

The Existence of God.

Proof: 3 main ways by which the existence of things is proved. 1. Personal experience. 2. Reliable evidence. 3. Chain of reasoning to reach a conclusion. These types of evidence can be used to prove or reject the existence of God.

- Someone who is a **theist** believes in God. A **theist** is certain that God exists because; they are certain that they have been in contact with God directly, they accept accounts of other people of their experience of God as evidence that God exists, believe that God is the only logical explanation for the origin of the universe and the order within it.
- An **atheist** is a person who believes that there is no God. An **atheist** does not accept that any evidence accepted by theists is sufficient proof that God exists.
- An **agnostic** is a person who believes that we cannot be sure whether God exists. An **agnostic** believes that any evidence produced by theists does not prove the existence of God one way or the other. They believe that it cannot be known whether God exists.

Cosmological– referring to the origin and structure of the universe.

First Cause (COSMOLOGICAL) argument -This argument says that there is a perfect and well ordered universe rather than nothingness because God brought the cosmos into existence. St Thomas Aquinas said that things could not cause themselves to come into existence so something has to cause them. The universe exists and therefore must have been caused by something outside the universe. There had to be something eternal (without beginning or end) that was not caused by anything. The eternal first cause was God. Aquinas argued that this first cause of the universe was God. If God had not caused the universe to begin then there would be no universe and therefore we would not exist.

Arguments for First Cause-Some theists (Christian's) argue that the measurement of time is evidence that the universe had a beginning. This beginning was caused by God. If we apply this theory to the Big Bang, could argue that God is the First Cause, the cause of the Big Bang and the universe could have evolved from this. They would argue that as scientists do not know what caused the Big Bang, then why could it not be God? The Big Bang describes how God caused the Universe. Islam accepts that scientific findings support Allah's existence and the creation of the Universe. Many Christians believe that the Cosmological argument is supported by the creation story found in Genesis 1:1-3. It says that before the Universe was created only God existed and at the command of God the process of creation began.

Arguments against First Cause- Just because events/things have causes doesn't mean that the universe itself has a cause. It is possible that the universe does not have a beginning, it is infinite. (Steady State Theory – universe is eternal it has always existed. Atheists and agnostics would challenge the argument saying it contradicts itself. It still does not answer 'who or what caused God'? If God is eternal than why can the universe not be eternal? Big –Bang Theory – Atheists could use this to argue that the universe resulted from a random spontaneous event, not an action by God. The religious accounts of creation are simply myths.

Big Bang– Scientific theory that argues that the world and universe resulted when a singularity exploded. From this explosion all the matter that makes up to universe came into being. Tiny ripples of radiation detected by scientists have been used as evidence to back up this theory. It is suggested that at one point all the matter in the universe was at a single point, there was an explosion and matter is now moving away from this point. This says that the world is not made in the same way as the seven day account in Genesis in the Bible. Big-Bang Theory is a challenge to First Cause argument only if it is thought to be a spontaneous random event without reason or cause. Can be compatible with first Cause.

Design (TELEOLOGICAL) Argument: The Argument that God designed the Universe because everything is so intricate and detailed that could not have happened by chance. It is too ordered and complicated and must have been designed. Intricate interdependence is evidence of this. (I.e. bees and pollen) Paley used a watch to argue this. He argued if we found a watch we would know it had been designed for a purpose. If we look at nature then we can see evidence of design. Isaac Newton used the fact that we have opposable thumbs as evidence of design (moved to touch other fingers – can grasp things) this movement is only found in humans and primates – evidence of God's design. Also our unique thumb prints are evidence that God has planned each human separately. He said ' In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence.' Most Christians believe that the Bible supports the Design argument and that God designed the world.

The Anthropic Principle: This is a modern version of the design argument developed in the 1930's by F.R. Tennant. **Tennant argued that God planned the world so that everything was just right for human life to develop.** The gravitational force was just right for the universe to come into existence. If the force had been greater, the stars would have been too hot and burned out before the universe developed. If the force was smaller then the stars would have been too cool and would not have formed. As the universe expanded, it was the correct rate for the development of galaxies and eventually planets. Once the earth formed, it had all the conditions for intelligent life to develop. **Theists believe that this fine tuning cannot be chance but is the deliberate action of God.**

Arguments against design: Natural disasters could indicate that the world has not been designed as no design would have such flaws. Atheists also point to the existence of cruelty and suffering found within nature. Why would a creator design animals that are specially adapted to hunt and hurt other animals. If it was designed there is still the further question of how can a loving, creator God allow his design to cause so much human suffering. Just because something looks designed doesn't guarantee that it was. The discovery of penicillin was an accident. Not everyone believes that humans are the result of design. Even if the world is designed we cannot prove that the designer is God. It may be the work of many gods. Many atheists use Darwin's theory of evolution to account for apparent design in the world.

Arguments for design: Some theists argue that if humans had evolved through natural selection then we would not need to write books, paint pictures or create music to survive. The fact we do these things suggests we are designed. Theists would argue that God is beyond human understanding and there will be an explanation for natural evil and suffering which human beings do not yet understand, or perhaps will never understand.

Evolution-Scientific belief that life forms changed over time, developing from simple to complex creatures. The animals or plants best suited to their environment survive, 'survival of the fittest' and those that are not suited or do not adapt die out. This is called Natural Selection. This means that animals adapt and evolve and could mean that they were not designed on purpose. This could mean that they were not designed on purpose. This theory argues that the world has always been changing. Species were not made in a fixed way but living organisms have adapted and changed in order to survive in changing environments. If this is the case then there is no designer and the design of the world is not evidence for the existence of God. Some Theists may argue that evolution was God's plan for the development of life. They believe that it was the process through which God's creation took place. God's design is found in the processes of evolution.

Miracle: a seemingly impossible occurrence, usually good. Theists use the term 'miracle' to refer to an event performed by God that appears to break the laws of nature. It may be the cure for a terminal illness or disability that doctors cannot explain. It may be survival from certain death by a freak event. A miracle needs to have some religious significance or purpose, such as the strengthening of faith or the demonstration of God's love. Shows God is immanent – interfering in our world. Miracles are often very personal. God is showing himself. No natural explanation for what happened then it must be a supernatural event. The miracle must have been caused by something outside of nature, and as only God is outside nature, then it must be the result of God's intervention in the world. Therefore God exists.

Two types of miracles: Events that break the laws of nature and cannot be explained by the sciences. E.g. Jesus is said to have turned water into wine at the marriage of Cana. Events in which no laws of nature are broken but a **coincidence occurs at just the right time to cause a good outcome**. This is believed to be because of God's intervention.

Reasons for rejecting miracles: coincidence. Science might be able to explain it in the future. Theists want them to happen so interpret ordinary events as miracles. Power of the mind (healing). Wrong diagnosis. Fake 'miracles' by people wanting fame or money. Some theists do not believe in miracles because God would be picking and choosing who is helped and this does not seem fair and loving.

Arguments supporting miracles: Miracles are for the benefit of everyone they are signs to prove the existence of God and teach people about God. Most theists would argue that miracles occur. There are too many accounts of miracles for them not to happen. Don't always happen to believers. Miracles can cause people to convert. Miracles are investigated e.g. Roman Catholic Church investigates miracles that happen at Lourdes—checked by priests and doctors. (66 occurred since 1882)

Argument from Religious experience: Some theists are certain that God exists because they claim to have experienced God. When people claim to have met God personally this is called a religious experience, it can occur to an individual or a group. Religious experiences include: (think back to the Revelation unit) Communicating with God through prayer and meditation. Feeling God's presence in worship e.g. Charismatic worship and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Feeling the presence of God in Nature – awe and wonder. Experiencing a conversion – they may be converted to believe in God or to change their beliefs about God – e.g. Saul who became St Paul after the road to Damascus conversion. Involvement in a miraculous event

Arguments supporting Religious experience– Theists would argue influence of religious experience is so great they must be genuine. Direct personal proof for an individual that God exists. Conversion and life changes are further evidence. People willing to die for their faith after they have had a religious experience. If a number of people shared experience, cannot be hallucinating.

Arguments against Religious experience– difficult to prove as genuine. Atheists and agnostics believe that people are mistaken or misled. Imagined the experience because they wanted to believe God exists, or misinterpreted ordinary experience. May be under the influences of drugs, alcohol. May be ill and hallucinate.

Morality- a system of ethics which distinguishes between right and wrong. It is a sense of right and wrong that helps guide people's behaviour. A moral action is one that is believed to be right according to the rules/laws of the society, country or religion in which that person lives.

The Moral Argument: People have an inbuilt sense of morality. This sense comes from a source outside them. This source is God. Therefore God exists. Theists argue that the fact that most people have a powerful sense that they should behave in a moral way is evidence for the existence of God. Morality takes priority, even when it's not what we want to do. It is a command that must be obeyed and comes from an ultimate source God. Conscience is the 'voice of God'. Inner voice guiding us. God is needed to provide an after life where people who have acted morally are rewarded. (Kant). This is because the universe is just.

Arguments for the moral argument: Theists who accept evolution believe that the fact morality helps people survive is part of God's design. Theists argue that conscience is the voice of God. Feelings of guilt is God telling them they have done wrong. Feel guilty whether others would find out about actions or not. Freewill means people can ignore the voice.

Arguments against the moral argument: Can't prove morality exists, may be just rules to control people. Morality is part of human development through evolution. It is needed for survival when resources necessary to support life are scarce and danger is all around us. Therefore natural selection has favoured morality. Richard Dawkins argues for a 'Cultural Evolution'. Can't be a shared sense of morality when ideas of right and wrong are completely different. Some question whether there is even a shared sense of morality as people's ideas of right and wrong are completely different. Freud argued conscience developed from society and up-bringing, then internalised and reflected back out. (part of the unconscious mind— 'super-ego') Not everyone feels guilt. Atrocities done in the name of conscience e.g. Yorkshire Ripper. May be random chance if people are happy. May not be connected to morality. No evidence that there is an afterlife where people are rewarded. Universe might not be just.

Faith: a commitment to something that goes beyond proof and knowledge, especially used about God and religion.

Arguments against belief in God: Science can provide all the answers and so belief in God is no longer needed. The presence of evil and suffering. (see unit on the problem of evil and suffering)

The problems of Evil and Suffering

Suffering: When people have to face and love with unpleasant events or conditions.

Man-made suffering: Suffering caused by the actions of humans e.g. through war, pollution, crime.

Natural Suffering: Suffering caused by nature e.g. because of earthquakes, volcanoes, floods.

Natural Disasters: Disasters caused by nature e.g. earthquakes, volcanoes.

Evil: That which is deliberately bad or harmful, or goes against the will of God

Responsibility: Duty; the idea that we are in charge of our own actions.

Unjust suffering: unfair or not right. Difficult to see how the suffering of innocent children can ever have a purpose.

Free will: having the ability to choose one's own actions.

The Problem of Suffering: Suffering raises a problem for theists: If God is loving, all-knowing and all-powerful then why is there suffering? If he was all-loving then he would want to stop it, if he was all-powerful then he would be able to stop it, if he was all-knowing then he would know it exists and therefore stop it. Either God isn't all of these three or God does not exist. (Both are problems for the Christian understanding of God.)

Questions suffering raises: What is God's purpose in suffering—if God is all-good then surely he would want the best for people. If God wills our suffering then he is cruel. Knowledge brings responsibility, if God knows about our suffering how can he stand by and do nothing? Why did God create a world with so much suffering? Why do innocent people suffer? Why did God give humans free will if they hurt each other?

Theist responses: God is powerful and created the earth but is not to blame for earth-quakes. They are the same forces that formed the earth in the beginning. Human freedom is part of our nature, if not we would be robots and lose all that it means to be human e.g. relationships, love etc.

Purpose of suffering: A punishment. Some suffering keeps us alive and well, pain tells us something is wrong. Stops us doing serious harm. Can make us appreciate things that we take for granted. Can make us a better person. To achieve a goal e.g. child birth. Test of faith. Part of God's mysterious plan.

Christian explanations for why we suffer: Suffering is a result of free will. If we didn't have free will then we would be robots and life would be pointless. Free will means that sometimes humans choose to do the wrong thing and hurt others. The story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) shows the consequences of free will. By disobeying God Adam and Eve brought suffering and evil into the world. Suffering could be a punishment for the things we have done wrong, or a test of our faith in God. (Job) It could be to develop our personalities and enable us to grow and become stronger. Suffering could just be part of the balance of nature or it could be necessary for us to appreciate goodness. Pain is a test from God. Suffering could be caused by an evil being called the devil who opposes God.

Muslim explanations for suffering: Muslims believe that evil and suffering, whether caused by human actions or natural disasters, are a test from Allah. Muslims are taught to accept the will of Allah. According to the Qur'an Allah created the earth and made Adam to look after it. Allah gave him free will. Allah also created angels who do not have free will to act as his messengers and some beings with free will called Jinn. One of the Jinn, called Iblis, refused to obey Allah. He was renamed Shaytan ('rebellious one') and was thrown out of heaven. Allah, however, allowed Shaytan (Satan) and the Jinn who followed him to tempt people away from the true path. The hardships and sufferings of this life are a test of a person's faith. A Muslim needs to have an optimistic approach to life and not run away from difficulties of life.

Hindu concept of Karma – literally means 'actions'. Law followed by Hindus, the results of one's actions determines the nature of future 'rebirth'. Events that happen to people in the present life may be the result of actions in past lives. People who live in the right way according to their faith achieve good karma. People who disregard the teachings of their faith will build up bad karma which will influence the quality of their next life.

How does God help those who suffer: Christians believe that God supports and helps them through their suffering, giving them the strength to manage. Through praying and reading the Bible they find strength. Others argue that God comforts them. Some

Christians see suffering as an opportunity to show God's love in the world practically to others. It is their responsibility to help those who suffer. Christians point to the life of Jesus and the suffering he went through during his life and death on the cross. They argue that God understands our suffering and goes through it with us. The Bible also promises that there will be no suffering in heaven. **The example of Jesus.** Christians believe that Jesus suffered in his life and that he was innocent. This means God has suffered through Jesus (died on the Cross, friends betrayed him, friend died). Jesus also worked to prevent suffering in the lives of people who suffer. Christians believe that God will take away suffering in heaven.

Responses to suffering: If live a good life and follow religious teaching, a religious believer will probably not cause much suffering. Religions teach followers to help those who suffer in active practical ways e.g. religious charities and organisations that help the poor, asylum seekers, the sick, people who have suffered bereavement. May start a charity when recognise a particular need. May use skills e.g. doctor to aid those who are suffering in response to natural disaster (doctors went out to Haiti after the earthquake). May raise awareness in local area and collect items or money to relieve suffering in response to natural disaster.

Christian Response to Suffering: Taught to help those who suffer e.g. 'love one another as yourself' Matthew 22:29. Should not only feel compassion but help. Told to follow the example of Jesus who helped the needy and healed the sick. Tithes - 10% of income given to the Church, some will be given to help those in need in the local community, taught to give to charity.

Muslim Response to suffering: Islamic law is based upon justice for everyone. Suffering is a consequence of injustice and a lack of compassion. The prophet Muhammad clearly taught that it is the duty of every Muslim to do good, to live the law of Allah, to oppose injustice and to relieve suffering. Believers are judged on Day of judgement for suffering you have caused to others. Zakah (2.5% of surplus income) is one of the 5 pillars and is given to the Mosque. Some goes to those in need or those who are suffering. One of Allah's 99 names is 'The Compassionate'. Muslims are taught to be compassionate. Also taught to give to charity.

Evil: the opposite of good. A force or the personification of a negative power that is seen in many traditions as destructive and against God.

Natural Evil: natural events. Pain caused by the activities of nature e.g. because of an earthquake.

Moral Evil: caused by humans. The pain caused by the words and actions of humans

Personal being: (nature of evil) the idea that evil is an evil spirit or devil rather than an impersonal force. In Christianity (Satan) and Islam (Iblis) is the source of all evil and the opposite to God/Allah. Many people today don't believe the Medieval picture (red, flames, horns etc) but believe that there is a personal being who can represent the struggle between good and evil.

Impersonal force (nature of evil) the idea that evil is a power outside of people that draws them to evil. It is beyond reason and the ability of humans to influence or stop.

Psychological phenomenon: an idea about the nature of evil that is something arising from the mind of a person. It is influenced by a person's upbringing or society in general, or could be the result of a damaged mind. The way parents bring up children has a major influence on their behaviour. Peer-pressure can cause actions even when a person knows they are wrong. Society influences the way people act, the media emphasises being rich, famous and beautiful. This can cause people to act in certain ways that are not always good for themselves or others.

Mentally ill: In some cases a person who commits an evil act e.g. murdering a child is suffering from a mental illness or are mentally unstable and this causes them to act in a certain way.

An evil act suggests a deliberate cruelty done in the full knowledge that it is wrong.

Questions about evil: Is there really a 'thing' called evil? Are there evil people or just evil actions? How does someone become evil? How does an innocent child grow up into an 'evil' adult?

Blame: Evil is God's fault- gave free will. Evil is our fault- we give into the dark side of our nature, we make the choice ourselves.

The problem of Evil: If evil was brought into the world as a result of free will. I.e. Humans choose to do wrong This means that evil was brought in to the world at the fall when Adam and Eve choose to disobey God. As God gave freewill then God brought the possibility of evil into the world. Although humans are responsible for evil, how can a good God bring the possibility of evil into the world?

Questions for believers: If God is all-good why did he create a world where evil is present? If God is all-powerful why does he not stop someone before they do evil? If God is all-knowing and knew the result of free will, why did he give it to us? Some argue that everything happens at the will of God. Does God will evil? This contradicts his goodness and care for people.

Answers for believers: The fact God gave freedom to make decisions about right and wrong shows his goodness and love. God gave free-will despite the risks that we would use our freedom to hurt others. God is like a loving parent who allows his children to make mistakes and learn from experience. God chooses not to use his power to force people to use their freedom wisely, if he did we would not be free. Not everything that happens is in God's will. If it was people would not be free. God does not want evil to happen but people go against his will.

Christianity: Evil came into the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience, sometimes called 'original sin'. When Satan tempted them to eat the fruit from the forbidden 'tree of knowledge of good and evil', they realised that they had freedom to choose right and wrong and would now be responsible for their own actions. When people rebel against God evil results. People need salvation (rescuing) from sin. Christians believe that Jesus was the 'second Adam' who restored people's broken relationship with God.

Islam: Muslims believe that Allah created the perfect world, including some beings called Jinn who, like humans, had free will. A Jinn called Iblis refused to bow down to Adam as Allah had commanded. Iblis (renamed Shaytan, 'the refuser') tempted Adam and Hawa (Eve) to disobey Allah. Shaytan, the source of evil, still tries to turn people away from Allah. People will be punished on the Day of Judgement for evil, but Allah is merciful and compassionate, so those who truly repent will be forgiven. Muslims do not believe in original sin, everyone starts off life with a clean slate but must submit to Allah and resist temptation. Allah's plan for humans means that nothing can happen unless he wills it. Allah gives people free will, but knows the outcome of their choices.

Christian responses to evil: Jesus commanded Christians to love God and their neighbour. He taught people to love their enemies and, when evil is done to them, 'to turn the other cheek'. The Lord's prayer says that people must forgive others so that God can forgive them. 'forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.....' (Luke 11:4. Bible). **Many Christians worked tirelessly against the evil of racial discrimination in the USA and in South Africa. In the USA Martin Luther King, a Christian minister was one of the leaders of the civil rights movement and used non-violent protest.**

Muslim responses to evil: Muslims live by the five pillars of Islam; faith in Allah and his prophet Muhammad, prayer, zakat, fasting and pilgrimage to Makkah. Allah will judge them on Judgement Day, so Muslims try to live in complete submission to his will and in peace with others. **The Qur'an teaches Muslims to stand up for justice and what is right. Muhammad Ali was stripped of his boxing title and was prepared to face jail in the USA for his belief that the Vietnam War was evil.**