

## **Philosophy of Religion – Module 2 - AQA**

### Divine Characteristics

*The concept of God by most philosophers is compatible with the main world religions and their concepts of God*

#### **Singular**

One God, otherwise finite as bounded by another God.

#### **Non-corporeal**

Not composed of matter, no physical properties, cannot be perceived by sense

#### **Omnipresent**

Present everywhere at once

#### **Unconditional**

His existence does not depend on anything, always existed and always will

#### **Omnipotent**

No limit to what God can do. God can eliminate the universe and therefore sustains it in existence

#### **Omniscient**

All knowing, God knows everything (past, present and future)

#### **Perfectly Good**

God is perfectly and completely good, wants the best for us and is the source of our morality and obligation to lead a good life

#### **Immutable**

God is changeless. Because he has infinite characteristics nothing could change him otherwise it would imply incompleteness

#### **Transcendent**

God existence occurs outside the universe, beyond human experience

### Divine Characteristics Problems

#### **Omnipotence**

God is omnipotent = God can do everything

- Square circles? Descartes thought God could do the logically impossible, that we could not understand it because of the **limitations of our mind.**
- Most philosophers agree that it makes no sense to say God could do the logically impossible (a square circle is contradictory)

God is omnipotent = God can do anything logically possible

- This means God can do **anything except logically impossible actions** (such as square circles)
- What about actions that are logically possible but God could not perform?
- If God is **immutable** and **omnipotent** can he cough? Can he die?

### Paradox of the Stone

#### **Can God create a stone that he cannot lift?**

- This action is perfectly possible for a human to do, so it is a logically possible action to perform, but in doing the action God would not be omnipotent.

### Solutions

- 1) It has been suggested that this paradox is merely a problem of language; in fact the whole paradox is actually a logically impossible action (*Mavrodes*)
  - a. *God is omnipotent*
  - b. *God can create a stone*

- c. *The stone is too heavy for God to lift*
- d. *A stone which is too heavy to lift by God whose power is sufficient to lift anything*

As can be seen from that part *d.* is a self-contradictory statement.

- 2) Swinburne suggested the above just begging the question, as we take the assumption that God is omnipotent in part *a.* Swinburne proposes that God could not make a stone he could not lift, however 'the fact that God could abandon God's omnipotence does not entail he will'
  - a. *To myself this appears to ignore the issue even further! Omnipotence means that God can do anything and it is not something you can just 'abandon'*
- 3) God's omnipotence consists in his possessing all powers that it is logically possible for a being with his attributes as God to possess
  - a. *God is immutable and therefore it is logically impossible for God to change*
  - b. *To cough or to die are therefore not logically possible for God*
  - c. *The power to create a stone too heavy to lift is again not logically possible for God. God is unchangeable and to create a stone he could not lift means he would change (no longer omnipotent).*

#### Omniscience and free will

- a. *God is all-knowing (past, present and future)*
- b. *God therefore knows if we will pick X or Y*
- c. *If we are free we could pick either*
- d. *Either we are not free or God is not omniscient*

#### Solutions

- 1) Determinist (Any free-will defence becomes void)
- 2) Timeless-God sees an eternal present and does not foreknow anything
- 3) Because we are free we could make what God believes will happen wrong, by doing Y and not X. God chose to forego part of omniscience in creating free beings (*Surely this defeats the point?*)

#### Religious Language

##### **Meaningless**

- A. J. Ayer and others commonly know as the **logical positivists** made the bold claim that **God talk was meaningless.**
- **Verification Principle (Strong)**
  - For any statement to be meaningful it must be verifiable by sense experience (morality, metaphysical etc. statements – meaningless)
    - What about visiting mars?
- **Verification Principle (Weak)**
  - For any statement to be meaningful it must be verifiable by senses experience or we must know how to verify the statement
    - In *Language, Truth and Logic* Ayer said of God talk that '*the notion of a person whose essential attributes are non-empirical is not an intelligible notion at all*'

#### Criticism

- The VP cannot be verified itself – self refuting
  - LP claimed that it was just a recommendation for a use of words
    - *Well...we decline their recommendation!*
- Swinburne – **Toys example**
- Also, in principle '*If I were god I would be able to check the truth of my own existence*'
- Verify after death? Difficultly that we can have no disproof.

## Falsification

- *Parable of the gardener*
  - Two men, clearing in jungle, one of the men claims an invisible gardener maintains the clearing. All tests fail to show the existence of this gardener
  - **What is the difference between the believer's gardener and none at all?**
  - A statement can only be regarded as **factually significant** if something could happen that would **falsify** the statement.
  - Swinburne – **Toys example**
    - This example is meaningful but not possible to falsify

## Analogy

- Thomas Aquinas took the view that religious language was an analogy, in his view commonly named the *Doctrine of Analogy*
- Let us take the statement '*God is good*' when we talk of God the word 'good' applied to him is **not univocal** (with exactly same meaning) **nor equivocal** (completely different meaning) – it is analogical, God is not exactly good as we know it, but is similar.  
*'Divine truth has to be refracted and expressed in terms of human words and finite images'*  
*(Philosophy and Christian Faith)*
- It is not an attempt to compare God to man directly, but merely utilising our words in order to in some way describe God's nature

## Criticism

- Can we really use our language at all to describe an infinite transcendent God?
- This account does nothing to stop someone saying talk of God is absurd
- It answers the question *how do we refer to God* not *can we refer to God*.

## Language Games

- Language is an activity, '*a form of life*'
- Different languages (i.e. Science/religion) are different 'language games'
- They each have their own set of rules
- In understanding the use of the language in a particular 'game' meaning is able to be grasped
- Each language game cannot be called incoherent or irrational because they all have their own criteria of coherence and intelligibility
- Only when words are used outside their 'game' does it become a problem (i.e. scoring a goal in tennis)
- *Can we really have each area of life having its own criteria/meaning/truth?*

## Ontological Argument

The existence of God can be grasped just from the meaning of the word 'God'  
*'a priori analytic statement'*

### Anselm

- God = that which nothing greater can be thought
- God exists in the mind (understanding)
- However, a greater being could be thought of (exists in mind + reality)
- **Therefore in order to be the greatest being God must exist in reality also**
- **God exists is therefore an a priori analytic statement.**

### Descartes

- God is a supremely perfect being (has all perfections)
- Existence is a perfection
- Therefore God must have existence
- **Thinking of God without existence is like thinking of a mountain without a valley...existence is a necessary part of God's essence.**

### Malcolm

- Either God exists or he does not exist
- God if He exists could never cease to exist – So if God exists His existence is necessary
- God if He does not exist could never come into existence (limited) – So if God does not exist then his existence is impossible
- God's existence is therefore impossible or necessary
- His existence can only be impossible if the concept of such a being is logically absurd
- **Assuming this is not so, it follows that God's existence is necessary**

### Criticism

- **Kant – existence is not a predicate (property).** Both Anselm and Descartes try to make existence into a property you can 'give' to God – however consider the following..
  - I place an ad for a 'blonde haired 31 year old woman' I get no replies. Next week I place the ad again, saying 'blonde haired 31 year old woman who exists' – I have not added anything!
  - It is unintelligible to say *'I have two dogs, one is black and one is brown. One of them exists and the other does not'*
- The ontological argument is trying to make a **'concept' into something that exists in 'reality'**. We may very well agree that if there is a God in reality, he **must** have existence however it does not follow any actual God exists. The concept may not refer to anything in reality (referential logic failure)
- **The idea of a 'necessary being' – is this possible?** Analytic truths (cats are feline) are necessary and to deny it would be self-contradictory. However, can we apply this to God? Necessary existence would entail that to deny his existence is self-contradictory – it is not.
- Gaulino – 'the most excellent island' criticism
  - Criticised as don't have intrinsic maximum / contingency of an island

## Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument is concerned with why there is something and not nothing.

### The Beginning Argument

- We associate physical matter (i.e. the universe) with causality – **what caused the universe?**
- **Something must have started it all off**
- **This must be a cause transcending the entire universe** and this leads to the notion of God
- **The universe could be infinite** so there would have never been a beginning – *does this make sense? Could we add more events onto infinite events in the past? [Modern cosmology]*
- **We can imagine a beginning of existence without a cause** (two events distinct). *Is this true? We can imagine nothing then X but we still associate causality. Imagine to reality?*
- Does **not** show that the definite cause of the universe is God – **why must it even be a personal being with divine attributes?**

### Argument from Contingency

- The universe is not necessary therefore it is contingent (happens to exist)
- This means something in the end **must have had necessary existence**
- Is 'God exists' necessary? It most certainly is not a contradiction to deny such a statement which it would be if God's existence was necessary – *Can be claimed it may appear not but it actually is.*
- For something to exist necessarily then it must entail in its definition existence – *Is existence a predicate?*

### First Cause Argument

- Something must account for there being a universe (How come any universe?)
- **Sequence of causation back to a first cause**
- Theists point to God as the first cause (still does not explain divine attributes)
- God must therefore lie beyond the universe and be incomprehensible and this gives some account of him being the first cause.
- Could the universe not have been a brute fact? – *Physical matter requires causality*
- What caused God? (*ad infinitum*)
  - It could be said that because God lies outside the universe (transcendent) saying God is a 'brute fact' is a lot more plausible
- Modern physics has pointed toward the fact **something could come from nothing**
  - *Is this notion plausible?*

## Teleological Argument

### Paley (Spatial order)

- **Analogous argument**
- As you walk along the beach you come across a stone and a watch, you are asked 'how did they get here?'
- Stone: you have no reason to suppose anything other than it was always there
- Watch: complex (etc.) you would suppose that some intelligence designed it
- The universe is like the watch, parts fit together, work perfectly, very complex, all have a purpose etc. Therefore the world must have a designer (God)

### Hume's Objections

- The universe is unique; we have no experience of a universe being designed/made. The universe is so massively dissimilar to a watch that we **cannot use such an analogy**
- The universe could be said to be more vegetable than 'human art' like maybe the ultimate cause is that of an 'infinite spider' rather than something of reason and intelligence (God) – **Multiplicity of possible causes**
- If we see a well-maintained garden what can we say about the gardener? We can say he has excellent gardening ability – we cannot say anything else. **How are we to say God is perfect when he created a finite universe?** Or perfectly good when he created the evil? Or omnipotent as he seems to have messed things up! **Why not multiple gods?**

### Swinburne's Replies

- **Modern cosmology / Anthropic principle** is pointing toward the universe being more similar to the watch. Also, anything can be unique under certain descriptions (this the only computer in my house)
- The idea the universe could have been **naturally created** (i.e. like vegetable) does not explain the fact that the laws of nature hold across time (temporally)
  - **Darwin natural selection – purpose/design evolved from the very simple**
    - This does not necessarily undermine the design argument, as it could be said God used the process of evolution to create the design within the world (how come any natural selection process at all – very complex etc.). In no means however does it follow any God did do this.

### Swinburne (temporal order)

- **Tremendous orderliness within the universe**
- **Laws of nature govern what happens that can be understood and be predicted**
- We are justified in thinking the laws will continue to hold *ad infinitum*
  - Is this really surprising? If there were not these laws we most probably would not be here to argue about the existence of God since we require order to survive.
    - **Thought Experiment: Card shuffling machine**
- 'Cries out for explanation in terms of some single common source with the power to produce it' – **This simplest explanation of this is God.**
  - *Simple!* Since when is God simple he is highly disputed over – supposedly is infinite, all good and just **makes matters more complicated**
  - Does not stop the object from Hume – **multiplicity of Gods.**
- **Chance** – surely it is a possibility that the world is like this. It is a quantitative issue and using God is trying to solve it using a qualitative issue. (Someone must win the lottery 1<sup>st</sup> time...)
- **Chaos theory** suggest the world does not have this masses of temporal order

## The Argument from experience

### Can God be experienced at first hand?

- Notion of God is to be rejected (There is no God, hence no experience of Him)
  - *Are there good reasons to do this? Divine characteristics incompatible? Surely, there must at least be a possibility – we cannot prove the non-existence of God.*
- Our experience was wrong (mistake identity, mis-interpretation, hallucination)
  - *Possibility we could be wrong does not mean we were wrong*
  - *Hallucination requires the possibility of it being a true experience, how could have a hallucination/illusion of X without X being a possibility?*
- The people who experience God are usually under psychological/social pressures
  - *But if people who experience God are often mad...that is not always.*
- We have no tests for verifying experience as being experience of God
  - *But the existence of tests is independent of the truth of the claim*
- Some people report experience of **absence** of God, no uniformity on this experience
  - *This does not demonstrate there is **no** God*
  - *Surely this means that religious experience does not demonstrate God?*

### What is experience of God?

- Sense experience
  - *Sense experience of a non-physical, non-locatable (etc.) object??*
- Experience of God is sharply distinguished from inference
  - *Again, does this allow us to recognise God as God?*
- Experience of God is like experience of people (involving direct apprehension of non-physical)
  - *The experience of a person seems to include having a body (etc.)*

### Recognising God

- How could we ever recognise an infinite being just by experience?
  - *People who have had religious experience claim they just 'knew'*
- Does knowledge work like that? Can we just 'know'? I may be convinced that it is true, and it may well be true but knowledge is more than 'feeling sure' (justified true belief). We cannot deduce God to be true and exist just from someone being convinced, after all people were convinced the world was flat!

### Defending Experience of God

- Some people can just 'see' the reality of God while others cannot
  - *So this is a proof for believers only? Hardly a proof at all....*
- Directly apprehending the dependence of everything on God is a way of apprehending God.
  - *But a conviction of dependence does not imply real dependence*
- We cannot characterize and discuss experience of God because experience of God is ineffable
  - *If that is the case we must remain silent about what truth it brings!*

### Experiencing-As

- If all seeing is 'seeing-as' (you bring to the world, not the world bring to you) and all experiencing is 'experiencing-as' then religious people can be said to experience a world as a world in which God is present
  - *If this is the case, then we could experience the world as X or Y, and it follows from this we could experience the world as a world in which God is not present. If everything is 'experiencing-as' we can not gain any truth from this – the only truth can be gained for those who already experience the world as a world with God*
- **The nature of the experience of God seems very hard to bring out (how can it be verified? How can we experience 'infinity'? etc) therefore it does not provide grounds for belief.**

## Pascal's Wager

Pascal trying to show how it is rational to believe in God, this because out best 'bet' is to believe in God so we should go to Church etc.

	<i>God Exists</i>	<i>God does not exist</i>
<i>Believe</i>	<b>Eternal Life</b>	Small loss
<i>Not Believe</i>	Damnation	<b>Small gain in life</b>

- Wager for God
  - God exists, I get infinite reward
  - God does not exist, I lose (more or less) nothing
- Wager against God
  - God exists, I am condemned to Hell
  - God does not exist; I gain (more or less) nothing

Pascal also comments that you cannot just start believing, you must adopt a religious life and gradually you shall come to believe in God. Pascal is not saying you *decide* to believe he is saying you can help yourself become *convinced* in God's existence.

## Objections

- This argument is powerless against someone who doesn't care for the **long-term**
- This whole argument is based on **self-interest**, we are believing for the wrong reasons – '*lacks the inner soul of faith's reality*' (James),
  - It may be agreed that this appeal to self-interest is bad, however it is the best that can be done to help people who are already tormented (etc.) to bring them to the light of God
- **Can belief really be a choice?** No matter how hard I try, I can never believe it is raining when it is not. We cannot choose to believe, belief is different.
- Goes against personal **intellectual integrity** and becomes a form of self-deception, in which you go against your own conscious and mind – '*I'll drink to the pope but conscious first*'
- **Many Gods objection** – Pascal only offers us one choice of Catholic Christianity, however there are numerous other religious Gods, and could be any number of Gods – how are we to know how each will reward us and which to believe in?
- **Will God punish non-believers?**
  - If God is a benevolent deity who gave us no conclusive proof of his existence then how can he punish someone who could not believe for not believing? He made the earth, he made **us** yet will punish us for his own creations? Belief is irrelevant, why would a perfect being need worship? Surely living a good life would be enough?
  - Secondly, eternal punishment for **any** crime could never be considered just for what would be a **finite** crime. So surely, the problem of not believing in God and then him existing is not such a problem!
- **Nature of God unknown** – We could never know the nature of a transcendent, non-physical being so how can we speculate about his rewards and punishments anyway? Maybe he rewards non-believers?



## Religious belief as basic

- Suggested by Plantinga, using an approach known as Reformed epistemology
- Religious belief can be a basic belief/foundational belief without being self-evident or incorrigible or infallible
- Belief in God can be basic for a person, so they can be rationally justified without argument.
- What about the belief the **Great Pumpkin** returns every Halloween? Could that be basic?
  - *The response of Plantinga suggests that the basic belief in God has grounds while the Great Pumpkin does not.*
- You see someone rolling around, looking as if they are in pain and you have the belief this person is actually in pain. Their behaviour that they are in pain is not evidence that they actually are in pain...and you do not infer the belief he is in pain from other beliefs. However, the belief he is actually in pain is not groundless – you are watching the person have ‘pain-like’ behaviour. So a basic belief has grounds and can be justified.
  - The grounds for a belief in God are such things as
    - The universe is wonderful to behold
    - Reading the bible can lead to you thinking God is speaking to you
    - Feeling of guilt – God disapproves of what you have done
- These act as **grounds** for the belief, although they all don’t entail directly God’s existence, however knowing ‘God created the universe’ and ‘God speaks to me’ follows from that God exists.
- Plantinga is not claiming argument is irrelevant merely it is possible to believe without argument.
- There are plenty of beliefs which can no more be easily proven than the belief in God.
  - The world existed 5 minutes ago
  - Human Rights
  - Religious belief is no better and no worse than those beliefs above.
- Other cultures have equal grounding for believing in multiple Gods, witches etc.
  - There is no reason to accept one particular God than others, so how can you claim to *know* God exists?
  - Can we ever claim we *know* God to exist? Just through a basic belief?

