***A-Level Religious Studies:***

***Unit 1: Philosophy of Religion***

***Bridging work***

**Contents**

**Chapter 1: What is proof?**

**Chapter 2: What or who is God? The God of Classical Theism.**

**Chapter 3: Why is the Universe the way that it is? The Teleological Argument.**

**Chapter 4: Where the Teleological Argument fails.**

**Chapter 5: Why is there something rather than nothing? The Cosmological Argument.**

**Chapter 6: Aquinas’ Five Ways.**

**Chapter 7: Further reading and internet resources.**

**Chapter 1: introduction to philosophical arguments for the existence of God**

**Introduction**

Certain questions seem to be asked by almost all individuals e.g. ‘Who am I?’‘What is the meaning and purpose of life?’ ‘Is there a life after death?’ ‘Is there a God?’ etc. Such questions involve serious thinking of a reflective and critical nature. To embark on such a course is to ‘do philosophy’. The word ‘philosophy’ means ‘love of wisdom’ and hopefully you will find that this discipline will sharpen your mind by dealing with a variety of concepts and problems. You should become more aware of what does and does not constitute a valid argument. By studying philosophy you will also develop the skill of following and evaluating arguments.

A further benefit of the discipline of philosophy is that it will provide you with an insight into the ‘history of ideas’ and the critical debates that have accompanied them. In one sense the study of philosophy is not a neutral discipline. It will force you to examine your own ideas and presuppositions. It may also raise questions where before you thought that there was none, and answer others that you thought were unanswerable. As the ancient Greek philosopher **Socrates** (d.399 BC) concluded: **“A life that is not examined is a life not worth living.”**

**Does belief in God really matter?**

People who believe in God or some forms of a divinity are said to be **theists**. Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc. are typical examples of what we would call theistic religions. Their believers assert faith in an all-powerful, creative, loving and eternal God who is guiding the journey of life. A person who denies all possibility of there being any God is an **atheist**. An **agnostic** is not convinced by an argument for or against the existence of God and is open to persuasion.

There are clearly a number of different attitudes towards the question of God’s existence. Some of us will have no doubts whatsoever concerning the existence of a Supreme Being, whereas others will find such a notion as being either unverifiable (beyond all forms of proof) or totally illogical in a modern world. However, whatever our conviction we have all given the question thought even if it has only been in a Religious Studies lesson.

It is interesting that **Blasé Paschal**, a 17th Century mathematician and religious philosopher once described the question of God’s existence as the most important issue that any individual could face in his life and one which should receive the highest priority. Of course we may all personally disagree with Paschal but the point is that the problem of demonstrating the existence of God has, and still is, taken very seriously within philosophical and academic circles.

**The philosophical concept of proof**

If I claimed that my dog was a brilliant mathematician you would all regard my claim as absurd and dismiss outright it unless of course I could ‘prove’ beyond all reasonable doubt that my dog was indeed a genius at maths. I would imagine, though, that you would only accept as ‘proof’ a good, compelling and logical argument. Although my illustration is clearly a ridiculous one the principle applies to all quests to prove God’s existence since what we are attempting to establish is that God’s existence can be verified by logical argument.

Arguments for the existence of God should always be thought of in terms of proofs. According to **Richard Swinburne** a ‘proof’ is: **“An argument which starts from one or more premises, which are propositions taken for granted for the purpose of the argument, and argues to a conclusion.”** A proof, then, may be represented as follows: premise + premise = conclusion, or P + P = C.

However, a proof is a statement which cannot be false e.g. 4+4=8, London is the capital of England etc. Such a proof is therefore logically necessary i.e. it could not be anything else and it would be absurd to suggest an alternative solution. A logically necessary statement consists of a set of premises and a conclusion, which cannot be disputed e.g. mathematical statements as above, or statements such as ‘all circles are round’ etc. Some proofs, however, are only proofs in so far that they lead to conclusions, which are only possible or probable. The evidence points towards a certain conclusion but it is still possible for there to be a different conclusion e.g.

P1: The sun is shining today.

P2: The sun shone yesterday.

C: The sun will shine tomorrow.

Although it is possible that the sun will shine tomorrow there is still a possibility that it will not. Forecasts may prove inaccurate and so it would be a ‘probable’ conclusion, and not a logically necessary one. Proofs of this kind, then, often work from a specific example to a more general conclusion. However, the conclusion is not necessarily conclusive or true.

**The difference between ‘a posteriori’ and ‘a priori’ proofs**

**‘A posteriori’** proofscan be described as **‘inductive’** proofs. By this we mean that they are proofs which are based on premises which can be argued or drawn from experience but which do not contain the conclusion within their premises, and which argue to a conclusion that is not logically necessary. The more evidence-stating factors we have, the greater the likelihood may be of the conclusion being correct. However, a posteriori proofs can be disproved. They do not conclusively prove it to be the case. We have all seen those films where the obvious suspect turns out to be innocent despite fingerprints at the crime scene, having a motive for murder etc.

An a posteriori argument, then, can be powerful, even probable, but not necessarily conclusive for there remains the remote possibility that the conclusion reached is false even though all the evidence suggests that the conclusion is sound. The following are two examples of ‘a posteriori’ and inductive proofs:

P1: The sun is shining today.

P2: The sun shines in September.

C: It is September.

P1: The best scientists are men.

P2: I am a man.

C: I am a good scientist.

On the other hand, **‘a priori’** proofsare **analytic** and **deductive** arguments. By this we mean that they are based on premises that are not drawn from or are dependent upon experience but which contain a logically necessary conclusion. Both the premises and the conclusion cannot be misinterpreted. If we agree with the premises in a deductive argument then we would have to accept the conclusion. To agree the premise and not the conclusion would be a contradiction. The conclusion follows on logically and is necessary. The following are two examples of ‘a priori’ and deductive proofs:

P1: All teachers have a degree.

P2: Mr Smith is a teacher.

C: Mr Smith has a degree.

P1: A bachelor is an unmarried man.

P2: James has not married.

C: James is a bachelor.

**Proving God’s existence**

Arguments for the existence of God traditionally move from premises to conclusion using inductive or deductive reasoning. An example of a traditional deductive argument put forward for the existence of God is the **ontological argument** introduced by **St Anselm of Canterbury** in the 11th Century AD. Anselm’s argument is a challenging one and will be considered in detail in Year 13; however the deductive nature of its presentation can be outlined as follows:

P1: God is ‘that being than which nothing greater can be conceived’.

P2: ‘That being than which nothing greater can be conceived’ possesses (has) all perfections i.e. greatness, power, love, knowledge etc.

P3: Existence is a ‘perfection’

C: God must therefore exist.

The ontological proof demands that if we accept the definition of God as ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’, we must accept that along with perfection, omniscience (all knowledge), omnipotence (all power) etc. God must also necessarily possess existence. If God does not possess existence i.e. exist, then how could He be ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’? This is a toughie (no need to worry about it in Year 12) but illustrates perfectly one argument for the existence of God that uses ‘a priori’ and deductive reasoning. Now compare the ontological (a priori) argument with the following a posteriori (inductive) argument:

P1: All events require a cause.

P2: The universe is an event.

C: God is the cause of the universe.

This proof is the basis of the **cosmological argument**. It is a proof, which leads only to a ‘probable’ conclusion because there is no logically necessary, a priori reason why we should conclude that God is indeed the cause of the universe and not anything else. Neither are the premises logically necessary-there is no compelling reason to agree conclusively that ‘all events require a cause’. It is only on the basis of our regular experience that we assert that all events have a cause, and experience can be deceptive, limited and open to many interpretations. The design (or teleological) argument, the moral argument and the argument from religious experience for the existence of God are also inductive and ‘a posteriori’.

**The strengths and weaknesses of inductive (‘a posteriori’) and deductive (’a priori’) proofs**

Both types of reasoning have their strengths and weaknesses. **Inductive reasoning** (i.e. ‘a posteriori’ arguments) can be considered as **strong** for the following reasons:

* They rely on experience, which may be universal and testable.
* ‘A posteriori’ proofs are also flexible in that more than one possible conclusion can be reached.
* ‘A posteriori’ proofs do not demand that we accept the premises as fixed.

However, the **weakness** with inductive or ‘a posteriori’ reasoning is equally evident e.g.

* Alternative conclusions can be just as convincing. For instance the ‘Big Bang’ can be a plausible reason for the existence of our universe. We do not necessarily have to postulate a ‘God’.
* ‘A posteriori’ arguments only convince if we accept the nature of the evidence. However, the evidence can be ambiguous or open to interpretation.
* For an ‘a posteriori’ argument to succeed there has to be overwhelming good reasons for accepting that its conclusion is the most likely.

The strength of **deductive reasoning** (i.e. ‘a priori’ arguments) can be set out as follows:

* ‘A priori’ proofs do not depend on variable or misunderstood experience.
* ‘A priori’ proofs accept that words and definitions have fixed and agreed meanings.
* There are no alternative conclusions with ‘a prior’ arguments.

However, the **weakness** with deductive reasoning lies in the fact that:

* It only works if we accept the premises as being analytically and necessarily true e.g. all circles are round, all angles of a triangle add up to 180°, all bachelors are men etc.
* However, is it necessarily true to say that God is ‘that being than which nothing greater to be conceived’?
* Thus, when establishing the existence of God, the conclusions of ‘a priori’ arguments only lead to apparently logically necessary conclusions.

**Why have scholars offered proofs for the existence of God?**

Although we may well live in a society in which God is viewed as being dead or non-existent the indisputable fact is that man has always had a sense of something greater than himself and who is responsible for his very own existence. Both the philosopher and the believers from all the great religious faiths have sought an explanation for certain phenomena within the universe, which are not self-explanatory and require an external explanation. They may interpret evidence in terms of God rather than something else. Since the universe is ambiguous, it can be interpreted in religious or non-religious ways. The traditional arguments for the existence of God that we will be studying in Year 12 will seek to demonstrate that the most satisfactory way of interpreting the universe is best done by reference to God.

**Problems with attempts to ‘prove’ the existence of God**

Proofs, particularly in the context of arguments for the existence of God are problematic. As we have seen the evidence of our senses and experiences can be deceptive. There is also a difficulty in relying on the testimony of others. Their interpretation of the evidence may well be misguided. There is also a considerable degree of subjectivity about traditional arguments for the existence of God. The men that put them forward believed in God anyway. They did not come to believe in God through their rational and academic arguments. Furthermore, it could be argued that it is only inevitable that a person with a belief in God will see in a beautiful sunset or night sky the work of an all-powerful and all-knowing God. The rest of us will probably see no more than a beautiful sunset or night sky.

The weakness with these so-called proofs then is that they appeal to the believer and not necessarily to the atheist or agnostic.

Atheists may argue that since believers do not allow anything to count against their belief in God, then all proofs for His existence are flawed because the criticisms raised against them will not be allowed to carry any real weight. Atheists may also claim that their conclusions are just as likely as the conclusions of theists, and there is no way of verifying or falsifying either of them. In view of this **John Hick** argues that **eschatological verification** could be the solution to establishing whether the atheist’s or the theist’s claims are valid. This means that verification (i.e. proof) as to whether or not God exists will come at the end of time. Hick draws an analogy between two travellers who are heading down the same road. One of the travellers does not know where the road leads to, but the other traveller believes that it leads to the ‘Celestial City’. He will be proven right or wrong when he gets to the end of the journey, but in the meantime he has to live by faith.

Of course such faith may be criticised as being anti-intellectual (**Richard Dawkins** is one such scientist who has no time for religious faith in a rational world) and the believer as having failed to weigh and balance evidence in a rational way. However, just as we draw conclusions on non-religious matters through testing the evidence, why can’t it be said that the same skills are also used in matters of faith as well? The theist may well be misguided in concluding that there is a God but who is to say that his faith has not involved some process of testing, assessing and evaluating. People just don’t conclude that there is a God without some form of rationalisation. If they did then their faith is no more than unsubstantiated opinion.

**Conclusions**

It can be argued that we do have ways in which we can prove God’s existence although we have to be clear about what we mean by the term ‘prove’. We could amass evidence that makes it look increasingly likely that God does exist (inductive or ‘a posteriori’ reasoning) or we could argue deductively (‘a priori’ reasoning) from certain premises that, if accepted, would make God’s existence more certain. Clearly, proof of this type is more preferable but as we shall see most traditional arguments for the existence of God are of an inductive type and throughout this course you will need to establish whether this weakens the theistic claim that God does indeed exist.

**Tasks**

1. What is meant by an ‘a priori’argument?
2. What is meant by an ‘a posteriori’argument?
3. Write out two examples each of your own inductive (‘a posteriori’) and deductive (‘a priori’) arguments.
4. Explain John Hick’s eschatological verification theory. In your view Is this theory credible?

**Chapter 2: An introduction to philosophical arguments for the existence of God.**

# Introduction

In our first introductory lesson we noted that the question of God’s existence is an important one and has been the focus of considerable religious, philosophical and academic debate for centuries. We also noted that when attempting to ‘prove’ the existence of God we have to be clear what we mean by the term ‘proof’. Most philosophers today use the ‘inductive’ (‘a posteriori’) approach as apposed to the ‘deductive’ (‘a priori’) approach when trying to verify the claim that some sort of God must exist.

Of course it may be argued that religious or theistic belief is so subjective and personal that proving God’s existence is more or less impossible. You may sense a real presence of God in a religious building whereas I may find the whole experience meaningless. That said we should note that Western civilization has claimed more than a subjective and personal belief in God. Indeed God has been seen as an objective certainty (the Bible, Torah, Quran etc never seek to prove that God exists) and religious, moral, social, political and legal systems all have their origins in a culture that has claimed some divine justification.

But before we consider the various philosophical arguments that have been put forward to ‘prove’ the existence of God it is important to bare in mind that our investigations will mainly focus upon the Western view of God taken from the ‘Judaeo-Christian’or Biblical tradition. This view of God is also referred to as the **God of classical theism**.

# The God of classical theism

Before examining the philosophical arguments put forward for the existence of God it would make sense to first of all consider what we mean by the term ‘God’. Any serious discussion will inevitably yield different views and even within theistic circles there is often considerable disagreement as to what we mean by ‘God’. However, as we are considering the Judaeo-Christian (Biblical) tradition it seems reasonable to define what are the common views about God in that tradition, and from that point move on to discuss what grounds the tradition might have for belief in such a God.

A good starting point is obviously the Bible and there are countless passages in both the Old and New Testament where God is described as guide, protector, comforter, judge, healer etc. Look no further than Psalm 23 (‘The Lord is my Shepherd’) or the parables of Jesus to see how God is described. Yet classical belief in God is not solely based on Scripture. As Christianity spread throughout Europe important theologians began to argue and debate definitions of God. Important figures such as **St Augustine** (AD 354-430), **St Anselm** (AD 1033-1109) and **St Thomas Aquinas** (c. AD 1225-1274) come to mind here and we shall learn more about these key figures as the course proceeds.

We should also note that Christian belief about God became much more sophisticated in the face of new challenges, especially from the rise of science. The end result has been that we now have a plurality (many) of views about God ranging from a straightforward wrathful God, through to a loving God and to the very abstract God of some academic theologians. For many, such definitions of God are clearly unsatisfactory, if not inaccessible. To say that ‘God is love’ is just one example of an over used and somewhat vapid (dull, lacking interest) cliché. What does it actually mean? Furthermore, the abstract God of the intellectual e.g. ‘God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived’ (Anselm’s Ontological argument) is equally unsatisfactory-who can understand them? Therefore in defining God, we need to take a middle path.

A more sophisticated definition than ‘God is love’ is necessary, yet it is still important to keep within the boundaries of what we can comprehend. Therefore, what follows are a number of accessible attributes of God commonly associated with the classical concept of God. You may not agree with them but you will have to be clear about what they mean if you are to fully understand the philosophical arguments that have been put forward for the existence of God. Here goes:

1. **God is personal**. This does not imply that God is a man. It suggests that God is self aware and self-conscious. God exists and knows it! ‘God is personal’ also implies that He has a personal relationship with His creation. He is not removed from it. For the theistic philosopher Richard Swinburne God is a person in a real sense. He writes: ‘By person I mean an individual with basic powers (to act intentionally), purposes and beliefs.’
2. **God is incorporeal**. We take this to imply that God has no body. God is spirit. He is not physical in the sense that He has flesh and blood. However, He does have a form.
3. **God is omnipotent**. The prefix ‘omni’ means ‘all’ and ‘potent’ means ‘powerful’. God, then, is all-powerful. This idea of omnipotence is taken to mean that God has unlimited and absolute power. It does not mean, however, that God can do anything! See below.
4. **God is omniscient**. The ‘scient’ relates to the idea of knowledge. God is therefore ‘all-knowing’. Again, see below.
5. **God is omnipresent**. Clearly this implies that God is everywhere. Unlike you and me, God is not restricted to time and space.
6. **God is eternal**. This means that God is everlasting. More specifically, it implies that He is outside time. God has no beginning and no end. Mind- boggling this one!
7. **God is free**. God is without constraint and cannot be influenced into operating outside His will.
8. **God is immutable**. By this we mean that God is changeless. He is the same now as He was before time existed.
9. **God is creator and sustains of all that is**. Things only exist and continue to exist because God has created everything.
10. **God is perfectly good** (omnibenevolent). God is perfectly good but not in the same sense as human goodness. See below for a further discussion.

We could add that if this God exists then He must also be **worthy of worship**. For a religious person this makes sense if you accept the above attributes.

# Some problems with the classical theistic understanding of God

For some (you may be one of them) the ten attributes of God noted above are not satisfactory at all. Indeed, the philosopher **Anthony Flew** has described them as the **‘ten leaking buckets of theism’** riddled with internal inconsistencies. Flew has a point here and they can be illustrated by the following observations. According to the above definitions we would be justified in saying that God is perfectly merciful. We would also be justified in saying that God is perfectly ‘just’. Yet how can He be both at the same time? Put more simply, how can God forgive and punish at the same time? How should He act in cases of evil behaviour such as rape or child abuse? How should God respond to evil individuals such as Hitler, Stalin etc?

There are other difficulties with the traditional Western concept of God. Take for instance the following criticism: if God is changeless (immutable) how can He relate to a world that is constantly changing? Furthermore, the God of the Old Testament is often wrathful-a very different picture to the loving God portrayed by Jesus in the New Testament. But our criticisms do not stop there. There are considerable difficulties with the claim that God is omniscient and omnipotent. For instance why does He allow evil to happen? If He is all-powerful surely God could stop it?

If God knew that Hitler would plan mass extermination of the Jews why did he create him? Furthermore, can such a God be worthy of worship? Of course it can be argued that God has given man freedom to choose and act but that is little consolation for the victim and the problem still remains (we will consider the problem of evil in some detail at a future date).

In view of these important considerations I propose that we examine in more detail two attributes most commonly attributed to God, namely His omnipotence and omniscience. We would normally understand **omnipotence** to mean that one can do everything. But does this understanding of the word omnipotence apply to God? In other words, can God do literally everything or only those things that are logically possible? If God can do literally everything then He should be able to create a square circle, make 10×10=5000, change the past, make things that exist and do not exist at the same time etc.

For the French philosopher and mathematician **Rene Descartes** God could indeed do the logically impossible e.g. make a wall so high He would be unable to climb it. However, **Thomas Aquinas** argued that God is omnipotent but that His omnipotence involves doing only those things that are logically possible. It is therefore not considered a limit to God’s power or omnipotence when we say that He cannot commit suicide or draw a square circle since they cannot be done. If God could do such things it would be both a contradiction of His nature and illogical.

Having considered some problems associated with understanding God’s omnipotence we now need to establish the extent of His knowingness i.e. **omniscience**. For the Christian philosopher Richard Swinburne God’s omniscience means that ‘whatever is true, God knows it’. He writes: **“If it snowed on 1st January 10 million BC on the site of present day New York, God knows that it snowed there and then…All God’s beliefs are true. And God believes everything that is true.”** However, God’s omniscience does not mean that He must know what a person will do in the future. Because God is omnipotent (see above), He has chosen to create free beings, which must impose a limit on His omniscience because it would be logically impossible for God to know in advance what free beings were going to do.

Of course any discussion on God’s omniscience or omnipotence inevitably turns to the problem of evil. If God knows all events, past present and future why does He fail to intervene over human atrocities such as the Holocaust or 9/11 and natural disasters such as the Asian tsunami in 2006? We could also ask why God did not choose to create a world where evil and suffering could not occur? God is after all supposedly omnipotent. It is points such as these that make people question why anyone should accept belief in an omniscient God when ‘this notion cannot be integrated with the facts of reality’ (Anton Thorn). Thorn goes on to argue that there is no real need for God to be omniscient, because for an omniscient being, knowledge cannot be the result of the long processes that we as humans have to face to gain new knowledge. God’s omniscience is therefore unearned knowledge and it is never the product of any mental effort like the rest of us.

In conclusion we can see that these definitions of God are not without criticism, nevertheless they are a starting point and without them we would not be able to argue anything.

# Tasks

1. Are Anthony Flew’s objections to attempts to describe God fair? Is it possible to describe something that we cannot see or experience? Which of the ten attributes of God do you find most problematic. How might these problems be overcome? Give reasons for your answer.
2. The following philosophers/theologians figure prominently in our quest to establish whether or not it is possible to ‘prove’ that God exists. Using the library/internet etc. give a short background profile to each of them: **St Augustine**; **St Thomas Aquinas**; **David Hume; William Paley; Bertrand Russell; Richard Dawkins; John Hick** and **Richard Swinburne**.

**Chapter 3: The teleological argument as a philosophical argument for the existence of God**

**A glance at what you will need to know**

The specification does not name or identify any particular version of this argument. You will be credited with any version(s) relevant to the question. Notable examples may include Aquinas, Paley, Tennant, and Swinburne etc. Key ideas may include its empirical basis, interpretation of experience, role of analogy regarding cause and effect, cumulative effect of evidence and notions of ‘God’ in this argument. Knowledge of these key concepts will be supplemented with an understanding and evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. You will need to be able to identify these features and make informed judgements about the merits or otherwise of these strengths and weaknesses. For example material from Hume, Kant, Darwin, Dawkins, including alternative interpretations, will be appropriate.

**An introduction to the argument from design**

One of the most frequently used arguments for God’s existence is the **teleological argument**, otherwise known as the **design argument**. It is a good example of an **‘a posteriori’** argument (see introduction to philosophy lessons 1 & 2 for full explanation). This **first form** or feature of the argument makes it an inductive argument and is based on the observation that the universe demonstrates regular motion that follows laws and rules. If obedience to rules is evident in the universe it is reasonable to ask who or what put those rules in place.

At the heart of the design argument, then, is the assertion that certain features within our universe appear to display design and purpose in that they are perfectly adapted to fulfil their function e.g. the human eye is cleverly suited to what it is apparently made for-seeing. The design argument goes onto conclude that such design cannot come about by chance and can only be explained with reference to an **intelligent and personal designer**.

A **second form** or feature of the design argument draws an **analogy** (comparison) between the works of human design and the works of nature, which compels us to conclude that there are sufficient similarities to infer design of a similar nature. Since the works of nature are far greater than the works of man, an infinitely greater designer must be postulated (suggested), which in turn points to the existence of God as the one whom possesses the necessary attributes. This sort of argument, based on similarity between two things, is known as an **argument from analogy**. Arguments from analogy rely on the principle that if two things are similar in some respects they will very likely be similar in others.

**Famous forms of the design argument**

**Aquinas’ Fifth Way**

The argument from design has been put in various forms down the ages and is commonly associated with the following philosophers. **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274) was one of the greatest Catholic theologians. In his most famous work, **‘Summa Theologica’** (‘The Sum of Theology’), Aquinas suggested that God reveals certain truths that cannot otherwise be known, and assists (helps) humanity to discover other truths through the use of reason. He is remembered for his **‘Five Ways’**, which were five arguments or ‘ways’ for the existence of God. They can be set out as follows:

1. God must be the **‘First Mover’**, since all things must be moved by something else. God must be the original **‘Unmoved Mover’**.
2. God must be the **‘First Cause’** of all things.
3. God is a **‘necessary being’**, that is He exists in His own right and He alone depends upon no other being for His existence.
4. God is the **source of all values**.
5. God is the **Divine Designer** of everything.

The first three ways are commonly associated with the cosmological argument (we shall discuss this at a later date) and the fourth way as an argument for the existence of God based on morality. However, for our purposes it is the fifth way that has association with the argument from design and what Aquinas does here is suggest that non-intelligent material things produce beneficial order, and therefore require an intelligent being to bring this about, i.e. God. Put more simply, Aquinas’ fifth way points out how things in nature, such as plants and animals, seem to aim at a goal, without the conscious power to do so themselves.

An example might include the annual migration of vast pods of grey whales from their sub arctic feeding grounds off Alaska to their Mexican breeding grounds, a journey that takes them 3 months and involves travelling 20 000km. Aquinas argued that since such behaviour patterns rarely change, and their end result is beneficial, there must be a purpose to them. Furthermore, if non-rational beings can work towards such as goal, something must be directing them to do so. This form of the design argument is based on the following premises or observations:

* There is beneficial order in the universe i.e. there are things in the universe that work towards an end or purpose.
* This beneficial order could not happen by chance.
* Many objects do not have the intelligence to work towards a purpose.
* They must therefore be directed by something that has intelligence.
* Therefore God exists as the explanation of beneficial order.

Aquinas’ form of the argument from design merits considerable appeal but could be considered as limited because the premises on which it is based are not ‘necessary’ premises and therefore the conclusion is open to interpretation. In other words it could be argued that things do not work towards a purpose and/or order is a result of chance. If this is indeed the case then Aquinas’ conclusion i.e. God is the best explanation for the universe’ order is by no means certain.

This is why this form of the design argument and those of Paley, Swinburne, and Tennant etc. are **empirical**. They draw their premises from experience and observation of nature. It is highly accessible requiring the observer to note nothing more than the world in which he or she already lives. It is therefore an **a posteriori** argument.

**William Paley**

Perhaps the most well-known and classic version of the teleological argument is associated with **William Paley** (1743-1805). Paley was an Archdeacon in the Church of England and in 1802 he published a work titled **‘Natural Theology’** in which he compared a watch to our universe. Just as the discovery of a watch on a heath cannot be explained satisfactorily by saying that it had ‘always been there’, so too does the order in our universe demand an explanation.

For William Paley **the world was like a machine** that was made up of intricate parts, all of which worked towards an end for the benefit of the whole and all the small adaptations in nature were, for Paley, proof of a providential designing intelligence. The watch serves as an analogy for the world: it demonstrates purpose, design and ‘telos’ (an end or ultimate function). All parts of the watch unite to fulfil that function and this unity cannot be explained by chance. William Paley was fully aware of David Hume’s criticisms of analogical forms of the design argument (see further on) and therefore did not commit himself to suggesting that the world was perfect or within the grasp of human reason to understand. Nevertheless, even if we have never seen a watch before we could still deduce that it had been designed, and even if parts of it appear to malfunction, or if we cannot work out the function those individual parts contribute, it does not disprove that it has been designed.

Paley was also aware of Hume’s resounding criticism of the design argument because of its inferred **anthropomorphism** (see further on). However, working on the principle of like causes produce like effects, Paley concludes that what is true of human design must also be true of the world, and what is true of human designers can also be said of God, although God is of course far greater than any human designer. Richard Swinburne who is a contemporary philosopher supports Paley when he writes: **‘The analogy of animals to complex machines is correct, and its conclusion justified.’**

**F R Tennant**

For **F R Tennant** (1866-1957) humans possess the ability to appreciate the beauty of their surroundings- to enjoy art, music and literature etc. Yet such an appreciation is not necessary for survival, but suggests a personal designer (God) with a concern and interest in His creation that goes beyond mere survival. The appreciation of beauty, then, cannot be the result of natural selection.

With this feature, Tennant is proposing a teleological argument that is **aesthetic in nature** (‘aesthetic’ means having an appreciation of beauty). Tennant also argued that our universe is not ‘chaotic’ where no rules apply. The fact that there is considerable order suggests design. Even the evolutionary process is the culmination of God’s plan. Tennant therefore writes:

**“The fitness of the world to be the home of the living depends on certain primary conditions-astronomical, thermal, chemical etc. and on the coincidences of qualities, apparently not casually connected to each other. The unique assembly of unique properties on so vast a scale makes the organic world comparable to a single organism…The world is compatible with a single throw of the dice and common sense is not foolish in suspecting the dice to have been loaded.”**

In short, Tennant is arguing that I can hardly be blamed for coming to the conclusion that behind all the complexities of life there is considerable purpose and design that has been put there deliberately i.e. by God. That said, Tennant does not profess to offer a strict logical demonstration of the existence of God, but **a cumulative argument** to the effect that theism (belief in God) is more probable than any other attempted explanation of the universe.

**Richard Swinburne**

Richard Swinburne, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford takes a similar line to Tennant in his teleological argument. Like Tennant, Swinburne recognised that the universe could just as easily have been chaotic. The fact that it is not suggests design rather than chance. Swinburne considered that it came down to **probabilities**. Which is the most probable reason for order in the universe, random chance or design?

The sheer complexity of the universe makes it unlikely that the universe would just ‘happen’ to be the way it is, so Swinburne concluded that it is more probable that there is a designer. If there is design, then God is the simplest and best explanation. Yet Swinburne not only points to the evidence of order and purpose that the universe clearly displays, but also to its **providential nature**. That is, the universe contains within it everything that is necessary for survival. Swinburne maintains that it is a universe in which humankind is designed to occupy the highest position and that natural laws function within the universe, making it a place where humankind can meaningfully contribute to its development and maintenance.

**The value i.e. strength of the design argument**

Having considered briefly various forms and features of the teleological argument (we shall return to them in greater detail in future lessons) we need to consider whether or not they succeed in establishing proof for the existence of God.

* The first point that needs to be made is that there is common acknowledgement that the universe appears to betray evidence of design and purpose. Even the hugely influential but atheistic philosopher **David Hume** (1711-1776) acknowledged that: **“A purpose, an intention, a design, strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker.”**
* Since the argument from design is **‘a posteriori’** it draws upon observable evidence. In this case the evidence of design. The conclusion that this design has been deliberately brought about by a designer God may be wrong but the argument is not completely illogical i.e. it does make sense.
* Although Hume would never attribute this design to God (he always maintained that religious beliefs could never arise from rational or scientific thinking), at least he agrees with the theist that our universe contains order and purpose.
* As for scientific explanations of the universe even they can be seen as being compatible with the teleological argument since evolution or the ‘Big Bang’ could simply be the means with which the designer achieved his creation.

**Weaknesses of the teleological argument**

Although there is considerable appeal and logic to the teleological argument it has faced a number of challenges. We will address these challenges in greater detail in future lessons, but the following overview will suffice for now:

* **The analogy between the universe and a watch is a weak one**. It takes for granted that there is a significant resemblance between natural objects e.g. the function of our eyes, plants, and animals etc. and objects which we know to have been designed e.g. a watch, computer, car etc. It could be argued that the human eye is not like a watch in any important respect.
* Therefore if we accept that the similarity is weak, then the conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of the comparison are also weak. Thus, although both the watch and the human eye show evidence of purpose we are not necessarily obliged to conclude that both have a designer, in the latter case God.
* A related criticism is that to make an analogy between the universe and the works of humankind is highly dangerous to the theist since it leads inevitably to **anthropomorphism** i.e. projecting onto God human qualities and attributes. The more we do this then the less ‘God-like’ God becomes.
* David Hume takes up this criticism as well. He argued that the teleological argument removed from God His divine distinctiveness, something that the believer surely wants to preserve?
* It could be argued that **Charles Darwin’s** (1809-1882) theory of evolution by natural selection provides us with a much more verifiable and rational account of how it is that species display order and purpose.
* In his controversial, but ground breaking publication, **‘The Origin of Species’** (1859) Darwin showed how, by a process of the survival of the fittest, those animals and plants best suited to their environments lived to pass on their genes to their offspring. This scientific process explains how such marvellous adaptations to environment as are found in the animal and plant kingdoms could have occurred, without introducing the notion of God.
* Of course, it should be said that Darwin’s theory of evolution does not disprove God’s existence. Indeed many Christians and believers from other religious traditions would argue that God used the mechanism of evolution to bring about the human and animal world as it is today. However, Darwin’s theory does weaken the strength of the teleological argument since it explains the same effects without referring to a divine making cause i.e. God.
* It should be added that today the world-renowned scientist **Richard Dawkins** sees Darwin’s theory of evolution as one of the main reasons why belief in God makes little or no rational sense. Read his books **‘The Blind Watchmaker’** or **‘The God Delusion’** to discover why.
* Even if we accept that the world and everything in it clearly shows evidence of being designed there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that it has been **designed by the God of 'Classical Theism’** i.e. a God who is one, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, loving, perfect etc. Take as an example great works of architecture such as the Pyramids of Egypt, the Sydney Opera House, the Taj Mahal and St Paul’s Cathedral in London etc. Few would attribute these tremendous achievements to any one individual-they were built by teams of individuals.
* If we agree with this, is it not possible to conclude that our planet and universe was also built by a ‘team’? Perhaps a group of ‘lesser gods’ worked together with different creation roles? This analogy if we carry it to its logical conclusion would have to lead us to the idea that the God of monotheism could never have designed our universe.
* Objections to the teleological argument can also be made on the grounds that it does **not necessarily support the view that the designer (or designers) is all-powerful (omnipotent)**. The existence of ‘design faults’ such as earthquakes, the tendency of the body to grow old and organs fail e.g. the human eye has a tendency to short-sightedness and cataracts in old age, hardly lend weight to the view of an all-powerful creator wanting to create the best world possible. Indeed, such observations might lead some people to think that the designer of the universe, far from being all-powerful, is a comparatively weak God limited in power, if not goodness.
* The design argument alone, then, does not convince in presenting us with a picture of a God who is worshipped by believers of the great religious faiths who maintain that He is completely good and all-powerful.
* Finally, related to the last point, the existence of **moral and natural evil** is for many the clearest indication that if there is a conscious designer of our universe (God), then He cannot be omniscient (all-knowing) and benevolent (all-good). These types of evil range from human cruelty (Holocaust, 9/11, 7/7 etc.) to the suffering caused by natural disasters and disease.
* The existence of such evil and suffering make it hard, if not impossible, for many to accept the idea of a benevolent creator. If God is omniscient as classical theism asserts then He must have known that evil would exist in His creation. It follows that if He is all-powerful then He must be able to prevent evil from occurring and likewise if God were indeed perfectly good then He would surely not want evil to exist?
* Yet evil continues to exist, and although we shall address this philosophical area of study under the ‘problem of evil’, for our purposes it does make us wary about claims that the design argument provides conclusive evidence of a supremely good God.

**Conclusions**

It would appear from our discussions thus far that the teleological argument only gives us, at best, a very limited conclusion that something or someone designed the world and everything in it. To go beyond this would be to overstep what can logically be concluded from the argument. However, our investigations have really only just begun and what will follow in forthcoming lessons is a more thorough investigation into the strengths and weaknesses of this ‘proof’. Perhaps then we will discover that the objections raised thus far have not been without their faults themselves.

**Tasks**

1. What kinds of things count as evidence of ‘order’ in the universe?
2. What do events such as earthquakes; droughts, disease etc. reveal about the designer of the universe if there is one?
3. Are arguments from analogy weak?
4. Richard Dawkins insists that: “**We are so grotesquely lucky to be here.”** In other words the notion of purpose behind the universe is a misleading one. In your view is this assessment a fair one?
5. **“God does not play dice.”** Examine Albert Einstein’s claim in the context of the teleological argument. Do you agree with him?

**Chapter 4: The teleological argument as a philosophical argument for the existence of God**

As we have seen one of the most popular philosophical arguments offered for the existence of God has been the **'teleological'** or **'argument from design'**. The argument itself can be presented in a number of different forms and as we saw in our last lesson is commonly associated with the philosopher **William Paley** (1743-1805).

I propose that we turn in greater detail to the various forms of the teleological argument that have been put forward by both past and contemporary (current) philosophers and assess how successful they are as **‘proofs’** for the existence of God. But first let us consider what is it about the operation of the universe that convinces people that our universe bears the mark of some divine intelligence?

**Seeking explanations for why the universe is as it is**

The issues that arise by the question ‘Why is the universe as it is?’ can be set out as follows:

* **Order**: objects behave in the universe in a regular way and according to scientific laws.
* **Benefit**: the universe is an orderly structure and provides all that is necessary for life.
* **Purpose**: objects within the universe appear to be working towards an end or purpose.
* **Suitability for human life**: the order exhibited by the universe provides the ideal environment for human life to exist.
* **Appearance**: the appearance of the universe, which could be said to exhibit beauty, suggests that it is intended for something more than basic survival.

It should also be noted that there are things about our world that could not be different without significant implications for human life as we know it e.g. if the sun were slightly further away or half as powerful, if the axis of our planet was slightly different, if the moon were larger or further away, if water did not exist, if gravity were not such a weak force, if DNA did not replicate etc.

Of course, we could explain these features of our world as one huge **coincidence**, but the design argument attempts to show that the delicate balance of the universe is such that the probability of it coming about by chance is possible, but most unlikely. For an interesting attempt to demonstrate that the delicate balance of our universe owes itself to some form of intelligence refer to Dave Hunt’s **‘parable of the two shipwreck survivors’** from the Edexcel AS Religious Studies resource (page 14 in the book).

This parable illustrates both the value and limitation of the design argument. The two characters in this parable represent sharply opposing positions. The first survivor is convinced that the evidence points to an intelligent and purposeful being-the other does not. He is satisfied that the evidence has been brought about by chance. It would appear then that the burden of proof seems to rest with the theist when it comes to demonstrating that the universe is marked by purposeful and intelligent design.

**Further analysis of various forms of the design argument**

The design argument can be traced to the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. Thus **Plato** stated that the human body, with all its particles and elements, must owe its origin to **‘the royal mind soul and mind in the nature of Zeus’.** Another early reference to the teleological argument can be found in the writings of the Roman thinker **Cicero’s**‘The Nature of the god’s’.

In this work a character called Lucilius asks: **"What could be clearer or obvious when we look up to the sky and contemplate the heavens, than that there is some divinity of superior intelligence?"** The point that Lucilius seems to be making here is that the operation and design of the universe must be somehow **controlled by intelligence**. Here we need to distinguish between two different notions of design. First there is **design that shows regularity**, examples of which might include a musical score or the arrangement of flowers in a garden. Just as Beethoven’s famous score to his 9th Symphony shows order and regularity (how else can we perceive the music as being one of the greatest orchestral symphony’s to have been composed) so too does a garden (the arrangement of flowers in the borders, lack of weeds etc).

With these two examples alone we can make a comparison with the universe e.g. the rotation of the planets and natural laws, the seasons etc. They all behave in a regular way and many philosophers conclude that this cannot have occurred by random chance. A second feature of design is **design that shows purpose**. The universe can be compared to a man-made machine in which a designer fits all the parts together for a specific function. For example, the parts of a television are fitted together in such a way as to receive pictures and sound. If the parts were fitted together in a random manner, then the television simply would not function. Similarly, it could be argued that there are complex arrangements within nature that have been fitted together by a designer for special purposes.

With these two distinctions in mind we can now note two lines of argument offered by those who claim to see in the universe evidence of design-a universe that **displays regularity** and a universe that **displays purpose**. Richard Swinburne’s design argument focuses on a universe that displays regularity. We shall consider Swinburne’s form of the design argument in more detail in lesson 4 but for the time being we should note the following when he writes:

**“Almost all objects in the world behave in a highly regular way describable by scientific laws…The most general regularities of all are, as such, scientifically inexplicable. The question arises whether there is a possible explanation of another kind, which can be provided for them, and whether their occurrence gives any or much support to that explanation…since actions of agents can explain regularities…the action of an agent could explain the regular behaviour of the matter of the universe, the behaviour codified in scientific laws. All the regularity in nature would be due to the action of a postulated god, making nature, as it were, performing a great symphony in the way in which a man produces from his throat a regular series of notes.”**

**Tasks**

1. What would you consider as examples of regularity within the universe?
2. What would you consider as examples of purposewithin the universe?
3. What do you think Swinburne means when he states that the **“most general regularities of all are, as such, scientifically inexplicable”**? Does this give grounds for belief in a designer God?

As we saw in our last lesson the most famous form of the Design Argument that relates to purpose is that offered by **William Paley**. In his work ***‘*Natural Theology’**he writes about ‘crossing a heath’.

**“Suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there: I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it, perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place. I should hardly think of the answer I had before given-that, for anything I knew, the watch might always have been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone?”**

Paley's reply is that parts of the watch are obviously put together to achieve a definite result: **"When we come to inspect the watch we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day…"** Paley's suggestion, then, is that the universe resembles the watch and must therefore be accounted for in terms of intelligent and purposive agency:

**“Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation** (calculating)**. I mean, that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art** (man-made design)**, in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism.”**

**Immanuel Kant’s criticism of the argument from design**

As we have seen, all forms of the design argument seem to suppose that there really is some kind of order which is independent of our minds, something we come across rather than manufacture for ourselves. However, with the German philosopher **Immanuel Kant**(1724-1804) we come across a decisive rejection against the design argument. Kant argued that it is **human nature to impose order upon things**. In other words, we would impose order on whatever universe we were in i.e. an orderly one or a chaotic one.

Working with Kant’s view, and you may agree with him, many critics of the argument from design have suggested that it fails because, to put it simply, **order is mind imposed rather than God imposed**. Kant’s criticisms are worthy of consideration since he is regarded by many as one of the most influential thinkers of the **Enlightenment period**. It was during this period (18th Century) that greater emphasis was placed upon philosophical and rational thinking as a means to addressing questions about the meaning of life and the origins and nature of our universe. Consequently older values of tradition and authority (especially religious tradition and authority) were questioned.

Yet Kant was not the only philosopher to challenge the view that the order in our universe owes itself to a designer God. The Scottish philosopher **David Hume**(1711-1776) has perhaps with even greater clarity challenged the argument from design in perhaps his most famous work **‘An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding’**. Like Kant, Hume is an influential figure. He argued that we are driven by emotions rather than reason. Thus religious beliefs such as belief in God arise from a natural desire to ‘blame’ natural problems on invisible forces rather than to examine the problems rationally or scientifically.

Let us now turn to Hume’s argument against they’re being a ‘divine designer’ of the universe and assess whether or not his criticisms are justified.

**David Hume’s rejection of the argument from design**

Hume’s first objection to any notion of a ‘divine designer’ is enforced in the following statement. Hume writes: “When we infer any particular cause for an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to any cause any qualities but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect.” Hume adds further that if design needs to be explained, then explain it but only by appealing to a design producing cause. To say that this cause i.e. the design of the universe is God is to go beyond the evidence presented by design.

It would seem that Hume has a point here, a point that can also be used against the cosmological argument. The thrust of Hume’s argument is that if we conclude that the order in our universe needs an explanation it does not necessarily follow that this explanation will be what we commonly refer to as 'God'. God, for instance, is sometimes said to be ‘timeless’, yet it seems hard to see why anything capable of imposing order needs to be timeless.

In his next point Hume suggests that the defender of the design argument may well have to concede that the evidence of design in the universe may well owe its existence not to one God, but to a plurality (many) of god's, especially when one considers the vast scale and complexity of the universe.

This view is clearly at odds with the classical theistic concept of God (i.e. belief in one God) that we noted in our earlier lessons. Thus Hume writes: **"A great number of men join together in building a house or ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth: Why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world?"** This point has certain strength, for design is often the work of many individuals.

Of course, if we apply the **Ockham’s razor** principle it could be argued that the traditional classical belief in God as one, omnipotent, omniscient etc. can be defended. According to the philosophical principle of ‘Ockham’s Razor’ **'entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity'** since this only complicates the problem. Furthermore, as we noted when studying miracles, the principle of Ockham’s razor implies that the simplest explanation is often the best explanation. Richard Swinburne therefore argues that if God does exist then it is much more likely that He is one, eternal, good, all-powerful etc as opposed to completely good but limited in power.

If we accept this view (many do not) then a defender of the teleological argument might have some justification for arguing that although there is a possibility of there being more than one designer god it is equally quite possible that there is only one. It is worth adding that even Hume himself is prepared to concede this point: **"To multiply causes without necessity is indeed contrary to true philosophy."**

But let us now consider briefly three further criticisms put forward by Hume against the design argument. The first is that the universe might easily be regarded as a **'living organism'** such as a plant or an animal. This **organic model** may be more compatible with science, which suggests that the universe is in a permanent state of development and decay, not of unchangeable order. Hume is arguing, then, that the universe is not like a machine or watch, and neither does it function like one. Paley’s analogy, then, is not as strong as it may have first seemed.

As we have already seen Hume argued that the **problem with analogy** is that it leads inevitably to **anthropomorphism**. If we are going to compare God with a human designer (as Paley did) then it could be argued that it only serves to emphasise his limitedness and fallibility. If Hume is correct then the design argument cannot support the view of a single deity of infinite capacity who created and designed the universe with a benevolent (loving) interest in His creatures.

A further criticism with the use of analogy from Hume is that it argues from that which we know (i.e. a watchmaker) to that which we are ignorant i.e. God. How can we legitimately draw a comparison (analogy) between that which we know to be limited and imperfect (i.e. human designers) to that which theists claim to be unlimited and perfect i.e. God? Hume’s next criticism, and a popular one for many, is that the order in the universe might easily be the result of **'chance'**. It is here that Hume draws upon the **Epicurean hypothesis**. This hypothesis argued that at the time of creation, the universe consisted of particles in random motion.

This initial state was chaotic but gradually the natural forces evolved into an ordered system. The universe is eternal and, in this unlimited time, it was inevitable that a constantly ordered state would develop.

The stability and order that we see today, then, is not the result of a divine designer but of random particles coming together through time to form the present stable universe. This is akin (similar) to the argument that if an infinite number of monkeys were all put together in a room each with a typewriter, one of them would eventually produce the works of Dickens or Shakespeare. According to this principle, again, no special explanation is demanded for the universe.

Finally, for David Hume the argument from design fails since the universe shows considerable **signs of disorder** e.g. earthquakes, tsunamis etc. Such events only serve to reinforce that if there is a divine designer then He must be a **limited one**. Hume is effectively offering a version of the problem of evil here but seeing it as an absence of order. This is sometimes referred to as the **dysteleological argument**, a form of the argument for poor design. Examples of poor design, which may be inefficient rather than causing evil and suffering, include the pointless existence of the appendix which can lead to fatal appendicitis, myopia (short-sightedness), the existence of unnecessary wings in flightless birds e.g. the ostrich etc.

**Responses to Hume's criticisms of the design argument**

It would seem that Hume has convincingly highlighted the weaknesses and limitations present in the argument from design. But how decisive are his criticisms? For **Brian Davies**, a Dominican Friar and contemporary lecturer in philosophy, Hume's own arguments are not without their own difficulties. Take for instance Hume’s criticism of Paley’s watch analogy and insistence that a comparison between the universe and a living organism is a much more favourable analogy. Nevertheless, Hume still fails to explain that within our universe there is considerable regularity. Thus, at the heart of Richard Swinburne's design argument is the premise that the universe behaves in predictable and regular ways.

As for Hume's criticism concerning disorder it would appear that this observation counts as a mighty blow against the argument from design for few would contend the view that the universe contains considerable disorder. Earthquakes are just one example of pain producing events of a natural kind. That said Brian Davies takes the view that this observation need not deter the defender of the argument from design. Disorder as seen in pain-producing natural events can also plausibly be taken as an illustration of order.

One might, for instance argue that pain-producing natural events exhibit order in that their origins can often be traced and their future occurrence predicted with a fair degree of success. But is the argument from design still reasonable or has it been successfully refuted? Our investigations are as yet incomplete and in order to form a balanced judgement we will need to consider the arguments again in our next lesson.

**Chapter 5: The cosmological argument as a philosophical argument for the existence of God**

**A glance at what you will need to know**

The specification does not name or identify any particular version of the cosmological argument and you will be credited with any version(s) relevant to the question. Notable examples may include Aquinas, Kalaam versions, Leibniz, Copleston etc. Key ideas may include principle of sufficient reason, interpretation of experience, concepts such as movement, cause and effect, contingency, infinite regress, first cause, necessary existence etc. Knowledge of these key concepts will be supplemented with an understanding and evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. You should be able to identify these features and make informed judgements about the merits, or otherwise, of these strengths and weaknesses. For example, this may include material from David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Bertrand Russell; alternative explanations, notion of brute facts, debates about infinite regress, necessary existence, type of God etc.

**Introduction**

Like the teleological argument, the **cosmological argument** is also an ‘aposteriori’ argument. Whereas the design argument states that the design in the universe is best explained with reference to a designer God, the cosmological argument states that the existence of the universe cannot be explained without reference to causes and factors outside itself. This approach to the origins of the universe is in contrast to the ‘brute fact’ approach, which asserts that the universe requires no explanation but simply ‘is’. The cosmological argument, then, assumes that the universe has not always been in existence, and for it to come into being an ‘external’ agent is necessary*.* Classical theism, of course, asserts that this external agent is God!

**The need for explanation**

The cosmological argument refers to a collection of arguments that have been continually improved and developed. They are arguments from **natural theology**, which hold that humanity does not know God through reason, but through the work of God in creation, which is accessible to everyone. Like the teleological argument, the cosmological argument is concerned with finding an explanation for the universe. Both look to the universe and conclude that it is not self-explanatory, and this demands that we ask questions about its origin, nature and purpose e.g. ‘Why is there something rather than nothing’ and ‘Why is infinite regress not a sufficient explanation for the existence of the universe’ etc?

The cosmological argument in all its forms, then, responds to man’s instinctive awareness that the existence of the universe is not explicable without reference to causes and factors outside itself. It cannot be self-causing because it is contingent and only the existence of a non-contingent, first necessary cause and mover explains the origin of an otherwise ‘brute fact’. Note that **non-contingent** and **necessary being**are key ideas that figure prominently in the cosmological argument. When something is said to be ‘contingent’ it implies that it is dependent upon other beings or events for its existence. You and I, then, are contingent since we are dependent upon our parents for our existence.

God, however, is said to be ‘non-contingent’ since His existence is self-sufficient and not dependent upon anything. It must follow, then, that if God is non-contingent He is also ‘necessary’ in that He is self-causing and self-sustaining. You must be familiar with these terms when discussing this argument.

The cosmological argument, then, assumes that the universe is finite and has not always been in existence and for it to come into being an external agent i.e. something that existed before the universe was necessary. This external agent is itself beyond being affected by anything and the question, ‘Who made that agent?’ is considered irrelevant. Cosmological arguments essentially contain three elements:

1. There exist things the non-existence of which is a possibility.
2. The existence of such things needs to be explained.
3. The explanation of these things lies in something that is self caused and totally independent.

Proponents of the argument identify this independent and self-causing agent as God, a supremely perfect and self-sufficient being. The cosmological argument, then, like the design argument is concerned with finding an explanation for the universe and both conclude that the universe is not self-explanatory and self-sufficient. The universe demands that we ask questions about its origins, nature and purpose.

The cosmological argument essentially deals with questions that logically precede those of the design argument because they are concerned with asking why the universe exists at all, rather than why it possesses the features it does. Furthermore, the cosmological argument is based on the sense that life is not random or accidental. If God is the reason why there is a universe, then we are free to believe that the universe is here for good reason rather than no reason at all. It therefore seems reasonable to ask questions such as:

* Why is there something rather than nothing?
* Why does the universe possess the form it does and not some other form?
* How can the series of events that culminate in the universe be explained?
* Must a chain of movers have a first cause or is an infinite regress of causes a self-sufficient explanation for the universe?
* What kind of cause or agency is necessary for the universe to come into being?

The success of the cosmological argument will depend entirely on your willingness to ask these questions. For the British and atheistic philosopher **Bertrand Russell**, questions about the origins of the universe and what existed before it are meaningless. When interviewed by **F C Copleston** on the cause of the universe, Russell simply asked: ‘shall we pass onto some other issue?’ For Russell, the universe ‘just is’ or as he put it ‘simply brute fact’. Asking questions that are beyond all forms of empirical questioning, testing and experience are simply beyond us and can provide us with no meaningful insight. However, Copleston accused Russell of refusing to engage with what are perfectly legitimate questions about the origins of the universe. He said of Russell:

**“And if one refuses to even sit down at the chessboard and make a move, one cannot, of course, be checkmated.”**

Unlike Russell, **Richard Swinburne** is a perfect example of a great contemporary supporter of the quest for explanation as reflected in the cosmological argument. We will consider Swinburne’s own version of the cosmological argument in a later lesson, but it will be suffice to say at this stage that he argues that the existence of all things rests on ‘one ultimate object’ i.e. God. We should note that supporters of the cosmological argument are not satisfied with finding partial explanations for the universe, but seek a complete explanation or, what **Gottfried Leibniz** called a **‘sufficient reason’**.

We will consider Leibniz’ principle of sufficient reason at a later stage, but in short it concludes (as do all forms of the cosmological argument) that God is the ultimate, complete and adequate explanation for the universe, and possesses in Himself all the necessary characteristics to be that complete explanation.

We should note that although the cosmological argument is ‘a posteriori’ in that it is based on experience i.e. all things require a cause therefore the universe requires a cause; it does depend to some extent on the **ontological argument**, which is ‘a priori’. According to Anselm’s ontological argument God is a supremely perfect being or as he put it, God is ‘That being than which nothing greater can be conceived.’ For Anselm, a supremely perfect being has to exist otherwise he would not be perfect. God’s existence, then, is necessary i.e. God cannot, not exist. Just as the ontological argument proposes a God that is necessary i.e. cannot not exist, the cosmological argument also argues for a necessary God. This point will become clearer when we consider the third of Thomas Aquinas’ ‘Five Way’s’ or ‘proofs’ for the existence of God.

**Pre-Christian applications of the cosmological argument**

The cosmological argument is not just a Christian attempt to prove the existence of God. Within Greek philosophy both **Plato** (427-347 BC)and **Aristotle** (384-232 BC)postulated (suggested) the need for a craftsman and a cause of all things within the universe. Both began their arguments with the fact of motion, which they argued needs a prior agency to motivate it. This mover would, itself, need no further mover, because it would be a prime mover, which is a self-actualising, necessary being. Neither Aristotle nor Plato understood how the universe could exist without such a mover. Plato identified different types of motion or change e.g. growth and decay, movement from place to place, as well as the power of something to move other objects when it is moved by something else e.g. the power of a wave (moved by the wind) to move a pebble on a beach. Plato also identified the power of something to move itself as well as other objects e.g. a glazier moving debris down a valley.

The point being made by Plato is that the power to produce motion is logically prior to the power to receive it and pass it on. If must follow, then, that there is a first cause, itself uncaused, that originates that movement. Plato believed that there was a ‘higher order’, although he did not believe that this was necessarily a creator, but rather the source of the activity that there is in the world, which itself existed externally i.e. before and outside it. Aristotle took Plato’s cosmological argument further by arguing that the prime mover must be different to the material universe. He concluded that this prime mover was an intelligence that activates the world by its presence, is eternal and both good and perfect.

Another pre-Aquinas (Christian) version of the cosmological argument is the **Kalam cosmological argument**. This Muslim version simply asserts that:

* Whatever comes into being must have a cause
* The universe came into being
* The universe must have a cause
* If the universe has a cause of its existence it must be God
* Conclusion, God exists

The principle is that if something cannot be the cause of its own existence, then it must have been caused by something else, and that by something else again etc.

Only when we arrive at a self-causing,non-contingentand necessary beingcan we say that we have reached the end of the chain of causes and effects. We will consider the Kalam cosmological argument in much more detail at a later date, and a modern interpretation of it as put forward by **William Lane Craig**.

**Questions**

1. What are the key questions which the Cosmological Argument is trying to address?
2. What type of argument is the Cosmological Argument?
3. What is meant by a ‘non-contingent and necessary being’?
4. What does Bertrand Russell mean when he says that the universe is a ‘brute fact’?

**Chapter 6: The cosmological argument as a philosophical argument for the existence of God**

**Thomas Aquinas and the cosmological argument**

Just as William Paley is best associated with the design argument, the Italian Catholic theologian and philosopher **Thomas Aquinas** (1224-1274) is synonymous with the cosmological argument. In his most famous work, **Summa Theologica**, Aquinas suggests that God reveals certain truths that cannot be otherwise known, and assists humanity to discover other truths through the use of reason. In his work Summa Theologica, Aquinas puts forward **Five Ways** that he believed ‘demonstrated’ the existence of God; although in reality it is unlikely that he thought an atheist would be convinced by them.

The first three ways are cosmological arguments, the fourth is a form of an ontological or even a moral argument, and the fifth is a teleological argument. The first four ways propose similar arguments: that everything depends on something else in a constant regression (going back) until a beginning is reached, which is God. Each of the ‘proofs’ starts from a general feature of the world, and argues that there could not be a world unless there was also the ultimate reality of God. These proofs or ways can be set out briefly as follows:

1. God must be the **First Mover** since all things must be moved by something else. God must be the original **Unmoved Mover**. For Aquinas nothing can ‘move’ itself, yet things are evidently in motion. There must be a first mover that causes motion in all things, and this Aquinas called ‘God’.
2. God must be the **First Cause** of all things. The second way follows the same kind of reasoning as the first way: all things are caused and since nothing can be its own cause (a logical impossibility), there must be a first cause (God) on which all other causes depend. An infinite chain of causes is rejected since in an infinite chain there can be no first cause.
3. God is a **Necessary Being** who exists in His own right and He alone depends upon no other being for His existence. Everything we know and can point to is dependent upon factors which in turn depend upon other factors. However, reason demands that there must be an ‘ultimate explanation’ and for Aquinas there is in the form of a necessary being (God) who is dependent on nothing outside Himself. For Freddy C Coplestonthe force of Aquinas’ third way is so strong that he adds that a necessary being ‘must and cannot-not-exist!’
4. God is the source of all values (The Moral Argument).
5. God is the Divine Designer of everything (The Teleological Argument).

Remember that only the first three of Aquinas’ Five Ways are relevant to the cosmological argument*.* With this in mind let us now consider them again in more detail.

**A more detailed analysis of Aquinas’ cosmological argument**

A doctor, on examining a patient, may conclude that the patient is ill because he is displaying certain symptoms. There are the symptoms, so there is more than likely a cause. For **Brian Davies**(a Dominican friar and modern lecturer in philosophy) we can use a similar type of reasoning when arguing for the existence of God from the cosmological argument.

As we noted in lesson 1, the cosmological argument has a long history and versions of it can be found in the work of many philosophical and religious writers from the early Greek period to the present day. We will of course examine a number of these versions again over the next few lessons. Interestingly, for many people the cosmological argument has considerable appeal as a rational argument for offering good grounds for belief in God.

Your task will be to assess whether or not this claim is justified. But first let us turn again to the philosopher with whom this argument is most commonly associated-Thomas Aquinas*.* As we noted above the most famous version of the cosmological argument is to be found in the first three of his so-called ‘Five Ways’.

Remember that Thomas Aquinas was one of the most powerful intellects in the history of Christian thought and remains the theological patron saint of the Roman Catholic Church. His cosmological argument, then, deserves serious consideration. Aquinas’ contribution to the development of philosophy and theology cannot be underestimated. With the ‘Summa Theologica’ we have an attempt by Aquinas to 'prove' the existence of God beginning with some general feature of the world around us and proceeding to the conclusion that there could not be a world with its particular characteristics unless there were also some ultimate reality, which we know as God. Aquinas' 'Five Ways' can be set out again as follows:

**The First Way: from motion**

The key word in Aquinas’ **First Way** is 'change' or 'motus' to use the original Latin. The First Way is also called the **kinetological way** from the word ‘kine’ meaning motion. The First Way argues from the fact of change to a **Prime Mover**. According to Aquinas everything is in a process of 'change' and nothing can change itself. Therefore, whatever causes things to change must it self be 'operative'. In other words, the fact that all things undergo change must mean that there is a cause of this change that is not itself caused to change by anything. Aquinas concludes that this is what people mean by God-He is the 'unchanged changer'. God causes things to change without ever being caused to change Himself.

The thinking behind Aquinas’ First Way can be set out in the form of premises (P1, etc.) and a conclusion.

* P1: nothing can move itself, since nothing can be both mover and moved, yet things are evidently in motion.
* P2: an infinite chain of movers that has no beginning can have no successive or ultimate movers.
* Conclusion: there must therefore be a first mover that causes motion in all things, and this we call God.

Aquinas called motion **“the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality.”** For example, fire, which is actually hot, changes wood, which is potentially hot, to a state of being actually hot. Motion, then is a change of state, and not just movement in time and space from one place to another. Things have motion when they go through change in location, quantity or quality, such as leaves rotting to become compost, or a person growing old. The world is constantly in process and the changes that are part of that process are the result of some prior changes and states of affairs.

However, that motion and change require an explanation because we know that nothing can be both in potentiality and actuality in the same respect; in other words, nothing can be simultaneously in motion and motionless. Something is required to bring about the change from hot to cold and vice versa and it must be something upon that which is changed is dependent. Aquinas argued that God is the initiator of change and motion in all things. Aquinas also maintained that when two objects, A and B, come into a relationship with each other, one affects the other and brings about a transfer of effect. Take for instance a ball travelling towards a second ball. When it strikes the second ball it is set in motion from the first. To do this, what ball A does to ball B, has already been done to A.

In other words, we are faced with a communication or transfer of essences i.e. movement in A communicates or transfers to B, empowering it to motion.

**The Second Way: from cause**

Aquinas' **Second Way** is also called the **aetiological way**, because it seeks to explain things from their origin. It is also referred to as the **'first cause argument'**, since it focuses upon the notion of causation and existence. It can be presented as follows:

* The world is a series of events.
* All events are caused and nothing can be its own cause (a logical impossibility).
* There must be a fist cause (God) on which all other causes depend.
* Aquinas rejects an infinite chain of causes because in an infinite chain there can be no first cause.
* Therefore there must a cause of the whole sequence.
* Aquinas therefore concludes that there must be a 'First Cause’ that we call God. This conclusion is reached on the grounds that if there is no such 'first cause' then nothing could exist at all.

According to Aquinas' second way then, the present existence of all things depends upon the existence of an uncaused first cause. In the Second Way, Aquinas also observes that there is something different about God. While all other beings are caused, God is not. Furthermore, God is not just the first cause in a chain of causes that are otherwise just like Him, He is one on whom all subsequent causes and effects are dependent.

As with the First Way, Aquinas again rejected an infinite chain of causes but insisted that without a first cause there could be no subsequent causes and so in effect, without a first cause, there would be nothing at all. Furthermore, the implication is that Aquinas is not just looking for a first cause in a linear chain but one that maintains the existence of all effects that derive from that first cause: the dependency of the effects on the first cause does not cease once they have come into being.

**Richard Swinburne** in his book‘Is there a God?’ (1996),sets out to show that the first cause of the universe i.e. God operates with deliberate purpose and intention. He does this by distinguishing between different ways in which objects or beings cause events. **Inanimate causation** occurs when something that has the power to act under certain conditions does so. He uses the example of dynamite causing an explosion.

However, **intentional causation** provides the reason why the dynamite was set off e.g. perhaps a terrorist had ignited it or a mining company was attempting to remove a rock face etc. The point that Swinburne is making is that intentional causation is personal and is motivated by beliefs and purpose. From human experience nothing would ever happen unless we acted with purpose e.g. I would not do my essays, go to school, eat etc. It is this model that Swinburne argues is fundamental to theistic thinking about the origins of the universe i.e. the first cause also operated intentionally and is both conscious and personal.

**The Third Way: from necessity and contingency**

Aquinas’ **Third Way** is sometimes referred to as the **argument from contingency** and is very similar to the Second Way. However, there are subtle differences and they can be noted as follows: Everything in the world is **‘contingent’** in that its existence is dependent upon a series of events or circumstances. If these events had not occurred then we would have to conclude that nothing would exist at all*.* Take for instance the printed pages in a book.

The pages within are ‘contingent’ upon the prior activities of trees, lumberjacks, transport workers, paper manufacturers, publishers, printers, author and so on. Each ‘item’ within the chain depends upon factors outside it, and so everything points beyond itself to other things.

According to Aquinas, if we accept that everything is contingent, there would have to be a time when nothing existed because all the possibilities that can affect any contingent item or being will have been realised before we have reached the present. If we are agreed with this point, we would then have to conclude that since things do exist then there must be some **‘causal agency’** which is not contingent. In other words there has to be an ultimate explanation in the form of a necessary being (God) who is dependent on nothing outside Himself.

Confusing isn’t it? Put more simply, the third way states that some things come into existence and then pass out of it. That is, some things are generated and corruptible. According to this reasoning Aquinas concluded that there has to be something which is self existent to which everything owes its existence, since if we trace things backwards it would have to owe itself to a first cause, and for Aquinas this first cause and self existing (non-contingent) being is of course God!

There is no doubt that that the Third Way is the most interesting of Aquinas’ Five Ways. However, the existence of a necessary and non-contingent being depends on the view that the world might not have been i.e. there is no reason why it had to exist anymore than you or I had to exist as individual persons. For F Copleston, if we do not postulate the existence of a necessary being **“we do not explain the presence here and now of beings capable of existing or not existing. Therefore we must affirm the existence of a being which is absolutely necessary and completely independent.”**

**Conclusions**

Significantly, the cosmological argument shows that even an infinite universe would demand an explanation and so couldn’t be the explanation for all other events or causes taking place within it. Overall, then, we can see that Aquinas’ form of the argument has attempted to demonstrate that whether we think of the world as a process or a sequence of events or a collection of things, it would still need to be explained. For Aquinas’, the best possible explanation is a necessary and self-causing being. We can set Aquinas’ argument as follows:

* P1: the universe exists.
* P2: everything in existence has a cause and that which is in a state of motion must be moved.
* P3: causes come before their effects; that which is moved cannot move it’s self.
* P4: a chain of causes and effects, movers and moved cannot regress to infinity.
* P5: there must therefore be a first cause and first mover that is not in its self an effect.
* P6: this first cause/mover is dependent on nothing else to come into existence.
* P7: this first, self-causing cause/self-moving mover is God.
* Conclusion: God exists.

**Task**

1. Summarise the key features of Aquinas’ first Three Ways.
2. What reasons does Richard Swinburne offer for concluding that the universe was brought about deliberately?
3. In what ways could it be argued that the first Three Ways of Aquinas’ cosmological argument is both weak and strong?

**Chapter 7: Further reading**

* ‘Sophie’s World’ by Jostein Gaarder. This is an enjoyable and highly readable novel about the history of philosophy.
* ‘An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion’ by Brian Davies. Copies of this can be purchased cheaply on-line; it is worth purchasing a copy as background reading throughout the course. (The chapter on Concepts of God, Cosmological Arguments and Design Arguments are most relevant for the course).
* DK’s ‘The Philosophy Book’ is beautifully written and illustrated, and an interesting way to dip into the thoughts of different philosophers.
* The ‘School of Life’ channel on YouTube is excellent. Particularly relevant are presentations on Plato (including the Allegory of the Cave), Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Augustine.

***A-Level Religious Studies:***

***Unit 2 Religion and Ethics***

***Bridging work***

***Key questions/areas for exploration***

1. ***What is a study of ethics?***

Socrates “how then should we live?’’ Or what norms (values) should I live by?

Ethics comes from the Greek word ethikos/ethos meaning ***‘character’***. It is a philosophical study of right and wrong, good and bad

The branch of philosophy that deals with ethics is ***‘moral philosophy.’***

***There are several ethical theories which approach how we should behave or what standards we live by.***

***Deontological ethics:*** Theories that place special emphasis on the relationship between ***duty and the morality of human actions***.

Focuses on the ***nature of the act*** itself rather than the outcome produced.

On example of deontological ethics comes from ***Immanuel Kant***. He argued that morality is ***objective*** (morality exists independent of humans) and ***universal***- If an act is reasoned to be wrong then it is wrong for everyone at all times in all places. Immanuel Kant believes we should beave morally because it is our duty to. For example: You should not steal, because it is your duty not to steal. We shouldn’t be preoccupied with consequences or what we get in return for good actions but on duty alone. Kant believed that we could come to an understanding of what our moral duties were through rationality alone (Not God/Not experience/not through societal beliefs- through pure reason)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWZi-8Wji7M>

***Consequentialist ethics:*** Judges the rightness of an action on the outcome that the action brings about. Thus a morally right act is one that will produce a good outcome, or consequence.

One example of a consequentialist ethical theory proposed by Jeremey Bentham is ***utilitarianism***. This ethical theory is ***relative*** (meaning that right and wrong depends on the situation). Jeremy Bentham believed what as good was that which produced the most pleasure and happiness and the least amount of pain (this was calculated in the outcomes produced)

***Below are some videos which will introduce utilitarianism further……………***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A07YpT7nbRE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-a739VjqdSI&t=49s>

***Example 1: The enquiring murderer***

You are cornered outside of your house by a bloodthirsty madman who is looking for your friend. You know that this friend is inside of your house. The madman tells you in no uncertain terms that he will kill this person as soon as he finds him, and demands to know his whereabouts. For some reason or other, you do not have the ability to remain silent but must answer this villain with truth or falsehood. Is a lie in this case morally permissible?

What is your initial thoughts on what is the morally right action in this situation? Record your thoughts

 ***What would a utilitarian do in this situation?***

***What would a deontologist do in this situation***

***Example 2:*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFe-OJq6A94>

What is your initial thoughts on what is the morally right action in this situation? Record your thoughts

 ***What would a utilitarian do in this situation?***

 ***What would a deontologist do in this situation?***

***Covid 19: A Doctor’ dilemma: Read the following article and consider the questions/moral dilemmas below***

The realisation that Covid-19 was going to be a very serious problem came to me shortly after my 70th birthday two weeks ago. I had celebrated this in a small and happy party with my family and friends — in retrospect, some of them almost certainly were already infected with the virus. We joked about not shaking hands or embracing. I didn’t appreciate it at the time, but the party was not just celebrating my birthday but also marking my entry into a higher-risk group for dying from the virus. There is nothing new about pandemics, nor is there anything new about our short memories — especially for painful events, both in our own lives and in society as a whole. Time heals all wounds, as they say, but it makes us vulnerable as well. Most of us also suffer from an innate biological optimism that has us believe bad things happen to other people but not to us. Problems arise, however, when those in power suffer from the same weakness. After initial denial, China swung into action very quickly, informed by memories of the recent, more deadly but less transmissible Sars coronavirus. But in the west, most of us — myself included, and certainly our politicians (whose minds were elsewhere) and NHS leaders — comforted ourselves with the thought that what happened in China was far away and of little relevance to us, and anyway it was only a disease of old people who were going to die soon anyway. Don’t panic! Keep Calm and Carry On! (And don’t spend large sums of money on protective clothing for health workers.) How wrong we were

 Each pandemic, the experts tell us, is different. What is striking about Covid-19 is that it is mainly, but not entirely a serious threat to the elderly and infirm — “patients with co-morbidities” in the jargon. For unknown reasons, a significant number of middle-aged patients are at serious risk as well. It is also clear that many people can be asymptomatic and infected and hence infectious without knowing it — which makes controlling the disease particularly difficult. In susceptible people, the virus causes pneumonia after the first few days (when the symptoms can initially be hard to distinguish from a common cold or flu). In the past there was no treatment for viral pneumonia, other than oxygen. You either lived or died. Now we can save some of these lives with mechanical ventilators, which force oxygen into the failing lungs. But even with ventilation, there will still be many deaths.  The problem is an ancient one — Covid-19 is the latest pandemic in a long line of them. There are many examples of pandemics that drastically changed the course of history. But this one is also peculiarly modern. There are far more elderly people in today’s world.  Furthermore, there were no ventilators in the past. Now there will almost certainly be large numbers of patients who need ventilation, even though the mortality of the virus is probably only in the region of 1 per cent. At 1 per cent we are looking at many thousands of people — perhaps millions worldwide — who will die without artificial ventilation, and by no means will all of them be old or unfit. Besides, don’t the old and unfit deserve treatment as well? There could be more than enough patients to lead to the collapse of the healthcare system, as in most countries — and especially in the cash-strapped NHS, starved by the recent years of austerity politics — ventilators, and the highly trained staff needed to run them, are in short supply. Social interaction determines the rate at which a respiratory virus pandemic spreads. The virus thrives on the fact we are such sociable creatures. It jumps from person to person — by touch, by affection, by droplets in the air, by hard surfaces we have touched. So the politicians and their expert advisers face a terrible choice.  **How do you balance drastically curtailing social interaction, with the risk of crashing the economy, to save the baby boomers, healthcare workers and some younger people, against the next generation’s future?**

Remember, for instance, that almost every child on the planet is now being deprived of schooling. If the health service collapses, it will not just be people with the virus who die but many with other life-threatening conditions, who cannot access the treatment they would normally have received before the catastrophe.

Politicians talk of “waging war” on the virus. War involves sacrifice. **Do we sacrifice the elderly now, for younger patients who have more years of life ahead of them?** **And when do we start economic activity again for the sake of future generations?** **Decisions about who should live and who should die at the height of the crisis will simply be forced upon the poor doctors caring for the patients** — the one that George Bernard Shaw, in a very different context, addressed many years ago in his play The Doctor’s Dilemma.  As cases multiply, it should also become possible to make more accurate predictions as to who can realistically be saved with intensive care. Sir David King, the government’s former chief scientific adviser, **is entirely right to say that people in their nineties with respiratory failure from Covid-19 should consider not going in to hospital. He is already being criticised for saying this — but this is a war. Sacrifices must be made.  We will have little choice other than to apply a cruel and horrible utilitarian calculus, in flagrant breach of the ideal of the sanctity of life. How much longer does this patient have to live anyway? Do they have any dependants? The fact that they are loved is not sufficient grounds by itself to treat them. As doctors we have always had to make these assessments, but usually discretely — you cannot legislate for them.** My colleagues will now just have to make a grotesquely larger number of such decisions than usual. I do not envy them. And, alas, there will also be an element of arbitrary “first come, first served”. There has already been a huge shift of wealth from the young to the elderly over recent decades in wealthier countries. Donald Trump is already talking complacently about getting the US economy going again by Easter and yet in recent years the benefits of any growth in the US and UK economies have accrued to a very small number of people. If social distancing is relaxed, cui bono? It is utterly extraordinary how Covid-19 has raised the most profound questions about every aspect of our lives — decisions in a time of war are easy in comparison

***What are the key ethical issues raised by the corona virus in modern medicine and society?***

***How should ventilators be assigned? What are the benefits and dangers of assigning them on a first come/first served basis?***

***A utilitarian would support the view that those* people in their nineties with respiratory failure from Covid-19 should consider not going in to hospital- why? Is this beneficial to society? Is there a bigger picture? What other ethical considerations need to be considered apart from the outcomes in this situation?**

**Do we sacrifice the elderly now, for younger patients who have more years of life ahead of them?**

**Decisions about who should live and who should die at the height of the crisis will simply be forced upon the poor doctors caring for the patients- Is this fair? Does it change the role of a doctor?**

**Should sanctity of life or quality of life determine the NHS’ response to covid 19? Why? Explain?**

**When do we start economic activity again for the sake of future generations? Do the majority of the population benefit from economic growth? Do we risk harm to the minority/vulnerable for the benefit of the masses? What is more important?**

**Down's syndrome: Campaigners say abortions 'need 24-week limit'**

* 24 February 2020

**A law allowing parents to terminate pregnancies where the foetus has Down's syndrome at any time up until its birth should be changed, campaigners say.**

They have written to Health Secretary Matt Hancock saying all non-fatal disabilities should be subject to the standard 24-week abortion limit.

Heidi Crowter, who has the condition, said the law was "deeply offensive".

The government said any decision to terminate "must rest on the judgement of the woman and her doctors".

**'Unloved and unwanted'**

The Down's Syndrome Association estimates about 40,000 people in the UK live with the condition - which is caused by the presence of an extra chromosome in a baby's cells.

Ms Crowter told the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire programme the current law, contained within the 1967 Abortion Act, made her feel "unloved and unwanted". She said her life was as valuable as someone who does not have Down's syndrome.

Her mother, Liz Crowter, called for the law to be updated to recognise "all babies in the womb are treated the same".

Cheryl Bilsborrow, whose two-year-old son Hector has Down's syndrome, described the present law as "downright discrimination".

She said, as an older mother, she had felt pushed into taking a test to detect if her baby would likely have the condition.

Then, she added, she felt "pressured to terminate", saying she was offered an abortion at full term, three days before giving birth to Hector.

Ms Bilsborrow said she was told by a medical professional: "You do know we still terminate babies with Down's syndrome at 38 weeks?".

She told the programme: "I was completely blown away, shocked and disgusted."

She described Hector as a child who was "gorgeous" and loved. "All babies - and children - should be treated equal," she added.

The Department of Health and Social Care told the BBC "any decision to terminate must rest on the judgement of the woman and her doctors.

"Only when two doctors both agree there is a risk a child will be born with a serious abnormality can an abortion take place outside the 24-week limit," it added.

***Key questions to consider***

***Question of autonomy? Should people be authors of their own morality? Is morality dependant on the individual?***

***Should a difference be made to the value of a person’s life based on disability? Is there a danger to society in placing different types of value on people’s lives because of disability/age/intellectual ability etc.***

***How might a utilitarian approach this? Remember they focus on outcomes and not means.***

***Does this case study emphasise the importance of focusing on acts rather than outcomes? How?***

**I'm A Celebrity: ITV ends 'bushtucker trials' that include eating live bugs**

* 16 November 2019

**Live insects will not be eaten in this year's I'm A Celebrity, in a "permanent" change to the reality TV show.**

I'm A Celebrity has previously been criticised for using live bugs in its 'bushtucker trials'.

Some tasks on the ITV show have included insects being eaten alive or dumped onto contestants.

The stars could still be covered in bugs during filming in Australia but any eaten will already be dead.

"Producers have taken a look at the trials and decided that no live critters would be eaten in the trials this year," BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat has been told.

An ITV source said: "They have been planning this for some time and actually last year beach worms were the only critters eaten live but this time around they've decided to implement the change fully and permanently."

**'Eating live invertebrates was abuse'**

The move has been welcomed by wildlife presenter Chris Packham, who says he's "very pleased" at ITV's decision, but describes it as "a first step."

"I hope this is the start of some significant change," he told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"What's long concerned me about the programme is that is portrays animals in the wrong way.

"There was never any ambiguity that eating live invertebrates was abuse and also exploitation for entertainment."

Chris also criticised the show for stereotyping animals like rats and snakes as "bad organism."

He also said he thought ITV's decision was part of a change in global thinking due to the current climate crisis.

"We're going to have to make changes," he added.

"That means you and I making changes in our lives,that means TV producers making changes in the way they make their programmes."

***Key questions to consider….***

***Do we have a morally responsibility towards animals?***

Should animal interests/pains be considered by humans? Are there certain animals whose interests should be considered over others? If so, what criteria should be used?

Should animals have moral rights? Why?

Should experimentation on animals happen in order to benefit/further the quality of human life?

Think back to the killing of Harambe to save the 3 year old child? Why was the child’s live seen as more valuable than the gorillas? Was the right action taken?

***Read the information written about the views of Peter Singer on animal rights below. Do you agree or disagree with his animal rights philosophy?***

**Moral status of animals**

**Which animals deserve moral consideration?**

Pete Singer [**©**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/copyright.shtml)

The idea that non-human animals have significant moral status is comparatively modern. It owes much to the work of philosopher Peter Singer and his 1975 book 'Animal Liberation'.

Animal lovers would say that all animals deserve moral consideration.

This doesn't help resolve cases where the moral interests of different animals are in conflict.

Philosophers have made valiant attempts to offer a systematic answer to this question. But all their attempts are subjective and have a human bias:

* they involve human values in the way they approach the subject
* they involve human value judgements in applying them to particular cases

**A moral classification of animals**

The approach below is what philosophers call consequentialist. It does not argue that animals have rights. Although this line of thinking is both useful and persuasive it does lead to [**one rather unpleasant conclusion**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/rights/moralstatus_1.shtml#h5).

**Outline**

Organisms can be arranged in a moral hierarchy in which the lowest group deserves no moral consideration at all, and the top group deserves more moral consideration than the second group.

* Sentient organisms that are aware of their own existence and would prefer to continue to exist
* Sentient organisms that are not self-aware and don't have any idea of continuing to exist in the future
* Inanimate objects and insentient organisms

**Moral hierarchy discussed**

It's helpful to look at the three categories in more detail.

**Sentient organisms that are self-aware**

Sentient organisms that are aware of their own existence and would prefer to continue to exist deserve full moral consideration because:

* They experience pain and pleasure
* They are aware of their own existence and context
* They prefer to experience pleasurable lives
* They prefer to stay alive

This group includes most human beings and the higher animals. Using this criterion leads to [**a conclusion that would shock most people**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/rights/moralstatus_5.shtml).

**Sentient organisms that are not self-aware**

Sentient organisms that are not self-aware and don't have any idea of continuing to exist in the future deserve some moral consideration because:

* They can feel pain and pleasure
* They prefer to avoid pain
* They prefer to experience pleasure
* It is wrong to cause pain to members of this group
* Killing and replacing individuals in this group is not significant
	+ because one individual is not significantly different from another

This group includes animals like fish and rodents.

**Inanimate objects and insentient organisms**

These deserve no moral consideration because it doesn't make sense to talk of treating them badly or well. This is because:

* They can't feel
* Nothing can matter to them

This group includes insects and simple animals, plants and inanimate objects.

***Key moral philosophers***

For each philosopher provide a short summary of who they are and their work in moral philosophy. Any of these may have work in several different branches of philosophy so focus on their work within the area of ethics.

***Jeremy Bentham***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Key information***  |  |
| ***Key work/influence in ethics*** |  |

***Joseph Fletcher***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Key information***  |  |
| ***Key work/influence in ethics*** |  |

***Peter Singer***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Key information***  |  |
| ***Key work/influence in ethics*** |  |

***Where does morality originate?***

For Religious believers, God is the most perfect and supreme being and is therefore the source of morality. Their ethical rules are therefore based upon ‘divine commands.’ Things are right and wrong insofar as God says they are. No more exploration is necessary.

Many people criticise this and say that it renders morality useless because people just follow rules blindly and do not make use of their God-given reason. They also argue that it could be dangerous. Following this model, God could command us to kill all gingers and it would be good basically because God says so. People point to the story of Abraham and Isaac to support this point.

The Euthyphro dilemma introduced by Plato explores a criticism of divine command ethics and the problems associated with it.

***Watch the following clip and try to summarise the key problem posed by the Euthyphro dilemma.***

[***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmsepLRggpo***](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmsepLRggpo)



***A-Level Religious Studies:***

***Unit 3 New Testament Studies***

***Bridging work***

*The Gospels*

*The most obvious preparation for you would to thoroughly read all four Gospels. However, please try to complete the following in the order they are presented as this should offer you greater insight to the Jesus story and the structure and content of the Gospels themselves*

***Bonus Work****: Go to the John Ryland’s Library on Deansgate to see the oldest written piece of the New Testament!*

***A modern biography.***

*Explain how you would go about writing a biography of someone who dies in 1990. What would be your research process, how would you find out information, what information would you include/exclude, Why would others want to know about your subject?*

***Prior Knowledge.***

*Write, from personal memory only, your own short summary of the Gospels with details within the following 7 headings:*

*1. Birth Narrative*

*2. Stories told by Jesus*

*3. Jesus’ teaching on how to live*

*4. Jesus belief in prayer*

*5. Miracles*

*6. Jesus’ trial and execution*

*7. Resurrection appearances*

*Now read all 4 Gospels, then highlight specific examples in your personal account above with different colours for each Gospel.*

***Answer the following:***

*1. Where do we find the story of the ‘wise men’ and how many of them were there?*

*2. Where do we find the story of the annunciation?*

*3. Which Gospel has the parable of the Prodigal Son?*

*4. Where do we find the ‘sermon on the mount’?*

*5. Which Gospel tells of Jesus turning water into wine?*

***Experiment A****: Write out, side by side in two columns the text of the following Scripture:*

*• Mt 6:9-13*

*• Lk 11:2-4*

*What are the differences? Give reasons why this might be the case.*

***Experiment B****: Read the following scripture references.*

* *Mt 27:32-54*
* *Mk 15:21-39*
* *Lk 23:26-47*
* *Jn 19:17-30*

*Make 4 separate lists of the events in the order that they happened according to each Gospel.*

*1. Where do they differ/agree?*

*2. What did Jesus say on the Cross?*

*3. Who was present at the events?*

*4. What image of Jesus do you think each Evangelist is trying to portray (victor, servant, sacrifice etc….)*

***Individual Gospels.***

*Read the attached PDF “****The Four Gospels”***

*Answer the questions on each Gospel:*

*Mt – pg 21*

*Mk – pg 25*

*Lk – pg 32*

*Jn – pg 39*

*Read* ***“How the New Testament came into being”*** *and watch* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCy7NuujCLc> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0BrP8bqj0c>

*Create a bullet point summary of how and why what we call the New Testament came to exist.*