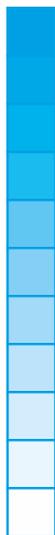




Starting A Level Religious Studies

With Dr Peter Vardy
& Dr David Webster





Starting A Level Religious Studies

A student event specially designed to enrich and extend from the new specifications...

LVI Religious Studies students will love this intensive event exploring big questions in the Philosophy of Religion and Ethics with Dr Peter Vardy and Dr David Webster. Designed to support the NEW 2016 GCE A LEVEL Religious Studies SPECIFICATIONS and focusing on topics specified centrally by the DfE for study at both AS and A Level, therefore common to all examination boards, this event is designed to bring courses to life and open up the possibility of continuing the subject into HE.

Sessions will include:

1. Religious Experience: Reflecting on the validity of basing religious belief on other peoples' accounts of religious experiences, including personal testimony, Scripture and the question of the places of authority and reason in faith.
2. Arguing for God: Exploring Aquinas' famous ways to God, considering why he rejected Anselm's Ontological Argument and the strengths (and weaknesses) of his Cosmological and Teleological Arguments.
3. The Problem of Evil & Suffering: Explaining the logical and evidential problem for religious believers and evaluating two popular theodicies.
4. Natural Law: Analysing Aquinas' approach to decision making and finding out about modern developments of Natural Law from John Finnis and Bernard Hoose. At London and Oxford students will see a live interview with Proportionalist Dr Bernard Hoose as part of this session and will be able to pose their questions (at other venues, a video will be supplied).
5. Debate: "This house sees legalising Euthanasia as the most loving response to suffering!"

Candle's events offer a rich learning experience. Sessions are pacy, full of current examples, images and film-clips; they are designed to extend and enthuse, building broader subject knowledge and deeper understanding, rather than just rehash the classroom experience or cram for the exam. Nevertheless, content is always relevant to OCR, AQA, Edexcel and Eduqas Religious Studies, IB Philosophy and Pre-U Philosophy & Theology. A full colour printed set of high-quality notes (complete with suggested classroom activities relating to each topic and tips for developing strong essay-skills) will be provided to each student, so they have no need to copy down reams of things on the day. Additional resources will be provided to each participating school electronically.

Our people...

Charlotte Vardy

The sessions and notes today have been designed by Charlotte Vardy, a highly experienced teacher of A Level Religious Studies, who has also written textbooks (Ethics Matters, God Matters and Bible Matters with Peter and Life and Death for PushMe Press) and worked for examination boards. Charlotte led Candle's campaign to refine the subject content specified for the new A Level by the DfE in 2014/15 and met with officials to offer teachers' perspectives on their draft proposals.



Dr. David Webster

The acting Head of Humanities at the University of Gloucestershire (where Religious Studies was ranked third in the country by the Guardian in 2016) David is also the Head of Learning & Teaching Innovation and has just been appointed an HEA National Teaching Fellow. David studied at Sunderland and then Newcastle University and has published scholarly works on Buddhism and desire, the nature of belief, and other topics in Buddhist studies and the Philosophy of Religion.



Dr. Peter Vardy

The vice-principal of Heythrop College of the University of London from 1999-2011, Peter has done more than anybody else to inspire the resurgence in the popularity of studying RS and Philosophy. A lively and engaging speaker, Peter was been the main speaker at the largest RS conferences in England and similar events around the world since the 1990s and is the author of the best selling "Puzzle" books for HarpoerCollins.



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How does faith relate to reason?

This question underlies the whole of the Philosophy of Religion content of the new A Level...

Today, the common perception is that faith and reason are in opposition.

The polarisation of Religion and Science led to a shift in how people understand the nature of faith. Whereas in the past faith was understood as an intellectual response to any study of the universe and atheism seen as a mark of ignorance, following Darwin there seemed less and less need to posit a divine designer. Atheism seemed like the mark of the informed mind and faith started to be portrayed in terms of weakness, stemming from a need for simple answers and comfort and basic fear of facing the Truth.

As scientists uncovered more about how the universe operates the creative role of God grew smaller; God was pushed into the gaps in human knowledge. Religious texts had to be re-interpreted to account for longer time-scales, ice-ages, the existence of other hominid species and dinosaurs. This raised huge questions. If God's role and nature seemed to change according to the state of human knowledge, could that suggest that He is dependent on us, rather than we on Him. If "revealed" wisdom falls short at precisely the same point as the state of human knowledge, could that imply that religious texts and traditions owe more to human authors than to divine inspiration?

In 1841 German writer Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) wrote a book called *The Essence of Christianity*. Feuerbach was a "young Hegelian", one of a group of radical thinkers inspired by the writings of Georg Hegel (1770-1831).

Hegel suggested that human history is dynamic, that ideas and society moves forward through a process of dialectic. The dominant philosophy is challenged by a new theory and, over time and out of the tension between the two, a new synthesis develops, which then becomes the dominant philosophy. Hegel's model was exciting because it suggested that things change and progress and because it suggested that there could be more than one way of seeing the world, that "truth" to some extent depends on the world-view which dominates at the time. Young philosophers saw in Hegel's ideas hope that society could and would progress, that their radical ideas could challenge established orthodoxy and contribute to human advancement.

In the mid-19th Century Christianity dominated all life in Europe. The Church held the keys to education and employment in most cases; it exerted a powerful influence on all governments, their laws and policies. Although most of the horror-stories of actual repression are untrue, in some cases the Church seemed to stand in the way of scientific progress; it was slow to accept new ideas and continued to invest in areas of study which seemed archaic and irrelevant. By Hegel's own theory, it was natural that some "Young Hegelians" would challenge the Church and propose radical, new ways of looking at and running the world. It was also natural that they should be inspired by scientific materialism, which offered a world-view diametrically opposed to that held by Christians.

Ludwig Feuerbach claimed to be "a natural philosopher in the domain of the mind." He was a materialist and tried to apply scientific method to his study of society, history and philosophy. Starting with a definition of existence which limited what could be known to that which could be experienced, Feuerbach examined Christianity and concluded that "Religion is the dream of the human mind" He explained how the religion had developed and changed over time and he noted that doctrines and structures seem to adapt in order to fulfil societal needs.

For example, in the power-vacuum after the decline of the Roman Empire the Church grew into a provider of governance. God was portrayed as emperor-judge and there was a great emphasis on teachings about heaven and hell. In a world with little

infrastructure, no police service and few courts, Christianity transformed from a minority faith which encouraged believers to stand against social norms into a state religion which gradually assumed the functions of government.

As Feuerbach saw it, religion was a form of social control. In order to maximise its effectiveness, people were being encouraged to accept nonsensical things on the basis of authority, to suspend their critical faculties. He wrote

"in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane... Religion has disappeared and it has been substituted, even amongst Protestants, with the appearance of Religion – the Church – in order at least that "the Faith" might be imparted to the ignorant and indiscriminating multitude."

Feuerbach went on to argue that it is not just the Church which seems to respond to social needs and wants; peoples' personal concepts of God often fulfil their needs and desires. Thus, a person without a strong Father figure sees God in this role, as authoritarian, whilst another person who lacked affection in their upbringing sees a God of love and forgiveness. For Feuerbach, faith in God is a form of subconscious wish-fulfilment.

It follows that analysing peoples' concepts of God can tell us a lot about their psychology and about the characteristics of their society, but it is difficult to escape the implication that the object of faith, God, has no independent existence. If God is simply a projection, a product of deep-seated imagination, then faith is not credible and not compatible with reason.

Feuerbach's work was highly influential. *The Essence of Christianity* was translated into English in 1853 by Marian Evans (1819-1880), who wrote novels under the name George Eliot. Whilst Evans was working on the text the poet Matthew Arnold was writing the famous poem "Dover Beach" which reflects the devastating effect that ideas like those of Feuerbach had on British intellectuals in the 1850s. He wrote,

*"The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."*

Evans also translated the work of David Strauss (1808-1874). Strauss was also influenced by Hegel, choosing to re-examine the life of Jesus and the Christian Theology which purported to be based on it, using modern historical and literary techniques. "The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined" concluded that all the stories of supernatural events were mythological and that there was very little historical fact in any of the Gospels. According to Michael Massdorp, "Strauss denied that he was accusing the gospel writers of dishonesty. Rather, he was acknowledging that they conceived of truth very differently from modern rational thinkers who were currently evolving science, astronomy and the many other disciplines." Nevertheless, Strauss' was one of the first in a series of volumes of Biblical Criticism which suggested that the "historical Jesus" is elusive, that our perception of Christ owes more to our own situation than to what really happened. George Tyrrell (1861-1909) famously quipped that we tend to look down the well of history and see our own faces reflected back from the bottom.

Practice Essay Titles:

"Religious faith is not dependent on reason!" Discuss

"To what extent is Clifford's claim that "It is always wrong to believe something on insufficient evidence" damaging to Religious Faith?"





You don't have to make detailed notes during the sessions today, but you may find it useful to jot down questions that you think of so that you can ask them at some point today, or back at school.

Naturally enough, Strauss' book was controversial. The Earl of Shaftesbury went so far as to label Marian Evans' translation "*the most pestilential book ever vomited out of the jaws of hell.*" Yet the influence of Biblical Criticism grew and by WWI most scholars accepted that the Bible tells us more about its many authors and editors, and their theological and historical contexts, than it does about the subject-matter. This represented a profound challenge to Protestant Christians who oriented their lives by reading the Bible and seeing it as a channel of inspiration directly from God. Broadly, Catholics had always accepted the need for the Church to interpret the Bible, and had always followed Church teachings rather than any personal reading of text. For some Protestants however, the idea that Jesus may not be known by reading the Gospels or that God's will might not be revealed in a pure form through, say, the laws of the Pentateuch was deeply troubling.

The development of Biblical Criticism led some Protestants, like Marian Evans, to lose their faith altogether – but it led others to cling to it in the face of rational objections. For some, reason and scholarship started to seem like the enemy of faith and religion; they focused on personal experiences of God, on feelings and emotions rather than on verifiable fact or argument. In the second half of the 19th Century the mainstream of Christian thought rejected attempts at rational engagement with faith, which had characterised the previous century, and tried to rekindle medieval spirituality. Rational, bright and open neo-classical churches went out of fashion; neo-gothic swept in, embracing shadows and symbolism.

Building on "Contrasts" by Augustus Pugin (1836), he manifesto of the neo-gothic, the Gothic Revival went further than bricks and mortar, making a case for "*a return to the faith and the social structures of the Middle Ages.*" Faced with the fruits of scientific research, mass-industrialisation, urban migration, child-labour, poverty, ignorance, crime and social breakdown, people hankered after a golden age, before factories and the threat of famine. Christians saw in the Gospels a message of anti-materialism, simplicity and socialism which could help restore the world. Whether in the works of novelists like Elizabeth Gaskell, designers like William Morris or the Pre-Raphaelite artists, suspicion of "progress" and a longing for people to reengage with tradition, embrace myth and emotion and be suspicious of calculating reason is plain to see. The Church had never been so popular; it offered the possibility of blocking out the real world and nourishing the parts of humanity which modern life ignored – imagination, spirituality, beauty.

Nevertheless, the human horrors which led on from industrialisation, graphically described by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, led to worse horrors on the Western Front of WWI, in the gas-chambers of Auschwitz and in the streets of Hiroshima. In the 20th Century it became more and more difficult to reconcile faith in an all-powerful and loving creator-God with the realities of life in an obviously imperfect world. Those who kept faith increasingly seemed like ostriches, burying their heads in the sand and as such, it became easier for atheists to criticise them for choosing to believe, not just without evidence, but in the teeth of the evidence.

Evidentialism

In his 1877 essay "The Ethics of Belief", Mathematician and Philosopher WK Clifford (1845-1879) explored both the nature of belief and the significance of what we believe. He argued "*No real belief, however trifling and fragmentary it may seem, is ever truly insignificant; it prepares us to receive more of its like, confirms those which resembled it before, and weakens others; and so gradually it lays a stealthy train in our inmost thoughts, which may someday explode into overt action, and leave its stamp upon our character for ever.*"

For Clifford, because of the relationship between belief and action, "*no one man's belief is in any case a private matter which concerns himself alone.*" It is a matter for public concern if anyone chooses to believe something which is unsupported by evidence, because of what they might do with that belief.

Famously, Clifford's essay concluded,

"It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call into question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it, the life of that man is one long sin against mankind."

Clifford's apparent attitude to religion went on to influence generations of scientists and philosophers.

Although William James attacked Clifford's argument in his famous *The Will to Believe* lecture, today religion operates in what has been described as a "*hegemony of evidentialism*". Believers either cede Clifford's point and try to argue that their faith is based on evidence of one sort or another, or they try to challenge evidentialism itself, either by suggesting instances in which it is sensible or necessary to believe without evidence or, like Alvin Plantinga, by pointing out that evidentialism is self-referentially inconsistent, that there is no evidence for evidentialism.

It is fair to say that religious attempts to satisfy the standards of evidentialists remain controversial. The arguments for the existence of God have all been challenged and few people would see any one of them as sufficient grounds for Theism, let alone any particular type of Religious Faith.

✦ **DISCUSS: What do you think? Can and should Religious faith be supported by evidence? If it cannot, is it wrong, as Clifford suggests, to hold on to faith? Justify your answer.**





St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) had a huge influence on how Christians saw faith relating to reason. Through the Middle Ages it was his work which formed the basis for many Roman Catholic doctrines.



Scholars such as John Hick (1966) and Terence Penelhum (1995) concluded that faith is “*evidentially ambiguous*”. In other words, what evidence there is may be interpreted differently by Theists and Atheists. The Theist will look at evidence of pattern in nature and see it affirming their own paradigm of creation, whereas the Atheist will look at the same evidence and see it supporting the theory of evolution by natural selection and the lack of any need for a supernatural explanation. Arguments both for and against God’s existence tend to be circular, thus failing to change people’s beliefs.

Because of this, it might seem as if one might be justified in accepting Dawkins’ definition of faith as “*anti-intellectual*”, yet would ignore the fact that there have always been different definitions of faith. It is inappropriate to lump all believers together, judging the character and quality of all of their beliefs together. While one person might believe “*in the teeth of the evidence*” and refuse to engage with the outside world, another might base their faith on what seems like cogent argument and might be willing to engage with counter evidence and criticisms.

Broadly speaking there are five different approaches to defining faith...

1. **PROPOSITIONAL FAITH:** Faith is based on evidence and/or argument. It depends upon propositions and may be destroyed if its basis is destroyed.
2. **NON-PROPOSITIONAL FAITH:** Faith is not based on reason or argument but may be enriched or explored through them.
3. **FIDEISM:** Faith is independent of reason, superior to it in providing a complete account of the world. Faith may be hostile to reason, particularly when reason goes too far and claims impossible certainty.
4. **VOLUNTARISM:** Belief is under our control, directly or indirectly. Further, it is rational to will to believe, at least to put oneself in a position whereby faith may develop, because doing so will yield positive results...
5. **NON-VOLUNTARISM:** Faith is not a matter of choice – God chooses some to believe and others not to, and we are not in a position to understand why.

Propositional Faith

Propositional Faith identifies faith with justified belief or knowledge. Faith that God exists may be compared with belief that evolution through natural selection occurs. Evidence (propositions) supports a conclusion, theory or explanation; if the evidence changes the conclusion will be *falsified* and the theory may have to change. Most, though not all, proponents of Propositional Faith use Natural Theology (arguments for God which start with observations of the natural world) to provide the propositions on which faith depends.

The traditional definition of faith is best articulated by St Thomas Aquinas (1215-1274), who wrote that “*from the perspective of the one believing ... the object of faith is something composite in the form of a proposition*” Aquinas admits that God Himself is not dependent on or defined by anything in the world, logical propositions included. However, for the human being, the world (being God’s creation) reveals the truth of God’s existence and tells us something about His nature.

In his monumental “Summa Theologica” (1265-1274) Aquinas reasoned from the world to God; he developed arguments for God based on observational evidence, engaging in what is known as “Natural Theology”. Aquinas’ famous five ways to God are summarised in just two pages of the Summa, but still attract a good deal of scholarly attention.

All of Aquinas’ arguments are synthetic and *a posteriori*, they move from observations of the world to a conclusion which seeks to explain those observations. Aquinas refused to entertain the idea that God’s existence could be established a priori, arguing that we know too little about God to be able to analyse His nature and find necessary existence within it.

Today Aquinas’ arguments are usually treated as stand-alone proofs, but this may not be how Aquinas intended them to be used. For Aquinas, the existence of God was unquestioned. The arguments demonstrated the rationality of belief, but were not intended as the primary reason for faith. None of Aquinas’ ways are entirely original; Anthony Kenny (b.1931) puts the arguments firmly in the context of Aristotelian thought, showing how they should not be understood in isolation but as part of a broader Philosophical system, though this is not always considered today.

The First Way

Taking the first sentence of the first argument in isolation, namely “*The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that*





in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another..." you might understand that Aquinas is using a crude "domino" argument and suggesting that God is the first cause of the universe at the beginning of time. In fact, the first way is subtler; Aquinas uses the word "motion" in its Aristotelian sense, meaning all forms of change from potentiality to actuality.

For Aristotle, all things have a potentiality. A stick has the potential to be living on the tree, full of sap and supporting leaves, or dry on the woodpile or burning in the grate - or ash in the bucket. It cannot actualise all its potential at the same time and place. Nothing in this world is 100% actual, fully what it has the potential to be. Further, nothing changes or actualises part of its potential without being changed by something else. The stick does not spontaneously combust – it is set alight by a lit match. Everything and every change depends on other things and other changes. Taking a step back, this does not make sense. If everything must have its potential actualised by something else and nothing can be its own explanation, then nothing should exist, - but it does!

Aquinas concludes that an actual infinity in movement is impossible and there must be something, unlike any other thing, that could be its own explanation, an unmoved *prime mover* that could go on to actualise all other potential.

It might seem that this means that God has potentiality to change since everything in the universe which moves something else changes from one state to another in the act of moving something else. However this is not the case. Aristotle argued that God creates motion by attracting or drawing the universe towards God's self. God does nothing. This is important – indeed it is vital! Aristotle's God does nothing at all and yet God is responsible for all motion in the universe. Merely by existing God draws the universe towards God's self without any activity by God. It is like a magnet causing motion in something else without doing anything at all except being what it is. Aristotle's God is supremely indifferent to the universe – God contemplates God's self and has no interest in the universe, does not create the universe and certainly does not intervene in the universe but, merely by existing, the whole of the universe depends on God. Aquinas was to modify this idea and to argue that this God was the God of Christianity and was, essentially, Trinitarian.

The Second Way

Aquinas' second argument also arises from Aristotle's Philosophy, specifically Aristotle's theory of causation. For Aristotle all things have four causes; material causes (ingredients), efficient causes (agents which cause them to be), formal causes (a definition or essence) and a final cause (a purpose or goal). Focussing on efficient causes, nothing exists in the world which has not been caused by some other thing. Aquinas concludes that there must, at some point, have been a first cause because an actual infinity of causes is impossible and things exist. It is important to note that although the chain of efficient causes and effects is *often* a temporal one, one thing causing a subsequent thing, causing a subsequent thing and so on, this is *not necessarily* the case. Efficient causes, agents which bring another thing into being, may or may not be necessary to sustain its existence.

For example, some oak trees are affected by mistletoe, a parasite. The oak tree is an efficient cause of the mistletoe – it is not like the seed or spore of the plant, or like the sunlight or rain, it is not just a cause in the way that a spark is the cause of a fire. Rather it continues to sustain its being. For another example, if some of the causes of a circus plate-spinning display are...

- Material: Clay, glaze, gilding, bamboo etc.
- Efficient: Potter, fire, sticks, circus-performer
- Formal: Design of plate and trick
- Final: Entertainment

Some of the efficient causes might be temporal, one thing leading to another, but some are sustaining, continually needed if things are to stay as they are. The potter need not be present for the plate to spin, but the stick must!

It is important to realise that none of Aquinas' ways is properly represented by the GCSE "domino" analogy [or identical with the Muslim Kalam argument, for those of you who have studied it]. The ultimate causes identified in all three of Aquinas' cosmological arguments are better represented by the sticks which circus-performers sometimes use to support spinning plates. This point is important in understanding the famous radio-debate between Frederick Copleston sj and Bertrand Russell, which will be considered later...

The Third Way

The Third Way arises from the principle of contingency, related to the principle of Aristotelian principle of potentiality, described above.

Everything has the potential to be or not to be, everything is contingent, but, given infinite time and space, this cannot be. If everything actualised its potential not to be simultaneously then nothing would exist, and given infinity this must occur, but things exist – so there must be something which does not have the potential not to exist, which is not contingent but necessary.

- P1 Everything can 'be' or 'not be' (so everything may or may not exist)
- IC If this is so, given infinite time, at some time everything would not be (if every possibility could be realised in infinite time, there would once have been a time when there was nothing at all. This ignores, however, the Principle of Conservation of Matter which states that matter and energy may remain constant whilst changing their state.)
- P3 If there was once nothing, nothing could come from it. (Something cannot come from nothing)
- IC2 Therefore something must necessarily exist (note most carefully that this is not God)
- P5 Everything necessary must be caused or uncaused (Aquinas introduces the category of caused necessary things –these are things that are caused to exist but cannot go out of existence – he is thinking of Angels and human souls)
- P6 The series of necessary things cannot go on to infinity as there would then be no explanation for the series (this rules out the idea of an infinite regress of caused necessary beings, one such being causing another)
- C Therefore there must be some Being 'having of itself its own necessity' (this is the idea of something 'de re necessary' – something that cannot not exist and is not dependent for its existence on anything else)
- C2. This is what everyone calls God.

Aquinas' introduction of the idea of caused necessary beings is not essential for the argument – he introduces this for theological reasons and it is not a crucial step. The key idea is that it is impossible to have a universe consisting entirely of contingent things. Something must be necessary for a contingent universe to exist.

Frederick Copleston sj simplified this argument as follows:

- P1 Everything in the universe is contingent
- P2 The universe is the sum total of contingent things
- C The universe itself is contingent
- P3 There must be something that is not contingent and therefore necessarily exists
- C2 This is what everyone calls God

A key feature of this argument is its primary conclusion, that the universe itself is contingent. Arguably there is a leap in logic which makes the first part of the argument *invalid*.

Putting this part of the argument into other terms,

- P1 All human beings have mothers
- P2 All human beings are part of the human race
- C The human race must have a mother

This was one reason why Bertrand Russell's rejected Copleston's argument in their famous 1947 radio debate. He argued that features of parts of the universe do not determine features of the whole universe. While things within the universe might be contingent, that does not mean that the universe is contingent. Perhaps the universe just is, perhaps it does not require an explanation and is the ultimate *brute fact*.

In a way, this is the nub of the whole dependency cosmological argument. What is the ultimate brute fact? Atheists will say it is the brute fact of the universe – something that does not require an explanation. Believers will say that the ultimate brute fact is God who is necessary in and of God's self. Any child of five is likely to ask 'Why Mummy?' when confronted with the existence of the Universe. Theists will reply that God is the answer to this question. The child may then ask 'But why God Mummy?' and the theists answer is that God, by being necessary in and of God's self, is the sort of explanation about which it does not make sense to ask this question. Whether this is convincing or not is, perhaps, the single most important issue in discussion of the argument.

☞ Before thinking about the formal criticisms, DISCUSS: What do you think? Does the Cosmological Argument in any/all of its versions succeed in demonstrating God's existence? Justify your answer.





Criticisms of the Cosmological Argument

In his *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1705) Hume developed five criticisms, which were originally intended to be taken together rather than separately...

- 1) There is *no reason to believe that everything has a cause*. We have only a necessarily partial and subjective understanding of natural laws and cannot conclusively state that "all things must have a cause"
- 2) The argument commits what is called *the fallacy of composition*: it assumes that a characteristic of parts of a thing is also a characteristic of the whole thing. Consider your own body; it is alive but if I cut off an arm or a leg or poked out your eye those parts would not be alive! The whole and parts do not always share characteristics...
- 3) If God is the cause of the universe, then *what is the cause of God?* If God is his own cause, then why can't the universe itself be its own cause? Perhaps the universe has itself existed forever and needs no cause other than simply being what it is.
- 4) Why must the existence of everything have an *intelligible* cause? Why not accept that the sequence of causes has no beginning: it simply goes on endlessly, in an "infinite regress"?
- 5) Even if we were to accept the argument that the universe has a cause, that *would not prove that God is infinite, good, caring, etc.* Since the universe is finite, it would prove only that its creator would have to be powerful and wise enough to create it, but not infinitely powerful, wise, or good. Likewise, it would prove only that God is a cause of things who might not care at all about his creation.

Note that Hume's objections to the cosmological argument are not intended to prove that there is no God. They just show that the argument does not provide any reason to believe in God. The result of Hume's critique is not atheism as much as agnosticism. Nevertheless, Hume's criticisms are often used by atheists

Kant argued that the cosmological argument, because it concludes that a necessarily-existing being exists, ends up depending on the ontological argument. Since Kant destroyed the ontological argument by showing that the concept of necessary existence is impossible, the cosmological argument must also fail.

Like Kant, Russell argued that the idea of "necessary existence" is basically ludicrous. If all things are moved, changed and caused, if all things are contingent, then we cannot reasonably posit the existence of something that is not in the form of God or any other thing. He wrote "Any particle of matter, it is said, may be conceived to be annihilated, and any form may be conceived to be altered. Such an annihilation or alteration is not therefore impossible. But it seems a great partiality not to perceive that the same argument extends equally to the Deity, so far as we have any conception of him..."

In the 11th Century Al-Ghazali (d.1111) had also come to believe that the contingency argument was self-defeating. If the world is eternal, having no beginning or end in time, then the 'necessary being' has already been reached: it is the world. There is no need to postulate an external cause for the universe when an assumed premise of the argument from contingency is that the universe is eternal.

Like Hume, Russell went on to argue that although it is natural to look for a cause for the universe, it is ridiculous to suppose that one will be found! For Russell, and more recently for Richard Dawkins, postulating God as the first cause of the universe is an unnecessarily complicated step. By the process of *Ockham's Razor* (the principle in logic by which the simplest solution is usually the strongest) they argue that there is no need to suppose the existence of an external body to account for the eternal existence of the universe – the universe could just be eternal full stop.

Although John Hick (1922-2012) conceded that Russell had a point in supposing the "brute fact" explanation simpler than the God explanation, he agreed with Richard Swinburne (b.1934) when he argued that..."*It is extraordinary that there should exist anything at all. Surely the most natural state of affairs is simply nothing: no universe, no God, nothing. But there is something. And so many things. Maybe chance could have thrown up the odd electron. But so many particles! Not everything will have an explanation. But...the whole progress of science and all other intellectual enquiry demands that we postulate the smallest number of brute facts. 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 inevitably we cannot explain the existence of that simple being.*"

Alvin Plantinga (b.1932) suggests that Aquinas' cosmological arguments do not work because they rely on a quantifier mistake. This criticism arises from Plantinga's interpretation of Aquinas which suggests that he engages in a temporal argument (suggesting that at some time in an infinite universe of contingencies nothing would

exist). Plantinga concluded of the cosmological argument that "*that this piece of natural theology is ineffective.*" John Haldane (b.1954) of St. Andrew's University is one scholar who would oppose Plantinga's reading of Aquinas, arguing that his quantifier-mistake criticism is invalid.

Richard Gale (1932-2015) argued that since the conclusion of all versions of the cosmological argument invokes an impossibility, then no cosmological arguments can provide examples of sound reasoning. Michael Martin, Quentin Smith and Graham Oppy have all concluded that no current version of the cosmological argument is sound. There has been a trend for conflating the reasoning of the Cosmological Argument with the basic principles of Big Bang Theory, co-opting the observational data and interpretations of modern science as support for the conclusion that an uncaused creator-God brought the universe into existence *ex nihilo*.

It is not difficult to understand how the amateur scientist would be struck by similarities in language and concepts between the Big Bang Theory and Theology. For example, in reading about Einstein's theory of Relativity a Theologian might recall that in the 5th Century St Augustine claimed that "*The world and time had both one beginning. The world was made, not in time, but simultaneously with time.*" Alternatively, in reading about the Singularity, a Philosopher of Religion might recall Aquinas' description of God as "*neither something nor nothing*" ...

Some apparently respectable scientists have lent their support to such a drawing together of contemporary cosmology and Theology – perhaps most famously Professor John Polkinghorne and more recently evangelical Christian scientists such as Professor John Lennox from the University of Oxford.

In 1978, in his book *God and the Astronomers* Astrophysicist Robert Jastrow wrote "*For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.*"

As Jastrow explained later, "*Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every living thing in this cosmos and on the earth. . . . That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact*"

Theodore Schick described the growing numbers of theological interpretations for the Big Bang Theory apparent during the 1990s. He wrote "*Astronomer George Smoot suggested as much when he exclaimed at a press conference reporting the findings of the Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) satellite, 'If you're religious, it's like looking at the face of god.' Why? Because something must have caused the big bang, and who else but god could have done such a thing? Astronomer Hugh Ross in his book, The Creator and the Cosmos, puts the argument this way: 'If the universe arose out of a big bang, it must have had a beginning. If it had a beginning, it must have a beginner.' So beguiling is this argument that astronomer Geoffrey Burbidge has lamented that his fellow scientists are rushing off to join the 'First Church of Christ of the Big Bang.'*"

The Philosopher of Science Adolf Grunbaum (b.1923) reacted strongly against this trend, taking on Craig and other Christian apologists in *Creation as a Pseudo-Problem in Current Physical Cosmology* (1991), *Some Comments on William Craig's "Creation and Big Bang Cosmology"* (1994) and *Theological Misinterpretations of Current Physical Cosmology* (1998). In 1991 he concluded that "*neither the big bang cosmogony nor the steady-state cosmology validates the traditional cosmological argument for divine creation. But, as we see, that argument dies hard.*"

The Fifth Way

Like the first, second and third ways, Aquinas' fifth way used Aristotelian arguments from causation as a starting point. This time Aquinas focussed on the existence of a final cause, a *telos*, in all things. He wrote "*The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.*"

Aquinas' argument is an argument *qua purpose*. Aquinas focuses on the fact that all natural things appear to have a final cause, a *telos* or purpose and moves from this to claim that the universe as a whole also seems to have a final cause, *telos* or purpose. In "*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*" (1779) David Hume's character Philo objected to this movement, pointing out that just because natural things seem to act for an end doesn't mean that the universe as a whole does.

Further, Aquinas argues using an analogy - just as an arrow in mid-flight suggests a target and an archer, the existence of purposeful processes in nature suggests a designer God and a divinely willed end for creation. Hume's character Philo attacks this common approach to developing the teleological argument as well, suggesting that

Practice Essay Titles:

"Critically Evaluate the Cosmological Argument for God's existence."

"To what extent have Aquinas' ways to God survived the development of modern science?"





the selection of analogies is arbitrary and inappropriate. What makes it alright to draw a parallel between the universe and an arrow, or a watch, and not alright to draw a parallel with a house, a human leg or anything else for that matter.

Finally, Philo points out that teleological arguments like Aquinas' fifth way cannot reasonably conclude that the intelligence that sets things in motion towards a final cause is anything like the Christian God. Why one God? Why a competent God? Why not even an evil God... this last point has been developed by several scholars, most recently by Stephen Law in his "The Evil-God Challenge" (2010).

Despite Hume's attacks, the idea that the universe, and all processes within it, are purposive and that this is best explained by a creator-God was extremely popular until the mid-nineteenth century. Even Immanuel Kant thought that the teleological argument, the physico-theological argument as he called it, was the most persuasive of the classical arguments for God.

There were always issues with arguing from teleology though, and John Stuart Mill summarised these in his 1874 works 'On Nature' and 'Three Essays on Religion'. For Mill any sign of purpose in nature is counterbalanced by many signs of chaos, inefficiency and by the existence of things whose purpose is only to cause suffering. Mill wrote... "Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are nature's everyday performances. Even the love of 'order' which is thought to be a following of the ways of nature is in fact a contradiction of them. All which people are accustomed to deprecate as 'disorder' and its consequences is precisely a counterpart of nature's ways. Anarchy and the reign of Terror are overmatched in injustice, ruin, and death by a hurricane and a pestilence..."

Mill also wrote... "If there are any marks at all of special design in creation, one of the things most evidently designed is that a large proportion of all animals should pass their existence in tormenting and devouring other animals." Mill echoed Charles Darwin's remark, that "I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice." This is the Problem of Evil and Suffering, which continues to perplex Theologians and which demands plausible responses, both logical and pastoral, if peoples' faith is to survive its challenge.

☞ Before going on to explore the challenge of Evil in more detail, DISCUSS: to what extent do you accept the proposition that the universe contains signs of order and purpose? Why / why not?

Evil and Suffering as a Challenge to Propositional Faith

In his famous essay 'Evil and Omnipotence', JL Mackie tried to develop a clear argument against God's existence based on the apparent conflict between evil and a world created by an omnipotent God.

Mackie began by observing that traditional arguments for the existence of God have been criticised to the extent that "no rational proof of God's existence is possible" and that believers must at least hold that God's existence is "known in some other, non-rational way". He then suggested "here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another". This would push faith far from being possibly propositional, even non-propositional, into the realm of being fideist in the most anti-intellectual sense. Not only would it be irrational to believe that God exists, but the believer "can only maintain his position as a whole by much a more extreme rejection of reason".

Mackie listed the beliefs which most Christians, and indeed members of other faiths, have.

- P1. God exists and is omnipotent
- P2. God exists and is omnibenevolent
- P3. Evil exists

This forms what David Hume called an "inconsistent triad" of beliefs.

Mackie noted that "there seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true, the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions." He admitted that the contradiction is not necessary unless additional premises or assumptions are added – such as that a good thing always eliminates evil so far as it can – but Mackie contends that it is still a big enough problem for believers to make it difficult for them to consistently uphold P1+P2+P3, though doing so is essential.

Mackie reviewed possible solutions to the problem of evil, but found them all lacking, concluding that "of the proposed solutions of the problem of evil... none has stood up to criticism". While either dropping one of the propositions by denying the existence of evil, denying God's omnipotence or omnibenevolence, or reducing the content of those concepts by means of a redefinition of terms would provide an adequate solution to the problem, it would also have major consequences for other aspects of belief.

For example, if a believer is willing to say that God's power is limited in respect of addressing evil, how could they still use the teleological argument for His existence, which supposes the need for an all-powerful designer?

Mackie is particularly scathing about the tendency for believers to be inconsistent, saying "often enough these adequate solutions are only almost adopted..." He notes how believers may accept God's limitation or the non-existence of evil only when confronted with the problem of evil, only to revert to a more traditional position in other matters. Also how believers can redefine their terms to such an extent that although they appear to have an acceptable theological position and be holding P1+P2+P3, in fact their position is far from clear and probably unacceptable to fellow believers, were it widely realised. For these reasons, he labels many attempts at resolving the problem of evil almost adequate or fallacious.

For Mackie, the problem of evil also serves to highlight the limitation of religious language as well as inconsistency and confusion surrounding believers' concept of God. If people believe that God is omnipotent, what can they possibly mean by that? If God is eternal but in time, watching events as they unfold, then there must be a question over whether God could act to change past events or whether God could know what happens in the future. On the other hand, if God is outside time and space and creation exists wholly and simply from God's perspective, then to what extent could God act directly in time or know how things seem from the perspective of beings within time and space.

Mackie wrote "God's omnipotence must in any case be restricted in one way or another, that unqualified omnipotence cannot be ascribed to any being that continues through time. And if God and his actions are not in time, can omnipotence, or power of any sort, be meaningfully ascribed to him?" If God's omnipotence cannot mean that God could act to prevent what seems to be evil then the "inconsistent triad" becomes stable, but at the price of removing a large part of what makes God worthy of worship and the basis of saying "and this is what everybody means by God" at the end of classical arguments for God's existence.

- ✓ Is it worth praying to a God who could not hear you and could not do anything to help if God could?
- ✓ Can miracles be ascribed to a being who cannot act directly in time? If miracles are pre-programmed into creation from the beginning, or brought about by angelic beings is that really the same as the position most believers wish to maintain?
- ✓ What can heaven or life after death really mean if God is wholly simple, outside time and space? If human beings become timeless to be with God, then no sense of personal identity could remain.
- ✓ Is the *de re* necessary prime mover of the universe limited? If God is no more than a quantum blip, which can both exist and not exist simultaneously and act without cause then can this be the same as the God of Abraham?
- ✓ Can the divine designer be constrained by the time and space God himself created?

Mackie's criticism of traditional Theodicies, attempts to defend God against charges of creating or allowing evil, is worth serious consideration. There are four possible approaches to Theodicy related to the three statements already outlined:

1. Deny P1 or P2 – or redefine the attributes of God
2. Deny or redefine P3, evil.
3. Provide a P4, a 'morally sufficient reason' for a perfect God to have created and/or allowed evil...
4. Demonstrate that P1+P2+P3 is not actually irrational!

Serious thinkers attempt all possible strategies, though most efforts focus on 3, providing a morally sufficient reason for a perfect God to have allowed evil.

St Augustine

St Augustine (354-430) argued that evil has no positive existence – it is "privatio boni", a lack of good which causes suffering just as a lack of health causes illness and a lack of wealth causes poverty. God cannot be accused of creating evil if it does not actually exist. God merely allows evil - and because a world containing it is better than one without.

For Augustine, evil is necessary for free will. If God forced everything to operate according to God's will and to be good, there would be no evil - but then there would also be no possibility of freedom or moral good. Moral goodness, the goodness which is freely chosen, is much better than automatic goodness. Companies reward the conscientious waiter and not the electronic ordering system with an "employee of the month" award precisely because the waiter is free to act in other ways. In order to make moral goodness possible God allows the possibility of things falling short of God's plan.

That people choose to actualise moral goodness is their fault and not God's. Nothing forces people to misuse their freewill, choose to go against the natural order and cause innocent suffering in the process – yet this misuse happened corporately at the beginning of time, at the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, and happens again and again, hour by hour throughout the lives of almost every individual.

For Augustine, God's goodness has to include justice. A good God cannot allow sin, the misuse of freewill to fall short of what we are capable, to go unpunished. Without





 candle
conferences

Painting of St Augustine by Antonio Rodríguez (1636 - 1691)





punishment for sin, there would be no incentive to do good and indeed no real way to know what is good. What sort of God would allow freedom for the sake of moral goodness and not teach us how we should use it to achieve that end?

God's justice requires God to punish human beings for falling short. According to Augustine, as a race we fell short at the Fall; we were all "seminally present" in Adam and participated in his betrayal. Consequently all humans are punished through inherited *Original Sin* - through mortality, hard work, fear, responsibility and pain in childbirth (Genesis Chapter 3), but most through distance from God. Nevertheless, Christian baptism provides us with a way back, redeeming us from Original Sin and making it possible to enter into God's Kingdom through a life of faith and good works. Humans are individually punished for sin as well, either in this life or the next.

Augustine considered whether a perfect God might have been better not to create anything if the best possible creation must contain evil and suffering. Drawing on Plato's *Timaeus*, Augustine argued that the world is perfect because it contains diversity and that without infinite variety God's infinite creativity could not be expressed. This is known as Augustine's *Principle of Plenitude*.

Why God would allow the suffering of animals was difficult for Augustine to explain. He held that neither have the freedom that would allow sin and make their punishment just. Augustine argues that the suffering of plants and animals is *illusory*, it occurs to teach humans by the mercy of God.

- It is better that one should learn not to be violent from the yelping of a puppy than from the screams of another person?
- It is better that one should learn the value of dignity and fortitude in dying from autumn leaves than from repeated familial exposure to terminal illness?

All real natural evil, Augustine maintains, results from the world falling short of its original perfect state due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

One of the difficulties that arose from Augustine's theodicy caused him to argue with Pelagius (354-440), a British monk. According to Augustine doing good works was never going to be enough to achieve salvation; without baptism, without God's grace enabling us to be released from Original Sin, we would all be justly damned. Pelagius argued that this encouraged people to think that taking part in religious rituals would take away any need for them to consider their behaviour and was contrary to the Gospel message of Jesus. Nevertheless, like so many reformers who tried to return Christianity to the Gospel message, Pelagius was declared a heretic. Strangely, the church has not seemed to like the idea that people could earn salvation simply by doing what is right - although it is significant that Pope Francis made statements that seem to be moving in this direction.

Aquinas and Evil

St. Thomas Aquinas' built on the work of Augustine but his theodicy emerges from his wider system. As we have previously seen, his arguments for the existence of God established that the Thomist God is a *de-re necessary* being, who is 'neither something nor nothing'. As such, God is placed at a distance from the universe that God created and is seen as intrinsically *other* - while God is necessary, creation is contingent, while God is perfectly unlimited, creation is limited.

Like Augustine, Aquinas started by arguing that evil has no positive existence and cannot be caused directly by God. For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, goodness is determined in relation to an object fulfilling its nature. It follows that evil is only possible for things which exist in time and space, things which have contingent existence rather than necessary existence. To fall short of one's nature implies time and space in which to do so; a wholly simple, unchanging God cannot fall short of what it is to be God. Necessary existence precludes change and therefore precludes evil. God cannot, therefore, as a matter of logic ever be described as evil since God cannot fall short of what it is to be God.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that evil causes horrendous suffering. Aquinas seeks to provide a 'morally sufficient reason' for God to allow evil and its consequences in creation. Like Augustine, Aquinas starts by arguing that a world containing evil is better than one without. Aquinas wrote:

'The good of the whole is of more account than the good of the part. Therefore, it belongs to the prudent governor to overlook the lack of goodness in a part that there may be an increase of goodness in the whole. Thus, the builder hides the foundation of the house underground, that the house may stand firm. Now if evil was taken away from certain parts of the universe, the perfection of the whole universe would be much diminished, since its beauty results from the ordered unity of good and evil things. Seeing that evil arises from a failure of good, and yet certain goods are occasioned from those very evils through the providence of the governor, even as the silent pause gives sweetness to the Therefore evil should not be excluded from things by the divine providence.'

Like Augustine, Aquinas argued that variety in creation is necessary as it reflects God's infinite majesty. Though the material of contingent creation is necessarily limited, though God's genius the limitations of individual forms is overcome. He wrote,

'The distinctiveness and plurality of things is because the first agent, who is God, intended them. For he brought things into existence so that his goodness might be communicated to creatures and re-enacted through them. And because one single creature was not enough, he produced many and diverse, so that what was wanting in one expression of the divine goodness might be supplied by another, for goodness, which in God is single and all together, is in creatures multiple and scattered.'

Aquinas differed from Augustine, who argued that all genuine natural evils are just punishments for general or specific misuse of free will. For Aquinas earthquakes are part of God's design and are good because they do what they are meant to do (releasing tectonic pressure) and enable the world to do what it is supposed to do (to sustain life).

Aquinas had the option of defining evil as a necessary part of creation. It is not possible for God to do the actually impossible, such as by creating a universe that is not contingent. God would have a perfect excuse for allowing evil, providing that creation with all its flaws is better than no creation at all, but Aquinas worried that we are not in a position to *know* whether this is the best possible world, whether a world without evil would have been better or worse. Swinburne agrees, arguing that it does not make sense to argue that there are greater goods that justify the presence of evil in the world unless we have experience of them, which is impossible. Aquinas concluded *'This world could not be better arranged, but there could be a better world, different from this one'*

For Aquinas, as Brian Davies OP explains, *'God makes the best possible this-world, but not the best possible world'*. Remember, God is under no moral obligation as God is not a moral agent - this universe perfectly fulfils its nature and is rightly therefore called perfectly good. Aquinas seriously considered the question of whether God would have been better to create no world than this world. Gerard Hughes s.j. Wrote...

"Plainly all evils could have been avoided had God decided to create nothing at all. And all the evils of this world could have been avoided had God created a quite different world.... But whether such a state of affairs, in which god alone existed, or in which no moral beings other than god existed, would be overall better than the present state of affairs is just the question I think cannot confidently be answered."

Certainly this world contains evil; whether a better world could have been created without these evils we simply cannot know. Hughes concludes his discussions of the problem of whether this is the best possible world with a dilemma:

- 1) Either we can imagine a better version of this world, but without much confidence that what we imagine would be causally possible,
- 2) Or we can suppose that a radically different creation might be causally possible, but we would then have no way of knowing whether it would be better or worse than the present one, since it would be beyond our power to describe it.

Hughes concludes that we lack any perspective from which we are able to judge whether this is, on the whole, a good universe - still less can we judge whether this is the best possible universe. Too often human beings look at the world from their own narrow perspective.

- The rabbit who narrowly escapes being eaten might well see the fox as evil - but, if it was a philosophic rabbit, it could appreciate that the fox was just trying to fulfil its nature, providing food for itself and its cubs, and that in doing so the fox was actually good.
- The man dying of AIDS could bemoan the evil of the world and question the existence of a God who could allow such suffering - or he could marvel at the efficiency of the HIV virus and appreciate that all forms of life are necessarily finite, varied and revelatory of the majesty of God.

However, we cannot totally escape our perspective. We cannot see the world from a God's eye view or understand the mind of God. We cannot realistically analyse or weigh-up the qualities of possible-worlds. Whilst this might seem like *"playing the mystery card"* and fail to satisfy critics, it stems from the reality of the human condition and is probably more rational than supposing that man can be the measure of all things.

In the end, the limits of our contingent existence place such a strain on language and conceptualisation that what it might mean for a wholly simple, timeless God to create anything is baffling. Aquinas' theodicy ends up relying on his doctrine of analogy - and analogy places a necessary distance between human beings and God, invalidating any literal reading of Scripture or tradition and emphasising God's otherness and inscrutability.

Yes, Aquinas can truthfully say that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omni-benevolent - but not unless the *meaning* of each term is carefully delineated. God's power and knowledge are limited to the actually possible and his goodness simply lies in being God. God cannot create anything but the best possible world containing evil.

In conclusion, both the Augustinian and the Thomist theodicies are sophisticated and multi-layered. They both approach the problem of evil by

1. Denying P1 or P2, redefining God's attributes
2. Denying P3, the positive existence of evil.
3. Providing a P4, a 'morally sufficient reason' for a perfect God to have allowed evil
4. Ultimately, demonstrating that P1+P2+P3 is not irrational.

Yet, in the end, neither approach is very pastorally satisfying.

- ✓ Can one respond to the victims of the Japanese Tsunami by saying that it was a just punishment from God?
- ✓ Can one comfort the parents of a still-born baby by saying that God, in his justice, will punish their infant for the sins of Adam by keeping it out of heaven?
- ✓ Can an omniscient God who creates freedom really not be responsible for its inevitable consequences?
- ✓ Is the evil which inspired the Final Solution really analogous to the pauses in Gregorian Plain Chant as Aquinas indicated?
- ✓ Is a God whose nature prevents God from creating a better world, and from understanding or caring about people who experience the worst of this one, really worthy of worship?





Practice Essay Titles:

“Evil and suffering fatally undermine any argument from design in the universe” Discuss

Evaluate the suggestion that this world is the best possible world.

“Religious Experience is the best reason for believing in God!” Critically Evaluate this claim.

Despite what may be the pastoral shortcomings of the traditional best-possible-worlds theodicies of Augustine and Aquinas, Leibniz (1646-1716) saw this approach as the most philosophically sound, writing:

‘Now as there is an infinite number of possible universes in the ideas of God, and as only one can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God’s choice... And this reason can only be found in the fitness, or in the degrees of perfection, which those worlds contain, each world having the right to claim existence in proportion to the perfection which it involves. And it is this which causes the existence of the best, which God knows through his wisdom, chooses through his goodness, and produces through his power...’

He was roundly mocked for asserting the goodness of creation in the face of overwhelming evidence. In 1755, an enormous earthquake struck Lisbon and underlined the dangers of this sort of argument for philosophers’ reputations. Saying that this is the best possible world as bodies were being recovered from wrecked homes seemed in poor taste!

Despite the dangers, the puzzle of reconciling God’s perfection with the apparent limitations of God’s creation retains its fascination today, though scholars tend to reserve such discussions to academic papers rather than explaining the issues in sermons.

Is this REALLY the Best Possible World?

Robert Adams, Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne all reject the idea that there is such a thing as a best of all possible worlds. Swinburne claims that if there is going to be a world, there is no reason to suppose that a world with one more or less individuals would be less good. Like Aquinas, Swinburne tries to see the world from God’s perspective and broadly considers a good world as one which fulfils God’s intentions. Swinburne warns against drawing either of two false conclusions.

Firstly it would be wrong to say that God *would not create any world*, even a less good one. Aquinas suggested that God’s goodness effectively forced him to create worlds which fulfil God’s purpose, although he acknowledged that God could have created a variety of worlds with different purposes. Leibniz went further, arguing that if there were not a best-possible-world God would not create any world, that God is constrained to create only the best. Whereas, for Swinburne, God would have reason to create a world but no overriding reason to create this world.

- Chris and Mary have a reason to buy a house within commuting distance of Cambridge, that is close to where Mary works in London - and that does not cost too much. This does not mean that there is ONE such house that they must buy - there may be many alternatives which fit these descriptions.

Secondly, for Swinburne, it is false to say that God *might create any world*. God might have reason not to create worlds in which there is excessive innocent suffering.

- There might not be any house at all which fits Chris and Mary’s requirements and, after years of searching, they might decide not to buy at all rather than compromise.

It follows that God has reason to create a world or worlds of a broad type or group that fulfils God’s intentions - and might have reason not to create a world or worlds of a type or group that would not fulfil God’s intentions, such as a world which contains excessive innocent suffering. Swinburne considered that there are four possible-world groups...

- GROUP ONE** contains a limited number of immortal free beings who can improve the world to a limited extent before it is perfect
- GROUP TWO** contains a limited number of immortal free beings who can improve the world to an unlimited extent
- GROUP THREE** an unlimited number of immortal free beings who can reproduce and improve the world to an unlimited extent
- GROUP FOUR** an unlimited number of mortal free beings who can reproduce and improve the world to an unlimited extent

First, Swinburne argued that human freedom is an obvious condition of the best-possible-world and that part of this is the ability to make unlimited improvements to our world. Further, Swinburne claims that reproduction adds to peoples’ ability to enjoy and perfect the world - without having children we would be constrained in expressing our creativity, love and joy in humanity just as God might be constrained if he had never created a world. It follows that God has reason to create a world of groups three or four, not groups one or two.

Swinburne went on to argue that God would have reason to create a world falling into world group four, but *not* a world in world-group three. A world with death in it is better than one without because death has advantages, beyond the obvious lack of space if the human population eternally expanded. For examples,

- The old will die; young people need a chance, otherwise the old will dominate.
- It limits the amount of suffering humans have to undergo.
- It allows for the possibility of the ultimate self-sacrifice.
- It means that God trusts human beings, even to inflict ultimate harm.
- By limiting life, it concentrates our attention on life.
- We learn from the presence of death.

Swinburne rejects a world where there is less suffering as a demand for a *‘toy-world’* where nothing matters very much. He sees this-world as a *‘do-it-yourself kit world’* which humans can perfect over a long period of time and where we can learn from our mistakes; what appears to us as evil can be occasions for us human beings to develop higher-level virtues. He sees this-world, which contains death and innocent suffering, as better than the alternative possible-world types - and better than no world at all.

Peter Vardy previously attacked Swinburne, saying that this is *“an obscene position”*. His reaction was shared by the audience at a public debate in which Swinburne suggested that the world containing the Holocaust might be better than one without, because the death-camps gave Jews the opportunity to develop virtues such as courage. Richard Dawkins, who was also on the panel, later discussed Swinburne’s contribution in *The God Delusion* (2006), referring to it as *“Swinburne’s grotesque piece of reasoning”* and saying that it is *“damningly typical of the theological mind”*, a mind which Dawkins argues is callous and out of touch to the point of being immoral.

Swinburne sees human freedom as a precondition of a best-possible-world and sees reproduction and death as necessary means of actualising that freedom. Without having children, people would be constrained and without death limitations would be placed on life. Another critic, Vincent Cosculluela, observed that there are many free choices that people do not have. He asks why God does not trust us and give us the choice over whether or not to surrender our immortality - the old could choose to make way for the young or otherwise people could choose to lay down their life for others. Wouldn’t this be a greater sacrifice than a mortal merely accepting death?

Cosculluela also maintains that death undermines justice - it provides a means of escaping one’s own failures (e.g. through suicide) and otherwise means that people are often not brought to justice in this world. For examples, both Fred West and Harold Shipman (who were both obscene killers) committed suicide in prison and Jimmy Savile died before his abuse of underage girls was uncovered. In a world where humans are immortal there would be no escaping the consequences of one’s actions. A world without death would actually be a better world, a world where God trusted human agents more, than a world with death. He argues, therefore, that Swinburne’s position is flawed.

Perhaps it is fair to say that peoples’ response to evil and suffering depends on prior probability. People who are pre-disposed to believe in God are convinced by the teleological argument while atheists remain atheists. Of course, until Darwin published *“On the Origin of Species”* in 1859 science lacked a well-known, plausible alternative explanation of the appearance of design in the natural world. Yet as the theory of evolution by natural selection gained traction, the appeal of teleological arguments *qua purpose* declined quickly. To many people evolution by natural selection seemed a much simpler and common-sense solution than a supernatural creator, let alone one as complicated as the God of Religion. Today fewer people see faith as a logical response to their experience of the world and fewer have strictly Propositional Faith.

Summary: Where have we got to?

Aquinas’ five ways support Propositional Faith, faith that is based on reason. For Aquinas, faith in God is a logical response to experiencing motion, causation, contingency and teleology in nature. Observational evidence and not just the Bible or the authority of the Church, points towards the existence of a wholly simple, *de re* necessary God unlike any other thing, *“neither something nor nothing”*. God provides his own explanation, is not contingent or dependent on anything else, God is unchanging, eternal and other.

Nevertheless, each of Aquinas’ ways takes the form of an *a posteriori* inductive argument and therefore each may be refuted if the observations, the propositions, on which the argument depends, are shown false. The existence of uncaused causes in





the quantum world might falsify the premises of the way to God from causation and this version of the cosmological argument might be a dead end. The existence of evil and suffering might be held to falsify the proposition that nature is characterised by order and purpose and the way to God from design might also be shown to be a dead end.

Although Natural Theology provides strong evidence to support belief, that evidence and the faith it supports is always subject to challenge. Arguably, Propositional Faith is not as strong as other forms of faith. Indeed, some would say that it is not really faith at all. Even Aquinas admitted that reason and Natural Theology cannot take us all the way to God. For Aquinas, it is as if Faith is a destination city served by two railway lines. The fast line, reason, leaves passengers to find their own way from an out-of-town terminus. The slow line, revelation, is completely unreliable but can deliver some passengers right into the city-centre. Close to the end of his life Aquinas had a series of Religious Experiences and stopped writing, saying that "all that I have written seems like straw to me" (mihi videtur ut palea).

Religious Experience

There is a big difference between basing faith on one's own direct experience of God and basing it on other peoples' experiences. Although celebrity atheist Richard Dawkins (b.1941) argues that the proper response to having a Religious Experience would be to check oneself into a psychiatric hospital, most other people accept that it is reasonable to believe one's own senses, providing that the experience is consistent with the nature of a loving God.

As to accepting other peoples' experiences, Richard Swinburne (b.1934) argues that whether reports of religious experiences should be accepted depends largely on assessment of **prior probability**. If you consider that fairies cannot possibly exist, you will not accept claims to have seen fairies. If you consider that aliens do not exist, you will not even consider accepting claims of aliens being seen. In the case of God, the same applies. If one is a convinced atheist, then other peoples' religious experiences are likely to be rejected as a basis for believing in God.

Swinburne goes on to argue for two key principles:

1. **The Principle of Credulity** maintains that things are probably as they seem to me. Unless the conditions are such that doubt is merited, things are probably as they seem. To deny this, he argues, would land us in a sceptical bog. If, therefore, it appears that God or the Virgin Mary has appeared to a person then it is reasonable to accept this is the case (provided, of course, that one accepts there is a reasonable prior probability that God or the Virgin Mary exists).
2. **The Principle of Testimony** maintains that, by and large, people do not lie or set out to deceive us. In the absence of reasons for thinking that a person is mistaken or deceived (for instance if they were on drugs or had been drinking heavily) then it is reasonable to accept the reports of religious experiences as valid.

These principles accepted, the huge number of reports of Religious Experiences provide the basis for an argument for the existence of God. In very basic terms, such an argument could be presented like this...

- P1. Religious Experiences are relatively common
- P2. Religious Experiences are best explained by the existence of God
- C. God Exists

Clearly, there are some immediate criticisms of this argument. Dismissing Swinburne's Principles, it could be that Religious Experiences are better explained by physiological, psychological or sociological factors than by the existence of God. However, Swinburne would respond by referring to prior probability; for those who are disposed to accept Religious Experiences and God then the argument seems sound but for those who are not disposed to accept either then the argument seems unsound. To be clear, Swinburne accepts that none of the arguments – Religious Experience included – succeed in proving God's existence but in "The Existence of God" (2nd edition, 2004) he maintains that, if all the arguments are taken together, they succeed in showing there is a reasonable possibility that God may exist. If (and this is the key assumption) this is accepted, then claims to religious experience should be regarded as good evidence for the existence of God.

Of course, there are a great variety of different religious experiences, so there is a problem in using them as the basis for an argument for God's existence. What is a Religious Experience? What counts and what does not count? Is there any acceptable definition for the sort of experiences which can serve as propositional evidence for faith?

William James

In his Book 'The Varieties of Religious Experience' William James (1842-1910) wrote what is still regarded by many as the classic text on Religious Experience. He described four "marks" that most Religious Experiences share...

1. **Noetic quality** – religious experiences and particularly mystical religious experiences, which were the focus of William James work, convey knowledge. For some it is knowledge given in a voice, or by way of a vision. For the mystic, it might be knowledge which transcends the intellect. William Johnstone describes this noetic quality of a mystical experience as God infusing the person's heart with 'knowledge and love' and argues that such knowledge is not knowledge of concepts or facts but it is obscure.....found in a cloud of unknowing or in a dark night. **St John of the Cross** wrote of this that '*God teaches the soul secretly and instructs it in the perfection of love without its doing anything or understanding how this happens.*)
2. **Ineffability** - they cannot easily be expressed by words. Words are not enough. A person has to experience it themselves to fully understand. **Teresa of Avila** wrote '*For it is one grace to receive the Lord's favour; another to understand it; it is yet another thing to express this understanding in words.*' **Thomas Merton** equally - '*There is then in Christian experiences a natural tendency to set them down in language and symbols that are easily accessible to other Christians*' but in reality he struggled as many of his experiences were beyond words and it was almost impossible to express them in words.
3. **Transiency** – the religious experience usually lasts only a short time but it has a lasting impact.
4. **Passivity** – the person cannot demand the experience, they are given. No matter how hard a person works to obtain these experiences they are always experienced as a gift. The person feels in the power of something superior, they are passive – acted upon rather than acting.

William James identifies the mystics' experience of union with the divine as the most distinctive feature of mysticism; "*it is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition hardly altered by clime or creed.*" James is clear that mysticism involves a certain self-emptying, which carries with it the potential for "diabolical mysticism", being filled with delusions, paranoia, desolation, pessimism, negative feelings, as much as for genuine mysticism and being filled with feelings of noetic transcendence.

James, like most writers on spirituality, believes the validity of 'religious experience' must be judged by the fruits unique to this type of experience: '*.... that element or quality in them which we can meet nowhere else*' which he summarises as: '*.....Saintliness.... spiritual emotions are the habitual centre of the personal energy; there is a certain composite photograph of universal saintliness, the same in all religions....*' and this, like primary experience, is common to saintly figures in world religions where the four 'fruits' of primary religious experience may be found:

1. A feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's little interests; and a convictionof the existence of an Ideal Power.
2. A sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a willing self-surrender to its control.
3. An immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down.
4. A shifting of the emotional center towards loving and harmonious affections.....Asceticism.....Strength of the soul.....Purity.....Charity'.....Religious rapture, moral enthusiasm, ontological wonder, cosmic emotion, are all unifying states of mind...'





James' four marks have been criticised for being very broad and for fitting a wide variety of experiences, including symptoms of common mental illnesses and common experiences that people have after physically traumatic experiences such as giving birth. Some argue that it is a contradiction to claim that religious experiences are ineffable. Many who have religious experiences do take considerable care to describe the actual contents of their experiences.

The mark of transiency was challenged by research by Greeley who asked people how long they would say that their religious experience had lasted. 51% said a very short while (up to 10 minutes) but the rest of the sample reported that it lasted for quite some time – 6% said up to a year! Others such as the Anglican mystic Evelyn Underhill argue that the religious path of mysticism is a life time pursuit and not transient at all. For the mystic who has advanced to higher levels the experience of the presence of God with them and in them becomes a permanent state.

Walter Stace (1886-1967) produced a different list of what he claims are universal features of religious experiences. This includes the experience of a unifying vision, timelessness and spacelessness, sense of reality, feeling of blessedness, joy or peace, feeling of the sacred, something which defies logic, ineffable and the sense of loss of self. Stace describes mysticism as

"the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor reason can penetrate." "The core of the experience is thus described as an undifferentiated unity- a oneness or unity in which there is no internal division..."

Stace is keen to assert that there is only one true mystical experience – this experience is common to all mystics across all cultures – but they interpret it differently dependent on their religious and cultural background. In other words, the experiences of a Christian mystic such as St Teresa of Avila are identical to those of the Buddha, but she interpreted hers in the light of the cross and Jesus as the door to all mystical union, whereas the Buddha interpreted his with an eastern flavour. Stace asserts that the mystical experience is an experience of something outside of the individual and cannot be explained in psychological terms.

Thomas Merton was a 20th century mystic who had an experience like that which Stace describes. He wrote;

'In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut Street, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness'. This is a good example of Stace's emphasis on the unitive side of religious experience.

Stace's description of Religious Experience can be criticised as well; it may not be comprehensive as it does not include features such as visionary religious experiences. Describing the main features of religious experiences is difficult because of the vast range of experiences which people have. Although William James was describing the main features of mystical religious experiences there is a sense in which his list is useful as a descriptor for religious experience generally. Not only is it recommended by its brevity but because it does capture the essence of a great many types of religious experience.

In "The Idea of the Holy" Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) uses the word "numinous" to define mystical experience. Otto comments extensively upon the nature of numinous experience:

" [The experience is] inexpressible, ineffable...." (p.5)

"...it grips or stirs the human mind... The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its "profane," non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strongest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering." (p.12-13)

The numinous experience tends to have these attributes:

- The element of "awe" fullness (p.13)
- The element of overpoweringness (p. 19)
- The element of energy or urgency (p.23)
- The element of the "Wholly Other" (p.25)
- The element of fascination (p.31)

For Otto, the mystic apprehends the 'wholly other' and is overpowered by the experience. It is so overwhelming that it cannot be denied. This echoes a similar idea in William James who claims that religious experiences are authoritative for those who have them but this does not make them authoritative for others (it is this claim that Swinburne seeks to address – see above).

C.S. Lewis's has a story which makes clear the nature of numinous dread and its difference from ordinary fear:

"Suppose you were told that there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told "There is a ghost in the next room," and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for no one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fact that it is a ghost. It is "uncanny" rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous. Now suppose that you were told simply "There is a mighty spirit in the room" and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking-described as awe, and the object which excites it is the Numinous."

The difficulty in classifying and defining Religious Experiences does little for the credibility of arguments from Religious Experience and means that few people will see the prevalence of reports of Religious Experiences as a good reason to believe in God in itself. As William James argued: mystical states, when well developed, usually are and have the right to be authoritative over the individuals to whom they come but that no authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.

Suggested Philosophy of Religion Resources:

The Internet is a fantastic resource for students of A Level Religious Studies, providing that it is used wisely.

In particular, be cautious about the information and essay-writing guides given on revision sites (even the big ones) - the sites mostly relate to the old exam specifications and their content and tips may not apply to the exams you will be taking. Also, some revision sites contain quite significant factual mistakes, which have led students to lose marks before now. Look for reputable sites, associated with known Universities, Scholars or Newspapers/Magazines. Check the "About" page of the website if you are unsure where it comes from, so that you can make a proper judgement.

If your school or college has a library, make sure you pay it regular visits. There is NO substitute for reading books - and universities expect you to be able to use a library effectively when you start any undergraduate course. Library resources which you can access on computers may include JSTOR (almost unlimited scholarly articles on all topics). Free-access web-resources to support your learning should include:

1. The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy and, for those aiming for top grades, the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.
2. New Advent has online searchable texts of Aquinas' works as well as those of many other Christian writers... e.g. Augustine.
3. www.reasonablefaith.org is William Lane Craig's site, containing masses of free articles and videos on Philosophy of Religion.
4. Infidels.org is the Secular web - it provides a wealth of free scholarly articles criticising the arguments for God in one place.
5. Crash Course Philosophy (YouTube) provides fantastic 10 minute videos on all aspects of Philosophy, which are great for revision.





Roman Catholic Propositional Faith

The Anti-Modernist oath promulgated by Pope Pius X required Catholics to affirm that "God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from the created world (cf. Rom. 1:20), that is, from the visible works of creation, as a cause from its effects, and that, therefore, his existence can also be demonstrated..." Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998) also affirms that reason is necessary for faith. He wrote...

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves"

Non-Propositional Faith

The Welsh Philosopher HH Price (1899-1984) distinguished between *believing in* something and *believing that* something. To *believe that* is propositional, the result of argument and so potentially falsified. It is an intellectual decision. To *believe in* however, is an attitude which requires that one's whole being changes. For Price, *believing in* is what Religious faith is really about – it cannot be reduced to believing that, whatever atheist philosophers seem to argue.

The reality of a non-propositional approach to faith is well expressed by St Anselm of Canterbury in *Proslogion* Chapter One. Although Anselm is associated with developing the Ontological Argument for God's existence, his writings make it clear that he did not believe that faith is simply the result of reasoned argument. He wrote,

"O Lord, I do not attempt to gain access to your loftiness, because I do not at all consider my intellect to be equal to this task. But I yearn to understand some measure of your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I believe even this: that unless I believe, I shall not understand."

For Anselm understanding is not necessary for faith, but faith hungrily seeks understanding. Philosophy is not just a tool for convincing atheists or winning arguments about *beliefs that*, it is a process which enriches *faith in God*.

The Danish Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) has been interpreted as maintaining a non-propositional definition of faith. Kierkegaard wrote *"I do not believe... that God exists, but I know it; whereas I believe that God has existed... even from the Greek point of view, the eternal truth by being for an existing person, becomes an object of faith and a paradox."* Faith is the individual's reaction to the paradox of Christianity. Since essential truth is far beyond our comprehension, it appears to us in the form of a paradox.

Jesus was a man. It is reasonable to believe that he existed. He lived truthfully. It is reasonable to believe what he said. Jesus said that *"the Father and I are one"* and demonstrated powers that only God could have - so it is reasonable to grapple with the meaning and implications of this claim. On one level the idea that God was made man is absurd, yet it is not reasonable to dismiss what is claimed by an otherwise impeccable source of truth.

It is more likely that the human mind is limited than that the truth is limited by what the human mind can conceive of. Kierkegaard would not have us believe the impossible or the contradictory, yet, because faith is necessarily puzzling and uncertain,

"when faith requires that he relinquish his understanding, then to have faith becomes just as difficult for the most intelligent person as it is for the person of the most limited intelligence, or it presumably becomes even more difficult for the former"

Kierkegaard is often identified with the idea that Faith requires irrational trust. Like in "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade", faith is not real unless it requires one to put one's weight on nothing, expecting it to hold. For Kierkegaard,

"there is no gradual accumulation of sensory data or rational proofs for God's existence or for the resurrection of Christ, etc. One performs a willed act of faith despite fear, doubt, and sin. The leap is not out of thoughtlessness, but out of volition."

The so-called "leap of faith" is not simply a suspension of one's critical faculties becoming certain of something beyond reason. For Kierkegaard, faith is the acceptance of the necessity of doubt and struggle with reality, a giving up of any hope of certainty.

For Kierkegaard, knowledge is *"the expression of reality in thought. When the reality in question is itself abstract, or ideal, and thus agrees in its essence, with the medium in which it is expressed, then knowledge of it is unproblematic... Knowledge becomes problematic, however, when the reality which is its object is not abstract but rather actual or concrete"*

Following Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), he believed that we can have certain analytic knowledge of necessary truths, matters of reason that arise from the relationships between concepts, however synthetic knowledge of the external world can only ever be probable, not certain. Human observations are always partial; human experiences of the external world are necessarily subjective. What human beings observe *might* reflect the objective truth but, because they cannot escape subjectivity it is impossible to know whether this is the case.

Human beings cannot use observations of the natural world to support belief that God exists, but that does not alter the fact that God either exists or He does not. Human beings must accept that certainty and full understanding is not possible; they must make a choice either to live in relationship with God or not to. Unless people come to accept their own subjectivity and the necessity and significance of making a choice about God, religion will have no significance in life and faith will not be real.

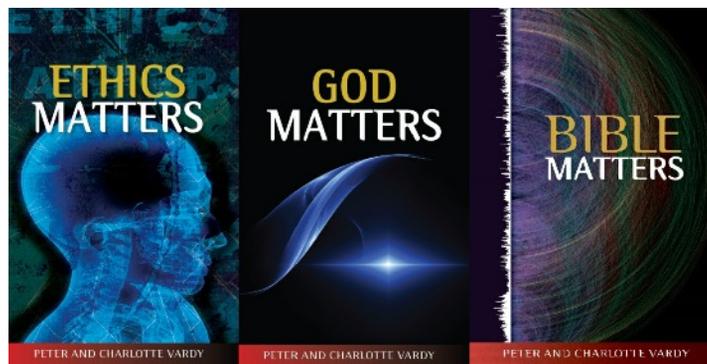
In his book *Dynamics of Faith* Paul Tillich (1886-1965) explored the nature of faith, arguing that although it involves both rationality and emotion, it transcends them both and overcomes the usual subjectivity of the human perspective which Kierkegaard had described. Tillich claimed that *"we never can be without"* the holy *"mysterium tremendum et fascinans"*, that it *"can destroy us as it can heal us"*. Faith involves a risk or wager, existential courage. It involves the certain acceptance of uncertainty, which can be overwhelming and lead us to live in what Kierkegaard called a state of *"fear and trembling"* or *"sickness unto death"*. Nevertheless, for Tillich God is nothing short of *"the ground of our being"*. It may be difficult to accept and live in relationship with God, but God concerns us ultimately and ignoring God is like ignoring reality itself.

For neither Kierkegaard nor Tillich is faith a comfortable state or an easy option!

Further Reading:

It is vital that those students aiming for a C grade or above start to read around the subject during Year 12. You will not get the required depth of information, or the understanding that is needed to link the topics synoptically, from the endorsed A Level textbooks that are currently available. Here are some places to start your wider reading:

- God Matters, Ethics Matters and Bible Matters (all Peter and Charlotte Vardy, SCM Press) offer an affordable solution to wider reading for those students who lack access to a full subject-library. These books together would go a long way to giving able students the broader understanding they need to get the top grades.
- Peter Vardy's *The Puzzle of Ethics* and *The Puzzle of God* are tried-and-tested textbooks to support topics on the Ethics and Philosophy of Religion - his brand new *"The Puzzle of Christianity"* (also HarperCollins) hopes to do the same for the Christianity paper.
- For students or departments with a limited budget, a good anthology like Chad Meister's *Introducing Philosophy of Religion* (Routledge, 2009) is a great way to encourage wider reading. Meister includes Christianity-relevant topics like Religious Diversity and Pluralism alongside the standard Philosophy of Religion topics.
- For those looking for a single book to extend their understanding, "The Miracle of Theism" by JL Mackie or "The Existence of God" by Richard Swinburne would offer a way of engaging with scholarship that would be relevant and go beyond introductory surveys.
- In terms of journals and magazines, subscriptions to *Dialogue*, *Philosophy Now* and *RS Review* are all worthwhile.





that the God hypothesis is live and our option in respect of it is living, forced and momentous.

Also like Pascal, James argued that beliefs are never purely rational; they tend to be *pragmatic* and, as such, point towards a *passional* (emotional) human nature rather than a purely intellectual one. In other words, human beings do not simply choose what to believe on the basis of argument; other factors play a part. People cannot choose to believe things which they *know* to be false, but they often choose to accept authority rather than wrestle with issues for themselves.

James then explored beliefs which cannot be supported on purely rational grounds, such as belief in God. He pointed out the limitations of empiricism, noting that although it fosters the attitude of continually searching for the truth, which is extremely important, empiricism holds us back from making some forced choices. In the case of God, James agreed with Pascal that the choice is inescapable; as Descartes is reputed to have said, "to know what people really think, pay attention to what they do, rather than what they say." He also agreed with Pascal that the choice cannot be made on rational grounds. James pointed out that, despite this, empiricism prevents people making the choice to believe, that in effect it forces them to choose not to believe when that choice is as indefensible as the choice to believe would be.

James argued that people have more to lose in being paralysed by doubt than they have to gain and that there is a pragmatic case for abandoning empiricism and choosing to believe, or at least to put themselves in a position whereby faith might develop, on the basis of passion, not reason.

Like James, F.R. Tennant (1866-1957) took faith to be the adoption of a line of conduct not warranted by present facts, which involves experimenting with the possible or ideal, venturing into the unknown and taking the risk of disappointment and defeat. Faith involves treating hoped for and unseen things as if they were real and then acting accordingly. Richard Swinburne (b.1934) referred to this approach as the *pragmatist* model of faith and, in the first edition of *Faith and Reason* argued that it is possible to have faith in certain propositions because unless they are held to be true, "that which is most worthwhile is not to be had."

Against this position, the evidentialist philosopher Jonathan Adler (d. 2012) argued that one cannot (in full reflective awareness, anyway) believe something, while simultaneously accepting that one has insufficient evidence for its truth. The heirs of WK Clifford remain unconvinced by James' account of how we should respond to the limits of empiricism and the ethics of believing that which cannot be supported through reason.

Nevertheless, William Alston (1921-2009) suggested that the problem may be less with the business of choosing a hypothesis regarding matters which cannot be known empirically and more with the use of the word "*belief*" in connection with such hypotheses. For Alston faith may involve 'acceptance' rather than belief; its propositions are borne out in peoples' 'resolve to use them as a basis for one's thoughts, attitude and behaviour'. There can be no firm assurance of the truth of tenets of faith.

Non-Voluntarism

A final understanding of faith is perhaps best represented by the stories of prophets in the Bible. God chose Moses as a leader for the Hebrews, Amos was "plucked" from his work as a farmer tending sycamore trees and sent to preach to the people of Judah and Jonah was chased across land and sea as he tried to escape God's mission for him. The Prophet Mohammed could be another example of somebody chosen by God for faith. For many people of faith it seems that their relationship with God is not the result of their own ordinary will or intellect, but is the will of God.

At its most basic level, a non-voluntarist approach to faith would suggest that some people are made for faith or commanded to believe; whether we have faith or not is, to a large extent, out of our hands.

The great Islamic philosopher Al Ghazali (1058-1111) described the process of acquiring faith in Chapter III of the *Munqidh*. Al Ghazali was a leading philosopher and teacher at the University of Baghdad. He started by looking for proof of God in normal forms of worship and through study, but realised that these would yield nothing. He wrote,

"I also perceived that I could not hope for eternal happiness unless I feared God and rejected all the passions, that is to say, I should begin by breaking my heart's attachment to the world. I needed to abandon the illusions of life on earth in order to direct my attention towards my eternal home with the most intense desire for God, the Almighty. This entailed avoiding all honours and wealth, and escaping from everything that usually occupies a person and ties him down... Turning to look inward, I perceived that I was bound by attachments on all sides. I meditated on all that I had done, teaching and instructing being my proudest achievements, and I perceived that all my studies were futile, since they were of no value for the Way to the hereafter... I thought of nothing else, all the time remaining undecided. One day, I would determine to leave Baghdad and lead a new life, but the next day I would change my mind... This tug of war between my emotions and the summons from the Hereafter lasted nearly six months, from the month of Rajab 488 A.H. (July 1095 A.D.), during which I lost my free will and was under compulsion... God tied my tongue and stopped me teaching... I grew weak. The physicians despaired of treating me. ... Feeling my impotence, my inability to come to a decision, I put myself in the hands of God, the ultimate refuge of

all those who are in need. I was heard by the one who hears those in need when they pray to Him. He made it easy for me to renounce honours, wealth, family and friends."

For Al Ghazali, faith cannot arise from a normal life, from everyday experiences or unassisted reason. It arises from the realisation of the inadequacy of being human and from putting oneself in God's hands. God's grace makes it possible to know God in a new way, to have a certainty in His existence which is otherwise impossible. For Al Ghazali real faith is total certainty, which holds the "soul so bound that nothing could detach it."

In the Christian tradition John Calvin (1509-1564) is most associated with a non-voluntarist approach to faith. For Calvin faith is

"a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit"

For Calvin and modern followers of his tradition such as Alvin Plantinga, some people have a special cognitive faculty which makes them able to sense God and truly *know* His existence. For these people faith is not really a choice. God's reality impresses itself upon them and they cannot honestly deny it. For those without the special cognitive faculty however, God's existence appears no more than possible.

Modern Reformed Epistemology, following the ideas of William Alston (1921-2009), Nicholas Wolterstorff (b.1932) and Alvin Plantinga (b.1932), suggests that for some people, having a "*properly ordered noetic structure*", belief in God is "*properly basic*", reasonable though it is not held as an inference from other truths. For those with faith, reason must then be used to "*defeat the defeaters*", to demonstrate the logical possibility of a faith position and that challenges, such as the existence of evil and suffering, do not destroy its credibility.

In *God and Other Minds* (1967), Plantinga argued that beliefs are *warranted* without regular evidence provided they are grounded and defended against known objections. Because it is conceivably possible that God has designed some minds to know God, faith is possibly warranted apart from argument. Plantinga challenges the dominance of evidentialism, suggesting that it has a limited view of warranted belief. He argues that Religious experiences, including everyday experiences such as awe and wonder, form an important part of the warrant of faith.

Conclusion: So, how does Faith relate to Reason?

The place of reason in forming or supporting faith rather depends on one's definition of faith. For Roman Catholics, many of whom have propositional faith, reason and argument will be of central importance. For Protestants, many of whose faith is non-propositional, reason will not lead to faith nor argument do much to support or erode it, though reason may still be used to explore faith. For Evangelical Christians, many of whose faith is fideist, the relationship between faith and reason will be slight, though the attitude that faith and reason are naturally opposed is not held as widely as many people think. For voluntarists reason and argument have an important part to play, not in terms of proving God's existence, but in demonstrating the benefits of believing in it. For non-voluntarists reason and argument are irrelevant in forming faith, but may be used to explore its nature once it exists.

Arguments for the existence of God and other discussions of God's nature and how belief relates to challenges such as science or the existence of evil and suffering usually stem from either a propositional approach to faith, whereby argument is used to provide reasons to believe, or from a non-propositional and/or non-voluntarist approach, whereby argument is used to explore pre-existing faith. Thus, the philosophical exploration of religion may be conducted either as the *Philosophy of Religion*, which starts from a position of doubt and builds propositional evidence that God exists on which to base faith, or from *Philosophical Theology*, which starts from a position of faith and uses the tools of Philosophy to explore and defend beliefs which are not themselves based on argument.

Scholars are not always clear about which approach they take, how they define faith or how they see reason as relating to it. Some fundamental disagreements between scholars can be traced to one being engaged in the *Philosophy of Religion* and the other *Philosophical Theology*. Philosophical Theology is particularly controversial amongst the Scientific and broader Philosophical community. The credibility of starting with a position of faith and then using the tools of philosophy to suit is not universally accepted.

- While reflecting on the arguments for God's existence and Religious Experience, in the context of Science and Evil, DISCUSS what do you think? Can religious faith be supported by reason? Is it desirable that it should be?
- Which rational reason for faith is the most and the least convincing? Explain and justify your answer. (Extension: Consider Pascal's argument as well as those you will have covered in class).





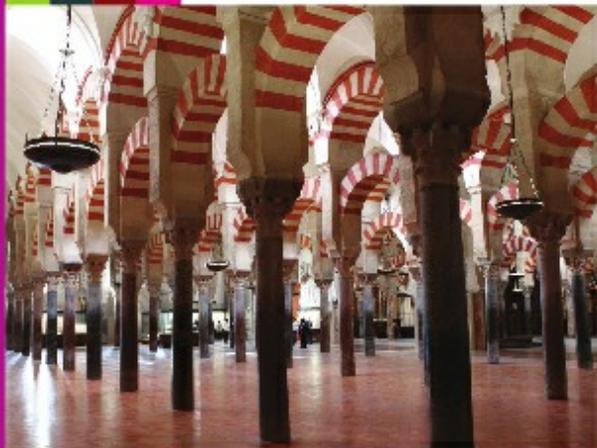
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Writing essays for A Level Religious Studies is all about developing a well structured, convincing ARGUMENT. In academic terms, an argument is a theory (Thesis / Conclusion) supported by a series of reasons (known as *Premises*), so a good essay begins with a clear statement of the theory you are going to advance - this is called your THESIS. Paragraphs should each contain a reason, a point (premise) supporting your thesis, and the essay must end with a CONCLUSION, a restatement of the thesis followed by a summary of the reasons you have given supporting it and, if possible, acknowledgement of the limitations of your argument, what it depends on, who might well disagree etc.

All the exam-boards mark your work in relation to the same Assessment Objectives, which have to be awarded the same proportion of overall marks. You MUST spend time looking at the marking criteria developed by your own board, suggesting what they expect candidates to do in order to be awarded marks for AO1 and AO2. They are similar, but not exactly the same.

AO1: (40% for the full A Level)

Demonstrate **knowledge and understanding** of religion and belief, including:

- religious, philosophical and/or ethical thought and teaching
- influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies
- cause and significance of similarities and differences in belief, teaching and practice
- approaches to the study of religion and belief

AO2: (60% for the full A Level)

Analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief including their significance, influence and study

This is a high-scoring A Level essay...

“To what extent does the Cosmological Argument prove God’s existence?”

The word “cosmological” comes from the Greek “Kosmos” which means both “order” and “universe”; the cosmological argument is, in essence, an inductive argument which starts with the existence of a particular order in the universe and ends with an explanation of that order, God. St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) put forward three versions of the cosmological argument in the *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 2, Article 3 in which he drew from the writings of Aristotle and for the purposes of this essay I will focus on these arguments. Aquinas’ first version of the Cosmological Argument used the Aristotelian concept of motion to argue for the existence of God as the Prime Mover, his second version argued from the Aristotelian concept of Causation to the existence of God as the uncaused cause of the universe and his third version argued from contingency and dependency in all things to the existence of God as a necessary sustaining cause *in esse* for the universe. Clearly, all Aquinas’ arguments are inductive, moving from observations to a conclusion of God’s existence that depends on those observations. It follows that none of Aquinas’ cosmological arguments can claim to *prove* God’s existence; they are subject to the problem of induction and can only provide a high degree of probability, not absolute deductive proof. Beyond that limitation, as William Lane Craig has argued, they succeed in demonstrating the rational plausibility of faith.

Aquinas’ first way starts with the observation that all things are moved by other things. As Anthony Kenny explains, by movement Aquinas means the changing of potentiality into actuality in the Aristotelian sense rather than movement in space. A criticism that could be made of this first proposition in Aquinas’ first argument is that human beings have insufficient experience to make a claim about the behaviour of all things in the universe plausibly sound. Both David Hume and later J.L. Mackie made similar criticisms of the cosmological argument; for all we know there could be unmoved movers within the universe. While recent developments in Quantum Physics seem to support this line of argument, claiming to KNOW that particles are unmoved on the quantum scale is as incredible as claiming to KNOW that everything in the universe is moved. Aquinas’ claim that all things seem to be moved by other things is supported by all normal human experience and has yet to be conclusively falsified by Physics, so it stands for the time being.

Aquinas’ second way starts with the observation that all things require efficient causes outside of themselves and moves on to claim that a chain of causes and caused cannot go on into infinity because if there were no first cause there could not be any subsequent cause as something cannot come out of nothing. Against this reasoning scholars such as Graham Oppy have suggested that Aquinas (and later proponents of the cosmological argument like Craig) are wrong to conclude that an actual infinity is impossible. William Lane Craig has produced a series of rebuttals of this particular criticism and maintains that it is incredible to suggest that the chain of causation has no beginning and yet that the universe exists today. While his argument fails to persuade most mathematicians, it has a good deal of common-sense appeal and succeeds in defending the cosmological argument as part of a religious apologetic, as a reason for being open to faith if not as a conclusive demonstration of God’s existence.

Further, Hume and Russell pointed out that Aquinas’ second cosmological argument makes a leap in its reasoning, moving from observations relating to things within the universe to a claim about the universe as a whole. This could amount to the fallacy of composition; what is true of parts of the universe may not be true of the universe as a whole. It could be that the universe, unlike parts of the universe, is a *brute fact* and provides its own explanation. Although again Craig has rebutted this criticism, appealing to common sense in rejecting the idea that the universe could be uncaused, this seems to be a convincing criticism of the cosmological argument. From the time of Aristotle until the 1960s the Steady State theory dominated theoretical Physics. Proponents including Sir Fred Hoyle found no way of supporting the existence of an uncaused cause for the universe on observations from within the universe, where all things are indeed caused. It was only with the advent of the Big Bang Theory - christened this by Hoyle for its cartoon like quality - that serious scientists started to entertain the idea that the universe had a beginning outside the normal laws of nature. Today, even within the Big Bang paradigm, most serious scientists are reluctant to accept the idea that the cause of the Big Bang is uncaused in any absolute sense and are united in rejecting the efforts of Theologians to recruit Big Bang science into supporting Aquinas’ reasoning and the plausibility of Theism. While it is difficult to accept, the idea that the universe is a brute fact seems like the best of the objections to the cosmological argument.

Yet Aquinas’ third way starts by assuming that the universe is infinite and has no beginning or end. Within an Aristotelian universe, Aquinas reasoned, the contingency, dependency and ultimate potential of all things not to exist suggests that there must be a necessary being, something which cannot not exist, if the current existence of the universe following on from an infinite past and all possibilities being realised is to be explained. Aquinas’ third way seems to respond to the criticism that the universe could be infinite and form its own explanation and opens up the inadequacy of Russell’s reasoning. Frederick Copleston clearly thought that Aquinas’ third way succeeded in rebutting Russell’s critical argument; he based his own version of the cosmological argument on it.

Of course, as with his previous arguments, Aquinas ends his third way by claiming that this necessary being “is what every man calls God.” Aquinas’ attempt to equate the necessary being with the God of religion seems implausible. How could the wholly simple cause of the Universe act within the universe, let alone form a presence in the lives of individual human beings? Aquinas seems to have appreciated this problem; he spent much of the remainder of the *Summa* establishing that the Christian concept of God was compatible with the qualities of the Prime Mover, uncaused-causer and necessary being that he had demonstrated through Natural Theology. William Lane Craig is also aware that the leap from concluding that a Prime Mover, uncaused-causer and necessary being must exist to claiming that these entities are in fact “what everybody calls God” is the weakest part of the Cosmological Argument. He stops his argument before making this claim, leaving it to Theologians to convince people that making it might be reasonable for them. This is the extent to which the cosmological argument succeeds as a demonstration, if not a proof, of the plausibility of having religious faith. It succeeds in creating room for faith and providing a rational defence for believers when they are criticised by atheists but in the end it fails to establish the existence of God as he is actually worshipped.

Note the level of specific detail and reference to scholarship, which is essential to score highly on AO1. Short quotations are a useful means of demonstrating the depth of your knowledge in the examination.

This is the Thesis (in blue) - it is a clear statement of what position the essay will advance... the links to the thesis in the rest of the essay are highlighted in blue as well - together they form the bare argument (AO2)

Each paragraph deals with a separate point (criticism of the argument) and ends by evaluating the point and LINKING the paragraph to the Thesis and the argument as a whole

This paragraph is a COUNTERCLAIM; it deals with the best argument AGAINST the thesis the essay is advancing and serves to demonstrate BALANCE, awareness of other views and the IMPLICATIONS / LIMITATIONS of the conclusion

This is the CONCLUSION - it restates the THESIS, summarises the chief points in support and draws attention to the LIMITATIONS / IMPLICATIONS of the argument.

Note how this paragraph is quite clear in ANSWERING THE QUESTION, using the wording as it was set.





Natural Law

Natural Law underlies most Christian moral principles, so having a good understanding of it is vital...



Christians had been influenced by Natural Law for centuries before Thomas Aquinas used it as the basis for a new systematic Christian moral philosophy, which was accepted as a definitive exposition of Catholic doctrine in 1879 by Pope Leo XIII (although in practice it had been accepted long before that). The apostle Paul seems to reflect Cicero's thinking in his Epistle to the Romans and Augustine of Hippo wrote

'Natural Law is the light of understanding placed in us by God through which we know what we must do and what we must avoid.'... "These rules are written in the book of that light which we call truth and are imprinted on the heart of man as a seal upon wax.'

He also famously remarked that 'lex iniusta non est lex' (an unjust law is not really a law).

Aquinas adopted Aristotle's ethics with relatively few modifications. He reasoned that if the universe was created by God and everything in it has a clear order and purpose, it is simple to argue that things behave in an orderly way and fulfil their purpose because of God's will. Aquinas argues that evil has no positive existence but results from a lack of something good and that 'it belongs to a prudent governor' to create ugly foundations that a great building stands strong, or to place silent pauses in a chant that the music might sound sweeter.

Non-human beings have no choice about how they act, as Hughes puts it 'the non-human parts of creation reflect the eternal law in a deterministic way: they inevitably behave according to the natures they have'. On the other hand, human beings have been created with free-will and have both choice and moral responsibility. 'Unlike rocks or trees human beings can come to understand the kinds of beings they are, and are free to live in a way which corresponds to that understanding, or to refuse to do so.'

Part of human freedom is the ability to understand Natural Law through reason; if humans did not understand how they should behave they could not be held morally responsible for making wrong choices. Every human being can use reason to work out what is morally right and is, therefore, morally accountable.

Aquinas accepted Aristotle's view that human nature includes animal functions (living, growing, eating, sleeping, sex), higher animal functions (contributing to society, working etc.) as well as distinctively human functions (reasoning, free action). He accepted Aristotle's argument that we experience pleasure as a result of fulfilling each of these

functions and that we experience more pleasure, true happiness, from fulfilling our entire nature than from fulfilling any single function within it.

For both Aristotle and Aquinas fulfilling our higher human functions will involve making choices and sacrificing immediate short term pleasures for wider fulfilment. Human beings should not aim for base pleasure, but should aim for total fulfilment and true happiness, as Aquinas wrote

'nor can pleasure itself be the ultimate end, but it is a concomitant of it'.

Where Aquinas differs from Aristotle is in his belief that 'God is the ultimate end of the intellectual substance'. He argues that 'since happiness is the proper end of the intellectual nature, it must come to an intellectual nature according to what is peculiar to it' and that 'the ultimate felicity of man lies substantially in knowing God with his intellect...'. For Aquinas 'knowing God' is the most distinctive human function and key to human fulfilment. It is clear, however, that 'knowing God' is related to the free exercise of rationality and it may not be that different from Aristotle's concept of wisdom and the contemplation of truth that he identifies with *eudaimonia* in Book 10 of the Nicomachean Ethics.

Although in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* Aquinas is at pains to detail how human happiness does not lie in pleasure, honours, glory, riches, worldly power, possessions, the senses, artistic activity or even in the exercise of the virtues, it is clear that each of these things has the potential to give us some pleasure and contribute in part to the fulfilment of human nature. In *Summa Theologica* II, i question 4 article 5 Aquinas argues that 'there are two kinds of happiness, one imperfect which is had in this life, and the other perfect, which consists in the vision of God. But it is manifest that the body is required for happiness in this life...'

Aquinas does not disagree with Aristotle's definition of a good life. He just believes that it cannot be complete unless the highest human capability is fulfilled through the rational contemplation of the truth, God. He wrote: "If man's ultimate happiness does not lie in those external things which are called the goods of fortune, nor in goods of the body, nor in the goods of the soul whether of the sensitive part or in the intellectual part, in the acts of moral virtue, nor in any intellectual activities pertaining to action, namely art and prudence, it remains that man's ultimate happiness lies in the contemplation of the truth. This is the only activity of man that is peculiar to him and is in no way shared by the other animals."





The Precepts of Aquinas' Natural Law

Aquinas goes on to explore which principles of action or 'precepts' follow from Natural Law. The most universal precept, the **primary precept of practical reason**, is

'bonum est faciendum et prosequendum et malum vitandum'
'good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided'

As Mark Murphy explained:

"no one can in acting simply pursue good — one has to pursue some particular good. And Aquinas holds that we know immediately, by inclination, that there are a variety of things that count as good and thus to be pursued — life, procreation, knowledge, society, and reasonable conduct (ST I-IIae 94, 2; 94, 3) are all mentioned by Aquinas (though it is not clear whether the mentioned items are supposed to constitute an exhaustive list).

Aquinas argues that on the most basic level human beings function as animals. Like animals it is natural for human beings to live, grow, eat, sleep and reproduce, ensuring survival. On a higher level, human beings have the potential to function socially, offering friendship and love, and growing in knowledge and wisdom. On the highest level, human beings function religiously and have the potential to know God and contemplate the Truth. All of these functions are good and contribute towards the greater good of human fulfilment; it follows that acting to support any of these goods would be a **primary precept of Natural Law**.

It follows from the primary precepts of Natural Law and how all human beings function that they should uphold certain absolute principles, for example 'thou shalt not kill' and 'thou shalt not steal' (Exod. 20). These become **secondary precepts** of Natural Law which rationality suggests must be applied **consistently**, that is not in some circumstances and not in others but universally and with no exceptions. This gives rise to Catholic teaching that certain actions are 'intrinsically evil' – wrong in themselves.

Aquinas believed that human beings always pursue what they think to be good, but this may be an **apparent good** rather than a **real good**. Aquinas wrote 'evil acts in virtue of a defective good', we think we are pursuing the good but may be mistaken either because the action is poorly motivated (Aquinas wrote 'we say that to give alms for the sake of vainglory is bad') or because it prioritizes a lesser good such as personal happiness outside the context of the greater good of human fulfilment. Nevertheless, Copleston wrote:

"As Augustine says, there are some things which cannot be justified by any alleged good intention... if I steal money from a man in order to give it to someone else, my action is not justified by my good intention... it is not possible to father on Aquinas the view that the end justifies the means."

Human beings are rational and acting for an apparent good is not a justification for doing something that is obviously wrong.

Aquinas also makes a distinction between **interior acts** and **exterior acts** in human behaviour. Exterior acts are those observable by another, while interior acts, such as intention and knowledge, are not directly observable, although they are more significant in God's judgement of us. Aquinas' thinking about what makes an action good or bad is sophisticated and subtle, which contrasts with how it is presented sometimes. As Longford wrote,

"the secondary precepts all have to be interpreted in the context of the situation, and it is here that the flexibility of Natural Law arises. At one point [Aquinas] argues as follows "The first principles are altogether unalterable, but its secondary precepts... although they are unalterable in the majority of cases... can nevertheless be changed on some particular and rare occasions..." Aquinas argues "the more you descend into the details the more it appears how the general rule admits of exceptions, so you have to hedge it about with cautions and qualifications."

This original flexibility in Aquinas' approach to Natural Law is often not recognized by some who appeal to it as a basis for morality today.

Like Aristotle, Aquinas saw that cultivating positive habits of mind and will is the first step in living a good life. Aquinas believed that one needs one's reason to be perfected by the virtues in order to understand how the primary precepts of Natural Law apply in practice.

Aquinas divided four **cardinal virtues** (prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude) from three **theological virtues** (faith, hope, and charity). The cardinal virtues are natural and appeal to our reason as a result of our experience of nature. They are

binding on everyone. The Theological Virtues are revealed by God and are required for us to achieve total human fulfilment in knowing God; humans may not appreciate these virtues without grace.

Law and Morality

Civil law can only be concerned with external actions. It is not able to forbid all wrong deeds, let alone punish them. There are some areas of human affairs that human law cannot control and it should not pretend otherwise. For example, no society has prevented the practice of prostitution and (despite our reasonable disapproval of it) Aquinas suggested that it should be tolerated. He wrote:

"accordingly in human government also those who are in authority rightly tolerate certain evils, lest certain goods be lost, or certain evils be incurred: thus Augustine says [De Ordine 2.4] "If you do away with harlots, the world will be convulsed with lust".

Aquinas was not troubled by the limitations of civil law because he maintained that God's eternal law can direct what human law cannot. God will judge us on how close each of us has come to total fulfilment. Although it is clear that a good person would not do bad things, it is perfectly possible for a good person to do good things with bad consequences or for a bad person to do good things for bad reasons.

Two of the most important modern proponents of 'New Natural Law' or 'neonaturalism' are the American Catholic Germain Grisez (b. 1929) and the Australian John Finnis (b. 1940).

Germain Grisez

Grisez is a practicing Catholic who became fascinated with Aquinas' philosophy while at a Jesuit University. He became one of the foremost thinkers in the field of Catholic Moral Theology, refining and developing Aquinas' thought within the bounds of Catholic doctrine and providing guidance on how Catholics should respond to modern moral dilemmas, from contraception to nuclear proliferation. Grisez said of Aquinas:

"He wasn't primarily interested in philosophy; he was interested in doing theology, and you didn't have to have a tight ethical theory and tight moral arguments in his day because in general the big arguments weren't going on in the area of ethics. So the theory in Aquinas is no more refined and perfected than it needed to be, and it didn't have to be very refined and perfected for his purposes. It is sound as far as it goes and very suggestive, but it's not honed and not worked out carefully. He is a gold mine of a starting-place, he's got a lot of good ideas, but he doesn't have any coherent overall theory of ethics, and he doesn't equip you to argue the issues and solve the problems as they've been posed in modern times."

Grisez made his name defending Church teaching on contraception. In *Contraception and the Natural Law* (1965) he developed a meticulous argument that 'the choice to contracept is a choice against the human good of procreation and as such can never be justified, since it is never morally right to turn one's will against a good of the person, not even for the sake of some other good'. He was not afraid to criticize other Natural Law arguments which he considered defective. As a result of this work, Grisez played an important role in the controversy surrounding the publication of the Papal encyclical 'Humanae Vitae' in 1968 and was the chief theological advisor to the US Church in 'selling' the Church's teaching to enraged American Catholics.

Grisez went on to develop Catholic responses to Abortion, Euthanasia and the Nuclear Deterrence (with John Finnis) as well as producing number of guides to Catholic moral philosophy and the philosophy of religion. The hinge of Grisez restatement of Natural Law is that human beings have real freedom and real moral responsibility; the stakes are so high that we must confront the difficult decisions that reason and faith call us to make, realizing that short-term happiness is nothing in relation to the long-term and big-picture consequences of falling short of our natural God-given potential.

In the three-volume *The Way of the Lord Jesus: Moral Theology*, (1983) Grisez set out the 'basic human goods' or Primary Precepts of his natural law. In summary, for Grisez, a good human life involves self-integration, practical reasonableness, authenticity, justice, friendship, religion, life and health, knowledge of truth, appreciation of beauty and playful activities. As with Aquinas, for Grisez all human actions are good in that they relate to at least one of these human goods (real or just apparent) but they may well be misplaced, serving a short-term single good rather than long-term total human fulfilment. One of Grisez' more controversial points is saying that a person should never choose to act directly against a basic good; to do so would be *'to make a choice to destroy, damage or impede that good in one or more instances'*. This rules out the possibility of intentionally sacrificing one good for the sake of another, or for the sake of overall human fulfilment. So, for instance, as 'life' is included in the list of basic goods, abortion or euthanasia will be absolutely ruled out. The basic goods are therefore given equal and infinite weight; no other factors can outweigh them.

Grisez' work has been criticized, by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, for its extreme conservatism and for the assumptions it seems to import into the framework of natural law. Like Aquinas, Grisez puts his naturalistic moral reasoning in the context of Scripture and Christian doctrine, and his interpretations are not universally accepted. Tom Deidun wrote:





Practice Essay Titles:

Critically evaluate Aquinas' Natural Law approach to ethical decision-making.

To what extent is Natural Law fairly criticised as an inflexible and impractical approach to the issue of euthanasia?

Is Natural Law really compatible with Jesus' commandment to love one another?



Emeritus since 2010, John Finnis was Professor of Law & Legal Philosophy at the University of Oxford from 1989. An Australian, Finnis began his career at the University of Adelaide, before winning a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford.

"Germain Grisez has written that according to Veritatis Splendor 'passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 mean exactly what they say: those who do certain kinds of acts, such as adultery and sexual perversion, will not inherit the Kingdom...' Whether or not such passages mean exactly what they say (or what Grisez says they say) one must first establish what they do say. A sure way of aborting this task is to ignore the Greek text and to neglect to ask what the terms used would have meant to Paul and his hearers."

The problem is that, instead of basing his approach to natural law on observation of what a fulfilled human life should be like (as Aristotle sought to do), Grisez imports theological assumptions which non Catholics as well as many Catholics would not accept in order to arrive at conclusions that are acceptable to his Church. This can be argued not to be good philosophy.

John Finnis

Finnis is currently Emeritus Professor of Law at University College, Oxford and visits the University of Notre Dame, teaching jurisprudence, political theory, and constitutional law. Finnis studied Aquinas because he provided an alternative theory of the nature and origins of the law to the relativist approach which was dominant in the 1960s and which suggested that 'law is a social construction'.

For Finnis, as for Aquinas, law and morality are closely related; Aquinas believed that what is morally and what is legally right ought to be the same thing. Finnis was seeking a universal basis for law which could be the foundations of International Law and a basis for judging certain laws or whole legal systems in some countries to be flawed, even if they have the support of government and/or people. For example, if the law in Afghanistan makes teenaged girls who have been gang-raped guilty of adultery and then face either marrying an attacker or prison then what grounds do people in Australia have for criticizing this position? If law is socially constructed then there is no basis for judging it from outside that society.

In *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980), Finnis developed a new version of Aquinas' natural law which, he argued, could be the basis both for moral philosophy and for law.

He tried to get around standard criticisms of natural law, such as those listed at the end of the previous chapter.

Controversially, Finnis starts with the argument that Aquinas, properly interpreted, was an ethical non-naturalist. He argues that the 'basic goods' of natural law appeal directly to reason without any need to make particular observations of nature. Jean Porter criticized Finnis for this, arguing that he speaks of basic human goods as if they were Platonic forms enjoying an independent existence of their own and is mysterious, not being clear about their logical or ontological status. Craig Paterson also rejects Finnis' argument, concluding that

"spurred on, no doubt, by laudable motives of 'intellectual rescue'... [Finnis] distorts the historical Aquinas by interpreting Aquinas as if he were wearing an analytical pair of spectacles, enabling himself, so equipped, to 'reconstruct' Aquinas as a post-Enlightenment compatible thinker."

Robert George has attempted to defend Finnis, saying that the basic human goods are irreducible, self-evident truths, but this does not convince many meta-ethicists.

Finnis argues that unless law is grounded in what it is to be human and relates to a moral code, then human beings will not see that following the law is morally right and will obey it only out of habit or fear whilst the tools of civic education and enforcement endure. They will not feel that the law has the moral authority to coerce people, to use prison and even death as a punishment. Finnis claims that a law can be legally valid, even if unjust, but that there can be no moral justification for enforcing an unjust law.

Take for example, the novel and film *The Reader*. Hana Schmidt (an illiterate factory worker at Siemens) was assigned by her employer to become an SS guard in charge of a work-party from a concentration camp. She was contractually obliged and arguably coerced to follow orders, choosing set numbers of women to send back to the camp gas-chambers to make way for new, stronger, prisoners. At her trial, the prosecutor says that she should have refused, knowing that choosing one woman rather than





another would make her complicit in an appalling crime against humanity, she replies 'what would you have done?'. Finnis would support the prosecutor's line of argument, saying that just because what Hana did was legal at the time in Germany does not make it morally right or acceptable in relation to the universal human laws which underpin rights. If more people had made a stand and refused to cooperate, then the Holocaust could not have happened; as Edmund Burke famously remarked 'all that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing'.

Finnis' version of natural law has had a wide influence on the wider world of Politics and Law. In *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, he set out the 'basic human goods' of his system as: life, knowledge, aesthetic appreciation, play, friendship, practical reasonableness, religion ('all those beliefs that can be called matters of ultimate concern; questions about the point of human existence.'). 'The marital good' was introduced in 1996.

Finnis' approach to normative ethics offers an interesting alternative to the more obviously faith-based approach of say Grisez. However, it would be a mistake to see it as secular. In Peter Singer's *A Companion to Ethics*, Stephen Buckle argues that Finnis' list of proposed basic goods seems plausible until it becomes clear that in their application Finnis intends to support the moral viewpoint of the Catholic Church on a range of controversial issues, including contraception and masturbation.

Proportionalism

Grisez and Finnis are not alone in proposing new versions of natural law, suitable for the modern world and seemingly (although this is debatable) taking account of post-enlightenment insights into human nature. In recent decades, a number of Catholic scholars have proposed a more radical reworking of natural law known as 'Proportionalism', a move which has caused a great deal of controversy and which provides the major dividing line in Catholic ethics today. Proportionalism has been firmly rejected by the Church despite appealing to many moral philosophers and ordinary Catholics.

Scholars such as **Bernard Hoose** and **Louis Janssens** take issue with Grisez and Finnis, seeing them to be too inflexible and legalistic to be serious about their claim to put people at the centre of moral philosophy. Hoose, Janssens and other proportionalists claim that their approach has support in early texts, even in the spirit of Aquinas' Natural Law, which acknowledges the complexity of real situations and the need to qualify every attempt at a moral law in the light of the diverse and demanding circumstances we operate in.

There will always be the need for right reason and judgement in the application of natural law. While the Church has tried to reduce this by providing exhaustive guidance and support, Proportionalists would argue that the only way to teach people to be good is to let them make real decisions. For example, imagine that your mother is teaching you to drive: Should she eliminate all risk and insist that you spend several years studying the highway-code, watching driving videos, using simulators and otherwise watching her – before she eventually allows you to drive a dual-controlled car around a track on Sundays. Or should she sit next to you and let you practice on her car (after some grounding in theory and practice in the car-park) before taking your test and setting out solo?

The traditional approach of the Catholic Church has been to eliminate risk, teaching that followers (if they are to remain followers) should be guided by detailed teaching and by trained priests in all matters, never 'going solo'. The reasonable justification for this is that the stakes are incredibly high and that the Church has a responsibility, both to members and society at large, to ensure that God's teaching is acted upon. There is a sense in which (through baptism) individual Catholics confirm their trust in the Church, agree to let it make decisions for them, and therefore earn salvation.

Proportionalists would argue that this approach is unrealistic and possibly counter-productive. People need to learn to be good people, not just obedient Catholics. These are not necessarily the same thing. It is perfectly possible, as Aquinas himself noted, for a bad person to do good things for the wrong reasons. Many obedient Christians do what they do out of fear, lack of imagination, habit or to 'fit in', gain prestige or other advantage. Are these really good people?

Many people are never really tested in this life; despite the impression given in ethics textbooks it is relatively rare to have to make big decisions about abortion, euthanasia, war, capital punishment or the environment. Although it is a much-vaunted statistic that a third of Western women have an abortion, this means that two thirds do not – and many who do abort do so when they are very young and unaware of the reality of the choice. Most people are not in a position to influence the law and simply go along with

what others have decided. They may enjoy offering their opinion in class-discussions, over a drink with friends or in a radio phone-in, but this is usually just an articulation of what they have been taught to believe and not a reasoned response to a full survey of the evidence.

Perhaps this is why issues such as contraception have had such an impact – it was the cause for Catholics encountering a moral dilemma in real life and unusually having to make a decision for themselves – and in practice this has meant that the large majority of Catholics use contraception even though it is forbidden by their Church. Church teaching forces 'obedient Christians' to consider whether to accept the paternalistic authority of the Church or to exercise freedom. It is sad that exercising freedom has so often been identified with rebelling against the Church. Proportionalists argue that it would be better if the Church could embrace free and responsible adults, rather than seeing them as a threat. This is the motivation of scholars such as Hoose, who rejects Grisez' absolutist approach, seeing it as opposed to Grisez' supposed focus on freedom and moral responsibility.

Taking Grisez' example about lying (or using violence) to protect an innocent from a murderer, Hoose wrote:

In spite of what Grisez says, resorting to violence when trying to protect an innocent person from a would-be murderer could well be described as an act of desperation (although one would certainly be hoping, in such a situation, that it would work, as would be the case if one lied instead). Moreover, resorting to violence might also be described as something that divides the inner and outer aspects of the self, especially if one is at heart a peace-lover (and, indeed, a peace-maker). As for attacking and impeding community, is anything better designed for that than violence? Grisez, of course, refers to real community, but real community is already under attack from the would-be murderer. If there are cases in which the existence of such attacks renders a proportionate use of violence justifiable, surely something similar can be said for lying. If it is helpful to call it the lesser evil, then let us do so.

Proportionalists, like all other proponents of Natural Law, begin by reflecting on what it is to live a good life. The list of 'basic human goods' proposed by most Proportionalists is compatible with those proposed by Aquinas, or Grisez, or Finnis – the difference comes in how these goods are applied. As Hoose wrote

proponents of this way of thinking hold that, when trying to judge whether a proposed action is right or wrong, we need to take into account all the goods and evils that are involved in that particular case. This includes taking into account unintended but foreseeable side effects of our action.

Proportionalists argue that people should take a complete and long view of each action and its particular context. They stress that no two situations are identical and it important to consider all the effects an action will have, positive and negative. It is clear that no action has entirely positive, or entirely negative, effects and it is for the individual to judge what is appropriate to do in the situation.

To use an example used by Bernard Hoose, what is good for Margaret (an adult) is not necessarily good for Mary (a child) – we may tell the unvarnished truth about the violent death of a friend to Margaret, whilst shielding Mary for her own benefit. Would not telling Mary the details of a car-crash be morally wrong? Is the only moral alternative to this to say nothing? Would it not be better from every human point of view to break the news gently and suggest that the death was peaceful – at least until time elapses and the child develops sufficiently to cope? Hoose concludes *'in short, then, a proportionalist takes the norm into account, but also considers other factors'*. qualifying this by saying...

"it is sometimes mistakenly reported that proportionalism is about finding a proportionate reason for doing what one knows to be morally wrong. This is simply not the case. It is in fact about trying to discover what is the morally right thing to do in any particular set of circumstances. We should always do only what, in conscience, we judge to be morally right, and we should never do what we judge in conscience to be morally wrong."

As W. D. Ross pointed out, justice does not refer to the production of the greatest sum of good; it refers rather to the right distribution of good. Clearly, the approach of the proportionalists remains controversial and is absolutely unacceptable to traditionalists like Grisez, who think it smacks of Situation Ethics.





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