

Revision

Religious Studies

Unit 4, Philosophy

The existence of God

The problem of Evil

Immortality

Revelation

Miracles

Science and Religion

The Existence of God

The First Cause Argument

Put forward by Thomas Aquinas

Relates to the Creation Stories in Genesis

Backed up by science, everything is caused by something.

- Everything that exists was caused to exist
- The universe exists so it must have had a cause
- There had to be something eternal that was not caused
- The eternal first cause is God
- Therefore God exists

Weaknesses/Challenges

Big Bang theory. This shows that there can be a beginning of the universe without the need for God.

If things exist because they are caused to exist, then what caused God?

The Design Argument

Put forward by Thomas Aquinas and supported by William Paley.

Evidence in the world around us.

- The world is too ordered and complicated to have come about by random chance.
- It appears to have been designed
- So it must have a designer
- The designer must be God

Paley's watch – the complex workings of a watch are compared to the complex workings of the world

Weaknesses/Challenges

It all depends on whether you agree that the world seems to have elements of design
Evolution explains away a lot of the 'design' in the world

Argument from miracles

- The miracle must have been caused by something outside of nature
- The only thing outside of nature is God
- The miracle must be the result of God's intervention
- Therefore God exists

2 types of miracle

- Break the laws of nature
- Work within the laws of nature

Examples of miracles

- Jesus turns water into wine

- Lourdes

Miracles can be signs to show people that God exists

Weaknesses/challenges

Just because science cannot explain it yet, it may be able to in the future

Theists want miracles to happen

The cure of an illness may be mind over matter

Miracles could be made up

Why is God only helping certain people? Why are so many innocent people left to suffer?

If God is fair, miracles cannot happen

The argument from Religious Experience

People have experienced God, therefore he exists
5 types of religious experience.

- Communicating with God through prayer
- Feeling God's presence in worship
- Feeling the presence of God in nature
- Experiencing a conversion
- Experiencing a miracle

Theists claim that because people have had direct contact with God, it proves that God exists

Weaknesses/Challenges

They are difficult to prove

The evidence is not accepted by atheists

People may have been under the influence of drugs/alcohol

The argument from morality

-People have an inbuilt sense of morality

-This comes from outside themselves

-This source is God

-God exists

Conscience is the voice of God advising us on how to behave

Weaknesses/Challenges

Morality may have developed as a survival technique. Helping others within a group helps survival of the group.

Guilt feelings are not from God, but from our upbringing.

Not everyone feels guilt.

There is no evidence of an afterlife, so no guaranteed reward for good behaviour.

The problems of evil and suffering

Problem of suffering

Why does a benevolent God allow suffering?

Why does an omniscient God not prevent the suffering?

If God is omnipotent, why does he not prevent the suffering?

Why do innocent people suffer?

Types of suffering

Natural – It's just the way the earth is. EG, natural disasters.

Is God to blame?

People choose to live in disaster zones.

Manmade – People use freewill to cause suffering.

If God created humans, is he responsible for the suffering we create?

Does Suffering have a purpose?

- Pain is useful for keeping us alive and indicating that there is something wrong.
- Suffering can make us appreciate things
- It can make us stronger
- It can help you to reach a goal e.g. training for a marathon
- It can be a test from God
- It can be a punishment from God
- It's all part of God's plan

Religious Views

Christian – human freedom to choose

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3)

Suffering is a punishment for sin (some Christians)

The innocent suffering of Jesus on the cross and rising on the third day show that suffering is temporary

Trusting in God will help accept personal suffering

'Love your neighbour' – help those who suffer

Jesus healed and helped people in the Bible

Islam – Allah gave Adam the world to look after but also gave him freewill.

Humans can choose to sin.

Shaytan (the devil) tests people's faith through suffering

People who cause others to suffer will be judged on the Day of Judgement

One of the Five pillars is Zakat, to give to charity to help those who suffer

Explanations for Evil

- Impersonal force that draws you into doing wrong or causes terrible things to happen
- A personal being or devil. The opposite of God
- Psychological phenomenon influenced by a person's upbringing or society or environment. It could even be mental illness

The problem of Evil

- Why did a benevolent God create a world where evil is present?
- Why did a benevolent God create beings that can do evil?
- Why doesn't an omnipotent God stop people from doing evil things?
- If everything that happens is the will of God, does God want evil to happen?

Religious responses

- God giving people free will was an act of love. We are not robots.
- God chooses not to defeat evil so that people must choose wisely and grow stronger
- Everything that happens is God's will, if you go against God's will, you cause evil

Christian – God made everything perfect, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, choosing wrong by choosing to disobey God, and had to take responsibility for their own actions.

Jesus offered salvation to those who believe in him, so that their evil actions may be forgiven if they are truly sorry.

We must forgive people and help them to reform

Islam – Allah created the perfect world. Shaytan (the devil) tempted Adam and Hawa (Eve). Shaytan is the source of all evil and still tries to tempt people away from God. Everyone starts life with a clean slate, but must resist temptation.

You must stand up to injustice and evil.

Immortality

Death

The end of life. Brain activity has stopped.

Types of immortality

Legacy

In the memory of others

Resurrection

Reincarnation

Resurrection

Christian – Resurrection of the body. Spiritual or physical.

Raised from the dead and judged by God and sent to heaven or hell

Catholics believe in Purgatory, a place to cleanse yourself of sins before heaven

Islam

Soul is taken for questioning by 2 angels. The souls wait for judgment day when Allah will send them to heaven or hell.

Problems

If you are given a new body are you the same person?

Why is there no evidence of an immortal soul?

If I am identified by my physical form, is my soul still me?

Reincarnation/rebirth

Reincarnation (Hindu) – after death the soul moves on to a new body at birth. This is controlled by the law of Karma. The actions in one life build up karma and affect which new body you will be reborn into. The aim is to be released from the cycle of rebirth (Samsara) so that the soul (atman) is free to reach nirvana.

Rebirth(Buddhist) – There is no soul. The life is transferred from body to body, but not any type of individual. Suffering and desire keep people trapped on the cycle of rebirth.

Problems

If you are reborn in to a new body which has a new personality and develops new memories, is it still you?

Religious evidence for immortality

Christian – Eternal life with God begins when a person accepts the Christian faith. Resurrection of Jesus proves eternal life. A new spiritual body after death.

Islam – Qur'an is the direct word of Allah so what it says must be true. The Qur'an says that there will be resurrection of the body.

Problems

- It's only true to believers of that religion
- The scriptural accounts do not agree with each other
- The accounts can lack detail
- Little knowledge of science when the scriptures were written

Evidence

Channelling

Near-death experiences

Ghosts

Problems

Ghosts may be hallucinations

Some mediums are frauds

NDE, you don't die, merely lack of oxygen to the brain

Arguments against immortality

Lack of proof

Different scriptural accounts don't match

Ghosts, channelling, NDE's cannot be proved

It may all be wishful thinking

Arguments from Science

-People are a product of evolution. We evolved from animals and therefore have no soul.

-Cryonics. Freezing people in order to bring them back to life in the future. Religious believers say that only God can resurrect the dead. At what point does the soul leave the body?

-The exploration of space. Where then is heaven?

Dualism

Materialism – Our minds are inseparable from our bodies. Death is the end of body and therefore the mind as it's part of the body (brain).

Dualism – Mind/Soul is separate to the body
Christians believe that the physical body, as well as the soul, will be resurrected on the Day of Judgement. God created humans as complete so the soul is not a separate substance from the soul.

Hindus/Buddhists believe in a separate soul that exists outside of the body.

Revelation

General Revelation

God becomes known through ordinary common human experiences or natural means.

Seeing the presence of God in nature

Seeing God in the Holy books of the religion

Seeing God in the writings of religious leaders

Seeing God in the life and work of other people

Seeing God's character revealed through reason, conscience and faith

Special Revelation

God speaks directly to an individual or a group of people.

Enlightenment

Hearing God's call

Experiencing visions or dreams

Revelation through miracles

Revelation through prayer and worship

Power and Impact of Revelation

Provides proof of God's existence

Helps to start a religion

Helping people to know what they must do to live as God wishes

Christian Beliefs

One God. There are three aspects to God,

Father – Creator, eternal almighty

Son – God came to earth in the form of Jesus

Holy Spirit – God working in the world

God has revealed himself through the Old and New testaments and through the life and work of Jesus.

'Why do you ask me about what is Good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.'

Matthew 19:17

Muslim beliefs

Muslims believe in the one God, Allah, who is eternal and unchanging. Allah has 99 beautiful names in the Qur'an to help people understand him. Allah's final revelation was revealed to Muhammad.

'behold, God is infinite, all knowing...His is all that is in the heavens and on earth; all things devoutly obey his will. The Originator is He of the heavens

and the earth: and when he wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, 'Be' – and it is.'

Qur'an 2 115-117

Immanent or transcendent

God is active in the world. Jesus was human and lived among us. So, God is immanent.

God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and omnibenevolent. So God is transcendent.

Personal or impersonal?

God is not human. God is beyond human understanding. So, God is impersonal.

People talk to God through prayer. God reveals himself to people. So God is personal.

Strengths of revelation

General

-indirect and available to everyone

-available to all people throughout all history

-continuous and ongoing so religion can update its thinking accordingly

-Conscience is available to all religious believers as a general revelation and guides them.

Evidence

Can the revelation be proved true (this water will heal people)?

Does it fit in with earlier revelations or does it contradict them?

Does the revelation convert a non-believer or a member of another religion?

Arguments against revelation

Brought on by alcohol or drugs

The believer is desperate to have a revelation

The person may be physically or mentally ill e.g. epilepsy

The mind can play tricks – there may be another explanation

They could be fraudulent

Problems for believers

Conflicting claims in different religions

Conflicting claims to the truth in the same religion

Different perspectives on what makes special and general revelation

Miracles

What is a Miracle?

Break the laws of nature e.g. walking on water, turn water into wine

Within the laws of nature/happy coincidence e.g. stairwell B in the 911 attack.

Act of God

Religious views on God working in the world

Christian

Jesus performed miracles showing God's love and power e.g. healing the sick and raising the dead.

Buddhist

There is no God so God cannot be working in the world. Miracles can happen though

Islam

Only Allah can perform miracles. No human can perform miracles, but Allah can perform miracles through humans, for example, the prophets.

Can humans perform miracles?

Buddhism

Yes. There is no God so if a human performs a miracle, it was caused by the human. The Buddha gained miraculous powers after enlightenment.

No. There is no such thing as miracles. Our knowledge of the world is incomplete so we cannot understand what is happening.

Christianity (and Islam)

Humans can perform miracles but only because God is working through them.

Christians believe Jesus is God in human form and therefore was able to perform miracles.

Examples of miracles from scripture

Buddhism – Buddha calms the crazy elephant and saves the baby

Christianity – Parting of the Red Sea by Moses

Islam – The revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad

Evidence

Evidence of miracles

- Many people see miracles happening
- People experience a miracle for themselves
- Miracles are associated with the founder of a religion

Evidence for miracles

- Too many accounts of miracles so some of them must have happened

-Not just events from the past, but still occur today

-May miracles have been investigated but no scientific explanation can be found

-The miracles performed by the founders of religions convert people. If these miracles were not genuine, they would not have this effect.

-There is documented research into the power of prayer to heal.

What do miracles reveal about God?

Love and care for his creation

Islam – The miracle of sending the Qur'an to guide us shows God's love for His creation.

Christianity – The miracle of Jesus' resurrection shows God's love for His creation.

Miraculous healings point to God's love, and allow people to learn more about God.

Immanence

God is active in the world. Sometimes God performs the miracles directly (Moses). Jesus is God in human form, and Jesus performed miracles.

Knowledge and power

Miracles that break the laws of nature show that God is able to interfere with the workings of the world. When miracles are a happy coincidence, they demonstrate God's power and show that he knows when to make change happen. Miracles that cannot be explained show how God is beyond human understanding.

Miracles causing problems for believers

God might not perform the miracle

Miracles could give the miracle worker too much importance.

Miracles make God's behaviour seem unfair

God is transcendent

Hume's argument against miracles

Never enough evidence

The witnesses are unreliable

The witnesses are uneducated

Religion depends on miracles.

Arguments against Hume

Miracles are the exception to the rule so will break the laws of nature.

Educated and honest people have claimed to have experienced miracles.

Religions depend on faith, not miracles.

Science and religion

Types of truth

Scientific truth
Historical truth
Religious truth

The creation account in Genesis

God created the world in 6 days and rested on the 7th. Everything was created according to God's command. Before anything existed, there was God.

Fundamentalist view

Direct word of God so everything is literally true. If science disagrees with the creation story, then science must be wrong.

Non-literal view

Not God's word, but inspired by God. The genesis account teaches the religious idea that God did create the universe, but it was written in a way to make the ideas clear to the people at the time.

Creation account as a myth

it contains a religious truth. It may have been passed down through generations. So Genesis is helping people to understand God's role in creation.

The cosmological Revolution

In the middle Ages, everything was controlled by the Catholic Church, the Bible was literally true and nothing could argue with this fact. The Earth was the centre of the universe as implied by the Genesis creation story. Galileo (and others) observed the movements of the stars and realised that the Earth revolved around the sun.

- So, God had not put humans at the centre of the universe.
- Christianity no longer had control over science
- Religion could only be the explanation for things not understood by science
- Parts of God's creation were like a machine that ran itself. God was not needed.

Big Bang

10 -15 billion years ago. The only single point in existence exploded with such force that it created all matter in the universe. This raced around colliding and forming planets which started to settle into orbits.

The theory of evolution

All life is interconnected.

Animals/plants/organisms mutate and the strong mutations get passed on to offspring. This gradually causes the mutation to become a new species.

Put forward by Charles Darwin. Darwin was religious and felt that his theory of evolution would support the argument from design. (eventually Darwin started to doubt God and the Bible) At the time most people felt that he was wrong (The Bible could not be challenged)

Darwin's challenge to religion

-development is in small steps based on random chance so plants and animals were not in their final form on the 6th day of creation.

-selection by random chance rejects the work of a designer

-Evolution shows that things change to suit their environment.

Religious reasons for rejecting Darwin

-Genesis states that humans were created in the 'image of God'.

-Humans have a soul

-Gaps in fossil records

There is no absolute link between humans and apes.

Religious reasons for accepting Darwin

Evolution can be part of God's plan. God set up the laws of nature and physics, and evolution must work within them.

Can science and religion agree?

NO – literal understanding of Genesis creation story does not allow for science. Science cannot prove God therefore cannot accept his existence.
YES – Non-literal understanding of the Bible. God can still be behind the way the universe has developed. Intelligent design suggests that Big Bang and evolution are part of complex design.

Absolute and evolving truth

Absolute truth – what is thought to be true can not change. A fundamentalist view (Religious and atheist)

Evolving truth – As new information arises, our understanding of what is true changes. Scientific view.