

Paula McCullough

CCEA

GCSE

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Revised Specification



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INTRODUCTION

EXERCISES

There are various exercises throughout the book to aid learning. They are labelled with different icons:



ACTIVITY

These exercises are designed to improve skills such as thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and being creative.



IN A GROUP

These group exercises are designed to encourage group participation and debate. They aim to improve skills such as communication and working with others.



FURTHER THINKING

These extended exercises are designed to encourage research and wider learning. They aim to improve skills such as using ICT, self-management, managing information, thinking, problem-solving and decision-making.



QUESTIONS

These are examples of the types of question that could be found on a GCSE exam paper. They aim to test knowledge, understanding and evaluation skills. These skills can be identified by the trigger or command words used in each question:

Knowledge

There are two types of knowledge questions in the examination. In the book they appear inside a yellow box:

1. Short answers worth 1 mark. They usually begin with one of the following words:

- Who...
- What...
- Name...
- Which...

2. Short paragraph answers worth 5 marks. They usually begin with one of the following words or phrases:

- Describe...
- Outline...

Understanding

These questions require short paragraph answers (of about 10 lines) and are worth 5 marks. They require an explanation and appear in a blue box. They usually begin with one of the following words:

- Explain...
- Why...
- How...

Evaluation

There are two types of evaluation questions in the examination. In the book they appear in an orange box:

1. Short paragraph answers (of about 10 lines) worth 5 marks. These questions are open-ended and take the following wording:

- “[A statement]” Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer.
- Do you think... Give reasons for your answer.

2. Extended paragraph answers (of about 1 page) worth 10 marks. These questions are open-ended and take the following wording:

“[A statement]” Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer showing that you have considered different points of view.

These questions require a response to the statement or question and are asking for knowledge and understanding to back up the evaluation (own opinion). You can respond positively (agree) or negatively (disagree); or combine both positive and negative points. It is the quality of the argument that attracts marks rather than the viewpoint adopted.

KEY TERMS

These boxes include useful explanations of the key terms in each chapter. They cover the terms included in CCEA’s GCSE Religious Studies glossary.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of each chapter there is a useful table to track learning. These tables are designed to check knowledge and understanding, and highlight any areas that need improvement.

GLOSSARY

Pages 78–80 provide a valuable glossary of key terms.

INDEX

Pages 82–83 provide a useful index of key words.

BIBLE TRANSLATION

For all Bible quotations and references, this book uses the Good News Bible.

CHAPTER | 2345

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD



The meaning of the terms theist, atheist and agnostic

THEIST

Theism is the belief that there is a God who is the creator and ruler of the universe and actively involved in the world. Theism can include **monotheism** (belief in one God) and **polytheism** (belief in more than one god). The only thing all theists have in common is that they believe that at least one god exists. A theist can follow any world religion or simply have their own thoughts about God.

KEY TERMS

Theist: A person who believes in the existence of God.

Monotheism: The belief in one God.

Polytheism: The belief in the existence of many gods. It is viewed by many as the opposite of monotheism.

ATHEIST

The word atheism comes from the Greek negative *a* which means ‘without,’ and *theos* which means ‘god.’ Atheism is the lack of belief in a god and/or the belief that there is no god. Atheists can be categorised into two groups:

- Strong atheists actively believe and state that no god exists. They argue against the existence of the Christian God or any other god. Strong atheists can be challenging in their conversations with theists and try to disprove theistic beliefs.

- Weak atheists simply exercise no faith in God. Some atheists maintain that there is a lack of evidence to affirm God’s existence. Others argue that the idea of God’s existence is illogical and contrary to the evidence at hand.

Although not all atheists hold the same views, there are some beliefs that many share:

- God, the devil and angels do not exist.
- There is no supernatural realm, including ghosts or spirits.
- Miracles cannot occur.
- Evolution is a scientific fact.



AGNOSTIC

The word agnostic comes from the Greek *agnostos*, which means ‘unknowable’. **Thomas Henry Huxley**, a British biologist, first used the term ‘agnostic’ in 1869 to describe someone who believes certain things are unknowable, such as the existence of God. An agnostic is not simply a person who has not made up their mind about the existence of

God or who cannot decide one way or another. An agnostic thinks it impossible to know whether or not God exists, or at least impossible at the present time. An agnostic suspends judgement and remains uncertain, saying that there is not enough evidence to confirm or deny the existence of God, the afterlife, miracles or anything else supernatural.

HUMANIST

Humanism is a system of thought that does not rely on belief in any gods or the teaching of any religious books. Humanists think that the answers to questions, such as ‘What is the purpose of life?’ come from what human beings have investigated or figured out. Humanists are atheist or agnostic.



Some Humanist beliefs include:

- People don't have to follow a religion to be moral. Being good and not harming others is a principle based on human nature and human experience.
- There is no life after death. Humanists think people only have one life so they should do the best they can while they are alive. This means treating other people with respect to make the world a better place for everyone.
- Society should be secular (non-religious). However, there should be religious toleration, with people free to practice their religion as long as it does not persecute or harm others.
- It is very important to maintain a sustainable environment for future generations and to show responsibility towards the other creatures on the planet.

KEY TERMS

Agnostic: A person who is uncertain if God exists or not because there is insufficient evidence.

Atheist: A person who believes that there are convincing reasons and arguments to conclude that God does not exist.

Humanist: A person who believes that human experience and rational thinking, rather than religious teachings, provide a moral code to live by.



IN A GROUP

Read the following statements and decide if the person is a theist, an atheist or agnostic.

“The man asked if I believed in God. ‘No.’ I replied ‘I know him. It’s different.’”

Jackie Pullinger (1944–), Christian missionary in Hong Kong.

“It is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any position.”

TH Huxley (1825–1895), English scientist.

“We are all atheists about most of the gods that humanity has ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further.”

Richard Dawkins (1941–), writer and broadcaster.

“Some scientists say that if the world were to stop revolving, we’d all disintegrate. But the world keeps on going. Something must be holding us all in place ... but what it is I couldn’t tell you.”

Charlie Chaplin (1889–1997), performer and comedian.

“Humanists do not see that there is any obvious purpose to the universe, but that it is a natural phenomenon with no design behind it.”

Stephen Fry (1957–), comedian, actor and broadcaster.

“I believe that there is a creator God: A God that created the universe and human life at the centre of it.”

Delia Smith (1941–), cookery writer and television presenter.

Arguments for the existence of God

Can the existence of God ever be proved or disproved, one way or the other? Many people have concluded that it is unreasonable to believe in God because there is no evidence for his existence.

On the other hand, some people argue that there is evidence to suggest that God exists. These are known as theistic arguments. Traditionally, these arguments are associated with Christianity. There are four of these arguments to study in detail on your course.

KEY TERMS

Belief: This is something that people accept to be true or exists when they may not necessarily have proof.

Existence: The state or fact of existing. This term is frequently used when talking about God.

Theistic argument: A religious argument claiming there is evidence for the existence of God.

Reason: The power to determine truth by rational means.

PHILOSOPHERS AND THINKERS

St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was an Italian Dominican monk, and a hugely influential philosopher, theologian and writer. His ideas still have influence in the Catholic Church today.

William Paley (1743–1805) was a Christian clergyman and philosopher who argued that the signs of design in the world justified belief in the existence of God.

Isaac Newton (1642–1727) was an English mathematician, physicist and theologian. He is most famous for his work on gravity and forces of motion.

David Hume (1711–1776) was a Scottish philosopher, historian and economist. He is especially known for his doubts about religious ideas and his agnostic views.

THE FIRST CAUSE ARGUMENT (also called the cosmological argument)

Everything that exists in the universe has been caused by something else. This means that the universe itself has been caused by someone or something. For theists, this is God.

The First Cause argument goes back to ancient Greek philosophy. It was developed by Arab scholars in the Middle Ages and used as an argument in Islam for the existence of God. The First Cause argument was first developed in a Christian context by **St Thomas Aquinas**. He was a Dominican monk who tried to use reason or logic to persuade people that God existed. Where did all the planets in the universe come from? What caused everything to happen? Aquinas argued that ‘nothing comes from nothing’. Everything in the universe has been brought into being, or caused, by something else.

Aquinas argued that everything is part of a chain of cause and effect. Something causes something to happen, which causes something else to happen, and so on. When traced back, the universe must have had a first cause, that is, something that made it all happen in the first place and set it in motion. This first cause must be eternal otherwise it, too, would need something to make it to exist. Aquinas called this first cause the ‘uncaused cause’. The uncaused cause is God. Aquinas concluded that because there is a universe, there has to be a God who made that universe. Therefore, God exists.

The First Cause argument can be illustrated with a line of dominoes. A domino falls because another one knocks it over; it then causes another to fall, and so on. If you go back to the first domino, it did not fall over by itself; it had to be pushed by someone or something.



PHILOSOPHERS AND THINKERS

Richard Swinburne (1934–) is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford. For more than 50 years he has been influential in putting forward philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was an English philosopher and a pioneer of modern scientific thought. He was also a very important political figure with influence in the royal court.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) was a British philosopher, mathematician, writer and social activist. He was born into an aristocratic family but described himself as a socialist. He was also a pacifist who actively campaigned against war and the use of nuclear weapons.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian doctor, who was the founder of psychoanalysis. This is a method of treating a troubled patient through dialogue. He was also considered an expert on the human mind and human behaviour.

KEY TERMS

First Cause argument: The theory that everything has a cause apart from God, who is the first cause, the 'uncaused'. This theory is used to argue in support of the existence of God. Also known as the cosmological argument.

Design argument: An argument that claims the existence of God can be inferred from the intricate design and complexity of the world in which people live. Also known as the teleological argument.

Religious experience: An experience that is caused by God rather than by ordinary or natural processes. Religious believers argue that a miracle is a type of religious experience. Also known as a spiritual experience.

Moral argument: An argument for the existence of God, based on the idea that all people have an instinctive sense of right and wrong that comes from God.

Strengths

This argument is a simple explanation, and many people would claim that a simple explanation is often the correct one. If this claim is to be believed, then it is logical to accept that God is the creator of the universe as it is the simplest explanation.

Scientific ideas, such as the Big Bang theory, can support the First Cause argument. If God is behind

the Big Bang (see page 23), then God is the 'first cause' that brought the universe into existence.

Rejecting this argument requires something more complicated. Logic states that things exist because something or someone has brought them into existence. So, since the universe exists, it's only logical to assume that someone had caused it to exist. This being must have been someone who was omnipotent, eternal, and who is absolutely self-sufficient – qualities that can be attributed to God.

Weaknesses

Some people look at this argument for the existence of God and conclude that it can just as easily prove that God *does not exist*. If the first cause can be eternal, then why can the whole chain of cause and effect not be eternal? They argue there is no logical need for an uncaused cause. Perhaps the universe had no beginning, or perhaps it just started and there was nothing to cause it to start.

This argument raises the question 'Who or what caused God?' To say that God is eternal and has always been in existence is not sufficient to prove God's existence to atheists or agnostics.

Evidence to support or reject this argument

Aquinas never called his argument a 'proof' for the existence of God, but a way of reasoning which could lead to a conclusion. It is a route to follow to explore the world we live in. Aquinas was a Catholic monk, already convinced of the existence of God, and he was addressing this argument to believers like himself. The problem is that it is not believers who need this argument, only unbelievers, who may not feel it necessary to examine who started everything in the universe. The First Cause argument only really makes sense to theists who already believe in God.

THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN (also called the teleological argument)

Looking at the world around us and seeing how beautiful and complex it is, proves it has been designed. This designer is God.

The argument from design is associated with

William Paley, a Christian philosopher. He argued that if people look at the universe around them, they will see that it has been very carefully designed. Think about the Earth in relation to the Sun. If the Earth was any closer or further away from the Sun it could not sustain life in all the variety people see around them. Many natural things have the appearance of being well thought out, for example, the design and order in a beehive or a snowflake. Why do all the things in nature seem to have the signs of being designed? Paley argued, “Design must have had a designer. That designer must have been a person. That person is God.”



William Paley used the example of a traditional wind-up watch to explain his argument:

“Imagine stumbling across a watch lying on the ground in an uninhabited place. You lift the watch and look at its intricate machinery of wheels and cogs. Do you think the watch was created by accident? You would be more inclined to think it was made by a skilled watchmaker. Yet the universe is far more intricate than a watch. Could it exist by chance? Does it require a designer? The implications are obvious. Something as complicated as the universe demands a designer who has put it together.”

To support his idea, Paley referred to the construction of a human eye. Like the watch in his

analogy, a human eye is a complex mechanism and to Paley it was obvious that the various parts of the eye had not come about by random chance. The efficient and well-designed structure are the work of a designer – God.

Strengths

The use of the watchmaker analogy in this argument makes it simple and straightforward to follow: it moves from something within human experience (a watch) to try to explain something beyond it (the creation of the universe). The argument is not necessarily incompatible with evolution and the Big Bang theory, as both of these processes could be part of the design of the universe. The concept of God as designer reinforces the idea that God is involved in the history of the universe and is therefore omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. The design argument gives a purpose to the universe, rather than having blind nature moving in a random direction. This in turn gives the universe meaning.

There are other examples to suggest design in the world around us, for example:

- DNA molecules, which contain all the information necessary to build a new creature, are so complex that many argue that they could not have arisen by chance alone.
- Scientist **Isaac Newton** used the thumbprint as evidence of the existence of God. Each person has an individual and unique thumbprint, even if they are identical twins. Newton argued that this pointed to a designer rather than random chance.

Weaknesses

Many people argue that the universe doesn't always seem so well-designed. There are major problems, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, floods and tsunamis, implying that there is no designer and that the Earth is simply the result of random chance. Darwin's theory of evolution (see page 21) presented a serious challenge to the argument from design, by saying that living things were not designed but have adapted to the world in order to survive.

Philosopher **David Hume** argued that there were big flaws in any argument for God based on design in the universe. Hume wrote his ideas in secret, as they challenged Christian teaching about God (a crime in the eighteenth century). They were published after he died. Hume's ideas have influenced a lot of people, particularly atheists and agnostics. Hume argued there were 'hidden assumptions' in the design argument, for example:

- Just because the design of the universe is complicated doesn't mean that there was just one designer who was responsible. The design argument might prove there are many gods; it does not prove there is one God.
- Even if we agree that God designed the universe, how do we know that God is still there? He might have designed the universe and gone off somewhere else to create something better.



- Pointing out examples of good design, like the human eye, does not necessarily mean that a good God designed these things. The world is often faulty and imperfect, so perhaps God is cruel and not good at all.

Evidence to support or reject this argument

Many people can find evidence for design in nature by observing the world around them. However, there have been some serious challenges from science, including the theory of evolution. Also, while the universe may seem well-designed, but there is much that could be called bad design, such as natural disasters and disease. This could lead to people questioning the wisdom and goodness of the designer.

In the late twentieth century, some philosophers thought this argument was worth reviving, calling it 'intelligent design'. This is the idea that all creatures were created more or less in their present forms by an intelligent designer. Supporters of this argument claim that some biological features are too complex to be the result of evolution.



QUESTIONS

1. (i) Name the argument for the existence of God associated with St Thomas Aquinas. [1]
(ii) What object did William Paley use in his argument for the existence of God? [1]
(iii) What is polytheism? [1]
(iv) What is monotheism? [1]
(v) Name one religion that is monotheistic. [1]
2. Explain the difference between a theist and an agnostic. [5]
3. Do you think there is evidence to support the idea of an intelligent designer? Give reasons for your answer. [5]
4. "God is not at work in the world today." Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer. [5]