

OCR Philo Revision

Keywords

- **Inductive** argument – if the premises are true, it is unlikely that the conclusion would be false.
- **Deductive** argument – it is impossible for the premises to be true but the conclusion to be false.
- **Analytical** statements – true by definition (e.g. a triangle has 3 sides)
- **Synthetic** statements – can only be verified by senses (e.g. it is raining outside)
- **A priori** – based on logic and reasoning.
- **A posteriori** – based on empirical observations.

Religious Language

- **Cognitive language** – conveys facts and knowledge.
- **Non-cognitive language** – things that are not factual, e.g. feelings, metaphysical claims.
- **Univocal language** – words that have the same meaning in all contexts.
- **Equivocal language** – words/language that has several different meanings, so unclear and ambiguous.
- Religious language is not univocal (so the meaning of a statements is unclear), it is equivocal (as it concerns the realm outside of existence, so there are different interpretations)
 - So, these arguments to religious language attempt to conclude if language has meaning or not/if it is objectively useful despite it being equivocal.

In the 20th century, many philosophers focused on issues relating to language. In philosophy of religion we are trying to describe concepts that no one physically sees and hears, such as God. There are two problems that are raised in the use of religious language, firstly how can words be used accurately to describe God? This is because if the words that we apply to God have the same meaning as when applied to human beings (thus univocal) it has the effect of bringing God down to a human level and thus anthropomorphising him. However, if language has a different meaning (thus equivocal) then humans can never really comprehend what a word means when it is applied to God. The second difficulty is more serious, some philosophers dispute if religious language is cognitive or non-cognitive. Some philosophers regard that statements about God are non-cognitive. Therefore, challenging religious faith and suggesting that religious belief is literally meaningless. If religious statements are non-cognitive then they are essentially nonsense.

Verification Principle

- Logical positivists – Vienna, 1920s, it was a movement in philosophy that believed that the aim of philosophers should be the analysis of language, particularly the language of science. The logical positives were concerned with relationship between the use of language and knowledge, rejecting non-cognitive statements as meaningless.
- The Vienna Circle- the group of philosophers including Schlick (1882-1936) and Neurath (1882-1945) who gave rise to the logical positivist movement.
- Verification Principle- the belief that statements are only meaningful if they can be verified by the senses. There are strong and weak forms of the principle generally associated with the Vienna Circle and A.J Ayer.
- Tautology- a logical statement that we can know to be true by definition.

Logical Positivists believed that some statements were meaningful and others were not. To distinguish between what is meaningful and what is not, the logical positivists came up with the verification principle; a statement is only meaningful if it is able to be verified by an actual experience or is a tautology.

A.J. Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* - 1936)

- “A statement which cannot be conclusively verified cannot be verified at all. It is simply devoid of any meaning”
- **Analytic** propositions (**a priori**) – true by definition because this is required by the word (a triangle has 3 sides), or because they are mathematical ($2+2=4$).
- **Synthetic** propositions (**a posteriori**) – true by confirmation of sense (I can see it is raining).

- Strong verification –an assertion only has meaning if it can be verified according to empirical information, anything else is meaningless.
- Weak – developed to allow historical facts to have meaning. Some evidence is enough to make a statement meaningful (e.g. eyewitness accounts).
- Religious claims are meaningless as they are non-cognitive and cannot be verified.

Criticisms

- **Hick**– eschatological verification, talk of God may be verifiable in principle; convincing evidence is not apparent now but may be in the future; i.e. when reach the “Celestial City” (heaven)
- **Swinburne**– propositions which no-one knows how to verify are not meaningless, e.g. toys that come out at night when you are asleep, it is not possible to prove or disprove this but this doesn’t mean it is meaningless.
- The weak form of verification would support some religious statements, e.g. some historical evidence for the existence of Jesus and his acts, and evidence of possible design could support “God as creator”
- Ayer’s creation of the weak verification principle may suggest that the verification principle has gaps.

Falsification Principle

A principle for assessing whether statements are genuine scientific assertions by considering whether any evidence would ever disprove them. The falsification principle aims to improve upon the apparently limited verification principle by suggesting that the difficulty with religious statements is that there is no possible state of affairs that could ever lead to a religious statement being proven false. The meaningfulness of a statement lies in the method of its falsification. Thus, any statement that cannot be falsified is empty of meaning.

Karl Popper(*Conjectures and Refutations* - 1963)

The falsification principle has its origins in Karl Popper’s (1902-94) philosophy of science. Science works by providing theories about the world that can be tested and possibly falsified.

- Differentiate between genuine science and pseudoscience.
- "science is more concerned with falsification of [a] hypothesis than with [its] verification."
- Any theory that is impossible to disprove is an invalid theory e.g. Freud’s psychoanalysis (theory by which empirical data was interpreted, not tested against). Einstein’s theory of relativity is genuine science in Popper’s view. Thus, according to Popper, theories are scientific only if they are falsifiable.

Anthony Flew

Anthony Flew (1923-) applied this principle to religious language and developed upon the philosophies of Popper.

- Religious statements cannot be falsified, therefore religious language is meaningless.
- A believer gives reasons why God remains good, so religious statements “die the death of a thousand qualifications”

Flew applied the Falsification Principle to religious language and concluded that religious statements are nothing short of nonsensical utterances. This is because:

- they cannot be falsified; there is no empirical evidence to count against them.
- Religious believers do not allow for the falsification of their belief. E.g. they are reduced to saying that 'God's love is incomprehensible' when they cannot explain suffering.

Flew calls the latter the 'death of a thousand qualifications'. No matter what disaster strikes, a believer will continue to argue for the existence of God, even if their claims are 'watered down' in the process.

- *Parable of the Gardener*- Flew uses a parable based upon John Wisdom’s parable to express and demonstrate his views. The parable describes of two explorers come across a clearing in a jungle. It contains a mixture of weeds and flowers. One claims that there must be a gardener who comes to tend the clearing, while the other denies it. The two sit and wait for the gardener to appear, but he never does. One gardener (the theist) continues to claim that there is a gardener: one who is invisible, intangible, inaudible and undetectable. Whilst the other (the sceptic) does not believe there to be a gardener. They set up a barbed-wire fence, they electrify it, etc. But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever suggest there to be an invisible climber. However, the Believer still regards there to be a gardener. The sceptic questions, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?".

A theist will allow nothing to count against his belief, instead interpreting observations in terms of belief- ‘move the goal posts’.

Basil Mitchell disagreed with Flew's argument.

- Religious statements are meaningful even if they aren't straightforwardly verifiable or falsifiable.
- Believers have a prior commitment to trust in God based on faith.

Mitchell used the story of the *Parable of the Partisan and the Stranger* to demonstrate his point. The story is set within the context of wartime whereby the story goes as such: The stranger tells the partisan that he himself is a member of the resistance, indeed that he is in command of it; and urges the partisan to have faith in him no matter what happens. The partisan is utterly convinced of the stranger's sincerity and constancy and undertakes to trust him. They never meet in conditions of intimacy again. But sometimes the stranger is seen helping members of the resistance, and the partisan is grateful and says to his friends "He is on our side." Sometimes he is seen in the uniform of the enemy handing over patriots to the occupying power. On these occasions, his friends murmur against him; but the partisan still says, "He is on our side." He still believes that, in spite of appearances, the stranger did not deceive him. Sometimes he asks the stranger for help and receives it. He is then thankful. Sometimes he asks and does not receive it. Then he says, "The stranger knows best."

- Trials of faith do occur but a believer's prior commitment means that nothing counts decisively against belief.
- Partisan does not deny evidence against his belief, he must accept the reality of this evidence, if not he is "guilty of a failure of faith as well as knowledge"
- Mitchell argues that religious belief has some grounding in reason.

R.M. Hare suggested that Flew did not understand the nature of religious belief.

- Falsification can be used to verify cognitive statements, but not non-cognitive statements, which are religious statements.
- Religious statements can't make factual claims but that doesn't mean that they are meaningless.
- Religious beliefs are blik's – thoughts that significantly alter life and are unfalsifiable.

Parable of the Paranoid Student (Lunatic) describes a lunatic who believed that all professors were trying to kill him. Nothing could alter his belief. Hare regards basic beliefs such as these as 'blik's'. Such beliefs are not verifiable nor falsifiable

- Blik's affect the way a person perceives the world – the paranoid student has a 'wrong' blik, whereas the normal student has a 'right' blik.

Braithwaite – (weakness to verification as well) religious language is meaningful because it is prescriptive - it recommends a course of action. So, for example, the phrase 'God loves me' has meaning because it advises you to live your life in a loving way. It is not necessary for the believer to have a truth to follow religious statements.

Hick

Eschatological verification- John Hick argued that if we can verify the afterlife in principle that would mean we can verify the afterlife. The Eschatological verification is intended, by John Hick, to respond to the logical positivists on their own terms by providing a possible scenario in which the Christian claim abide the verification, and thus such claims are shown to be cognitively meaningful. Hick gave an example of two travellers walking down a road, debating where the road leads to with one believing it to lead to a Celestial City and the other believes the road leads to nowhere. Hick draws an analogy between this and the statements made by a believer of God regarding heaven. Hick described that like the travellers, the believer's statements about heaven can be verified at the end of the journey. Therefore, Hick argues that beliefs can be verified in principle if true but never falsified if false.

Via Negativa/ The Apophatic Way

The idea behind the via negativa is that statements referring to God cannot be accurately made due to the incomprehension that humans have of God. This is because God is greater than anything in which we can conceive thus comprehend. The via negativa argues that humans can use negative statements about God in order to convey him. The via negativa recognises that we are limited in how far we can use language to describe God. It states that we cannot talk about God in positive terms (via affirmativa), e.g. God is omnibenevolent, as this is misleading and confusing. Instead, we can talk about God negatively/deny what He is, e.g. God is not mortal (via negativa).

- Positive statements about God will be inaccurate as we cannot comprehend Him; language is too weak (against via affirmativa/the cataphatic way)
 - Describe God in terms of what he is not, e.g. God is not malevolent.

Plotinus (c.205-270)

- Used this method to describe the form of the good. Plotinus argued that the good is separate to the world and is unknowable.
- A Neo-Platonist suggests God is ultimate and indescribable, only experienced by a mystical experience.
- Experience of the One is self-attesting.
- No logical reasoning or evidence is applicable/needed.

Pseudo (Dionysius the Aeropagite)

5th century Christian writer, who speaks of God as being 'beyond assertion'- God is beyond our ability to describe. When we make positive statements about God it results in anthropomorphism. For example, to say that God is good limits his goodness as it likens God's goodness to that of humans.

- God doesn't exist, as exist is a physical object description.
- God doesn't exist in the same way we do, exist is the wrong word.
- 'God is the universal cause of existence, while itself existing not, for it is beyond all being' – *On The Divine Names*.
- Used via negativa to emphasise the transcendence of God.

St John of the Cross

- A mystic, emphasises non-verbal experiences of God (mysticism).
- Tried to express in words the experience of mystical communion with Christ in poetry form.

Moses Maimonides– (*A Guide for the Perplexed*)

Empathised the importance of the via negativa in his 'Guide for the Perplexed'. He regarded that to make positive statements about God is disrespectful as it brings God down to a human level. The only positive statement that we can make about God is that he exists. A description of God can only come via the negative.

- "God has no positive attributes...the negative attributes of God are the true attributes"
- "There is no similarity in anyway whatsoever between Him [God] and his creatures...the difference between them...is absolute"

Strengths

- Gives a language that can be used to talk about God, as saying what God is may cause dispute.
- Doesn't give false certainties.
- It supports the idea that God is beyond description and experience of him is ineffable.
- It can be regarded as more respectful (Maimonides).
- It avoids being anthropomorphic (human-based) and focuses on a transcendent God.

Weaknesses

- **Brian Davies**– talking in negative terms opens up numerous possibilities of what God could be; not defining at all.
- Univocalists – talk of God must be literal and used in the same way as ordinary language to avoid agnosticism.
- If we are saying something negative, then we consequently imply the positive statement that counters it.
- The via negativa does not reflect how religious people speak of God.

Analogy, Symbolism & Myth

Analogy

Comparing two or more related items. It is an approach in religious language that compares the normal use of a word to its religious use. To say that God is good means a similar thing as saying that John is good. Analogies are something that we use frequently in everyday speech. An analogy is describing something that is unfamiliar to us by making a comparison with something we already know.

Aquinas – (*Summa Theologica*)

- 'it seems that no word can be used literally of God'. Analogies are the only option available given the difficulties of making univocal or equivocal statements about God.

Aquinas rejected *via negativa* as it is wrong to talk about what God is not. God is good but a different way to humans. Aquinas also rejected the separation of religious language into **univocal** or **equivocal**.

- Against univocal – when we say God is Holy and we are holy, they are not the same thing.
- Against equivocal – this means that there is no objective meaning to religious statements, which Aquinas says is illogical.

Aquinas instead upheld the concept of *Via eminentiae* – the way we talk about God is partial.

Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) argued that language cannot be used literally of God. Aquinas uses analogy in two different ways:

Analogy of Proportion

- Extent to which something compares to another. The type of properties that something has depends on the nature of the being that possesses the properties.
- Words related to objects are different in proportion. When we use words to describe God, we are describing an infinite being. When we use words to describe each other, we are describing finite beings.
- We can use the words 'loving' and 'faithful' when we talk about God, but they are on a bigger scale than our understanding of the words.
- John Hick (1922-) uses Baron von Hugel's example – faithfulness of human, dog and God. If we compare the faithfulness that humans might have to that of a dog, the dog's faithfulness is limited. This is the same when we assert that God is faithful, God's faithfulness is quite large in comparison to ours as humans.

Analogy of Attribution

- The qualities that we ascribe to each other are a reflection of the qualities of God.
- A causal relationship between two things being described e.g. healthy seaside due to effects on residents. Aquinas used an example that if a bull's urine was healthy then they are healthy. Their urine is a reflection of them.
- God can be described as 'living' as He is the cause of life.
- We gain understanding about God by comparing our attributes to Him, as we are made in his image:
- "God is called wise not only insofar as He produces wisdom, but also because, insofar as we are wise, we imitate to some extent the power by which He makes us wise"
- Brian Davies (1951-) uses the example of the baker and bread. If we say that the bread is good and the baker is good, there is a relationship between the statements. The bread is the product of the baker and his goodness or skill at baking 'spreads' to the bread.

Strengths

- It can help believers make sense of a concept (God) that is beyond human comprehension.
- Analogy seems to convey that religious language can provide some meaningful understanding of God.
- It avoids agnosticism and anthropomorphism.

Criticisms

- **St. Paul** – we cannot accurately express God even through analogy until we see him.
- **Duns Scotus** – argued that analogy is too vague and doesn't enable us to understand God.
- Analogy tells us nothing new about God – analogies are based on what is known through His creation.
- Based on the notion that God exists – analogy has no meaning to non-believers
- Implies that analogy is part of a language game (Wittgenstein), so no objective meaning.

Symbols

Signs simply point us towards something whereas a symbol 'participates' in that to which it points.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965)

- Religious language operates as a symbol – points towards "Being-Itself"
- Not as a sign as signs do not participate in what they signalise (they have no meaning outside of context).
- Religious statements are cognitive
- Systematic theology – symbols are not literal assertions. They point to something beyond themselves. Participate in that to which they point (intrinsically linked). Symbolism opens up otherwise hidden levels of reality and many interpretations. Open up levels and dimensions of the soul that corresponds to those levels of reality.
- Symbols are independent of empirical criticisms
 - "you cannot kill a symbol by criticisms in terms of scientific and historical research".

Tillich regards that God can only be expressed through the use of symbolic language.

J.H. Randall

Developed upon Tillich

- Religious language is symbolic but non-cognitive.
- Symbols are motivational - fire up passionate emotions.
- They are social - strengthen social bonds and have common social understanding.
- Communicative - express faith better than religious language due to limitations of religious language.
- Clarify and disclose our experience of the divine, same way as poet/artist reveal hidden depths.

Criticisms

- **Tillich is too vague in saying symbols partake, it is the person not the actual symbol partaking.**
- **William Alston**– Tillich removes real and existential significance of religious statements
 - E.g. “God loves His creatures”, Tillich says it must be taken symbolically, however Alston says this renders the statement meaningless.
- **John Macquarrie**- Criticises Tillich but not symbols – there is no difference between a sign and a symbol, e.g. clouds are both a sign and symbol of rain. He proposes an existential response – symbols and sign link to human existence as they evoke feelings, of awe, devotion, trust – akin to the feelings we should have towards God. A good example is the rite of washing in religions – the ritual symbolises the cleansing of sin. Similarity of relation – symbols are like analogies, e.g. the images of Jesus in The Gospel of John: the Living Water, the Light of the World, Good Shepherd; the True Vine. Symbolic relations of proportion are in operation.

Myths

- Understood to be a story that is not true but has other value e.g. inspirational and motivational.
- A literary device that enables us to talk about ineffable things.
- A method of interpreting reality, so has symbolic meaning.

Bultmann – (*Kerygma and Myth*)

- Modern Christians have to put aside reason, logic and scientific evidence when reading the Bible
- “it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless...and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles”
- Biblical stories/myths seem unbelievable and like fairy-tales otherwise.
- This means there is a need to demythologise myths in Bible and the New Testament to gain insight into historical Christ and make it relatable.
- The NT contains truths (the kerygma message) but require demythologising to understand and interpret them.
- Miracles do not exist as they make God unrelatable and therefore distant.

Criticisms

- Bultmann denies any historicity of the Bible. This challenges Christian beliefs and undermines the basis of Christianity (miracles).Or relieves the Bible of issues of historical accuracy.

Language Games

Early Wittgenstein- the Tractatus

In Wittgenstein’s first book, the Tractatus, he developed his picture theory of language arguing that the purpose of language was to enable us to represent the world concluding with the view that "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent." Suggesting to people, such as the logical positivist that religious language was meaningless.

Later Wittgenstein

In his later work, Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein changed his views and concluded that the meaning of words is in their use; The function the words perform is agreed by the particular group/society using them. He argued that language use is like playing a game with rules. Within our groups, we have agreed rules about how words are used. If I point to a table and say the word 'wardrobe', someone will correct me just as if I had moved a chess piece incorrectly. Different settings and situations each have their own language games.

- **Wittgenstein** – based argument on logical positivists, rejection of verification principle as too limiting.
- *Philosophical Investigations* – “to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life”.
 - “do not ask me for the meaning, ask me for the use”
- Words have a specific function performed in a specific group/society

- A game with its own set of rules.
- People not in the game will not understand the use of language.
- Language is a self-contained game
 - Focussed on use of language, different uses have different rules.
 - Every form of language is a self-contained game with own rules specific to group.
- Language can't exist in isolation
 - Individuals cannot create a private language as it is a social product to enable communication.
 - "cogito ergo sum" challenged as any thoughts are in public language with socially agreed rules, not a private language.
 - A private language cannot exist as an individual wouldn't know if they were using words correctly.
- Religious language is a language game. Thus, Religious language and the statements made by different religious groups are in themselves language games.
 - As the use of language is specific to groups, religious language is also a game.
 - Problems in philosophy occur through misunderstanding of the game; issue is not in the inherent meaning of the word.
 - Rules apply only to people 'in the game', so to outsiders it is meaningless.
 - This means religious language can be deemed as meaningless.
 - However, an outsider cannot claim it is meaningless just because they're not in the game. Some thinkers have suggested that Wittgenstein's ideas resemble Fideism; the beliefs of religion do not have rational foundations and are removed from criticism. Faith is more important than reason. Beliefs can therefore not be subject to rational analysis.
 - Means it is difficult to discuss religion and religious concepts if different faiths have different religious languages.

According to Wittgenstein, religious language is only meaningful in a certain context, i.e. it is meaningful to those participating in that particular language game. This means R.L is non-cognitive (not factual). Furthermore, it cannot be spoken of and analysed in a scientific way as it is not the same sort of thing. This comes under Wittgenstein's coherence theory of truth - that something has meaning if it is coherent to you.

D.Z. Phillips

Phillips criticised Wittgenstein's language game theory as he believed it prevents philosophy of religion because it suggests that players who are outside the game can't criticise the belief as they don't share a common understanding of the thing. Phillips, therefore, developed Wittgenstein's approach by arguing that some of the problems caused by religious language exist because we take the language literally.

- Religious language is a language game as religious language is not grounded or criticised in reason; it's a system of its own.
- Statements such as "God exists" are not grounded in belief, instead they are expressions of belief.
- The reality of God is located in the words used and the practices of religion
 - You can only make statements if you are part of the circle; outsiders make irrelevant or meaningless claims.

Criticisms

- Religious language isn't totally isolated, so non-believers can also understand it and decide if it has meaning.
- Non-believers may be able to understand religious language better because they have an objective view – rendering importance of game useless.
- Suggests exclusive 'clubs' of language; however, language is communal and cannot be used as a secret code by a group.
- Religion makes universal claims, so it is not confined to a small community.
- Language games do not allow for believer's claims to be objectively true.

Miracles

There are various definitions regarding miracles that have arisen from philosophical discussion. The definitions include:

- **Hume**– “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by...some invisible entity”
 - This makes miracles easy to identify.
 - But it restricts God’s actions to the laws of nature, and it does not focus on God’s interaction with the world.
- **Holland**– “a remarkable and beneficial coincidence that is interpreted in a religious fashion”
 - The onus is clearly on the interpretation of the individual; most likely there is no hand of God intervening.
 - What is seen to be a miracle is open to interpretation; this could mean that miracles become meaningless.
 - With this definition, God can intervene without breaking the laws of nature.
- **Swinburne**(*Is There a God*)– miracles must hold a deeper meaning or significance
 - Example – God making a feather land in a particular place has no “deep ultimate purpose”; “these events would not naturally be described as miracles.
 - “If he (God) has reason to interact with us, he has reason very occasionally to intervene and suspend those natural laws by which our life is controlled”
- **Ramsey**– miracles are disclosure situations – a usual complex of incidents with which a new insight into truth is wrapped
 - Not all miracles are disclosure situations, and not all disclosure situations are miracles.
- **C.S. Lewis** – miracles are a type of revelation.
 - The incarnation of Christ is central to Christian belief. All other miracles are related to this event.
- **Durkheim**
 - Miracle stories are attributed to a ‘holy person’. These events bear testimony to that person’s status.
 - Personal experiences of miracles have a spiritual value, as a ‘free gift’ from God.

Bultmann – (*Kerygma and Myth*)

Rudolf Bultman (1884-1976) attempted to demythologise the New Testament accounts. He removed supernatural elements, arguing that it is possible to get closer to the real message of Jesus rather than the miraculous interpretation of the early Church. Bultman sought to discover the essential message of Jesus.

- All miracles are mythological.
- They are wrapped in “mythological trappings” of 1st Century angels and demons and voices from heaven.
- The Bible was written by humans using myth to convey truths (a **liberal** interpretation)
- Modern science can explain things that would’ve seemed like miracles (e.g. healing)
- Therefore, people should be sceptical of Biblical miracles as:
 - The world through time is an unbreakable sequence of events; if the sequence breaks (i.e. through divine intervention) then science ceases to exist.
 - History is an unbroken whole, if there was divine intervention it would not be possible to link a historical cause with an event as it is unclear if the cause is divine or otherwise
 - Link this to **Aquinas’** view on God altering the past

Therefore, we need to remove these trappings to expose historical Christ.

- Demythologising will lead to the Bible being relevant to own existence and will also lead to kerygma – proclamation, the true Gospel.
 - E.g. the virgin birth is a myth used to emphasise the special nature of Christ

Strengths

- This view does accept the evidence that Jesus existed, so doesn’t undermine the Bible. However, the Biblical notion of redemption via Christ’s blood is ridiculous as it is scientifically illogical – challenge to the central belief of Christianity.
- Demythologising the Bible may lead to more acceptance of it and more people believing as it is more understandable/relatable.

Criticisms

- Myths are used all the time and can be understood easily, e.g. fables to children

- Biblical miracles may be understood as analogies, as proposed by **Tillich and Aquinas**

Maurice Wiles – (*God's Action in the World*)

The modern theologian Maurice Wiles (1923-2005) argued that any occasion where God intervened with the natural order to help individuals or groups would raise issues of consistency and fairness. He believed such God would be arbitrary and partisan. Wiles claimed that the goodness of God and the existence of miracles were two incompatible ideas.

- He was religious but rejected the idea of miracles as he disputed the idea of an interventionist God
 - This notion is "implausible and full of difficulty"
 - An interventionist God also conflicts with free will.

A miracle by definition is an unlikely event, so God intervening in the world occasionally creates the picture of a disinterested/arbitrary God or one that favours some of His creation

- Example – why did He not intervene in the Holocaust or at Hiroshima?
- Example – the parting of the red sea and the 10 plagues in Exodus show God favouring some (the Israelites) but not all (allowed harm to the Egyptians)

Creation is the only miracle; the "one single act of God."

Miracles present an obstacle to religious faith:

- The existence of evil alongside the existence of miracles degrades the classical image of an all-powerful and all-loving God.
- An arbitrary God would not be worthy of worship.

Criticisms

- **Wiles' beliefs are inconsistent with certain Biblical stories such as Joshua 10, where God calls to Joshua to tell him to lead the Israelites and conquer the Promised Land.**
- **Peter Vardy** says it is arrogant for us to judge God on what we don't understand.
- Wiles may have missed the point of miracles - they may just be signs of God's existence.
- **Swinburne** uses the analogy of God being a parent who sometimes bends the rules (in this case the rules of nature) to benefit his children.

Miracles and the problem of evil

Rejection on Theological Grounds:

- Maurice Wiles Criticism of Miracles would suggest this due to his view that God's goodness would be in question as miracles only affect a small number of people. Wiles suggested that the miracles of the Bible seem trivial compared to the events of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.
- However, The Augustinian Theodicy would suggest that evil is a result of Human sin so therefore God doesn't have to intervene. Furthermore, any intervention of God is just a sign of his goodness and is to encourage belief in God

Rejection on Scientific Grounds:

- An Irenaean-type theodicy argues that laws of nature are needed as well as evil for humans to develop. Miracles would undermine these natural laws and it would be illogical for God to act in that way.
- Scientists argue that Nature is a fixed system and is closed - therefore cannot be interfered with

Defending Miracles as symbolic stories:

- Bultmann argued that Miracles were myths and symbolic stories to help people with belief in God. They are examples of teachings from the early Church. Bultmann tried to demythologise the Bible - But had difficulties in deciding meanings of miracles without using them as analogies

Defending literal belief in miracles:

- God is omnipotent and omniscient therefore can act as he wishes outside of human rationality. Humans don't need to understand why or how God performs miracles, it is important to know that they happen

Tim Keller

- Eastern religions – suffering is an illusion as the world is an illusion, so we should not care much about it.

- Western religions – heaven makes up for suffering. The world is important as God resurrected Jesus Christ physically, therefore we should do something about suffering, not God.

Polkinghorne

John Polkinghorne defends the possibility of miracles, particularly the resurrection of Jesus. He regarded that the Laws of nature do not change, yet the consequences of these laws can change when one moves into a 'new regime'.

- Unpredictability in physics means that there is openness in the future.
- "agency" – God can change what He has set.
- God acts holistically with world, can be working at quantum and larger levels.

Free will defence

- **Augustine** and **Irenaeus'** theodicies suggest that moral evil is inevitable.
- FWD suggests that a world of free agents is better than a world of "robots".
- Seems reasonable that if God is good, He would allow his creations freedom.
- **Swinburne** – agreed with FWD, if God had stopped evil (Holocaust) then He would be intervening with free will, and prevents genuine human development.

Strengths – makes logical sense, evil is needed for development.

Weaknesses – what about natural evil? Is this justified?

Mackie

- An omnibenevolent God would have made a world containing free agents that could only ever perform/pick from good acts.
- As this is not the case, then God may not be omnibenevolent, which further challenges the existence of a classical mono-theistic deity.

Strengths – fits with monotheistic notion of God.

Weaknesses – not logical for free agents to have only good options as the world is not like this, so not possible.

Modern Thinkers and miracles

Tillich– contingency miracles

Paul Tillich in Systematic Theology (Nisbet, 1953), defines a miracle as '...an event which is astonishing, unusual, shaking, without contradicting the rational structure of reality... an event which points to the mystery of being'. The traditional understanding of miracles is that they are divine acts of God that cannot be explained in any other way. They are a religious experience with the power to convert people and affirm their religious belief. Thousands of testimonies abound from witnesses throughout the ages who have claimed to have experienced miracles in their own lives. Although these claims have been examined by scholars, doctors and theologians, no certain conclusion has been reached. Miracles capture the imagination of the religious and non-religious alike, all seeking to discover whether miracles happen and, as a result, discovering whether or not God exists.

- Miracles are signs pointing to God, so they must be interpreted to find the significance.
- The understanding of the miracle is more important than the existence of the miracle.

Criticisms

- Where do we draw the line? Any lack of knowledge may lead a person to interpret something as a miracle, where it may be purely scientific (e.g. Aurora Borealis)
- Events are only miraculous insofar as we interpret them to be, so mundane events can be seen to be miraculous.

Response

- A true miracle reveals something about the nature of God.
- The person knows what has been revealed to them.

Criticism

- There is no way of verifying if someone is being genuine

Response

- It only matters to the individual if they believe it is real or not, as it is them interpreting the significance and gaining personal knowledge/faith.
- Just because it may be unverifiable, it does not mean that it is not a genuine revelation.

Life, Death and the Soul

- Death - “the complete and permanent cessation of all vital functions in a living creature, the end of life” .
- “Death is the most dreaded of evils, is...of no concern to us, for while we exist death is not present, and when death is present we no longer exist” – Epicurus.
- **Dualism**– a person has two distinct parts, the mind/soul (immaterial) and the body (material). The idea that there are two aspects to human beings, the physical and the mental. The mental may be identified with the soul.
- **Materialism**– there is only a physical existence, there is no such thing as a soul usually. The idea that human beings consist of physical matter alone.
- **Monism**– there is a single unit of body and mind, the mind needs the body and vice versa they cannot be separated. The idea that human beings are made up of one substance, the word is often used synonymously with materialism.

Life and death; the soul

Plato –(*Phaedo*)

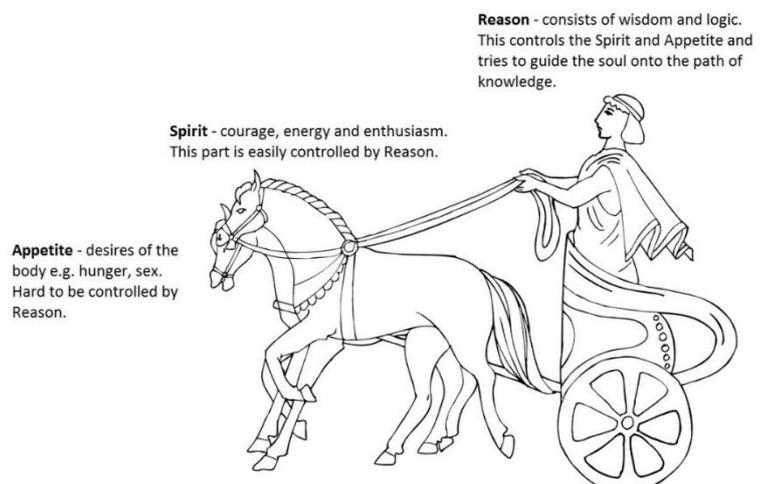
The Greek philosopher Plato is probably the most famous dualist. Plato draws contrasts between opposite ideas.

- **Dualist**- the immortal soul descended from the World of Forms, which is the real identity of a person
- Allegory of the cave–the world outside the cave is the World of Forms, where there is perfection and true knowledge and understanding; highest form is Good, then beauty, justice, truth.
- Plato believed that the soul was eternal. It existed prior to its incarnation in a human body; it will also exist after death. In the past, the soul was in the realm of Forms. In the present, it is incarnated in a body and experiences all the tension of the conflict between body and soul. In the future, the soul will be liberated from the body at death. The soul will reincarnate either to another body or eventually return to the realm of the Forms.
- Four **deductive** arguments for immortality of the soul:
 - Cyclical – everything comes into existence from its opposite (life, death), which sets up a cycle of birth and death. The body and soul are opposites. One makes the other necessary just as the concept of light logically makes us aware of the idea of darkness.
 - Recollection – knowledge is not learned but innate, partially remembered (anamnesis) from being in WoF where knowledge was acquired (example of questioning a poor slave boy who was still able to recognise a triangle despite having no education in *Meno*).
 - Affinity – the body has an affinity for the earth, and soul for WoF. Due to this, upon death the body is dispersed in the earth because it is composite (made up of many things), and the soul returns to WoF as it is simple (not made up of anything).
 - Final – as the soul is simple and cannot be destroyed, it must retreat to the WoF.

Regarding the body and the soul, Plato argued that the soul is more important. Plato argued that the soul is prisoner in body – the soul wants to travel to realm of ideas to understand and gain knowledge, tries to steer the body in this direction which wants to be involved in worldly matters concerning the senses.

The **tripartite** division of the soul:

Plato draws an analogy to describe the inner workings of the soul, the analogy of the charioteer. Plato explains that there are three aspects present within the soul: the reason, spirit, and appetite or desire. The soul works best when reason (the charioteer) is in charge. Although, appetite and spirit (the two horses) can pull us in different directions. Plato’s view of a good person is one whose soul is properly balanced with reason at the helm.



Descartes –(Meditations)

- Cogito ergo sum
 - The “I” and notion of the self implicates the existence of consciousness and ideas.
 - It is not possible to doubt the existence of the consciousness because if did not exist it would not be possible to make statements like “I think therefore I am”
 - It is possible to doubt the existence of the body
 - “I can conceive of myself as existing without a body, but I cannot conceive of myself as existing without conscious awareness” – **Brian Magee**
- From this, the mind is distinct from the body (**dualism**).
 - **Problem – how is it possible for an immaterial soul to interact with the material body?**
 - Descartes recognised this and thus suggested that the pineal gland in the brain is the “physical seat of the soul”
 - **Scientific evidence has now shown that the pineal gland has nothing to with consciousness and ideas.**

Criticisms of dualism:

- **It is impossible to verify the existence of something immaterial, making this argument unverifiable and weak.**

Aristotle

Aristotle’s views on human beings are complex. For Aristotle, the soul is the formal cause of the body. It is the characteristics and attributes that we each have. The soul is merely a description of the essence or properties of the body- the soul is the form of the body. Aristotle notes “it indubitably follows that the soul is inseparable from the body”. The soul cannot be divided from the body, we are body and soul.

- All living things have a soul, which actualises the body and isn’t separate (**monism**)
- Our particular soul is a human soul with human properties.
- When the body dies, the soul dies too.
- The psyche is the animator/the life force and a creature’s psyche is its “principle of life” which distinguished it from a corpse or inanimate object. Controls the function, structure and organisation of body.

Aristotle provides several illustrations that demonstrate the relationship between the body and soul. Aristotle suggests that if the body were an axe, the soul would be its ability to chop. Furthermore, if the body were an eye, the soul would be the ability to see.

- Faculties of the soul:
 - Nutrition – vegetative souls (plants) possess the faculty of nutrition (obtain food to stay alive)
 - Perception
 - Desire
 - Movement – sensitive souls (animals) possess these faculties cumulatively which helps them to sustain life
 - Intellect – rational souls (humans) possess intellect as well as the other faculties. Aristotle argues this is what distinguishes mankind from other creatures.
- Creatures fulfil their telos (purpose, final cause) by satisfying these faculties of the soul, i.e. humans by growing, reproducing, satisfying desires and thinking and living a deliberative life.

Hick– (Death and Eternal Life)

The Christian theologian John Hick is one of the leading theistic thinkers of recent times. Hick rejects the traditional belief in body-soul dualism. Hick adopts a materialist position whilst maintaining the concept of life after death.

A **materialist** and a **monist**– the body and soul are not distinct, they are together in a “psychophysical unity”. Hick demonstrated this through his replica theory.

Replica theory

- A person is “an indissoluble psychophysical unity”, meaning that the soul and body are linked/the same and make up the whole person.
- At death, a person can still continue to exist if an exact replica (a “resurrection body”) of themselves was to appear elsewhere (in a “resurrection world inhabited by resurrection persons”) create by God, possible as He is omnipotent

- Someone may die at a certain location but then live on in another world with genuine continuity.
- It is reasonable to speak of this replica as being the exact same as the original, as explained by Hick with his 3 examples:
 - If a man disappears from London and reappears in New York he is the same man
 - If a man dies in London and appears alive in New York he is still the same man
 - If a man dies in London and appears alive in another world he is the same man
- Personal identity, such as memories and appearance, are retained
 - A change in memory or personality would result in a loss of identity.
 - A change in the body (decay/cremation) would mean a loss in physical identity.
- Most materialist theories do not allow for continuity after death as they argue the body cannot survive death and there is no soul. Resurrection is also not possible if the body has decayed or been cremated. Hick challenges this with the replica theory and resurrection.
 - **Hick's view is compatible with Christian understandings of resurrection of the body**
 - **St Paul (1 Corinthians 15) – the body will become a spiritual body different to its earthly form at resurrection, as unlike a plant is from the seed it grows from.**

Criticisms

- **It is not possible to verify or falsify the existence of a resurrection world or of God**
 - **Counter – may be verified with eschatological verification.**
- **A deductive argument, so could be accused of being flawed as the premises are not correct/cannot be verified.**

Dawkins – (River Out of Eden)

Richard Dawkins is one of the most influential scientists of the last 30 years. He regards that humans are purely a product of genes. Our bodies enable our genes to survive and such genes are passed on via reproduction. Dawkins argues that the idea of a 'soul' is a mythological concept. Thus, Dawkins rejects the notion of a soul in both the religious and Platonic sense. However, Dawkins puts forward two definitions of a soul:

- **Soul one-** traditional view of a principle of life, a real separate thing that is spiritual and contains personality. Dawkins rejects this concept.
- **Soul two-** as defined by the Oxford dictionary, it refers to an 'intellectual or spiritual power. High development of the mental faculties. Deep feeling and sensitivity.' Dawkins argues that this is a meaningful way of describing ourselves provided that we are clear that this does not refer to a separate thing. (rejects dualism).

A biological **materialist**– rejects the concept of an immortal soul

- "There is no spirit-driven life force, no throbbing, heaving, pullulating, protoplasmic, mystic jelly. Life is just bytes and bytes and bytes of digital information"

A soul doesn't guide us, genetic make-up does as humans are merely DNA carriers, and only this exists beyond life through evolution, where good genes continue and bad genes die out. Genes (the replicator) are a colony of information wanting to be replicated, and this is easier to achieve in multi-cellular organisms, and we only feel like a single organism because natural selection favoured co-operating genes.

On religious concepts of the soul

- Any evidence of divine activity is an illusion, and a belief in the soul is anachronistic and damaging to society as it discourages self-growth.
- Scientific belief is supported by evidence (the existence of DNA etc.) whereas myths and faiths are not.
- Further argues that there is no creator God and that life lacks purpose and is indifferent to suffering – "DNA neither knows nor cares, DNA just is."

Life after death

Dawkins argues that the consolation religion provides can only truly be consolation if religion is true and we are able to survive death. Dawkins regards that death should not be feared, it is the 'extinguishing' of our consciousness. In his book 'The Selfish Gene' (1976) he proposes that humans are nothing more than 'survival machines' – they are the vehicles of genes which are only interested in replicating themselves in order to survive into the next generation. He deems that humans do not have immortal souls and instead are simply a mixture of chemicals – "life is just bytes and bytes and bytes". In Dawkins' view, human self-awareness is not due to the soul but has developed because self-awareness has evolutionary advantages.

- Only continuation of us is genes passed on to offspring.
- Memes continue if they have been incorporated in the soup of human culture.

- There is no soul and direct existence after death.

Gilbert Ryle – (*The Concept of the Mind*)

Rejects the idea of the soul. All mental events are physical events interpreted in a mental way. But what if for example we were wishing? This is not a physical event. He believes that an individual is a physical living body and no more, and so when the body dies that's it, the whole person is dead.

- A **materialist**.
- Dualism is a “category mistake”, a mistake in the use of language where it is illogical to call the mind/soul distinct.
- The talk of a soul is actually talk about the way in which a person acts and integrates with others and the world.
- The notion of a soul is the same a thought of a “ghost in the machine”; a belief that there must be an unknown entity controlling the body and making up our essence
- This is the same as a peasant seeing a bus and assuming a “ghost horse” is pulling it due to a lack of understanding.

Life after death

- Dualism – Life after death is only possible if soul survives death, a disembodied existence.
- Materialism –Life after death is only possible if the body survives too.
- Purgatory- a state or place where souls are purged or purified before going to heaven
- Beatific vision- the immediate sight and vision of God in heaven which imparts supreme happiness
- Replica theory- Hick shows that the concept of a life after death does not depend on humans having souls in a Platonic sense. Hick regarded that it was logically possible for an omni-potent God to recreate us in another world, i.e. heaven.

Moreover, Hick regarded that “if the human potential is to be fulfilled in the lives of the individuals, these lives must be prolonged far beyond the limits of our present bodily existence”

- Resurrection- the belief in an afterlife that involves the embodied existence of individuals.

Resurrection

A belief in a continuation of human existence after death has always be central to Christians. The Christian belief in the resurrection of the body is based up the belief that Jesus rose from the dead. Many Christians would argue that although the body dies, the soul is immediately united with God. The distinctive belief about Christianity is that it traditionally believes in the resurrection of the body in some way, not just a person’s soul or centre of identity.

- The promise of post-death existence in a re-created human body (not disembodied soul) –**monism**.
- Traditional eschatological Judeo-Christian and Islamic teaching concerned with the end of time; there will be life after death as the body will be raised from the dead on judgement day
 - Examples: Ezekiel 37: God shows Ezekiel a valley of bones and states He is able to “make them live again”
 - The resurrection of Jesus.
 - John 11:25-26 Jesus says “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will never die”

Catholic Christians believe that most souls go to purgatory where they experience punishment or purification to prepare them for the beatific vision. These souls are then ready to be united with a resurrection body.

Like Christianity, Islam has always had a belief in the concept of a life after death. The afterlife, or Akhira, involves the separation of the righteous from the wicked. Muslims believe that life is a test and the deeds done will either be rewarded or punished or forgiven in the afterlife.

- Heaven and Hell
 - Heaven is where people are rewarded for doing good.
 - Hell is where people are punished.
 - If the wicked aren’t punished and if the good aren’t rewarded then where is the justice of God?
 - **Hick**– Hell is scientifically fantastic, morally revolting and self-contradictory.
 - **Aquinas**– finite sins against an infinite God could only be justly punished by infinite time in Hell.

St Paul – (*1 Corinthians 15*)

Argued in favour of resurrection on two grounds. Since Jesus was resurrected, Christians should also hope to be resurrected. Furthermore, if we accept that God is a creator, then resurrection seems to be a coherent idea.

- As Jesus was resurrected, it is possible for God to resurrect Christians

- *1 Corinthians 15*: St Paul argues in favour of the body being “raised imperishable” as God can make human bodies perfect

Aquinas

Aquinas believed that the soul operates independently of the body. But it is through its link with a particular human body that the soul becomes individual and therefore needs the body. In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas looked at the question of where souls go when we die. He suggested three alternatives:

- *Hell* – a place of eternal punishment, where the worst sinners go.
- *Purgatory* – a place where lapsed Christians undergo purification and punishment to purge their souls from sins.
- *Beatific vision* – the highest joy; the unchanging vision of God, for faithful Christians and those who have completed purgatory.
- There is no truly independent soul as the natural condition is that of a human soul united with the body (**monism**)
- If there is no body, there is no self.
- Argues for resurrection with a body, not a disembodied existence.

Rowan Williams

- Resurrection lies “on the frontier of any possible language” – it is a difficult mystical idea but a part of faith.

Support

- **Brian Davies**– examined various theories and concluded that death followed by resurrection is logically possible. This is essential to making the topic worthy of further discussion.

Criticisms

- Christian arguments and the resurrection of Jesus based on scripture are only persuasive to believers.
- The idea of a physical body being re-made seems mythological in the 21st century.
- What becomes resurrected, the old/damaged/diseased body? The body is the source of flaws (desire)
 - In this case disembodied existence would be better.
- There is no empirical evidence for resurrection – Ayer and Popper would reject this.

Reincarnation– dualist theory

Reincarnation, or transmigration of the soul, is the rebirth in another body (after physical death) of a person’s soul. It is the notion that at death the soul moves from one body to another and leads a new life.

Hinduism

- Samsara – a series of rebirths in which the atman (eternal soul) moves from body to body, where the reborn atman carries no memories of its past life.
- “Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and takes on others that are new.”(Bhagavad Gita 2,13).
- The body which a soul is reincarnated into is dependent on karma accumulated in previous life
 - The consequences of actions in this life are experienced in the next.
 - By keeping to dharma (duty) good karma is accumulated.
- The aim of life is to obtain moksha – freedom from rebirth – where the atman is united with Brahman, the ultimate reality, in a state of knowledge, peace and bliss.

Strengths

- Backed up by people who claim to have knowledge of past lives.
- Provides a good explanation for the presence of inequality and suffering across the population; it is a consequence of own misdeeds.

Criticisms

- A metaphysical theory so cannot be verified.
- The steady growth of the world’s population may indicate that new souls are coming from somewhere instead of reincarnation
- Counter – souls may be moving up from the animal/plant world.

Buddhism

- Buddhists do not believe in an eternal soul as everything in this world is in constant flux so no permanent self can exist – anatta.
- The Buddhist concept of samsara is different; there is no reincarnation, instead there is rebirth.
- Rebirth is affected by karma which in Buddhism is intentional action – 4 types:
- A fully ripened karmic effect; e.g. hatred leading to rebirth in hell.
- An effect similar to the cause; e.g. being lied to if lied in the past.
- Conditioning; e.g. stealing may lead to rebirth in conditions of poverty.
- Proliferation; an action in the past will be repeated over again.
- The ultimate aim is to escape rebirth and reach true enlightenment (nirvana).

Near death experiences

Dr Raymond Moody

- The multitude of these experiences always describe the same thing; towards a light and the thought that there is life after death

Life after death and the problem of evil

- A possible argument is that evil is only justified if there is life after death.
- The argument from reincarnation – evil that happens will determine amount of happiness we gain in the next life
- Hinduism – karma plays a role.
 - This explains the inequality in the world and justifies the existence of evil.
- Evil happens in this life to enable soul-making

Irenaeus – (Against Heresis)

- Humans are immature beings as they were made in God's image; not perfect but they must grow to be perfect like Him.
- By spiritually growing, all humans will be able to join Him in heaven.
- Evil and suffering is necessary to enable soul-making
- If there was no evil, humans would not be able to spiritually develop by overcoming challenges.

Criticisms

- A lot of evil and suffering doesn't teach us anything or enables us to grow, e.g. Holocaust – genocides are still happening. This tactic doesn't work, so doesn't God need to change it?
- If there was no evil we would not need the virtues of compassion, so having to develop them would be unnecessary – evil not needed.
- Virtues needed for next world are needed to achieve perfection, but the fact that the goal of suffering is positive, it does not justify its means – makes us question God's goodness/justice.

Augustine – (Confessions)

- God created us in His image and we were good
 - “And God saw everything that He made, and, behold, it was very good” – *Genesis 1:31*
- Evil is not an entity within itself; it is the privation of good, a result of humans turning away from good
- The Fall was the origin of evil.
- Hidden God – God took a step back after this as evil is not His problem
- He concealed himself to enable humans to make sincere choices and freely choose to be with Him
- Why could God not make it so it was only possible to choose from good?
- Counter – humans must freely choose God to enable spiritual development, so evil/the ability to turn away from good is needed to enable this. John Hick's epistemic distance.

Criticisms

- God could have altered His creation when we accidentally created evil so it would not happen again.
- Evil and suffering necessary for soul-making, but is it needed to develop other virtues? – e.g. patience?

Attributes of God

Definition of God as eternal may be split into eternal as existing outside of time or everlasting as existing inside of time.

Simplicity

- God has no characteristics and is unchangeable.
- God is God

Aquinas– God’s nature and God’s existence are the same thing

- To talk of God is to talk of a being that exists

Anselm– existence is a predicate of God.

- God is not a kind of thing

Brian Davies–God is not an individual entity like a human being, but an entity as a whole like the human race.

- God is unchanging
 - Because God is perfect He must be unchanging (**immutable**).
 - This is because change involves moving from one thing to another
 - As God is perfect, He cannot become more/less perfect.
 - Only something unchanging can be the cause of the world; **Davies**– “if something changeable accounted for there being a world in which change occurs, it would be part of such a world and could not, therefore, account for it”
- God is immaterial
 - God does not have a body which has characteristics.
 - God simply is God.

Eternal

Whilst there is agreement between believers that God is eternal, it soon becomes clear that this idea is understood in very different ways. Different thinkers suggest that God is either timeless, everlasting or they advocate for process theology. *atemporal* – independent of or unaffected by time, timeless. God is outside of time and space and knows the past, present and future simultaneously. The belief that God stands outside of time and that all time is equally present to him.

Sempiternal – everlasting, of never-ending duration, eternal. The belief that God moves through time along with creation but has no beginning nor end.

Process theology – a reformulation of the concept of God which rejects the immutability of God and teaches that God is also in the process of becoming and change. God moves through time with his creation, but changes with it.

Christian beliefs

The concept of God as eternal is a central belief in the Christian concept of God. There are many biblical scriptures that have provided for this view, such as Psalm 48:14 “For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death.” And Jeremiah 31:3 “The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.”

- The Bible stated that God does exist and has always existed.
- God is the creator of the universe. The passing of time is a feature of the universe. God as the creator could not be subject to time; therefore, He is outside of time.
- Time passing signifies change, but God is perfect and cannot change as change means imperfection, so He must be eternal.

Boethius– (*Consolation of Philosophy*)

Boethius, the sixth century Christian philosopher, regarded that God had an eternal presence.

- God is changeless so does not exist in time, thus Boethius uptakes the atemporal position.
- “eternity, then, is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life”
- this will be clear from a comparison with creatures that exist in time.

- All of time is happening simultaneously to God; a timeless present.

Aquinas

Argument for God's eternal nature:

- God exists without an end or beginning
- Time consists of parts involving beginnings and ends
- Thus, God must exist outside of time and be eternal
 - "eternity is simultaneously whole, while time is not" *Selected Philosophical Writings*
 - Aquinas' 3 ways provide another argument for an eternal God – (*Summa Theologica*):
 - 1st way – unmoved mover (everything has motion (potentiality to actuality), no infinite chain of motion)
 - 2nd way – uncaused causer (everything has a cause, no infinite regression)
 - 3rd way – nothing comes from nothing, everything is contingent so something needs to not be contingent, a necessary transcendental and eternal God.

Strengths

- This is in line with Christian doctrine, so it is more understandable to believers.
- It doesn't limit the omniscience of God

Criticisms

- How can an eternal God be personal and interact with this world?
- In order for God's interaction in the world to have genuine providence (protective care), God must have middle knowledge of possible outcomes to know how to interact (which is possible with an everlasting God)

Anthony Kenny

- The idea that God sees the past, present and future simultaneously is absurd and incoherent.
- "my typing of this paper is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Again, on this view, the great fire of Rome is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Therefore, while I type these very words, Nero fiddles heartlessly on" *The God of the Philosophers*
- Counter-argument – Kenny seems mistaken; his point of view arises from a failure to distinguish between the temporal and the non-temporal; between the human perspective and the divine perspective

Everlasting

- God has always existed and will always exist, but time does pass for God.
- He exists within time, so is subject to it.
- God cannot know about the future as we are yet to make decisions, so God learns as time progresses.

Richard Swinburne

Swinburne is a prominent defender of the concept of everlasting.

- The idea that events happen simultaneously to God cannot be made sense of.
- "there was no time at which he did not exist... He is backwardly eternal. He also exists at any other nameable time... will go on existing forever... he is forwardly eternal."
- Therefore, the belief of an everlasting God fits more satisfactorily with the God revealed in the Bible
- "I cannot see that anything can be meant by saying that God knows (as they happen) the events of AD 1995 unless it means that He exists in 1995" *Is There a God?*

Process theology

- God moves through time with His creation; He is **everlasting**.
- God is not perfect.
- God is in the process of developing and becoming so is subject to time.
- God is involved in His creation and thus feels pain.
- Powerful not omnipotent.

Criticism – this is against the God of classical theism, so it is rejected by many

Strengths

- Preserves God's omnipotence and action in this world.

Criticisms

- How can a God in time create this universe?
 - This implies that He must have had a beginning too
 - It is more logical to say He is transcendent and eternal
- This view is against classical theistic God.
- Temporal without being partial?
- How can God not be changed if He is in time?
 - This would then mean He is not perfect.
- Does this mean that God's omnipotence is limited by time?

Omniscience

- God is all-knowing; has knowledge of the actions of people and of the universe.
- Full omniscience – God has unlimited knowledge including the past, present and future
 - God is **eternal**.
 - Gives rise to a hard determinist view.
- Limited omniscience – God has limited knowledge to only know what is possible to know (so can't know the future) or may limit His omniscience to allow free will, so His knowledge changes
 - God is **everlasting**.

Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*)– God has knowledge because knowledge is not physical

- Although humans gain knowledge through bodies and physical experiences (e.g. reading, listening) it is itself not physical, so an immaterial God can possess it.
- What God knows is self-knowledge, which explains why God can know creation too
 - Self-knowledge is where the knower (God) and the known (creation) are identical, therefore Aquinas argues that God knows Himself through Himself; by knowing about Himself He can know of creation and vice versa.

Criticism – if knowledge is not solely immaterial, then this point becomes illogical as an immaterial God would not be able to gain knowledge

Counter to both – it is not possible to verify the nature of knowledge.

Counter – however if God is material or knows things in a way that is different to humans, He can still be omniscient

Counter-counter – however if the nature of God gaining knowledge is not analogous to human ways of knowing, then it is unclear what is meant by God's omniscience.

Problem to free will

Can humans have free will if God already knows what we will do?

If God is **eternal**, then future events become **necessary** instead of **contingent**, and so there is no free choice

- People can be held causally responsible but not morally responsible for actions.

Boethius

- Argued that God is **eternal**.
- God only knows things eternally; God knows all history and present at a single glance simultaneously.
- "the outcome of something known in advance must necessarily take place"
- This means that actions are predestined and it is not possible to act in any other way, therefore there is no free will.
- Prayer is therefore pointless; no point in asking for forgiveness or asking for things to change
- However, Boethius responds further to this (in his book *Consolations of Philosophy*, this response is given by the character Lady Philosophy)
- God is eternal but He does not foreknow; He knows all at once simultaneously.
- "the same future event is necessary with respect to God's knowledge of it, but free and undetermined if considered in its own nature"
- This means that what God sees is necessary; it has to happen.
- However, it does not mean there is no free will; Boethius separates necessity into simple and conditional:
 - Simple necessity – necessity due to the nature of the thing involved
 - God knows everyone will die as mortality is an aspect of man

- Conditional necessity – does not involve simple necessity; things happen as a result of choice
- If God knows a deed will occur, it must occur; but that does not mean that the act of its own nature is necessary.
- God’s knowledge creates a conditional necessity but not a simple necessity.
- **Therefore His knowledge does not affect free will.**

Aquinas

- Adopts a **theocentric** approach; history seen from God’s perspective still allows free choice
- God has a bird’s eye view on history, meaning He perceives it all at once.
- Illustrated this with an analogy of travelling down a road:
- “He who goes along the road does not see those who come after him, where as he who sees the whole road for a height sees at once all those travelling upon it”
- **God has knowledge of the choices that will be made, but this knowledge is not causal and thus does not affect free will.**
- If God is **everlasting**, God only has knowledge of what has happened and what is happening, not what will happen too
- **This can allow for free will.**
- God learns about the future as it happens, He has no pre-knowledge.
- The past is closed and unchanging, but the future is open and not necessary.

Luis of Molina– God’s omniscience includes knowledge of all possibilities of the future.

- **Criticism – it is difficult for Christians and other believers in the God of classical theism to accept this notion that God is everlasting, as the traditional understanding is that He is transcendent and immutable, not everlasting.**
- Instead, the definition of freedom may be wrong
 - **Instead of freedom meaning “it is possible to have done otherwise”, it is better to define freedom to be “an act not influenced by external factors/constraints, and we’re amongst the causes”.**
 - This is a soft determinism approach.
 - **With this, God may still know the future/the outcome of our actions, but ultimately we still made the decision and caused the action.**

Omnipotence

- God’s activities in the world (e.g. miracles) point to the fact that God has power beyond human understanding.
- Definition 1 – omnipotence often refers to God’s ability to do anything; He is all-powerful
 - **Descartes**– God can do anything including what might seem impossible, e.g. change laws of physics.
 - **Criticism – Mackie(Sophia) argued that the idea of logically impossible actions is “only a form of words which fails to describe any state of affairs”**
 - By saying God can do the logically impossible, this then renders everything possible, therefore there is no longer anything impossible; a paradox.
 - **If God can do the logically impossible, then it becomes impossible for us to understand Him and thus He becomes inaccessible.**
 - **This also means that we can have no understanding of the laws of nature if they can change.**
- Definition 2 – God can do anything logically possible
 - He cannot do the impossible, i.e. break the laws of science and nature
 - He works within these laws that He created.
 - **This can clash with the classic theistic God; can He be evil? Can He lie? Can He change His mind?**
 - **We understand Him less if He acts out of sort with His nature.**
- Definition 3 – He can only do things in accordance with His nature
 - God’s powers are different to human powers and abilities
 - Example – it is logically possible to climb Mount Everest, however humans may not possess the power to do it. With God, He has the power to do anything logically possible.
 - E.g. it is not possible for Him to make a rock so large He cannot carry it.

Aquinas– (Summa Theologica)

- God is omnipotent because His power is infinite, and it is infinite because it is not limited.
- This therefore means that God must be **eternal** and not bound by the limitations of physical existence.
- “whatever involves a contradiction is not held by omnipotence, for it just cannot possibly make sense of being possible”

- It is illogical to challenge the omnipotence of God based on an impossibility, such as “if God cannot climb a tree then He is not omnipotent”; the concept of God climbing a tree is illogical as He has no physical body for this to be possible.
- He also considered whether God could change past events, and rejects this as illogical
- It is a paradox; if God did change it we would not be able to know at all.
- It is impossible that a past event did not take place as we know it to have happened.
- Aquinas says that this “more impossible than the raising of the dead to life”
 - This presupposes a certain nature of God; that He is perfect (see **Geach**).

Problem of evil

- If God is capable of doing anything, why does He permit evil?

Mackie(*Evil and Omnipotence*) – beliefs about God’s omnipotence are “positively irrational” due to inconsistencies in the Bible

- If God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent then evil and suffering should logically not exist (inconsistent triad)
- God could have made it possible so men could always freely choose good
- This failure, argues Mackie, shows that He is not omnipotent.
- God does not sin, as this contradicts His perfect nature

Anselm– God does not sin, as if He did sin this would imply a lack of control over His actions.

Plantinga (*God, Freedom and Evil*)–omnipotence may not be a necessary quality; God may choose to limit His power in some situations in order to preserve free will

- “God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil”
- “God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil”

Vardy(*The Puzzle of Evil*) – ending evil and suffering is not within God’s power

- “God’s power is much more limited than generally supposed and, far from this restricting God, it actually places Him in His proper place”
- He accuses Christian and Biblical views of exalting God’s power; exaggerating it more than how it actually is
- This is why there are issues with the existence of evil and God’s omnipotence.
- In this sense, evil and omnipotence are compatible.

Free will defence

- God intervening would inhibit free will; if people make immoral choices they must learn, not have God stop them.

Augustine– evil is only the privation of good, it is not an entity in itself

- Evil is the result of turning away from good and God.
- This therefore absolves God’s responsibility of eradicating evil
- It is man-made and not something He can actively stop; not part of His creation.

Hick and Irenaues– the world is here to enable soul-making, therefore natural evil as well as moral evil is necessary to allow this

- This does not challenge God’s omnipotence and free will.
- Alternative definition

Peter Geach (*Providence and Evil*) argues that this definition of omnipotence relies too much on the acceptance of the perfect nature of God

- He therefore argues that it is better to define omnipotence in terms of a statement concerning His power; God has power OVER everything, not to DO anything.

Anthony Kenny(*The God of the Philosophers*) agrees with Geach and defines “a being is omnipotent if it has every power which it is logically possible to possess”

- Omnipotence is a statement of how God is and is an aspect of God’s perfection.

William of Ockham– 2 powers of God

- 1. Absolute power – the options available before God committed Himself to an action.
- 2. Ordained power – the options currently available after choosing a course of action; He cannot undo it.

Omnibenevolence

- Popularly defined as God is all-loving and good.
- Aspects of His goodness are love, holiness and justice.

Euthyphro dilemma

- Does God command something because it is good?
- This supports the idea of an omnibenevolent God; He will only command something that will help His creation flourish because He cares.
- However, it could also mean that goodness is a standard that exists external to God, therefore implying that He is not all-powerful and good.
- Does something become good because God commands it?
- God could command anything and thus make it good.
- This could mean that God could command anything (something which may even be harmful)
- If there is no moral standard for good other than God's, then morality becomes arbitrary (based on God's views)
- It could also mean that goodness and God are intrinsically linked, therefore God is omnibenevolent.

The existence of evil

- Why would an omnibenevolent God allow evil to exist?
- Either God is not powerful enough to end evil, or He is not omnibenevolent (inconsistent triad)

Augustine– it is not God's responsibility to eradicate evil as He did not create it.

Hick and Irenaeus– God allows evil to enable humans to spiritually develop; this is the most loving thing to do so all can join Him in Heaven

Can God do evil?

- If He has to do good instead of being able to choose then His goodness loses value and His omnipotence is challenged.
- If He can do evil then He is not entirely omnibenevolent.
- Goodness is a necessity of God, so it is logically impossible for Him to do evil
 - God freely chooses what to do, and the outcome is always good.

Should an omnibenevolent God punish/reward people?

- God is often seen to be a law-giver and a judge (e.g. Judgement Day)
- It is right for an omnibenevolent God to be just and treat His creation fairly, therefore punishing the wicked and rewarding the good
 - **Swinburne**(*Providence and the Problem of Evil*) – for those that suffered due to no fault of their own, they will be compensated in Heaven; people that are wicked must be punished.
- **Swinburne**– God is like a loving parent, therefore He must reward and punish as a parent would in order to aid spiritual development and guide.

Boethius–God has a right to judge as people are responsible for their actions; God does not predestine people's actions, He sees all their acts simultaneously.

- If God is also omniscient, is it right to reward/punish?
- Heaven/Hell is only symbolic; people will not end up there, they're simply intended to inspire commitment and follow religious teachings.

What does "good" mean?

- There is no agreement on what is good; intuitionism, naturalism, emotivism.

Examples in the Bible

- "God is love" – 1 John 4
- "God loved the world so much that He gave His only son" – John 3
- God as just - "the righteous will go to eternal life" and the sinners will be "sent off to eternal punishment" – Matthew 25
- "I will not fail to punish children and grandchildren" – Exodus 34
 - Is it not unfair that children have to suffer for the wrong-doings of their parents?
- The parting of the Red Sea in the *Old Testament* – God as favouring some of His creation, where He allowed the Israelites to live but by doing this allowed the Egyptians to die by letting the Red Sea close on them.