention Hume's fork as an example of ways in which Hume criticised moral and dogmatic commands

Other arguments for the non-existence of God

- Science and rationalism
- Modernism rejects the literal use and understanding of many religious terms, such as 'heaven', 'hell' etc., claiming they are merely representations of outdated mythological concepts.

Westphal – 'The emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion'



Westphal's piece concentrates less on his own opinion, and is instead more of a history of the opinions of great thinkers in modern philosophy. Modern philosophy means philosophy since the enlightenment period.

After the Enlightenment period it became a focus on the 'philosophy of religion' rather than 'philosophical theology'. Due to enlightenment ideas, values and studies, religion was being seen more as a manmade creation rather than as an innately God-like entity. The focus became religion rather than God.

DEISM: Reason is completely distinct from revelation. Emphasises impersonal and unknowable aspects of the divine. God might exist, but we can't know him. E.g. Kant who sought to 'justify religion within the limits of reason alone'.

SCHOLASTICISM: Reason is in harmony with revelation. A Christian philosophy built around medieval scholarship. The value of logic and its application to Christian scriptures. E.g. Aquinas.

Deist Project: Attempting to define God within the terms of the enlightenment

- Epistemological autonomy of human reason
- Political concern for religious tolerance
- Anti-clerical: Deny church both epistemological and political power/influence

The Enlightenment was a time when academia and politics were moving away from the superstitions of religion. Its purpose was to reform society using reason, to challenge ideas grounded in tradition and faith, and to advance knowledge through the scientific method. It promoted scientific thought, skepticism, and intellectual interchange. Science and philosophy were developing. Major religious wars were happening between Protestants and Catholics. Therefore scholars wanted to make religions objective so that people could live in peace. Hence Kant's attempt to base religion on objective logic and the rule of universalizability.

To understand Westphal it is important to know about Kant, Schleiermacher and Hegel.

KANT: Fetish Faith = bad church. A good church should only exist to lead people to good moral duty. Kant was a deist who undermined metaphysical deism. Kant tried to rescue a belief in God based on reason. Kant attempted to reformulate our understanding of God.

There are two parts to Kant's reformulation:

1. We must know God by practical reason, not theoretical knowledge. This contrasts the a priori ontological argument.
2. There is evil in human nature. So the type of reason needed in enlightened society is one of morality.

SCHLEIERMACHER believed that the 'kernel' of religion is to be found in its feeling. He thought that God (the infinite) can be found through concrete objects (the finite).

God consciousness through feelings as the base of religion. Karl Barth quoted of **Schleiermacher** that he believed **Hegel** presented '*the worst attack on religion so far*'. This is because we could philosophise about GOD without RELIGION. Schleiermacher believed the revelation of Jesus Christ revealed to us a self-consciousness that leads us to dogma. Placed RELIGION in the realm of feelings. He believed the concept of the 'Church' and the people of the 'Church' was an integral element to knowing God's self-consciousness. Therefore, he attempted to answer many of the problems set out by enlightenment philosophers.

HEGEL: Hegel also dislikes how Schleiermacher restricted religion to '**feeling through concrete entities**'. Hegel thinks **Kant** is unconvincing (didn't like how he restricted religion to morality) and **Schleiermacher** is confused.

God consciousness through the absolute spirit. Hegel believed we can know GOD, and was therefore more focussed on GOD than religion. Hegel wrote the 'phenomenology of the spirit' which indicates to us how the inner movement of reality (the spirit) is GOD thinking. Nothing, for Hegel, is an absolute whole apart from the spirit (our access to God thinking)

Hegel demands **knowledge** of **GOD** rather than a focus on religion.

5.2 A comparison between a critic of religion, Bertrand Russell, and a religious believer, Frederick Copleston

- a) *The context of the writings of Russell and Copleston and the way these ideas are applied to issues in religion and belief, including the argument from contingency and religious experience.*

ANTHOLOGY: (4) www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/p20.htm (Russell B and Copleston F – The Existence of God)

Copleston / Russell on the argument from contingency

Copleston's argument from contingency:

1. There are some beings in the world that do not contain in themselves the reason for their existence
2. The world as we can conceive of it is the aggregate of all the individual objects contained inside of it
3. None of these individual objects contain in themselves alone the reason for their existence

4. There is no world distinct or outside of the individual objects which form it
5. Just as individual objects do not contain in themselves the reason for their existence; the totality or world of objects does not contain the reason for its existence
6. The world of objects, therefore, must have a reason for their existence external to itself
7. This reason must be an existent being
8. That being is either the reason for its existence or not
9. If it is not, then one gets an infinite regress of causes and there is no explanation of its existence
10. Therefore there must exist a Being which contains within itself the reason for its own existence
11. This Being is God

In order to understand the Copleston, Russell debate about contingency, you need to understand Leibniz' **principle of sufficient reason**: 'in virtue of which we hold that no fact could ever be true of or existent, nor statement correct, unless there were a sufficient reason why it was thus and not otherwise.'

The necessary being, God, according to the Cosmological Argument provides us with a sufficient reason as to **why** there is something rather than nothing.

Russell questions 'what do you mean by sufficient reason? You don't mean cause?'

He is challenging Copleston's position by questioning why God must be the sufficient cause.

He asks 'when is an explanation adequate?' and uses the example of making a flame with a match.

What Russell is proposing is that there is no need to look to the argument from contingency (GOD) when trying to fulfil Leibniz's principle and when trying to provide an explanation of the universe.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason is closely related to the idea of contingency. If all things are dependant, then there must be a necessary being to provide a reason for all this dependency. This necessary being, God, is therefore in a special category of His own.

The question that Russell raises, however, is where does this 'special category' come from? Why should we accept that there must be such a category?

Russell held that there was no reason for the universe's existence and it was therefore pointless trying to find a reason for it. Of course, this is a denial that there has to be a reason for everything and, you may argue, seems a rather un-philosophical conclusion to reach.

Copleston likened Russell's approach of denying the problem to saying 'If one refuses to even sit down at the chess board and make a move, one cannot, of course, be checkmated'. Copleston and Russell have to agree to disagree.

The second point is the move from the dependency of individual beings to the dependency of the whole universe.

Russell says, "Every man who exists has a mother, and it seems to me your argument is that therefore the human race must have a mother, but obviously the human race hasn't a mother..."

For Russell, to talk of the cause of the universe as a whole is meaningless.

For example, I may be able to explain the reasons why a number of people read this book (i.e. what causes you to read this book). Person one may be reading it to help him to pass his exam; Person two because she is interested in the subject; Person three because he bought it by mistake, thinking it was a thriller, but decides to read it anyway; and Person four because she is the wife of the author and feels it is her duty to do so. These seem like fair enough reasons, but would it then be fair for you to say, "Yes, but what is the one cause for all of these people to read the book?"

Must we then assume that there is one cause over and above the causes for each individual?

Three main points that Russell takes issue with:

1. **It is possible to distinguish between a necessary being and a contingent being**
Russell argues that the term 'necessary' can only be significantly applies to propositions that are analytic. The main issue Russell has with the idea of God as a necessary being is that it seems to imply that God exists simply by deduction.
Russell raises the objection: just because we can identify contingent objects does not mean that there has to be a 'necessary' being.
2. **The principle of sufficient reason – all things must have a reason or a cause for their existence**
Copleston uses this to argue that there must be a necessary being – this is the only thing that can explain the existence of a contingent universe.
However, Russell criticises by saying that cause and effect is not a universal truth.
3. **The universe is the totality of the objects inside of it**
One criticism Russell makes is that Copleston makes a jump from the contingent objects around us to arguing that the universe as a whole is a contingent thing.
Russell says Copleston is moving from a particular observation to a general observation (induction) without justification.

| Russell's criticism | Copleston's response |
|---|---|
| 'There is no reason why everything needs to have an explanation!' | Copleston believed that there must be 'sufficient reason' for all objects. Sufficient reason is an explanation that is completely adequate. However, it could just be that some people have a psychological need for explanations, rather than that rationality requires explanations to exist. |
| 'Everything could just hold everything else together!' 'Why should there be just one explanation?' | This is the sort of criticism that Buddhists would make. Life could just be contingent things holding other contingent things together – in a web. This would involve believing that life is risky and quite precarious – the web might break. But maybe philosophers like Copleston should face up to that rather than create ultimate explanations. |
| 'It doesn't have to be God that holds everything together.' | Copleston believed that God is the sufficient reason for all objects and the sufficient reason for himself. Only through God can there be a full explanation. If you only want to achieve particular explanations for particular things – rather than one full explanation for everything – then you don't need this belief in God. |
| 'Why does this ultimate being have to exist?' | Copleston has argued that God <u>must</u> exist, at least given that the world exists, by using his concept of God as cause in esse. However, this only works if we accept that the world <u>must</u> have a cause that sustains and explains it. Without the need for this, there is no need for God. |

Copleston / Russell on Religious Experience

This section of the debate focuses on one particular area of disagreement: whether the best explanation of religious experience is the existence of God.

An important thing to consider here is that it is not a satisfactory argument to put forward that religious experience can be explained away by psychological states, for if God did exist it can very easily be supported that on creating humans he also created the psychological capacity for religious experiences. Rather, Copleston seeks to argue that certain forms of true religious experience, that of something that transcends the self and is wholly loving, can only be adequately explained by a being that has those properties.

On the other hand, Russell argues that moving from our inner mental states to the existence of an external being is a very difficult jump to accurately make, especially when the private nature of religious experience makes it hard to verify both its real presence and substance.

One of the major issues he identifies is the difficulties involving theists arguing one can move beyond a subjectivity of experience, such that one can accurately state what is a true religious experience and whether someone has had this experience. For example he states:

Russell: But don't you think there are abundant recorded cases of people who believe that they've heard Satan speaking to them in their hearts, in just the same way as the mystics assert God... That seems to be an experience of the same sort as mystics' experience of God, and I don't seek that from what mystics tell us you can get any argument for God which is not equally an argument for Satan.

This is a difficult point for Copleston to respond to. While religious experience might be wholly convincing for the believer it is impossible to convert into an argument for God that could not be an argument for anything else. For example, if we imagine ten people had a mystical and transcendental experience of a three-sided square and became convinced it exists, under Copleston's argument we might have to accept this as evidence for, despite its contradictory nature, a three-sided square.

Nevertheless, Copleston appeals to three factors; the precision of religious experiences, their good moral effect on people and that they are of the ultimate reality.

Yet for Russell, these do little to improve the main flaw in Copleston's argument, that there is no form and logical connection between the religious experience and the being that caused them.

For Russell, no matter the intensity or subject of experience, there is no necessary connection between the private religious experience and the existence of an entity causing the experience. This factor, combined with the ineffable nature of God and the possibility of other natural causes for religious experience, means that it is impossible to reliably state that God must be behind the kind of experiences Copleston describes.

**See additional anthology study guide for Russell / Copleston debate*

Unit 6: Influences of developments in religious beliefs

6.1. Views about life after death across a range of traditions

- a) *Immortality of the soul: soul as non-physical and spiritual and continuing to exist after death of body.*
- b) *Rebirth: belief there is no unchanging soul and importance of karma.*
- c) *Reincarnation: transmigration of souls and importance of karma.*
- d) *Replica theory: notion that one can die in one body and continue to live in a different body while being the same person, including after death.*
- e) *Resurrection: belief that God will restore the dead in bodily form to eternal life.*

With reference to the ideas of J Hick.

Immortality of the soul

In the monotheistic traditions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, scholars have argued that the physical body cannot live without the soul – which is the real self and is non-physical, mental and spiritual. The body is contingent and will decay and die, but the soul is non-contingent and cannot die.

Christian tradition: there is a distinction between the body and the soul. When the body dies, the soul carries on after death and travels to heaven (or hell). Separate yet causally linked.

Rebirth

- The Buddhist teaching that we have no essential self or soul (**anatta**); true selfhood is an illusion. Everything, including conscious life, is forever changing (**anicca**).
- Everything that changes is impermanent and this includes the physical body. The real self is eternal and unchanging. If it is to be eternal, therefore, the soul must rid itself of all change and achieve nirvana, which is the end of rebirth
- This means that there is no personal afterlife, but instead a constant cycle of rebirth (**samsara**). Rebirth is a fixed principle of reality, not something created by God
- Governed by the law of **karma** – ethically significant actions have consequences.
- Ultimately, Buddhists aspire to escape from **samsara** by recognising the illusion, thus reaching Enlightenment (**nirvana**).

| STRENGTHS | CRITICISMS |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This idea is of moral value; since we are constantly reborn we must constantly strive for good karmic effects. We are never just damned or saved. • The idea that we have no 'true self' will appeal to some • There is some psychological truth in the idea of anatta, since who we are is something which is constantly changing. I am not the person I was ten years ago. • By emphasising the enlightenment of the Buddha, rebirth stresses the importance of personal spirituality and compassion over blind faith. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no hard evidence for the law of karma affecting our lives. It might fall into the 'naturalistic fallacy' (G.E. Moore) in that it confuses moral ideas with factual information about how the world works. • It assumes a dark view of reality with the inevitability of suffering – must life always be this way? Isn't life actually enjoyable? • It is difficult to live without the idea of a fixed or true self. Surely it's important to know 'what we are really like'. • Problem of verifiability – cannot be proven |

Reincarnation

- Hinduism teaches that the soul (**atman**) is immortal and seeks union with ultimate reality (**Brahman**). Those who perceive the world for what it is – an illusion (**maya**) – may achieve release from the world (**moksha**) and no longer be subject to reincarnation.
- This assumes the law of **karma** – the view that we receive the consequences of the morally significant actions we have performed in the past. The chain of past and future lives makes this law fair.
- Hindu scholars have argued that empirical evidence for reincarnation lies in the fact that it explains many odd phenomena in human life – for example, our fear of death could stem from knowledge gained in previous lives. Could also explain why some children are born 'geniuses', e.g. Mozart. Others, e.g. Hick, are not convinced by this, saying it's just genetic combinations.

| STRENGTHS | CRITICISMS |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General arguments in favour of dualism may support reincarnation: the idea that the thinking self is more essential than the body. • Some have claimed that there is evidence of 'yoga memory': the experience of people, usually children, who claim to be someone reborn with memories of a previous life. • If the soul is independent of the body, then it is logical to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arguments against dualism given by Gilbert Ryle apply as easily to reincarnation as they do to the immortality of the soul – the mind should not be seen as non-physical. • Stephen Davies argues that contact between families may allow children to account for a remembered 'past life' which they have not really experienced. He asks whether some cases of yoga memory are actually deliberate fraud. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>suppose that it could have pre-existed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief is ancient, tried and tested. It has emerged from a sophisticated body of eastern philosophy and metaphysics (e.g. in the Bhagavad Gita). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although Hindu philosophy is very ancient, that does not make it right. Incorrect beliefs may be well established. |
|---|--|

Replica theory: Hick

John Smith lives in America. John Smith tragically dies. However, someone appears in India, who looks like John Smith and has all the same memories as John Smith, you would conclude that they are in fact the same person. It would be **meaningful to regard this replica as the same person** because they would be conscious of the fact that they were the same person who died.

An all-powerful God would be able to create a replica of a dead person, and to place that person in a world inhabited by resurrected persons.

Life after death theoretically could be a different world inhabited by resurrected persons: ‘...as a resurrection replica in a different world altogether, a resurrection world inhabited only by resurrected persons’.

Problems:

- If God can create replicas at will, then God could create multiple replicas of the same person which would undermine personal identity
- Replicas are not as valuable as the original.
- If bodily resurrection does not take place until the day of judgement, how do we verify life after death now? Hick’s solution was ‘eschatological verification’

Resurrection of the body

Eschatology: a study within theology concerning ideas concerning the end of history and the final destiny of humanity

- An act of divine love will restore the dead to eternal life in bodily form. It is not the reanimating of corpses but **God re-creating the human individual**, as a spiritual being.
- The promise of post-death existence in a re-created (*i.e.* perfect) human *body* (not disembodied soul). It is a **monist** theory, in that a **physical body is required for redemption**.
- Jesus said ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live’ (John 11:25)
- The resurrected person is not the same as the one who died. He or she will have a spiritual body, rather than a flesh and blood one, which contains all of their memories and characteristics and which will endure forever.
- Keith Ward: ‘But for those who think there is a God, a spiritual reality that is the cause of the whole physical universe, it will seem obvious that there is a spiritual realm as well as a physical realm’

AQUINAS: “The natural condition of a human soul is to be united with a body”. Eternal life requires a body and a soul.

ST PAUL: Jesus was resurrected, so too should Christians hope to be resurrected.

God has created many types of bodies in nature, we should believe that he is able to make human bodies perfect.

Problems:

- Is a resurrected body really ‘us’ or simply a copy of us? If we have truly died then, by definition, we cannot be brought back to life.
- Is the body resurrected in perfect condition or do the sick and handicapped remain so for eternity? Jesus bore the scars of his resurrection. Russell speculates not though – ‘the continuity of a human body is a matter of appearance and behaviour, not of substance’.

6.2. Points for discussion about life after death

- Relationship between mind and body, including variations of dualism and monism.*
- Life after death linked to moral reasoning, near death experiences, debates related to role of evidence, religious language.*

With reference to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle.

The relationship between the body and the mind/soul

Dualism

- The mind and body are separate entities, although they can influence each other.
- Human beings have composite natures, partly material and partly non-material
- The mind/soul survives after death
- There are three different dualistic views:

- The mind totally depends on the body in order to function
- The mind and body influence each other equally, but the two need each other in order to be conscious and aware of the world
- The mind and body are distinct entities that are mysteriously locked together in this world, but that the soul will escape and live on after the death of the body

Plato: separate soul and body. Soul was the **essence of a person**. Plato believed that the body belongs to the physical world and, like all physical things, will one day cease to exist. The soul, however, belongs to a higher realm where eternal truths, such as justice, love and goodness, endure forever. He argued that the soul seeks to free itself from the physical world and go to the higher realm of true reality (the realm of the Forms), where it will be able to spend eternity contemplating truth, beauty and goodness.

Plato put forward two famous arguments for dualism:

1. In *Meno* Plato has Socrates get a slave boy to do some simple geometry and reach conclusions which the boy could not have learnt in his life. Plato draws the conclusion that the geometrical knowledge must have come from the boy's soul when it descended from the eternally-real world to join his body to make a human being. Our soul forgets its heavenly knowledge in its descent to earth and education is needed to enable it to remember it – 'Doctrine of Recollection'.
2. In the *Phaedo*, Plato's second argument is based on the idea that 'like gives rise to like'. Body and mind are so different that it is impossible that body is made up of bits of the material world and the soul 'made' of an invisible, intellectual and immaterial reality. It is in the material world that change, decay and death are possible, so the soul must be an eternal reality which existed before birth and will continue to exist after the death of the body.

Plato's ideas about the soul have long been discredited – they depend on a certain view of the relationship of mind and body, and empirical investigation has replaced Plato's abstract reasoning about them.

- Physical world vs. the world of Forms
- Soul and body are separate – dualism
- The soul has the ability to know the truth and to understand the Forms as they really are, through reason
- Whereas the body is physical and can learn only through sense experience, which is inferior knowledge as the senses can be mistaken
- The body is physical and constantly changing so cannot be the object of certain knowledge and cannot be the source of knowledge
- The soul is capable of certain knowledge – Plato deduced that this must mean that the soul is unchanging and therefore must be immortal, not only existing after death but also pre-existing before birth. When we learn things we are actually remembering them – intuition is memory. In the soul's life before birth, it lives in the world of the Forms and gains true knowledge of ideals and how things really are, so when in this life we feel we intuitively know what's good or beautiful, it's really because we've encountered these things in their ideal form before birth
- The soul is the "real" part of the person, temporarily attached to a physical body but destined to live after death
- Soul was made up of three distinct elements: reason (allowing us to gain knowledge, distinguish right from wrong, understand the Forms), emotion (allows us to love and gives us courage) and appetite (needed to encourage us to look after the physical needs of the body)

Criticisms of Plato:

- Does not seem to match our experience of ourselves as unified wholes – does not do justice to the way we perceive ourselves as having a single, unified mind and personality
- Depend on our accepting the rest of Plato's beliefs about the world of Forms and the nature of knowledge

Rene Descartes ("I think therefore I am") made a clear distinction between the mind and the body, stating that it was possible to doubt the existence of the body, but impossible to doubt the existence of your mind. Therefore they are two separate entities.

| Strengths of Dualism | Weaknesses of Dualism |
|---|---|
| <p>Dualism takes its strength from the arguments of philosophers like Descartes, who tried to prove that the mind or soul exists separately from the body in the act of thought: "I think therefore I am". The thinking self is different from the physical. An advantage of dualism is that it may allow for mental continuity between life and the afterlife – it is the same thinking self throughout. Descartes dualism is known as Mind-Body Dualism.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isn't the body an important part of somebody's identity? • How can physical evidence for life after death exist if both mind and body are required? Our mental life is bound up with the physical aspect of our body. • GILBERT RYLE – GHOST IN THE MACHINE. Dualists think that "the mind is a ghost in the machine of the body". RYLE disagreed. • UNIVERSITY TOUR: Someone is shown around the different buildings, the grounds etc. When they finish, the person asks "Yes, but where is the university? I haven't seen it yet" • Dualists make a mistake by separating the mind from the body. • We must understand the mind in the context of the physical body and behaviour. • Philosophical behaviourism states that all mental events are physical events interpreted in a mental way. |

Monism

- The body and mind/soul are linked together to form one entity. Life after death therefore involves a body and mind/soul linked together.
- Human beings are psycho-physical units
- A human person is the mind and body
- There is no distinct mind and body, but are both one reality.

Monism fits with typical modern neurological views – **our minds or selves are aspects of our anatomy, our brains.**

Our **minds and bodies form a single organism.**

Behaviourism - Gilbert Ryle – **consciousness is not caused by a soul but simply is a reflection of complex behaviour**

Aristotle argued at length against many aspects of Plato's forms, creating his own doctrine of hylomorphism wherein form and matter coexist. Ultimately however, Aristotle's aim was to perfect a theory of forms, rather than to reject it. Although Aristotle strongly rejected the independent existence Plato attributed to forms, his metaphysics do agree with Plato's a priori considerations quite often. For example, Aristotle argues that changeless, eternal substantial form is necessarily immaterial. Because matter provides a stable substratum for a change in form, matter always has the potential to change. Thus, if given an eternity in which to do so, it will, necessarily, exercise that potential.

Part of Aristotle's psychology, the study of the soul, is his account of the ability of humans to reason and the ability of animals to perceive. In both cases, perfect copies of forms are acquired, either by direct impression of environmental forms, in the case of perception, or else by virtue of contemplation, understanding and recollection. He believed the mind can literally assume any form being contemplated or experienced, and it was unique in its ability to become a blank slate, having no essential form. As thoughts of earth are not heavy, any more than thoughts of fire are causally efficient, they provide an immaterial complement for the formless mind.

- Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, thought that the mind and body were inseparable
- The soul is a 'substance', which was a term he used in his own way to mean the 'essence' or 'real thing'
- The physical body is in a continual state of change, but the 'substance' remains the same, in terms of a continuing identity
- Unlike Plato, thought that the soul could be explained in purely natural terms, rather than by making reference to any supernatural realm
- Aristotle thought there were various kinds of souls:
 - Plants have a vegetative or nutritive soul – have the ability to get nourishment for themselves
 - Animals have 'perceptive' souls – they have senses with which to experience the world around them
 - Humans have a higher degree of soul because they have the ability to reason
- The soul is not some separate entity but is completely dependent on the body. The soul is the capacity that the body has to do whatever it is meant to
- E.g. if an axe had a soul that soul would involve chopping, because that's the function of an axe
- The soul of a person is the potential for rational thought and activity
- Because the soul and body can't be separated, the soul can't survive the death of the body. However, Aristotle started to develop and change this view at the end of his life

Strengths

- Emphasis and value it places on the body

Life after death linked to moral reasoning

A very different argument for life after death starts from the observation that if life does not continue after death, there could be no justice. In this world, the innocent suffer, and often the good receive no reward while the bad go unpunished. If this moral imbalance were not balanced, the universe would not be rational. It would be unjust, meaningless and absurd. Therefore, the unfairness of life in this world indicates that life must continue after death, for only if life continues can the scales of justice be balanced.

Criticism:

But does the argument even establish temporary survival? Stripped down to its basic form, the argument consists of a premise (if life ends at death, then life would not be fair) and a conclusion (life does not end at death). As it stands, this is not a valid deductive argument; the conclusion does not follow directly from the premise. To make the argument valid, we must include an intermediate premise. The argument in full might then read as follows:

- If life ends at death, then life would not be fair.
- Life is fair.
- Therefore, life does not end at death.

The argument is now valid. The new premise is an implicit assumption that had not been stated previously, but on which the argument depends. However, having made clear the full argument, it is this premise that seems most questionable. It is far from obvious that life is fair, and there is nothing irrational or contradictory about a universe that is unjust by human standards. Unless we have good reason to believe the universe is fair, the justice argument fails.

Near-death experiences

Features

Feeling of peace / Out of body experiences / The tunnel of light / The being of light / The barrier / Another country / Relatives and friends / Life review / The decision to return / The Return

What conclusions can we draw from near death experience?

How we do decide what is hallucinatory or genuinely spiritual?

- Explanations need to be coherent and specific – accounting for particular features, not generalities
- A theory should not posit extra, or supernatural realms without good reason
- The theory should provide testable predictions.

Richard Swinburne argues that the principle of credulity might suggest that we ought to take such apparent memories seriously, especially in view of the considerable coincidences between them, as evidence that what subjects thought they had experienced, they really did.

Spiritualism claims that after death there is a spirit world in which the deceased can go. Spiritualists claim that the deceased can be contacted through experts known as mediums through séances.

John Hick: the best case scenario for spiritualism was that it was indicative of some form of continuation or communication.

Problems

The lack of verification of testimonies is the true problem with near death experience. They can only point to an afterlife, and not prove it

- Are they charlatans? Are they lying or deluded?
- Problem of reliability and verifiability of the testimonies

Parapsychology is the study of the spirit realm. Taken at face value, parapsychology does point to the existence of a life after death. However, over the years the spiritualist movement has suffered lasting damage due to the activities of hoaxers who have used spiritualism to gain money by deliberate deception. What is the purpose of a spirit-world? If it is simply a continuation of life on this earth, then what is its purpose?

Evidence for Life after death

Supernatural / psychic evidence. Some claim that there is evidence for spiritual forces working beyond the body. This may imply the individual's ability to live beyond death. Such evidence includes telepathy, spiritualism, and near death experiences. The latter have been subject to significant studies from neuropsychiatrists such as Peter Fenwick.

Revelation / authority. Some regard life after death as a certainty based on religious texts, faith, and teachings. Christians may see the authority of the New Testament as guaranteeing the resurrection of Jesus, for instance. Others may see a weight of historical evidence lying behind such accounts of afterlife.

Rational / logical arguments. If we agree with the likes of Descartes ("I think therefore I am"), then we know that our internal thinking self-constitutes what is 'really us', rather than our physical bodies. Thought is beyond our physical existence.

Criticisms of the evidence

- The supernatural evidence is controversial. Much of it can be explained away through psychological analysis, or is even sometimes a deliberate hoax.
- Revelation seems to be a very dubious basis. We may challenge the authority of the Bible; the accounts of Jesus' resurrection are not consistent with one another.
- Seemingly rational arguments like that of Descartes ignore latest scientific thinking: consciousness is a brain function, not a 'soul'.

Language

Flew – criticisms of life after death from language

- Questioned whether life after death has any linguistic meaning in his essay
- If a ship is torpedoed, we classify those on board exclusively as 'dead' or 'survivors'. It is accepted that one cannot be both. Flew argues that talk of surviving death is a bit like talking of 'dead survivors': a contradiction.
- Therefore, says Flew, the idea of afterlife is meaningless and untrue.
- Flew concludes that personal terms (I, you, him) can only apply to living organisms which we can experience or interact with.
- Wittgenstein says you cannot take day of judgement out of its context – boiling it down to whether it's true or not makes it meaningless

Responses to Flew

- Paul Badham is not convinced: we do not see ourselves just as the objects of experience
- There is nothing illogical or self-contradictory in thinking about 'me' without reference to my body

6.3. Religion and science debates and their significance for philosophy of religion

- a) *Methodologies with emphasis on observation, hypothesis and experiment, identifying connections and differences vis a vis religious belief and processes; miracles.*
- b) *Creation themes and scientific cosmologies: Big Bang, steady state theories, intelligent design and irreducible complexity, creationism, cosmological constant, evolution, Gaia hypothesis.*

With reference to the ideas of C Darwin and R Dawkins.

Methodologies

Scientific method: Question – Hypothesis – Prediction – Experiment – Analysis

Observation: Someone notices something and records what they observe, they may keep looking for it and recording when they observe it.

Hypothesis: They then come up with a reason to explain the phenomenon they observed.

Experiment: Scientists do experiments to test the hypothesis.

Law and Theory: When enough experiments have been done, scientist conclude that it a law. A theory may then be developed which links different laws together.

Problems with scientific methology

- All the problems that there are with inductive arguments.
- Relies on empirical evidence not reason.
- Thomas Kuhn explains that scientists don't like to give up their theories.
- Problems with falsificationism- Popper came up with falsificationism as a method of doing science.
- Scientists go in with preconceived ideas about what will be relevant.

Identifying connections and differences vis a vis religious belief and practices

- Religious belief can come from religious experience, sources of authority such as holy books, and from religious practices.
- When new scientific theories (such as evolution) challenge science some religious people say that they must be wrong because God is all knowing and the scientists are fallible, and some try to fir God around the theory, this idea has been known as "the God of the gaps".

KARL POPPER – SCIENCE AND PSEUDOSCIENCE

Distinguished between science and pseudoscience by falsification, rather than by verification.

Science must be able to prove the future through hypothesis.

Pseudoscience takes things which have already happened and applied a hypothesis to them.

Compatibility between science and religion

- Some such as Paul Davies have argued that empirical evidence can help to support religious belief because of the anthropic principle (the argument that the natural laws of the universe have been 'fine tuned' to allow human life to exist.
- Some argue their needs to be a cause of the big bang, which is God. God is seen more like Aquinas' prime mover.
- John Polkinghorne was a scientist who also said he gained knowledge of a different aspect of the world through religion. Science and religion are complimentary.
- William James also had a scientific background but argued people could gain knowledge through religious experience.

Miracles

Miracles are violations of laws of nature by God.

Hume: 'a transgression of a law of nature by a particular violation of the Deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent'

J.L. Mackie: 'a violation of the natural law....[by] divine or supernatural intervention. The laws of nature... describe the ways in which the world – including, of course, human beings – works when left to itself, when not interfered with. A miracle occurs when the world is not left to itself, when something distinct from the natural order as a whole intrudes into it.'

Transgression of a Law of Nature by volition of a particular God

- Intervention, raising from the dead
- Objective Supernatural
- *David Hume*

How are laws of nature violated?

- When a normal process is overturned, e.g. when someone rises from the dead
- When a normal process is arrested, e.g. the sun stopping
- When a normal process is speeded up, e.g. a man recovering from polio on the immediate touch of another man's hand.

Is this all that can be said? No – the transgression of a natural law in itself is insufficient to call an event a miracle. It is generally considered that miracles point beyond themselves, and have a wider significance. E.G. a miraculous healing would indicate God's power, love and compassion. Conversely, Swinburne says:

'If a god intervened in the natural order to make a feather land here rather than there for no deep ultimate purpose, or to upset a child's box of toys just for spite, these events would not naturally be described as miracles.'

Sometimes miracles are events that do not break natural laws. E.g. Holland – young boy on the railway tracks.

Religious significance and purpose

- Miracles of Jesus as *signs*
- Objective Supernatural – miracles seen as a sign of God
- *Richard Swinburne* says breaking the laws of nature is not a good enough definition for a miracle, it needs a deeper religious meaning

Beneficial Coincidence

- *Ray Holland* – example of the child caught on the train tracks.
- Interpretation – if the mother is religious, God stopped the train. If the mother is non-religious, it was just extraordinary good luck.
- Subjective – if the mother is religious it's a miracle, if she's not it's not!
- Therefore for Holland, a miracle doesn't need to break the laws of science – any event that has a 'sign' can be classed as a miracle (contingent miracle)

St. Aquinas

- Events done by God, which nature could never do.
- Events done by God, which nature could do, but not in that order.
- Events done by God, which nature can do, but God does without the use of natural laws.

Aquinas is suggesting an Interventionist God, who only acts on certain almost random occasions. A God who is in effect little more than a spectator of human affairs.

Miracles in the Bible

- Miracles in the Bible are often presented as a way to show God's power or as a sign of the world yet to come.
- The miracles of Jesus point to who he is, and help believers to understand his nature
- Jesus' miracles were to show that Jesus is from God and were a sign to show what God's kingdom is like, where God's grace and majesty relieve suffering and bring peace.
- Examples: Moses parting the red sea in Exodus
- They show that Jesus had absolute power over nature.
- The resurrection
- Many believe that the whole essence of the Christian message relies on miracle.

Religious significance of miracles

- **Swinburne:** There must be a reason why God intervenes in the world, therefore any miracle must have a deeper religious significance.
- **John Locke:** Miracles must be understood in the wider context of who has performed it and who has seen it. For Locke, proof that a miracle has occurred depends on knowing whether the person who performed has been sent by God.
- **Gareth Moore:** To say that God performed a miracle is the same as saying no one performed a miracle. We talk about miracles in personal terms. We should talk about miracles in of themselves, and not look for reasons how they are caused.

Hume's criticisms of miracles

Criticisms of miracles understood in the context of enlightenment ideas. Rationalism, reason, scientific method, rejection of the supernatural.

Hume disagrees that a miracle is a transgression of the law of nature. How do we know what the laws of nature are? We have observed them over a long period of time, e.g. 'as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can be reasonably imagined.'

That is,

- We have always seen, for instance, that all men die.
- There are vast quantities of evidence to prove the idea/ law that all men die.
- How can we overturn the idea that all men die? Only if all men stop dying! This would be proof of men rising from the dead.
- But if all men rise from the dead, then this would not be a miracle after all, but a law of nature!
- So we can never prove that a miracle happens.

Hume's criticisms:

1. There is insufficient evidence for miracles; there are not enough reliable witnesses.
2. It is human nature to believe the unbelievable, particularly religious believers, who are predisposed to believe in miracles.
3. Hume believed that stories of miracles tend to come from what he saw as unreliable places. "*ignorant and barbarous nations*"
4. There are many religions, each claiming to be correct, all with different miracles.

Responses to Hume

1. Hume defines miracles and natural law in a way that miracles have to be found impossible. When he says miracles are impossible what he means is *physical impossibility*. There is nothing logically impossible about the Son of God having ability to cure sickness instantly.
2. Hume defines natural law as unalterable, but this is an ambiguous term. Hume seems to define the improbability of miracles having a definitely logical conclusion that they did not happen.
3. Hume's argument is elitist. It also slightly contradicts his belief in the immediacy and importance of sensed empirical data. Even uneducated people are capable of experiencing something and correctly reporting and educated people are capable of being mistaken.
4. Hume also discounts religious believers' opinions as being less reliable than others, but why are religious people any more unreliable than anyone else?
5. Swinburne states that miracles that are significant in one religion should only be discounted as miracles if they are incompatible with each other.

Other arguments against miracles

1. Miracles cannot occur as there are no natural laws to violate – from a strongly atheistic perspective, the world came about by chance and continues to evolve purposelessly and randomly. Natural 'laws' may not be laws at all – just chance.
2. Miracles cannot occur as breaches of natural law, as natural law is simply redefined to take account of miracles – Hick argues that natural laws are just 'generalisations formulated retrospectively to cover whatever has, in fact, happened'. So if a new unique event happens we must redefine the laws to take account of this event. The new event cannot break natural law, as natural law itself is only based on observation of events.

The impact of miracles on scientific method

- Miracles challenge scientific laws
- Most scientists would disregard miracles as people looking at phenomena in the wrong way.
- Many of the arguments used against religious experience can be used against miracles.
- Some people ask why God used to intervene so much in the past and now doesn't seem to.
- Some put this difference down to advances in scientific knowledge: things people used to say were miracles have now been explained by science.
- Some question why Jesus' first miracle was to turn water into wine for a party.

Creation themes and scientific cosmologies

Big Bang

- The universe expanded from a very high density and high temperature state
- Offers a comprehensive explanation for a broad range of phenomena, including the abundance of light elements, the cosmic microwave background, large scale structure and Hubble's Law.
- Generally accepted to be 13.8 billion years ago
- After the initial expansion, the universe cooled sufficiently to allow the formation of subatomic particles, and later simple atoms. Giant clouds of these primordial elements later coalesced through gravity in halos of dark matter, eventually forming the stars and galaxies visible today.
- Georges Lemaître first noted in 1927 that an expanding universe could be traced back in time to an originating single point

- While the scientific community was once divided between supporters of two different expanding universe theories, the Big Bang and the Steady State theory, empirical evidence provides strong support for the former.
- In 1929, from analysis of galactic redshifts, Edwin Hubble concluded that galaxies are drifting apart; this is important observational evidence consistent with the hypothesis of an expanding universe
- In 1964 the cosmic microwave background radiation was discovered, which was crucial evidence in favor of the Big Bang model since that theory predicted the existence of background radiation throughout the universe before it was discovered.

In his most recent book, 'The Grand Design' (2010) Professor Stephen Hawking states that The Big Bang was the result of the inevitable laws of physics and did not need God to spark the creation of the Universe. "Because there is a law such as gravity, the Universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the Universe exists, why we exist." "It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the Universe going."

Professor John Lennox disagrees with Hawkins: "But, as both a scientist and a Christian, I would say that Hawking's claim is misguided. He asks us to choose between God and the laws of physics, as if they were necessarily in mutual conflict. But contrary to what Hawking claims, physical laws can never provide a complete explanation of the universe. Laws themselves do not create anything, they are merely a description of what happens under certain conditions". He goes on to say "...For me, as a Christian believer, the beauty of the scientific laws only reinforces my faith in an intelligent, divine creative force at work".

Steady state theory

The steady-state theory is a view that the universe is always expanding but maintaining a constant average density, matter being continuously created to form new stars and galaxies at the same rate that old ones become unobservable as a consequence of their increasing distance and velocity of recession.

In cosmology, the Steady State theory is an alternative to the Big Bang model of the evolution of the universe. In the steady-state theory, the density of matter in the expanding universe remains unchanged due to a continuous creation of matter, thus adhering to the perfect cosmological principle, a principle that asserts that the observable universe is basically the same at any time as well as at any place.

While the steady state model enjoyed some popularity in the mid-20th century, it is now rejected by the vast majority of cosmologists, astrophysicists and astronomers, as the observational evidence points to a hot Big Bang cosmology with a finite age of the universe, which the Steady State model does not predict.

Intelligent Design

Intelligent Design (or ID) is the controversial assertion that certain features of the universe and of living things exhibit the characteristics of a product resulting from an intelligent cause or agent, not an undirected process such as natural selection.

Proponents claim that "certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection."

Educators, philosophers, and the scientific community have demonstrated that ID is a religious argument, a form of creationism which lacks empirical support and offers no testable or tenable hypotheses.

Proponents argue that it is "an evidence-based scientific theory about life's origins" that challenges the methodological naturalism inherent in modern science, while conceding that they have yet to produce a scientific theory.

Irreducible Complexity

A single system which is composed of several interacting parts, and where the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to cease functioning.

Irreducible complexity (IC) is the argument that certain biological systems cannot evolve by successive small modifications to pre-existing functional systems through natural selection. Irreducible complexity is central to the creationist concept of intelligent design, but it is rejected by the scientific community, which regards intelligent design as pseudoscience.

Creationism

Creationism is the religious belief that the universe and life originated "from specific acts of divine creation," as opposed to the scientific conclusion that they came about through natural processes. The first use of the term "creationist" to describe a proponent of creationism is found in an 1856 letter of Charles Darwin describing those who objected on religious grounds to the emerging science of evolution.

Creationists base their beliefs on a fundamentalist reading of religious texts, including the creation myths found in Genesis and the Quran. For young Earth creationists, these beliefs are based on a literalist interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative and rejection of the scientific theory of evolution. Literalist creationists believe that evolution cannot adequately account for the history, diversity, and complexity of life on Earth.

Cosmological Constant

In cosmology, the cosmological constant is the value of the energy density of the vacuum of space. It was originally introduced by Albert Einstein in 1917 as an addition to his theory of general relativity to "hold back gravity" and achieve a static universe, which was the accepted view at the time. Einstein abandoned the concept after Hubble's 1929 discovery that all galaxies outside the Local Group (the group that contains the Milky Way Galaxy) are moving away from each other, implying an overall expanding universe. From 1929 until the early 1990s, most cosmology researchers assumed the cosmological constant to be zero.

Since the 1990s, several developments in observational cosmology, especially the discovery of the accelerating universe from distant supernovae in 1998 (in addition to independent evidence from the cosmic microwave background and large galaxy redshift surveys), have shown that around 68% of the mass–energy density of the universe can be attributed to dark energy. While dark energy is poorly understood at a fundamental level, the main required properties of dark energy are that it functions as a type of anti-gravity, it dilutes much more slowly than matter as the universe expands, and it clusters much more weakly than matter, or perhaps not at all. The cosmological constant is the simplest possible form of dark energy since it is constant in both space and time, and this leads to the current standard model of cosmology known as the Lambda-CDM model, which provides a good fit to many cosmological observations.

Evolution

Darwinism is a theory of biological evolution developed by the English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1882) and others, stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce.

Gaia Hypothesis

The Gaia hypothesis, also known as the Gaia theory or the Gaia principle, proposes that organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a synergistic self-regulating, complex system that helps to maintain and perpetuate the conditions for life on the planet.

The Gaia hypothesis doesn't claim that the earth is actually 'alive' - but that all living organisms and their non-living surroundings are bound together into a 'system' that maintains the conditions for life