Perceptions of Ultimate Reality

Revision Booklet

The Nature of God
Religious Language
Religious Experience
God and the Human Situation

Name: ________________________________
Section 1 – The Nature of God

A01 - The definitions and understandings of God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition:

- Simple God
- Eternal God – Timeless & Everlasting
- Omnipotent
- Omniscient
- Omnibenevolent
- Creator
- Transcendent & Immanent

A01 – Distinction between natural and revealed theology:

- Revealed theology
- Natural theology
- Propositional Revelation
- Non-propositional Revelation

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- Timeless or everlasting God?
- The issues raised by God’s omnipotence
- The issues raised by God’s omniscience
- The issues raised by God’s Omni-benevolence
- The issues raised by God as creator
- Is God transcendent or immanent?

A02 – the arguments for and against natural and revealed theology:

- Criticisms of revealed theology
- Response to the criticisms
- Criticisms of natural theology
- Response to the criticisms
A01 - The definitions and understandings of God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition

Simple God

- By ‘simple’ philosophers are referring to the traditional way in which God was thought of as not being changeable and not having parts or characteristics.
- When philosophers talk about God being simple they are saying that God does not consist of parts or characteristics.
- St. Augustine commented that God is unchangeable and thus cannot lose or gain any characteristics.
- St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of God being simple as God signifies ‘being/existing’.
- A simple God can be referred to in three ways:
  - *God is God* - God cannot be broken down or explained in terms of parts.
  - *God is unchanging / immutable* - God is unchanging because change involves a movement from being one thing to being another. Because God is perfect, God lacks nothing and is not capable of changing into something else
  - *God is immaterial* - if God is immaterial as argued by Aquinas and many other philosophers God does not have a body which has characteristics. God simply is God.
**Eternal God**

In Judaeo-Christian philosophy the concept of God being eternal can have two senses:
1. Eternal refers to God existing outside of time (Timeless)
2. Eternal refers to God having no beginning and no end, but time does pass for God (Everlasting)

**Timeless - Boethius:**

- The Christian belief that God is eternal was strongly influenced by the philosophy of Boethius.
- Boethius argued that God is changeless and does not exist in time.
- Boethius argued that God’s life is limitless and that God possesses the whole of his/her life eternally without end.
- For God there is no past, present and future.
- Instead, God exists eternally and all of time is present to God at the same time.
- God does not see the future as it happens; instead Boethius argues that all time is present to God ‘simultaneously’.
- “God ponders all things as if they were enacted in the present.”
- Boethius argues that God sees everything in ‘one glance’.
- The reason that Boethius believes that God is eternal is because God is simple and hence does not learn new things and time does not pass for God:
- “And God possesses this present instant comprehension of and sight of all things not from the issuing of future events but from his own simplicity.”

**Timeless – St Thomas Aquinas:**

- God exists unendingly without a beginning or conclusion.
- God must exist outside of time because time consists of parts and the notion of time involves beginnings and ends.
- God is the Creator of the universe and all life who always exists without end; time does not pass for God. Second,
- Aquinas, like Boethius, states that time involves living life ‘successively’. By this they mean that one event in life follows another, but for God this is not the case.
- God exists outside of time and the nature of God is to exist.
**Everlasting:**

- By ‘everlasting’ theologians mean that God always exists and will exist without end, however, time passes for God.
- Richard Swinburne supports the view that God is everlasting.
- He argues that the idea of events occurring simultaneously to God cannot be made sense of.
- Second, he suggests that belief in an everlasting God fits more satisfactorily with God as revealed in the Bible:
- “For myself I cannot make much sense of this [all events being simultaneously present to God] suggestion – for many reasons.”
- Nicholas Wolterstorff (1975) argued that God is everlasting because this is the picture of God we gain from the Bible.
- The picture in the Bible might suggest that God is everlasting rather than eternal. For example - The story of the Ten Plagues in Exodus.
- A further claim is that God can only be understood as Saviour and Redeemer worthy of worship if God is everlasting.
- Essentially, proponents of an everlasting God are appealing to the notion that God has directly revealed himself to his creation throughout history.

**Omnipotent God**

There are two main ways in which God’s Omnipotence has been viewed:
1. Omnipotence concerns God’s ability to do anything including the logically impossible.
2. Omnipotence concerns God’s ability to do what is logically possible for a perfect God to do.

**Logically Impossible:**

- René Descartes supported the view that God could do anything including what might seem impossible.
- He suggested God could change the fundamental laws of physics, which as far as we know are unchanging and apply universally.
- For example, it is logically impossible for God to perform certain miracles as they go against the laws of nature.
- However, imagine God as a designer of a computer game; the designer could change the game because the rules don’t apply to him.
- This is much the same for God if he created the universe.
Logically possible for a perfect God:

- This is a statement that God’s power is different from our powers.
- Aquinas argued that God’s power is omnipotent because it is infinite and the reason that God’s power is infinite is that God is not limited.
- This in turn relies on the idea that God is eternal and therefore not bound by the limitation of physical existence.
- Therefore if people ask a question such as ‘Can God climb a tree?’
- If God is eternal and not physical then God does not have a body with which to climb.
- This does not mean God lacks omnipotence it means it is illogical to ask the question.

Omniscient God

The definition of omniscience can be split up as follows:

1. **Omniscience**
   - This refers to God’s unlimited knowledge, including all history, past, present and future.
   - According to this view, God is outside of time and has knowledge of the whole of time from beginning to end.
   - This view fits in with belief that God is eternal.

2. **Limited omniscience**
   - God’s knowledge is limited to what it is logically possible to know or God chooses to limit what he knows to allow humans free will.
   - According to this view God’s knowledge changes over time, since God acquires new knowledge as events occur.
   - This view fits in with the belief that God is everlasting.
Omni-benevolent God

The concept of Omni-benevolence can be viewed in two ways:
1. God is perfect
2. God has a desire for perfection

- **God is perfect** - God must possess perfect goodness.
- Being perfectly good must entail being good in all ways at all times and towards all other beings.
- Many theologians and philosophers have tended to argue that God is indeed essentially good, which means that it is impossible for God either to will evil or to cause evil — everything that God wills and everything that God does is, necessarily, good.
- Moreover, this understanding of God suggests that goodness (morality) comes from God and God is the standard that we should strive for.
- **God has a desire for perfection** - While God is perfect, God is still capable of doing evil.
- This argument attempts to preserve a broader understanding God’s omnipotence; more importantly, however, it makes God’s failure to do evil more praiseworthy because that failure is due to a moral choice.
- If God does not do evil because God is incapable of doing evil, that would not seem to merit any praise or approval.
- This understanding suggests that morality does not come from God but from an external source that God also abides by.
**Creator God**

Within the Judeao-Christian tradition, there are three views of God as creator:

1. Creation ‘ex nihilo’ (creation out of nothing)
2. Creation ‘ex materia’ (creation from pre-existing material)
3. Creation ‘ex deo’ (creation out of the being of God)

- **Creation ‘ex nihilo’** - God created everything *ex nihilo* — out of nothing.
  - This expresses the important idea that God did not operate on pre-existing matter and is not an agent among other agents.
  - Instead, God is the absolute origin of all that exists — all matter, all energy, and all organisation.
  - There are many examples of God as this type of creator in the Bible:
    - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." *(Genesis 1:1)*
    - "Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?" *(Job 38:4)*

- **Creation ‘ex materia’** is a less common belief in Christianity, but it has its roots in the philosophy of Aristotle.
  - He held the view that the universe had always existed independently of God, who, in the creation imposed order and form upon it.
  - This view was developed in the Judeao-Christian tradition and the Bible includes some references that suggest to some philosophers that God worked on pre-existent matter.
    - "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." *(Genesis 1:2)*

- **Creation ‘ex deo** - out of the very substance of God.
  - God created the world from himself rather than from nothing or from some external pre-existing matter.
  - One modern expression of the doctrine of creation *ex deo* can be found in process theism, according to which the universe can be conceived as something akin to God’s “body.”
  - This means that God and our material reality are not wholly distinct:
    - God quite literally shares in our existence through our experiences of it. As we grow and develop, so does God.
Transcendent and Immanent God

Transcendent:

- To transcend means ‘to exist above and independent from.
- Being transcendent, God is both the unknown and unknowable.
- The Christian idea of a transcendent God has roots both in Judaism and in Plato’s philosophy.
- Plato’s philosophy emphasised the idea that God is so pure and perfect that it completely transcended all of our categories, ideas, and concepts.
- Furthermore, if God is absolutely perfect beyond all experience and understanding, then God must also be transcendent.
- If God is timeless (outside of time and space) and unchangeable, then God cannot also be with beings who are within time.
- Such a God must be wholly “other,” transcendent to everything we know.
- This notion is supported by Aquinas and his Cosmological Arguments – Aquinas describes God as an Unmoved Mover, Uncaused Cause and a Necessary being.
- These definitions are in direct opposition to contingent beings that exist within the universe.
- Therefore, in order for God to be unmoved, uncaused and necessary He must exist transcendently from the universe or else God too would be contingent and thus by definition dependant on something else for His existence.

Immanent:

- An immanent God, is one which exists within — within us, within the universe and, hence, very much a part of our existence.
- The idea of an immanent God can also be traced to both Judaism and Greek philosophers.
- The stories of the Old Testament depict a God who is very active in human affairs and the working of the universe.
- Christians, have often described a God who works within them and whose presence they can perceive immediately and personally.
- Interestingly, this notion is also supported by Aquinas and his Cosmological Arguments – Aquinas describes a God that is wholly distinct from time and space yet is its sustaining cause.
- This notion was developed from Aristotle and the idea that movement or change is sustained by the Unmoved Mover that exists separately to the world.
- Therefore, it is not unusual for Christians to suggest that God can be both transcendent and immanent.
A01 – Distinction between natural and revealed theology

Revelation in Philosophy

In philosophy of religion there are two different ways in which people understand the idea of revelation from God:
1. Revealed theology
2. Natural theology

Revealed Theology

• Revealed theology is based on the notion that God somehow directly reveals himself to his people.
• This revelation may come in the form of Holy Books, for Christians, the Old and New Testament.
• It can also be viewed as ‘supernatural’ where God reveals himself through religious experiences such as miracles or visions.
• Revealed theology takes it reasoning from the Bible as it highlights the idea that God has and will continue to directly reveal himself to humanity.
• The concept of revealed theology is perhaps most evident in the New Testament with the incarnation of God in Jesus.
• Jesus was fully human and fully divine.
• He held all the power and authority of God, but he voluntarily, for our sakes, subjected himself to the limitations of human existence.
• “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23)

Natural Theology

• This is the study of God based on the observation of nature.
• Over the years, the miraculous was downplayed as Christianity was reduced more and more to a “rational” philosophy.
• The tendency for philosophers to accept only natural theology led to the formulation of deism.
• Deists rely solely on natural theology for their knowledge of God, to the complete exclusion of revealed theology.
• To the deist, God is unknowable except through nature, and the Bible is unnecessary.
Propositional Revelation

- This refers to God revealing truths about his nature to his people.
- They are called ‘propositions’ to indicate that the revelations are statements of facts.
- The key to propositional revelation is that truths about God are revealed as propositions.
- Since the revelations communicate facts from God or about God, religious believers argue that the propositions are true – beyond debate or doubt.
- Jews and Christians would argue that the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses are revelation from God.
- They are not debatable, they are not open to question; they are facts laid down by God.
- The Propositional view of revelation is that it is infallible (cannot be wrong).

Non-propositional

- This refers to the idea that God does not reveal facts or truths to people; instead the religious believer recognises God acting in human history and human experience.
- For Example, a religious believer may come to see God in a beautiful natural scene.
- William Paley was famously impressed by the human eye.
- This revelation is indirect and a matter of interpretation.
- Hence the view is called non-propositional because the revelation is a human being’s recognition of God’s acts in the world.
- According to this view of revelation, a religious book such as the Bible is a witness to and record of how the revelation of God has been understood in history by religious believers.
- God has acted in history, and the perceptions of people who witness these revelatory acts are what are recorded in the Bible.
- An example of this is the signs given by Jesus; people witness the sign and interpret what they saw.
- Non-propositional revelation is a human’s free response to God rather than passively receiving God.
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<tr>
<th>Criticisms of an eternal (timeless) God</th>
<th>Response to the criticisms of an eternal (timeless) God</th>
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<td><strong>God knowing all time simultaneously is incoherent (it doesn’t make logical sense).</strong> Anthony Kenny famously argued that the notion of all time being simultaneously present to God is incoherent. The analogy of God viewing the entire creation at once much like viewing an entire film at once is not consistent with how humans understand time. Richard Swinburne echoed this criticism stating that he could not ‘make much sense’ of talk of all events being simultaneously present to God.</td>
<td><strong>God is ‘time free’.</strong> Abandon the idea of eternity involving events being simultaneously present to God. God should be considered to be ‘time free’. This means that time does not affect God, therefore it doesn’t limit God. This can be linked to the argument of God as a computer game designer; the rules of the game that apply to everyone who plays it do not apply to God.</td>
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<td><strong>How can God be personal and act in creation?</strong> The Bible implies that God is personal and acts in creation. For example God’s response to the Israelites prayer for freedom from slavery in Egypt and God intervening to help Joshua in battle. These biblical events imply that God is personal and acts in time.</td>
<td><strong>God is not a person.</strong> This response focuses on the idea that God should not be considered a person. Language that suggests God is acting personally in the Bible reflects the experience of people in past times who described their encounters with God using personal language. Philosophers alternatively would talk about God using language that is analogical or symbolic as God is immaterial.</td>
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<td><strong>How can God love his people and respond to them?</strong> Love involves a two-way process and ability to respond. If God is eternal how can God love his people and respond to them? In the Bible God responds to people in need out of love for them. Other philosophers have questioned how an eternal God can respond to people’s prayers.</td>
<td><strong>God’s love is displayed through the creation.</strong> God is loving because God changelessly sustains creation for people. This is because the universe and everything within it exists contingently, meaning it has been created by something else. God’s benevolence therefore, is displayed through the initial act of creation and the fact that God sustains his creation.</td>
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<td><strong>An everlasting God will be constantly surprised by his creation.</strong> Brian Davies has commented that an everlasting God would be continually surprised by his creation. The future for God is as much a surprise to him as it is to us. This does not fit with the idea that God is omnipotent and omniscient as it suggests he is lacking in some way.</td>
<td><strong>God has immanent omnipotence.</strong> An everlasting God is a part of, and acts within history. He exists through time like any other person, but has no beginning and no end. An everlasting God is unable to know the details of our future action, which leaves humans with free will. This everlasting concept of God has become more popular amongst believers and philosophers because it is far easier to comprehend humans having free will and is more compatible with religious experience.</td>
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<td><strong>An everlasting God is subject to change.</strong> Perfection does not allow for change, which means that God is changeless (immutable). However, change is a necessary consequence of any person who experiences the changing circumstances of the historical process. An everlasting God, by definition, experiences the changing circumstances of the historical process so this God is subject to change. This means therefore, that God is not perfect and contradicts the classical understanding.</td>
<td><strong>God does not change.</strong> Richard Swinburne argues that an everlasting God is far more palatable. An everlasting God does not lack any power; rather his powers are far more believable and logical. He disagrees with the idea that because God acts in the historical process God must change. Instead, he supports the idea that the only thing that changes is God’s omniscience. As time changes, he knows everything that is logically possible but does not infringe or impact upon our freewill. The notion of an everlasting God is also supported by the Bible and the Christian belief that God answers prayers and can become involved in time and space.</td>
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<td>Challenge to God’s omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence</td>
<td>Response to the challenge</td>
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<td><strong>Problem of Evil.</strong> The major issue raised by this collective understanding of God is the problem of evil and suffering. If God is omnipotent, then why does God not prevent evil and suffering occurring? If God is omniscient, then surely God would have known that evil and suffering would have occurred, as a result of creating this world? If God is benevolent, then surely God wants to remove evil and suffering from the world? Therefore, God is either not omnipotent, not omniscient, not benevolent or as David Hume would suggest God does not exist.</td>
<td><strong>Evil and suffering is not from God.</strong> God created all humans with free will so that is why evil things happen. Humans freely choose to bring about evil and suffering. God is powerful enough to create genuine freedom, knows the future but doesn’t interfere so humans remain free and loves as he creates us free and not like robots.</td>
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<td><strong>Omniscience and freedom.</strong> If God is omniscient, this implies that God knows everything I am doing all of the time. If this is correct it means I do not have a real choice as God already knows what I will do. The clear implication of this is that God has knowledge of future human actions. If God has knowledge of our future actions this would undermine claims that human beings have free will as God, being omniscient and perfect, cannot be mistaken.</td>
<td><strong>God is everlasting.</strong> A solution to the problem of omniscience and human free will is to suggest that God is everlasting rather than eternal. If God is everlasting this suggests that time passes, in some sense, for God. Given that time passes, God learns about the future as it unfolds. Philosophers have suggested that the past is closed and unchangeable – it cannot be different. The future is open and not necessary, as it has not yet happened. This means God is aware of all past events and all present events. He does not know the future as it hasn’t happened yet.</td>
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<td><strong>Moral and Natural Evil.</strong> The world contains both moral and natural evil. Therefore, if God is perfectly good then why does he allow this suffering to take place? The free will defence may explain moral evil, however, natural evil is not as easily explained away and it leaves God looking far from perfect. The knock on effect of this challenge is simply to deny the existence of God.</td>
<td><strong>Miracles and eternal life through Jesus’ sacrifice.</strong> The miracles that are recorded in the Bible highlight that God acts for the benefit of people. Furthermore, miracles that have been recorded in recent history also show that God will contravene the laws of nature if he feels it is necessary. In addition, human suffering can be explained in terms of God providing the most loving act through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus.</td>
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Challenge to God as creator:

- If God created everything then God created evil.
- If we accept that God is an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent creator of the universe then we are left with the difficult problem of why the creation clearly contains evil and suffering.
- We can accuse God of doing a very poor job with creation. If we bought an expensive car such as a Ferrari and the engine blew on its first drive, you would be right to complain and expect reimbursement; the same is true of God if we accept this understanding of him.
- Far from perfect creator.
- The Oxford English dictionary defines perfection as “having all the required or desirable elements, qualities, or characteristics; as good as it is possible to be” – can we describe God and his creation “as good as it is possible to be”; David Hume would say categorically no.
- “Such a God would not possibly allow evil to exist.” If God created the universe, it begs the questions what created God?
- If we follow the logic of Aquinas and his argument of causation (cosmological argument) it is very difficult to comprehend logically the notion of an uncaused cause.
- Furthermore, we can quite simply ask the logical question, who or what caused God.
- ‘Ex nihilo’ is incoherent.
- How can a human, in their limited experience and understanding accept the concept of something being created from nothing?
**Challenge to an immanent God**

**Verification** - Is it possible to verify (prove) the accounts of God’s immanence in the Bible or the apparent miracles that have took place throughout history. From an empirical viewpoint, we lack any way of proving these events through observation. If we take the view that the Bible is a testament of faith rather than a historically accurate text accepting God as directly revealing himself is empirically meaningless.

**Coherence of the Triune God** - The stumbling block for many philosophers regarding the Trinity is the logic behind it. However, if we look at the argument below we can see the difficulty in the logic. The doctrine of the Trinity states that God is three independent beings who are one being. The principle of coherence states:

1. It is not possible for three oranges to be one orange
2. It is not possible for a father to be a son; this contradicts the definitions of both father and son. The son is defined as offspring of a father not an ‘onspring’ as it were.
3. Sons are by definition created by their fathers, a son cannot be uncreated.

**Arguments in favor of an immanent God**

**Scriptures** – The major argument in favour of God’s immanence comes from revealed theology. This is an idea that God directly reveals himself to the world. The two main ways in which this is recognised in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is through scripture (Bible) and religious experiences (visions and voices). The sheer number of examples within the Bible and history that refer to God acting on behalf of his creation add strength to the argument that God is most definitely immanent in the universe.

**The Trinity** - From a Roman Catholic viewpoint the strongest evidence for God’s immanence is not simply the written word of the Bible or the apparent experiences people have had. The strongest is Jesus and the Holy Spirit – two parts of the Holy Trinity. In Catholic theology, Christ and the Holy Spirit immanently reveal themselves; God the Father only reveals himself immanently explicitly through the Son and Spirit.
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<th>Arguments against a transcendent God</th>
<th>Arguments in favour of a transcendent God</th>
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<td><strong>Intimately Personal God</strong> - Judaeo-Christian theology advocates that humans are able to enter in a personal and loving relationship with God. In simple terms, if God exists ‘above and independent’ from the world then how can this be possible. The dictionary defines a relationship as ‘The way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected’ – if we use the analogy of a couple who are married yet live at the opposite sides of the world we may say they have a relationship but it is by no means personal or intimate.</td>
<td><strong>The nature of God</strong> – if God is a creator then he has to exist outside the universe. It would be logically impossible for the creator to exist within the thing that they created. Furthermore, if God is simple and timeless then again by definition God must exist outside of the universe or He would be affected by time.</td>
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<td><strong>Above and beyond understanding</strong> - The assertion that a transcendent God surpasses our understanding implies that we have no way of actually knowing anything about God. If we know nothing about God then by definition we don’t know if God exists. A transcendent God is, therefore, so detached from the world that he simply becomes a human invention created to answer the most puzzling of questions regarding life and its meaning.</td>
<td><strong>Scriptures and Religious Experience</strong> - In much the same way that the Bible and religious experiences provide evidence of God acting immanently they also provide as much evidence to suggest that God is transcendent. The Old and New Testament make many references to God existing above:</td>
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<td><strong>Verification</strong> – if God exists above and beyond the universe then we cannot verify God due to a lack of experience and observation. Therefore, to make a statement that God is transcendent is meaningless.</td>
<td><strong>The Lord is “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>“You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.”</strong></td>
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<td>Furthermore, if we accept William James’ classification of a mystical/religious experience then we have to accept that God surpasses our understanding and description. William James referred to this as ineffability – ‘too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words’. Therefore, God must exist transcendently or we would have the ability to understand and describe God in human language.</td>
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# A02 - the arguments for and against natural and revealed theology

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<th>Response to the criticisms of revealed theology (propositional revelation)</th>
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<td><strong>How can we verify revealed theology?</strong> There is no way to verify or prove that propositional revelations happen. The Logical positivists (empiricists) would claim therefore that the propositions were entirely meaningless because there is no way of establishing proof of revelations of God.</td>
<td><strong>Experience is the best form of verification.</strong> Using facts is a powerful means of convincing someone of the veracity of something. Facts can come from your reading, observation, or importantly personal experience. Facts cannot be disputed and this makes them a strong form of evidence. The philosopher William James accepted this and suggested the experience was the final arbiter of truth, or in other words the evidence proves something. Therefore, as revealed theology is direct is should be accepted.</td>
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<td><strong>Liberal interpretation of scriptures.</strong> Many liberal Christians reject the infallibility of biblical accounts. Instead, many Christians read the scriptures symbolically as opposed to literally due to the difficulties a literal interpretation can cause for rational belief. For example, the creation accounts in Genesis 1 &amp; 2. Therefore, if we are to adopt a liberal reading of the text can we actually accept propositional revelation?</td>
<td><strong>Bible is infallible word of God.</strong> For many Christians we should accept revealed scriptural theology because quite simply the Bible is the literal and direct word of God. God by definition is perfect therefore the Bible is perfect and should be accepted without question. According to Kant, if a statement is analytic then it is true by definition. If we accept the statement ‘God is perfect’ and then consider the statement ‘The Bible is the word of God’ then by definition it is truth as we accept that God cannot be wrong (infallible).</td>
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<td><strong>Different revelations among religions.</strong> Different religions claim to have received propositional revelations, yet sometimes the truth claims of different religions conflict. How can these contradictions be resolved? How can we know which truth claim is correct?</td>
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<td><strong>Issues of accuracy.</strong> Propositional revelations of God may not be recorded accurately as the human mind makes mistakes. This has serious connotations for the reliability of the person making the statement. Furthermore, how can we know which revelations are true propositions?</td>
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Section 2 – Religious Language

A01 - The nature of religious language / God talk and how it can be used to understand God:

- What is religious language / God talk
- Thomas Aquinas – Analogy
- Ian Ramsey – Models & Qualifiers
- The Via Negativa
- Paul Tillich – Symbol
- Gerry Hughes – Metaphor
- H.J. Richards - Myth

A01 – How God is represented in art / symbol and the significance of these for people today as they seek to know an understand God:

- Examples of God in art
- How art / symbol can lead to a better understanding of God

A02 – the strengths and weaknesses of the different forms of religious language:

- Analogy
- Via Negativa
- Symbol
- Myth & Metaphor

A02 – arguments for and against religious language as meaningful:

- The Logical Positivists (Vienna Circle)
- Verification principle
- Strong and weak verification
- The Falsification principle
- R.M. Hare
- Basil Mitchell
- John Hick – Eschatological Verification
- RB Braithwaite: Religious language as a moral assertion
- Ludwig Wittgenstein and Language Games
What is Religious Language / God Talk?

- Religious language / God talk refers to the written and spoken language typically used by religious believers when they talk about God.
- The term also covers the language used in sacred texts and in worship and prayer.

What is the debate?

- The basic question behind the religious language debate is ‘what can be said about God?’
- The religious language debate is not concerned with whether or not God exists, or what God is like or why there is evil in the world.
- It is solely concerned with working out whether or not religious language means anything. In the debate about religious language, it is important that broadly speaking, there are two types of language, cognitive and non-cognitive.

1. Cognitive language conveys facts i.e. things that we can know or be cognisant of.
2. Non-cognitive language, predictably, conveys information that is not factual; emotions, feelings and metaphysical claims.
Analogy:

• An analogy is an attempt to explain the meaning of something which is difficult to understand.
• It does this in light of a comparison with something else which is within our frame of reference.
• One of the most famous theological analogies is Paley’s analogy of the watch, where he tries to explain the role of God as creator.
• We have no direct experience of God as a creator, but Paley claimed it is analogical to a watchmaker who designs an intricate timepiece for a purpose.
• The most famous early proponent of speaking about God in analogical terms was St Thomas Aquinas.

• Aquinas rejected *univocal* and *equivocal* language when talking about God.
• **Univocal language** is where words are used to mean the same things in all the situations where they are used e.g. black board, black hat, and black car.
• **Equivocal language** is where words are used to mean different things in different contexts e.g. ‘gay’ can be taken to mean ‘jolly’, ‘homosexual’ or more recently ‘rubbish’.
• Thus when we say ‘God is good’ we need to know how we are using the word ‘good’ in that sentence.
• If we are speaking univocally, we are claiming that God is good in the same way humans are.
• Aquinas rejected this as he believed God to be perfect and because of this, imperfect humans cannot be good in the same way that God is.
• Alternatively, if we are speaking equivocally, we mean that God is good in a totally different way to humans.
• Aquinas rejected this too.
• He argued that if we speak equivocally about God, we cannot profess to know anything about him as we are saying that the language we use to describe humans or the experienced world around us, does not apply to God.
• Aquinas believed that there was a ‘middle way’, a way of talking meaningfully about God.
• This middle way, was analogy.
The analogy of attribution:

- Aquinas believed it was possible to work out the nature of God by examining his creation.
- Aquinas took it for granted that the world was created by God and for him, the link between creator and created order was clear.
- In the analogy of attribution, Aquinas takes as his starting point the idea that God is the source of all things in the universe and that God is universally perfect.
- He then goes on to argue that all beings in the universe in some way imitate God according to their mode of existence:
  - Aquinas uses the example of a bull to illustrate this point.
  - It is possible to determine the health of an animal by examining its urine.
  - Aquinas said that if a bull’s urine is healthy, then we can determine that the bull will be healthy.
  - Obviously however, the health of the bull is more completely and perfectly within the bull itself and is only reflected in the urine produced by the bull.
  - In the same way God is the source of qualities in the universe and God possesses these qualities first and most perfectly.

In simpler terms:

- The ‘Analogy of Attribution’ means words such as just and good may be applied to God as well as human beings.
- When we use these words we are saying that a person has the quality of being good/just.
- As God created the world, He is revealed through it and this gives a point of comparison.
- We can know what it is for a person to be good or wise and from the way God is revealed in the world we can use these words to describe Him.
- What it means for God to be good is unclear but we deduce from the world that God is good.
- So, if we say, 'God is good'; 'The Pope is good', good is being used in similar senses.
- As we can see goodness in human beings this means that God is the source of goodness as He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things.
- Important to remember that Aquinas is not talking about good in a human, moral sense as God is infallible.
- God has the quality of being good, whatever that means for Him.
Analogy of Proportion:

- Analogy of proportion refers to the nature of what something is.
- Aquinas uses the example of ‘good’ applied to God.
- If you say that ‘a car is good’, you are saying that the car measures up to the idea of what a good car should be like.
- If you say that someone is a good person, the word ‘good’ is saying that the person somehow matches certain ideals of what a good person is.
- In the case of the statement ‘God is good’, ‘good’ is used to indicate that God measures up to what it is for God to be God.
- God is described by Aquinas as perfectly good, as in Aquinas’ thinking God is unchangeable and eternal.
- John Hick has given a useful example to help to illustrate this idea:
- ‘Consider the term ‘faithful’. A man or a woman can be faithful, and this shows in particular patterns of speech, behaviour and so on. We can also say that a dog is faithful. Clearly there is a great difference between the faithfulness of a man or woman and that of a dog, yet there is a recognisable similarity or analogy.
- The basic idea is that we possess qualities like those of God (goodness, wisdom, faithfulness etc) because we were created in his image and likeness, but because we are inferior to God, we possess those qualities in lesser proportion to God.
Ian Ramsey – Models and Qualifiers:

- Ramsey suggested that words and titles applied to God function as ‘models’.
- By ‘qualifiers’ Ramsey meant that every model has some limits; for example, a model is not necessarily like the original in all respects.
- Ramsey suggested that eventually a model can help a person to gain real insight and understand more clearly what is being talked about.
- He applied his idea of ‘models’ and ‘qualifiers’ to religion to suggest that when we use religious language to describe God, the language functions as a ‘model’.
- If we say that **God is good**, the model is the word **goodness**.
- As human beings, we have an understanding of the nature of goodness and when applied to God it is a model for our understanding the nature of God’s goodness.
- However, as we are dealing with God, the model word requires adaptation, thus the term "qualifiers".
- We recognise that God cannot be literally "good", in our sense of word, thus we need to qualify the statement the "God is good" by adding the qualifier "infinitely".
- The statement now reads **God is infinitely good**. In this way, we can develop a greater insight into the nature of God’s goodness.

The Via Negativa – The Way of Negation:

- The ‘Via Negativa’ is a form of theology, also sometimes called ‘The Way of Negation’ or ‘Negative Way’.
- According to the philosophy behind the ‘via negativa’, God is not an object in the universe and, therefore, it is not possible to describe God through words and concepts which are necessarily limiting.
- It is; instead, better to talk about God based upon what God is not. The ‘via negativa’ is, therefore, a means of coming to know God and what God is through negation.
- The key idea of people who support the ‘via negativa’ is that, ultimately, language cannot describe God.
- God is beyond human comprehension, totally ineffable.
- As Basil the Great advocates: “*Our intellect is weak but our tongue is even weaker.*”
- In brief, negative theology is an attempt to achieve unity with God by gaining knowledge of what God is not, rather than by describing what God is.
- Within Christianity the idea of the via negativa has been very influential.
- Not only does it emphasise the transcendence and otherness of God; the language has also been used by people who have religious experiences to describe the ineffable nature of their experiences.
Paul Tillich – Symbol:

- Paul Tillich was a theologian who believed that it is possible to speak meaningfully about concepts such as God through the use of symbol.
- Paul Tillich starts by making a distinction between signs and symbols.
- Tillich said that signs do not participate in what they symbolise.
- This means that without knowing what the signs mean, they would make no sense.
- Symbols on the other hand are powerful and they actually take part in the power and meaning of what they symbolise.
- If you look at the cross, this is the symbol of Christianity.
- Not only does it stand as a marker for that religion, but it also makes a powerful statement.
- It immediately reminds Christians of the sacrifice they believe Jesus to have made on the cross for them; it also reminds them of their beliefs about God and his plan for the salvation of human beings.
- In this way, a symbol communicates much more powerfully with us.
- Tillich believed that religious language operates as a symbol.
- Tillich outlined four main functions that symbols perform:
  1. They point to something beyond themselves.
  2. They participate in that to which they point.
  3. Symbols open up levels of reality that otherwise are closed to us.
  4. They also open up the levels and dimensions of the soul that correspond to those levels of reality.
- Tillich maintained that religious language is a symbolic way of pointing towards the ultimate reality, the vision of God which he called ‘Being-Itself.’
- Being-Itself is that upon which everything else depends for its being and Tillich believed that we came to knowledge of this through symbols which direct us to it.
- Tillich uses the example of a painting. He says:
  - “it is possible to describe a painting but the description is useless without having the painting there.”
- Tillich believes that religious language works in the same way.
- It is possible to describe God but the description becomes more meaningful with a visual symbol.
Gerry Hughes – Metaphor:

- An alternative way of using religious language / God talk is through the device of metaphor.
- A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in “A mighty fortress is our God.”
- Another metaphor applied to God is ‘God is my rock’
- No serious theologian would think that God is literally a rock.
- Metaphors can be used to refer to God without describing God; they can be helpful ways of talking about God which do not actually describe what God is.
- Gerry Hughes maintains that it is preferable to use metaphorical language about God as it is less likely to mislead and it does not even try to describe God.
- Hughes claims that science uses metaphors as a way to try to understand new concepts – in describing black holes science lacks an adequate vocabulary and resorts to metaphor.
- Light for instance may be described as a wave; it is not a wave but this is helpful way of talking about light.
- Brought together, a number of metaphors may come closer to capturing the reality of God – albeit without describing it.
- It follows that focusing on too narrow a range of metaphor could limit God.
- In Islam God is said to have 99 names and one name that cannot be known thus emphasising the many ways of talking about God.

H.J. Richards – Myth:

- Myths communicate different ideas about God.
- Myths such as the Genesis creation stories communicate a deep and real awareness of God as creator and of human beings’ place in creation.
- Myths are important, as they preserve and hand on the cultural identity of a group in story form.
- The fact that a myth is a form of story makes it retellable and easier to communicate than, for example, a philosophical theory.
- In the case of religious myths, the myth may point to and reveal something about God, in like manner to a symbol.
- The historical truth or not of the events recorded in a myth does not stop a myth communicating values to people.
H.J. Richards:

- “Myths were never proposed as ‘tall stories’; they are better described as deep stories. They were never mean to be taken literally, like newspaper reports. On the other hand, they were meant to be taken most seriously because they deal with realities so profound that no scientific language can express them”

- “Myths are the superhuman stories through which humans interpret the world and understand their place in it...in this sense, myths deal with insights far deeper than could be provided by history or logic or science”

- “Myths, then are ‘true’ not in the sense that what they speak of actually happened, or will happen, but in the same sense that they express truly what is always happening”
A01 – How God is represented in art / symbol and the significance of these for people today as they seek to know and understand God

The Creation of Adam:

- The Creation of Adam is a section of Michelangelo’s fresco Sistine Chapel ceiling painted in 1511.
- It is traditionally thought to illustrate the Biblical creation story from the Book of Genesis in which God breathes life into Adam, the first man.
- God is depicted as an elderly white-bearded man wrapped in a swirling cloak while Adam, on the lower left, is completely nude.
- The fact that God is depicted as an elderly figure is significant; with age comes inevitable wisdom.
- In no way is God portrayed as a frail old man, in fact this is quite the contrary.
- God is shown as a wise and powerful figure whose right arm is outstretched to impart the spark of life from his own finger into that of Adam.
- His left arm is extended in a pose mirroring God’s, a reminder that man is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26).
- Another point is that Adam’s finger and God’s finger are not touching.
- It gives the impression that God, the giver of life, is reaching out to Adam and Adam is receiving.

The All-Seeing Eye of God by Unknown (Russian 16th Century):

- The ‘All-Seeing eye’ of God which was introduced late, around the 16th century, into Russian icon painting) is an attempt to portray the omniscience of God.
- In the four corners, are the symbols of the four Gospels writers God is held to have inspired.
- God the Father, surrounded by gold, is portrayed in the semi-circle at the top, below him is Mary, the mediator between God and human beings and Jesus in the centre of the icon – the Alpha and Omega holding out his hands in blessing.
- The circle in which their eyes are set represents the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity.
- The success of the icon is clearly through the imagery of omniscience.
- This is an attribute of God that many people struggle with, especially if we are to accept God’s total or unlimited omniscience.
- However, if we read this view of God in line with this icon we that God’s eye (vision) covers the entirety of the icon much as it does the entirety of the universe.
The significance art can have for people today:

- It is a mistake to think of ‘religious language / God talk’ purely in terms of spoken language.
- Therefore, art contains a significance for people today in that it allows people to deepen their relationship and most importantly (in this case) their understanding of God.
- We look to art and symbol to find a way in which God can be understood without the limitations of the written word.
- Art is significant because it can be used to show meaning.
- People can use art to show themes/ideas such as love, truth, peace and misery.
- Art can be meaningful because of the images that can be collected into one small area.
- It is then up to the person to look at this form of art and to think about it and to make a conclusion about it.
- The fact that art is open to interpretation means that we can construct an understanding of God that is meaningful to the individual.
- In much the same way that Wittgenstein advocates language as a game; art can also be viewed in this way.
- If you were to show the image of ‘The all-seeing eye of God’ to theist then immediately they would understand the imagery of God’s omniscience.
## A02 – the strengths and weaknesses of the different forms of religious language

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments against analogy as religious language</th>
<th>Arguments in favour of analogy as religious language</th>
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<td><strong>Aquinas’ analogy argument rests on God having created the world.</strong> Aquinas based his work upon a number of assumptions that came from his religious belief. If one doesn’t accept his assumptions, one doesn’t have to accept the idea that we can work out what God is like by examining a creation that may or may not be his.</td>
<td><strong>Analogy offers a frame of reference.</strong> Analogy allows us to use things in our frame of reference to understand something outside it. For example, if we again look at William Paley’s analogy of the watch we are given a frame in which we can understand God as a designer of the world.</td>
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<td><strong>Analogy picks some qualities, but not others.</strong> The world also comprises evil, does God possess these qualities as well?</td>
<td><strong>Empirical base.</strong> Analogy has an empirical base - the world. This means that if we accept that God created the world as Aquinas did then we can use the world in our language to describe God. The analogy of attribution therefore we can use terms such as good or loving for God because God is the source of goodness and love.</td>
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<td><strong>Analogy can tell us nothing new about God.</strong> As it is based upon things that are already in existence, it is rather like saying that we can work out everything about a car designer from the car that he has designed. The bridge that Aquinas attempts to create between things known and unknown is built of imaginary blocks.</td>
<td><strong>Avoids anthropomorphising God.</strong> Analogy does this because the words used about God are not meant to be taken literally. This means that when we use a human term such as ‘seeing’ when describing God’s omniscience this is purely to make humans aware of God’s abilities.</td>
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<td><strong>Analogy cannot be verified.</strong> No cognitive / factual meaning arises from this type of religious language. The object one is trying to illustrate by use of analogy cannot be empirically verified, therefore the object of the statement is meaningless.</td>
<td><strong>Analogy is helpful.</strong> It is helpful because it can explain difficult concepts such as God’s agapeic love. Agape is a form of unconditional love and when this term is used it can be difficult to conceptualise (understand) how this love is shown.</td>
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<td>Arguments against the ‘via negativa’ as a form of religious language</td>
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<td>If we speak of God only negatively, then it is still not very easy for the person who has no experience of God to know what we mean. To say that white is ‘the opposite of black’ does not give much help to the person who has never seen and has no concept of white. God cannot be reached by process of elimination, if God is outside our experience.</td>
<td>The ‘via negativa’ is a good way of recognising that we have to go beyond our normal everyday experiences in order to experience God. It does not place a limit on God by giving a point of reference that is within the physical world.</td>
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<td>Anthony Flew in his essay ‘Theology and Falsification’ argued that if we try to explain God by saying that he is invisible, soundless, incorporeal and so on, there is very little difference between our definition of God and our definition of nothingness; Flew suggests that we argue God out of existence by a ‘thousand qualifications’.</td>
<td>It is a very strong way of conveying the essential otherness and mystery of God. In other ways it does not anthropomorphise God as it underlines the belief that God is not like us.</td>
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<td>Many of the holy scriptures of the world’s religions do make positive statements about God. For example, the Bible makes positive claims that God is a king, judge, a father, a shepherd, a rock. It is believed that Holy Scripture comes from God, then this would suggest that it can be right and appropriate to make positive claims about God.</td>
<td>It is a means by which we can say something about God, or about reality, which is literally true and does not need interpretation. Unlike symbols, analogy or myth, the ‘via negativa’ applies equally well in different cultures and in different periods of history. If we do not use figurative language, which necessarily demands interpretation, we can say things which are understandable and which mean the same things across cultures and generations.</td>
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<td>Arguments opposing Symbol as Religious Language</td>
<td>Arguments supporting symbol as religious language</td>
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<td><strong>Symbols may not always be appropriate and can lose their value / original meaning over time.</strong> For example, consider the swastika symbol. It began as a Hindu symbol used to represent good fortune, luck and well being. However, the symbol has changed dramatically due to its association with Adolph Hitler and the Nazi Party.</td>
<td><strong>J.R. Randall – The significance of symbols.</strong> Symbols have a unique function – they are able to stir strong emotion and bind communities together through a common response to faith.</td>
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<td><strong>How can religious symbols successfully point to something that is beyond human experience?</strong> Tillich argues that religious symbols successfully point to an understanding of God which is beyond our experience. The phrase ‘beyond human understanding’ however, highlights that no form of human language (symbols included) could give insight to God.</td>
<td><strong>Carl Jung – Symbols as innate archetypes.</strong> In his book ‘Man and Symbols’, Jung argues that particular symbols have appeared time and time again throughout history. ‘God’ is an archetype, a symbol of wholeness and perfection. Though remember, Jung is not necessarily saying God actually exists, the point here is that symbols have great value to humans as they are innate and point beyond their mere depiction.</td>
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<td><strong>It may give the wrong insights about the Ultimate reality.</strong> For example, the sanctuary lamp found within a Catholic Church is a light which is constantly lit. This symbol highlights the presence of God within a Church. For a Roman Catholic this is a terrifically important symbol and one that highlights God’s omnipresence. However, for a non-religious person the candle is a light, nothing more. Therefore, it does not point beyond its original function.</td>
<td><strong>Life is more than just facts.</strong> Life is not just factual and intellectual; it is also emotional and symbols best describe this. They help us describe the indescribable, for example Heaven or God Himself. Tillich believes they unlock dimensions of our soul that would otherwise remain closed. If we accept the soul as some part of our mind (brain) then symbols could be the key to unlocking something that we find difficult to understand.</td>
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<td><strong>Paul Edwards argues symbols do not convey factual knowledge so are meaningless.</strong> If symbols cannot be verified or falsified, they do not contain factual knowledge and so are meaningless.</td>
<td><strong>Symbols can evolve.</strong> Symbols can often hold more power and meaning than statements. They can change and fit with different societies and cultures. If the symbol no longer fits we can move to another symbol and the understanding we seek continues.</td>
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<td>Arguments opposing ‘Myth’ as religious language</td>
<td>Strengths of using myth to talk about God</td>
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<td>The main criticism leveled by the sciences of religious language is that it is not supported by empirical evidence. Myths are a form of religious language and therefore open to the same criticism. Myths are essentially lies and falsehoods. They may contain important messages or themes but they don’t contain literal truths which is of major importance to the atheist. A.J. Ayer would say myth like all other forms of religious language is meaningless because there is no method of verification. We should simply look upon them as fictional accounts and not look to find any meaning from them. Myths are so far removed from reality that the logical mind cannot be expected to accept them. Stories of cosmic battles between good and evil and one man’s death saving the world belong more to Hollywood than reality. Therefore, as with Ayer’s point above we should perhaps accept them as tall tales rather than having any deep significance. The themes of myths are the creation of modern scholars, not the people who created the myths in the first place. So can we really say the believers were using religious language as myth, or are we only now imposing such an interpretation on belief?</td>
<td>Myths allow humans to gain an insight into cosmological and existential questions that are difficult to express in cognitive terms. In other words we can understand and explain our place in the universe and how we come to exist. Myths are never meant to be taken literally. It is the message they convey which is more important. This means myths are never out of date. They provide us with ideas that stand the test of time and the threat of science. E.g. the story of the day of the Day of Judgement may never come true but the idea that everyone should strive to be good and avoid evil is a meaningful teaching. The English Philosopher Richard Braithwaite said religious myths are meaningful because they provide us with the motivation to lead a moral life. The American Philosopher John Herman Randall agreed with Braithwaite. He said myths help to bind communities together. Myths are the vehicles in which we can describe the indescribable or in the words of William James the ineffable. Therefore, myths are one of the strongest forms of religious language as they give us a means through stories to understand God. If you accept myths for what they are the issue of verification levelled by Anthony Flew and A.J. Ayer become redundant. This is because the stories are not meant to be factually significant.</td>
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A02 – arguments against religious language as meaningful

Logical Positivism:

- In the 1920’s a group of philosophers developed a form of scientific reasoning known as **Logical Positivism**.
- They became commonly known as the Vienna Circle.
- The members of the Vienna Circle were all convinced that a great many people, especially philosophers and theologians, spend a great deal of time either speaking or encouraging others to speak in a language that is absolute nonsense.
- They saw their job as freeing people from this factually meaningless chatter by applying some of the principles of science to language.
- They identified only two types of sentence where this was possible:

  1. Analytic Statements:

    **A triangle has three sides**
    
    **All husbands are married**
    
    - These sorts of statements don’t say much about the world.
    - They simply tell us what words mean.
    - However, they are factually meaningful because you can check that they are true by analysing the words being used (hence the term analytic).

  2. Synthetic Statements:

    **My RE teacher has bad breath**
    
    **If I punch you on the nose it will break and become distorted**
    
    - These statements are also trying to say something about the world and they are factually meaningful because their truth or falsity can also be checked.

- There are 3 main Logical Positivist challenges to religious language:
  - Strong verification, weak verification and falsification
Strong Verification Principle:

- This principle asserts that statements which attempt to say something about the world (make factual statements) are only meaningful if their truth or falsity can be conclusively proved (verified) by either experience or observation.
- Verificationists hold that non cognitive, metaphysical statements (i.e. statements about things beyond reality such as God, heaven, angels) are completely meaningless as we have no way of verifying whether or not these statements are meaningful.
- As A J Ayer puts it:
  - “The term ‘god’ is a metaphysical term. And if ‘god’ is a metaphysical term, then it cannot even be probable that God exists.”
- Ayer does not just deny God’s existence, he denies the possibility of God’s existence altogether on the grounds that there is no way of empirically verifying his existence.
- Ayer would disagree with all of the traditional arguments for the existence of God, as none of them conclusively and empirically prove the existence of God.

- However, for many logical positivists, even A.J. Ayer himself the problem with this strong principle is that since the requirement is for conclusive proof through observation or experience then it condemns as meaningless too many sentences that are obviously meaningful.
- For example: All sweaty socks stink
- Now most people would probably accept that this statement is meaningful and correct.
- However, The Strong Version of the Verification Principle would condemn it as factually meaningless because I am unable to conclusively verify it as true by either observation or experience because conclusive proof could only be obtained if I could experience (smell) all past, present and future sweaty socks in the entire world.
- It is these sorts of problems which produced a Weaker Version of the Verification Principle.
Weak Verification Principle:

- This weaker verification principle attempted to address the apparent flaws of the strong version by making two modifications.
  - **Modification one:**
    - It recognised that it is not always possible in practice to gather all the evidence required for conclusive proof.
    - So it asserted that statements which attempt to say something about the world are meaningful if it is possible *in principle* to gather the evidence i.e. do we know how such statements could be verified?
  - **Modification two:**
    - It is also recognised that conclusive proof is not always possible and so it asserted that statements which attempt to say something about the world are factually meaningful if experience and observation can establish statements as probable.
    - Logical positivists who accept this weaker version, therefore, allow more sentences to be defined as factually meaningful.
    - For example, that statement *All sweaty socks stink* is now a factually meaningful statement because:
      - **Modification one** - although in practice I can’t smell all of the past, present and future sweaty socks I know in principle what would be required to verify this statement.
      - **Modification two** - although I can’t produce conclusive proof I am now only obliged to produce evidence that makes the statement probable and so I could simply smell a limited number of sweaty socks and conclude that a characteristic of all sweaty socks is that they probably stink.
    - A J Ayer went even further in his classification of the verification principle and suggested that statements can either be directly or indirectly verifiable.
      - Direct verification meant a statement that is verifiable by an observation.
      - If you ask the question: are post-boxes red?
        - You can verify the answer by observing post boxes.
      - Indirect verification meant a statement that is verifiable if we have direct evidence to support it.
      - For example, a scientist predicts the existence of a black hole in space, however, black holes can’t be directly observed, and instead we can look for other evidence which suggest black holes exist such as a lack of light in an area of space.
The Falsification Principle:

- This third principle asserts that statements which attempt to say something about the world are meaningful only if it is possible to say what would make the statement false i.e. what sort of evidence could count against the statement?
- The philosopher Karl Popper was the inspiration behind this principle and he pointed out that if meaning depended upon verification then the whole of science would be wiped out because none of the general laws of science are actually verifiable.
- Following on from difficulties encountered with the Verification Principle, Anthony Flew developed the idea that a statement may be verifiable if it is known what empirical evidence would prove it to be false.
- He applied this idea to religious language.
- An often quoted example of how a proposition may be falsified can be seen with the statement ‘ALL SWANS ARE WHITE’.
- We may see hundreds of white swans but this does not prove the statement.
- However, when we see one black swan we know that the proposition is false.
- Statements such as “All swans are white” are meaningful because they can be shown to be false.
- This statement is synthetic and empirically testable.
- Flew argued that religious people tend to refuse the possibility that their statement can be falsified and so make their statements meaningless.
- They will not allow evidence to discredit their beliefs and so their statements are meaningless.
- What Flew is protesting about, is a tendency he observed amongst religious believers to shift the goalposts of statements about God.
- For example, one might start by saying ‘God loves all humans’.
- If one were to witness a child dying of inoperable cancer of the throat, one would be right to use that as evidence to falsify the claim that God loves humans.
- Religious believers, Flew observed, would then retort ‘...but God loves humans in an inscrutable way, a different way to the way we love.’
- For Flew, this second statement has no meaning, because it doesn’t allow for anything to falsify it.
The famous example used to illustrate this point, is that of John Wisdom’s gardener.

**John Wisdom’s ‘Parable of the Gardener’**

- 2 men return to a long neglected garden.
- Some of the plants have grown and flowered.
- One man believes that a Gardener has been coming and tending to the plants.
- Upon enquiry they find out that no one has been to the garden.
- The man believes that someone came when they were asleep.
- Other man says no, someone would have heard them and why would there be weeds.
- The first man believes there is purpose and arrangement and someone invisible to mortal eyes tends to the garden.
- The other man believes no one has been in the garden.
- They have the same experience but interpret it differently.

According to Flew the claim ‘that there is a gardener’ is a completely meaningless statement because the explorer making the claim will not accept any kind of evidence that could count against the assertion.

- In other words his claims cannot be falsified and therefore his statement is simply a nonsensical noise.
- Flew argues that religious statements are meaningless because religious believers do not accept any evidence against them.
- Propositions about God are non-cognitive.
- These constant qualifications render religious statements meaningless because they die the “death by a thousand qualifications”.


A02 – arguments for religious language as meaningful

R M Hare and ‘bliks’

• The philosopher RM Hare came up with a response to falsification, called the theory of ‘bliks’.
• Hare used a parable to illustrate his point.
• ‘A certain lunatic is convinced that all dons want to murder him. His friends introduce him to all the mildest and most respectable dons that they can find, and after each of them has retired, they say, ”You see, he doesn’t really want to murder you; he spoke to you in a most cordial manner; surely you are convinced now?” But the lunatic replies ”Yes, but that was only his diabolical cunning; he’s really plotting against me the whole time, like the rest of them; I know it I tell you.” However many kindly dons are produced, the reaction is the same.’
• Like the person who believes in the invisible gardener in Flew’s version of Wisdom’s parable, the paranoid student cannot imagine being wrong; his statement ‘all dons want to murder him’ is unfalsifiable.
• Hare argues that this belief remains very meaningful.
• Thus a ‘blik’ is a particular view about the world that may not be based upon reason or fact and that cannot be verified or falsified; it just is and we don’t need to explain why we hold our ‘blik’.

Basil Mitchell – Resistance Fighter:

• Mitchell disagreed with the theory of ‘bliks’ and suggested another way, using another parable.
• He used the idea of a resistance fighter to make his point.
• “A member of the resistance movement is met one day by a man claiming to be the leader of the resistance movement. The fighter is suitably impressed and pledges his loyalty to the stranger. As time goes on, the fighter sees the ‘leader’ helping out the resistance, but at other times he is apparently helping out the enemy. The fighter nevertheless carries on in his belief that the stranger is in fact the leader of the resistance movement”.
• Mitchell claimed that Flew missed the point that believers have a prior faith commitment to trust in God based on faith, and for this reason do not allow evidence to undermine their faith.
• Mitchell’s point is that religious belief is based upon facts, but that belief cannot be verified/falsified in the simplistic way demanded by the logical positivists.
John Hick – Eschatological Verification (Celestial City)

- This states that at the end of time (eschaton, hence eschatological) all the parts of religious belief that require faith will be made clear by God: just because they cannot be verified now, they will be verified in the future.
- Hick proposes the parable of the celestial city:
  - “Two people are travelling along a road. One of them believes that it leads to the Celestial City, the other that it leads nowhere; but since this is the only road there is, both must travel it. Neither have been this way before; therefore, neither is able to say what they will find around each corner. During their journey they meet with moments of refreshment and delight and with moments of hardship and danger. All the time one of them thinks of the journey as a pilgrimage to the Celestial City. She interprets the pleasant parts as encouragements and the obstacles as trials of her purpose and lessons in endurance, prepared by the sovereign of that city and designed to make of her a worthy citizen of the place when at last she arrives. The other however, believes none of this, and sees their journey as an unavoidable and aimless ramble. Since he has no choice in the matter, he enjoys the good and endures the bad. For him there is no Celestial City to be reached, no all-encompassing purpose ordaining their journey; there is only the road itself and the luck of the road in good weather and in bad.”
- Now during the journey these two travelers are faced with the same facts and none of these facts can verify which of their views about the journey is right.
- However, according to Hick that doesn’t mean that the words they use to describe their views in the journey are meaningless because when the journey is finished there is the possibility of verification i.e. if they came face to face with the Celestial City then the believers view would have been prove correct.
- Hick’s point is that Christianity believes that our journey through this life will not simply end up in the grave.
- It asserts that life will continue after death in a new dimension referred to as either heaven or hell.
- This, argues Hick, hold out the possibility of eschatological verification (verification after death).
- In other words if I find myself in Heaven or even Hell then the religious language of Christianity will have been verified.
R. B. Braithwaite – language as moral assertion:

- Braithwaite suggested that religious language / God talk has meaning and can be verified because it results in a change in behaviour and a moral commitment to live a certain kind of life. Religious language is meaningful because of what it brings about.
- Braithwaite was concerned not with what religious statements are, but with how they are used.
- Braithwaite believed that religious statements are moral in content and intention and can therefore be verified, because they result in a change of behaviour.
- Braithwaite argued that because religious statements such as ‘God is the almighty father’ result in action, they have meaning.

Ludwig Wittgenstein and Language Games:

- Wittgenstein had supported the logical positivists, but came to reject the verification principle.
- He decided that the meaning of words is in their use; the function they perform as agreed by the particular group or society using them.
- Wittgenstein developed the theory of language games, which he arrived at (supposedly) after having attended a football match.
- Wittgenstein observed that just like games such as football and Rugby, language operates according to rules.
- Just as football players understand the offside trap and Rugby players understand rucks and mauls, so religious people understand the language of religion.
- Language games exist within all forms of human activity and life.
- Not only this, but Wittgenstein said that language has a meaning for the people in those particular language games (or contexts of use).
- Religious belief has its own language.
- A non-believer will find religious language meaningless because he or she is not in the religious game.
- An outsider cannot claim that the language used in a particular game is meaningless just because it doesn’t make sense to them.
Section 3 – Religious Experience

A01 - The nature and variety of religious experience

- Definition of religious experience
- Different interpretations of religious experience: William James, Rudolph Otto, Caroline Franks Davis and Richard Swinburne
- Revelatory experience: Visions, Miracles, The Numinous and Conversion
- Mystical experience – The characteristics as set forth by William James

A01 & A02 - what do / can religious experiences teach us about God?

- God exists
- God is immanent in the universe
- God is omnibenevolent
- That Jesus is from God

- God is arbitrary
- God is a product of a faulty mind
- God is a physiological condition

A02 - Can we verify religious experience? / Can anyone know they have experienced God?

- A.J. Ayer - verification
- John Mackie - how can we know the experience is genuine
- David Hume - challenge to miracles/religious experience

- Richard Swinburne – Principles of testimony and credulity
- William James – Religious experience argument
- Corporate religious experience – The Toronto Blessings and Fatima
A01 - The nature and variety of religious experience

What is religious experience:

- A religious experience is when a person believes they have had an experience of God, or another religious figure.
- Religious experiences can range from God actually speaking to a person, to someone being aware of God’s presence, to an experience of another religious figure, or even a miracle.
- Therefore, religious experiences are not easily categorised as one thing or another.
- However, what we might say is common to all of them is that they are somewhat extraordinary events, and very different to ordinary everyday experiences.
- They are also viewed as offering perhaps the strongest source of knowledge about God.

Different interpretations of religious experience – William James:

- The American psychologist and philosopher William James was one of the first to discuss religious experience from a perspective external to theology.
- James considered the religious experience to be a distinct class of experience defined by its fruits (outcomes).
- In other words, an experience could be considered genuinely religious if its effects on a person were seen to be both positive and morally transformative.
- William James gave a four fold classification of what an experience looked like:
  - Passive
  - Ineffable
  - Noetic
  - Transient
Rudolph Otto:

- Rudolph Otto was a German theologian and philosopher who was particularly interested in the issue of religious experience.
- Otto uses the term *numen*, or *numinous*, to describe a sensation that recipients of religious experience feel.
- The numinous is often described as a feeling of being in the presence of something greater than yourself.
- Otto identifies two distinct aspects of the numinous, what he terms: *mysterium tremendum* (the element associated with overwhelming fear and awe of the unknown) and *mysterium fascinans* (associated with feelings of love, mercy and so on) – (we will consider the numinous later in the booklet)

Caroline Franks Davis:

- Caroline Franks Davis provides a clear six-fold classification of religious experience in her book ‘The Evidential Force of Religious Experience’.
- She concludes that religious experiences, like most experiences, are most effective as evidence within a cumulative style of argument which combines evidence from a wide range of sources.
- Her classification is as follows:

1. **Interpretive experiences** – the experience is religious by attribution, for example, the recipient is clearly aware that what they are experiencing is something that can be attributed to the divine/God.
2. **Quasi-sensory** – the recipient of the experience may have a physical sensation where they hear a voice or see a vision.
3. **Revelatory experiences** – the recipient is left with a feeling of ‘enlightenment’ which means they have gained some new knowledge.
4. **Regenerative** – the recipient often undergoes some form of transformation following the experience either through conversion or renewal of faith.
5. **Numinous** – the recipient experiences God’s unapproachable holiness or in the understanding of Otto has an overwhelming feeling of the presence of something greater.
6. **Mystical** – the recipient has a sense of apprehending ultimate reality or a oneness with God. In simpler terms the experience is other worldly in that the person has a spiritual connection with the divine which is completely different to a normal everyday experience.
Richard Swinburne:

- Richard Swinburne talks of there being five different types of religious experience.
- The first two are within the 'public' realm, and the next three within the 'private'. The first two experiences are considered public:
  1. **You see 'God's action' in a public object or scene.** For example, the sunset is really the 'hand of God', or the blooming of a flower is a 'miracle of God'.
  2. **A breach of natural law.** Miracles often come under the category of public religious experiences. For example, where water turns into wine or Jesus raises the dead

- The next three experiences are deemed private:
  3. **A personal experience that can mostly be described through normal language.** There are many other example of this form of experience: Moses and the burning bush, Saul on the road to Damascus, visions of the Virgin Mary, and Mohammed’s vision of the Angel Gabriel.
  4. **A personal experience that cannot be described in normal language.** That is, it is ineffable. For example, such 'mystical experiences' that can only be explained by using negatives (saying what it is not) or metaphor. This is more common with the more mystical elements within religious tradition.
  5. **No specific experience, but more of a constant, or regular, feeling that God is simply 'there'.** His presence can be sensed. In all cases, there is an experience of God, or some kind of Absolute force or being.
Visions:

- A form of revelatory religious experience that acts as a source of knowledge about God is a vision.
- This occurs when an individual believes that they have seen or heard something divine or a divine being.
- There are 3 ways in which the individual may experience a vision:

1. A corporeal vision is where the recipient sees a figure that is externally.
2. An imaginary vision is where something that strengthens faith is seen with the mind’s eye.
3. An intellectual vision brings knowledge and understanding such as a revelation from God.

- A ‘Corporeal vision’ is a supernatural sighting of an object.
- It is where a figure really presents itself to a person.
- According to the authorities of the Catholic Church, the presence of an external figure may be understood in two ways.
- Firstly the very substance of the being or the person will be presented and secondly it may merely be an appearance of a bright light from which the recipient hears a voice.
- The first may be true of people who have lived before such as the Virgin Mary and Jesus.
- The second is the corporeal apparition of the unresurrected dead or of pure spirits (some ghostly being, without shape or form)

- An ‘Imaginative vision’ is the representation of an object by the act of imagination alone or within the mind of a person.
- An imaginative vision is very different to a corporeal vision and the object is not physically seen with the eyes.
- In an imaginative vision a being superior to man (Godly) acts directly either on the imagination itself or on certain forces calculated to stir the imagination.
- The sign that these images come from God lies in the fact that the subject is powerless to define or fix the elements of the vision.
- Imaginative visions are ordinarily very short, either because the person is unable to endure the vision for a long time, or imaginative visions soon give place to intellectual visions.
- This kind of vision occurs most frequently during sleep; during sleep the mind is less divided by thoughts, it is more passive.
• An ‘Intellectual vision’ is a vision without any object or image.
• The intellectual vision becomes supernatural when a person begins to realise the intervention of God.
• This intervention is felt through the following effects, such as feeling loved by God, an overwhelming peace in the mind, a deeper belief in God and the benefits and rewards that this belief will bring.
• The intellectual vision takes place in the pure understanding, and not in the reasoning faculty.
• This means that a person does not have to work out what the vision means as the vision gives total understanding immediately.

Examples of visions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporeal</th>
<th>Imaginative</th>
<th>Intellectual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In 1858, a sickly 14-year-old girl called Bernadette Soubirous experienced a series of visions of Our Lady and discovered a clear water spring in a cave.</td>
<td>• Imaginary visions are produced in the imagination by God or by the angels when a person is either awake or asleep.</td>
<td>• Julian of Norwich, the 14-15th century mystic, is a particularly good example of someone who received visions.</td>
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<td>• Bernadette witnessed a total of 17 visions in the spring of 1858 and is often also credited with having witnessed an 18th on the evening before she left Lourdes.</td>
<td>• According to the Gospel of Matthew, St. Joseph was on several occasions supernaturally instructed in a dream.</td>
<td>• In The Revelations of Divine Love, she recounted one vivid experience:</td>
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</table>

‘And he showed me more, a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, on the palm of my hand, round like a ball...And again my mind supplied the answer, ‘It exists, both now and forever, because God loves it. In short, everything owes its existence to the love of God.’
Miracles:

- Most people who believe in God would say that miracles can and do occur, and would probably claim that they have either witnessed a miracle in their own or another person’s life.
- These people would no doubt also claim that miracles are evidence that God exists and would claim that miracles are a clear source of knowledge about God.
- The definition of the term miracle is not clear cut as the term is now so widely used that the true meaning is often clouded by people’s own interpretations and experiences.
- However, the definitions that are presented below all share a common characteristic in that a miracle is an event which in some way occurs contrary to the natural laws we accept in our world.

St Thomas Aquinas:

- Aquinas defined miracles as: ‘Those things done by divine power apart from the order usually followed in things’
- This view suggests that God can do what he wants with his creation and Aquinas identified 3 types of miracle:
  1. **An event done by God which nature could not do** – this could be said to be the most traditional approach. They are acts that contradict our regular experience. Aquinas uses the example of the reversal of the course of the sun.
  2. **An event done by God which nature could do** - such as recovering from paralysis or a terminal illness. It’s possible for these things to happen but it is not usually expected, and so could be attributed to the direct intervention of God.
  3. **An event done which nature could do but without using the principles or forces of nature** - for example, recovering from a cold more quickly than usual perhaps because someone prayed for this, and then it might be called a miraculous intervention of God.

David Hume:

- David Hume was a Scottish empiricist who put forward what is regarded in philosophy as one of the most damming critiques of miracles.
- Ironically, it is Hume’s definition of the term miracle that most philosophers use in their discussions of the phenomena:
  - “A transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent”
- In other words, God or another supernatural being would break a law of nature that humans would regard as being unbreakable.
Richard Swinburne:

- Swinburne acknowledges that it is difficult to outweigh the scientific evidence that could count against a miracle, but he maintains that we do have enough historical evidence to suggest that there is a God and that God can violate the laws of nature.
- “If he (God) has reason to interact with us, he has reason very occasionally to intervene and suspend those natural laws by which our life is controlled”
- It is perfectly probable that there could be one off exceptional and unrepeatable occurrences.
- The laws of nature do not have to be rewritten.
- If God is omnipotent, then he quite clearly could suspend the laws of nature although not too often as this will interfere with scientific progress and free will.

Examples of miracles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus changing water into wine</th>
<th>The Hindu milk miracle</th>
<th>Parting of the Red Sea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This was Jesus’ first miracle, performed in Cana of Galilee. The story goes that the wine ran out during a wedding Jesus was attending. His mother (Mary) asked him to do something about this, so he called for six large stone jars to be filled with water. When the master of the banquet was given some of the water to taste, he found that it had turned into the finest of wines</td>
<td>On September 21st 1995, an otherwise ordinary man in New Delhi dreamt that Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed God of Wisdom, craved a little milk. Upon awakening, he rushed in the dark before dawn to the nearest temple, where a skeptical priest allowed him to offer a spoonful of milk to the small stone image. Both watched in astonishment as it disappeared, consumed by the statue. What followed is unprecedented in modern Hindu history. Within hours news had spread like a brush fire across India that Ganesha was accepting milk offerings.</td>
<td>After freeing the Israelites from Egypt, Pharaoh changes his mind and sends his army to bring them back. With the Israelites trapped by the side of the Red Sea, and the Egyptian army closing in behind them, Moses holds out his staff and the waters part. The Israelites cross over on dry land in safety, but when the Egyptian army tries to, the waters close in on them.</td>
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The Numinous:

- The numinous is sense of ‘awe and wonder’ a person may feel when they experience the presence of God in a certain place or building.
- It usually describes the feeling that God is very different from us - powerful and awesome.
- Some people usually feel this when they enter a church or a cathedral.
- However, they might just as easily have a sense of God’s greatness by looking at the world around them (E.g. a sunset).
- The German thinker Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) argues that there is one common factor to all religious experience, independent of the cultural background.
- He identifies this experience as the ‘numinous’.
- He outlined a whole range of feelings associated with the numinous experience such as ‘creeping flesh’, ‘the fear of ghosts’ and ‘the sense of something that is uncanny, weird or eerie’.
- Otto states that the best expression for the numinous is the Latin phrase *mysterium tremendum* — a magnificent mystery.
- The mystery is the ‘Wholly Other’ which is beyond apprehension and comprehension.

Examples of the numinous:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C.S. Lewis</th>
<th>Kenneth Grahame</th>
<th>William Wordsworth</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Suppose you were told that there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. Now suppose you were told “there is a ghost in the next room,” and believed it, you would feel fear, but of a different kind. Now suppose that you were told simply “There is a mighty spirit in the room” and believed it. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking—described as awe, and the object which excites it is the Numinous.”</td>
<td>In the central chapter of Kenneth Grahame’s book ‘The Wind and the Willows’ he offers an excellent account of someone experiencing the numinous. ‘Rat!’ he [Mole] found breath to whisper, shaking. ‘Are you afraid?’ ‘Afraid?’ murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. ‘Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet— and yet— O, Mole, I am afraid!’ —</td>
<td>The English Romantic poet William Wordsworth describes an early morning view of the city of London which produces in the poet and in some readers what must surely be a numinous experience of some sort. Earth has not anything to show more fair: Dull would he be of soul who could pass by A sight so touching in its majesty: This City now doth, like a garment, wear The beauty of the morning; silent, bare...</td>
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Religious Conversion:

- Conversion is a form of religious experience where someone’s life takes a dramatic spiritual turn.
- A person may be converted from no religion to religious belief, from one religion to another or from religious belief to atheism or agnosticism.
- It is helpful to think of conversion rather like a set of scales that are in a state of imbalance.
- Subjects of conversion are often in a state of imbalance: they are unhappy or leading unfulfilled lives; an experience then takes place which balances the scales and gives them a sense of emotional and spiritual balance in their lives.
- There are basically two forms of mental occurrence which lead to a difference in the conversion process:
  1. A conscious and voluntary experience – volitional type (Gradual conversion)
  2. An involuntary and unconscious experience – self-surrender type (Sudden conversion)

- The volitional type is where the person decides that they wish to make spiritual changes in their life and they go about doing the things necessary to bring this about.
- For example, a person may choose to become a Catholic, so they begin by being baptised into the faith and then receive other sacraments such as the Eucharist and Reconciliation.
- After this gradual journey they may have a profound experience where their religious belief suddenly all make sense and they feel a deep sense of spiritual connection with God.
- The self-surrender type of conversion is less common than the volitional type but the sudden conversion usually produces the more significant and profound effects.
- Sudden conversions are more likely to be the result of a religious experience as they often affect people who have no religious faith whatsoever before the experience.
- Religious conversion can also be classified into three specific changes upon a person’s life:
  1. Intellectual – a change in a person’s thinking
  2. Moral – a change in a person’s behaviour
  3. Social – a change in a person’s way of life
### Examples of religious conversion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>St Paul</th>
<th>Davey Falcus</th>
<th>Nicky Cruz</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Paul heard the voice of Jesus – ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ This is followed by a declaration that the speaker is ‘The risen Christ’. After this vision on the road to Damascus, Paul converted to Christianity. Paul spent the rest of his life spreading the Christian message and is believed, according to Christian tradition, to have died a martyr’s death in Rome. The name change from Saul to Paul is significant to show the conversion of Saul/Paul to Christianity.</td>
<td>Davey Falcus was a renowned criminal from Newcastle upon Tyne. During his teenage years and early twenties Davey was involved heavily in the drug scene and was a very violent man. At the age of 29 Davey was a drug addict and alcoholic. In 1995 Davey picked up a Bible and from that point his life changed. A bright light filled the room where he was sat; it was brighter than the sun. The Jesus appeared and spoke to Davey. At that moment a 15 year drug habit was broken instantly; also my desire for alcohol left me.</td>
<td>Nicky Cruz was the notorious gang leader of the Mau Maus (named after a bloodthirsty African tribe) Not long after becoming leader of this vicious gang, Nicky met David Wilkerson, a Christian preacher. Cruz felt overwhelmed by guilt and collected money for Wilkerson. Wilkerson prayed with Cruz, and Cruz asked for God’s forgiveness. Cruz began to study the Bible and became a preacher himself.</td>
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Mystical Experience:

- Mystical experience is the experience of oneness or union with the divine.
- "Mystical" comes from the Greek meaning "to close", meaning the lips and eyes closed in contemplation.
- It is not unique to Christianity: there are Jewish mystics, Islamic mystics and religions like Buddhism lay a very great emphasis on mystical experience.
- One of the greatest modern writers about mysticism was William James. For James, mystical experiences have four characteristics:

  1. **INEFFABLE**
  2. **NOETIC**
  3. **TRANSIENT**
  4. **PASSIVE**

- **Ineffability**: The experience of God goes far beyond the human powers of description. The person feels like they are unable to describe the experience or not do it justice.
  - St Teresa of Avila states, *'I wish I could give a description of at least the smallest part of what I have learned, but, when I try to discover a way of doing so, I find it impossible …’*

- **Noetic**: The person receives knowledge of the divine which is not otherwise available.
  - The experience is therefore a direct revelation from God.
- **Transient**: Religious experiences are described as transient which means they are not permanent.
  - A transient appearance may appear to last for a long period of time whereas it may have actually been very short.
  - The effects of the transient experience are however, long lasting and involve a changed view of the universe.
- **Passive**: Religious experiences were found to be passive, which means the person was not in control of what happened to them.
  - Instead the experience just happens and is from God.
A01 - What do / can religious experiences teach us about God?

God exists:

- **William James** argues that the religious experience argument clearly shows that if religious experiences are genuine then God must exist.
- James suggests that experience is the final arbiter of truth which maintains that if a person has an experience of God then they have the truth/proofof God’s existence.
- James works on the premise that experience offers the final piece of evidence a religious person needs to prove to them that God exists.
- **Richard Swinburne** adds religious experience to his cumulative argument for the existence of God.
- If we take religious experiences along with other evidence of God’s existence such as the Cosmological and Design arguments then it makes it far more likely that God exists.
- Swinburne argues that religious experience adds cumulative (added) weight to the argument that God does exist.
- **William Alston** argued that in normal life the evidence for something existing is gathered from experience.
- For example, if you say ‘There’s a red car’ or ‘Can you hear that bird singing?’ you are referring to things that you have observed using your senses.
- You don’t doubt these experiences because many other people have had similar experiences.
- Alston suggests that if many people have had a religious experience why should we not believe what our senses tell us?
- Therefore, taking into account experiences such as the Toronto Blessing or Fatima we should accept these as proof of God’s existence.

God is immanent:

- The literal meaning of the immanence of God is "to be within" or "near" in relation to God’s creation.
- In other words, that God acts within the universe.
- Religious experiences offer strong evidence in favour of this idea because if God performs a miracle or someone feels the presence of God and converts due to a vision then God must be within our universe.
- If God were simply transcendent then we would not be able to accept any account of religious experience on the ground that God does not partake in a physical way in the lives of human beings.
God is Omnibenevolent:

- **Richard Swinburne** suggests that a good way of backing up the truthfulness of someone’s claim to have had a religious experience, is to look at whether or not there are changes in that person’s life.
- In addition, these positive changes highlight the love of God for humanity in that God intervenes in people’s lives to improve them in some way.
- The different conversion accounts we have studied all show that God, through religious experience, changed the lives of those in desperate need thus highlighting his benevolent nature.
- Furthermore, the views of **William James** offer support to the ideas of Swinburne.
- He supported this idea in ‘The Varieties of Religious Experience’ when he wrote:
  - ‘The real witness of the spirit to the second birth [conversion] is to be found only in the disposition of the genuine child of God. The permanently patient heart, the love of self eradicated.’
- In other words through religious experience, not only do people witness the genuine love of God but they also receive it and can pass this on throughout their lives.

That Jesus is from God:

- Religious experiences are signs that point to God and reveal something about God.
- In the case of Jesus, miracles and visions of the risen Christ are seen as confirmation that Jesus is from God.
- Within the New Testament we have many examples of Jesus performing miracles and Jesus appearing to his disciples following his death.
- Examples of nature miracles such as the ‘calming of the storm’ and ‘Jesus walking on water’ highlight the omnipotent power Jesus has.
- The signs Jesus works and the appearances he makes also show that Jesus is the Son of God.
- For instance, the resurrection appearances to his disciples show that Jesus had overcome death which again highlights his power and majesty.
- This view is also supported by the Catholic Church:
  - “The signs worked by Jesus attest that the Father has sent him…they bear witness that he is the Son of God.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church)
God is arbitrary:

- The idea that God acts in special or particular cases in response to prayers or other needs is rejected by many philosophers.
- The Christian theologian Maurice Wiles rejects the idea of God acting in the world and violating the laws of nature.
- For Wiles, God acting in the world leads to the question about religious experiences, especially miracles, showing God to be arbitrary or biased.
- If God has the ability to intervene directly in the world then why are his actions so rare?
- The examples below highlight that religious experiences rather than offering a positive view of God’s nature, instead raise more questions about his actions.
- **For example:** God helping Joshua to destroy Jericho in the Old Testament and thousands of people dying in a mudslide and earthquake that occurred in Guatemala in October 2005.
- Jeanne Fretel being healed at Lourdes and over 1 million people dying in the Rwandan genocide in 1994.
- Maurice Wiles states: “Miracles must by definition be relatively infrequent or else the whole idea of laws of nature would be undermined, and ordered life as we know it would be an impossibility. Yet even so, it would seem strange that no miraculous intervention prevented Auschwitz or Hiroshima, while the purposes apparently forwarded by some of the miracles acclaimed in traditional Christian faith seem trivial by comparison.”
God is in fact a product of a faulty mind:

- Sigmund Freud’s studies into religion and religious experience led him to conclude that God was a form of neurosis.
- Freud offers three pieces of evidence to support his theory:
  1. Collective neurosis
  2. Oedipus Complex
  3. Wish fulfilment

- Collective neurosis is the idea that the human mind creates beliefs and images in a part of the mind called the ‘unconscious’.
- The unconscious mind comprises a vast store of information about events which we consider long forgotten.
- He went on to suggest that unpleasant memories which are trapped in the unconscious can surface later in the form neurotic and hysterical behaviour.
- Religious experience is simply a manifestation of this behaviour.
- The Oedipus Complex idea suggests that God has developed from a shared past event. Primitive societies known as hordes were led by a dominant male.
- This leader was killed by the horde following feelings of extreme ambivalence.
- To overcome the guilt, the horde erected a totem to direct prayers and sacrifices in order to remove this guilt.
- Over thousands of years this totem developed into what we now term to be God.
- Therefore, religious experiences stem from this shared guilt and God is a projection of the mind that works as a defence mechanism.
- Freud argued that religious experience could be the product of Wish Fulfilment.
- Freud argues that the main characteristic of an illusion is that it is “derived from human wishes.”
- There is no real proof or evidence for religious experience and yet sensible men and women continue to believe they have had one.
- For Freud, this suggests that religious experience persists because they contain within them the wishes of those men and women which are so important to them that they cancel out any doubts they may have about the truth of the religion itself.
God is a physiological condition:

- **V S Ramachandran** argued that Religious experience and therefore God is the manifestation of a physiological condition known as ‘temporal lobe epilepsy’.
- He carried out extensive research related to temporal lobe epilepsy from which he has concluded that there is important evidence linking the temporal lobes to religious experience.
- What Prof. Ramachandran discovered to his surprise was than when the temporal lobe patients were shown any type of religious imagery, their bodies produced a dramatic change in their skin resistance, much greater than people not suffering from the condition.
- He concluded from his research that famous religious figures such as St Paul could also have been people who had the condition.
- **Michael Persinger** is a cognitive neuroscience researcher who agrees that the temporal lobes have a significant role in religious experiences, and argues that religious experiences are no more than the brain responding to external stimuli.
- Persinger claims that by stimulating the temporal lobes with a unique machine he can artificially induce in almost anyone a moment that feels just like a genuine religious experience.
- Therefore, people who claim to feel the presence of God through the numinous or experience some form of vision are simply experiencing a default mechanism in the brain.
## A02 - Can we verify religious experience? / Can anyone know they have experienced God?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments suggesting religious experience cannot be verified</th>
<th>Arguments suggesting religious experience can be verified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problems caused by ineffability</strong> – If God is beyond human understanding (i.e. &quot;unintelligible&quot; according to Ayer) or cannot be known through reason but only through faith (i.e. &quot;cannot be proved&quot; according to Ayer) then he can’t be verified. Ayer’s simple view of religious experience is that, if God is something that cannot be meaningfully described, and then if someone experiences God, they still won’t be able to give a meaningful description of their experience.</td>
<td><strong>Corporate Experience</strong> - If an individual claims to have experienced God it is possible just to doubt that what they claim to have experienced is true. However, if more than one person claims to have had the same experience, or many people witness the experience, it becomes more difficult to doubt. There are two examples of group or corporate experiences which could strengthen the argument from religious experience. The examples are the Toronto Blessing &amp; Fatima.</td>
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<td><strong>Lacking empirical evidence</strong> - Ayer regards a genuine experience as one which people can express or test empirically. For example, if I have a vision of alien life on Mars then there are things I can do to test this vision - I could build a telescope to detect the aliens or astronauts could travel to Mars to meet them. Ayer argues that religious experiences aren’t like this at all. Nothing can be done to test the truth or falsehood of the Mystic’s visions or encounters with God.</td>
<td><strong>Strong Verification</strong> - The strong verification principle as proposed by the Vienna Circle suggests that only those statements / events that can be experienced or observed are meaningful. William James would argue that religious experience would fit within their criteria. If a person has a vision of God or another divine being then they have observable evidence. Likewise, James argues that experience is the final arbiter of truth; therefore, if a person has a religious experience then surely this is the strongest form of empirical.</td>
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<td><strong>Religious experience is an emotion</strong> - Ayer states that there are two types of statement. 1) Statements which refer to things that exist in the world. 2) Statements which record experiences in someone’s mind. Ayer thinks that religious experiences are all of the second sort - they are religious emotions that don’t actually relate to anything in the real world.</td>
<td><strong>Direct and indirect verification</strong> - Many would also argue that religious experiences can be verified if we apply Ayer’s weak verification principle. <strong>Direct verification</strong> – Bernadette had in total 18 visions of the Virgin Mary. The vision spoke to Bernadette and gave her instructions that she was to take back to her local priest. Therefore, Bernadette would accept the visions as verifiable due to her own observation and experience. <strong>Indirect verification</strong> – 150 years on from the events in Lourdes the town has now become a popular Catholic shrine. It attracts around five million people each year and sixty seven miracles have been confirmed in Lourdes. The events therefore offer accumulated facts that make the experience of Bernadette to be verified.</td>
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<td><strong>Cannot verify directly or indirectly</strong> - By directly, Ayer is suggesting that we can also observe or experience what someone else has had. Unfortunately, this is not true for religious experience as it often happens to individuals. Furthermore, we cannot indirectly verify a religious experience either as we do not have sufficient evidence to support it.</td>
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# Arguments for and against religious experience as proof of God’s existence

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<tr>
<th>David Hume’s arguments against...</th>
<th>Richard Swinburne’s argument for...</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Probability</strong> - The probability of miracles/religious experiences actually happening is so low that it is irrational and illogical to believe miracles do occur. Hume is an empiricist which means he emphasises experience and observations of the world as the way of learning things. He argues therefore, when investigating miracles evidence is collected from human witnesses. Laws of nature appear fixed and unvarying. Miracles appear to violate the laws of nature. It is more likely that the report of a miracle happening is incorrect than that the laws of nature have been violated.</td>
<td>Richard Swinburne offers two ways in which we can accept that a person has experienced God:</td>
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<td>Practicality – Hume offers four ways in which we can discount miracles / religious experience as proof of God’s existence:</td>
<td>1. Principle of Credulity</td>
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<tr>
<td>1) Hume’s first reason in contradicting a miracle is that throughout history there has not been a miraculous event with a sufficient number of witnesses.</td>
<td>2. Principle Of Testimony</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Hume’s second reason discredits miracles and religious experiences by playing on a human being’s sense of reality. Humans have the capacity to suspend their reason and often follow the majority even if what they are following is in fact nonsense. E.g. story of a UFO landing</td>
<td>Richard Swinburne’s principle of credulity states “If it seems to a subject that X is present, then probably X is present; what one seems to perceive probably is so” Therefore, if a person believes God was present we should accept what a person experiences unless you can prove otherwise.</td>
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<td>3) Hume’s third reason in discrediting the belief in a miracle is from the testimony of the recipient. Hume states, Hume argues that those people who claim to have had a religious experience or witnessed a miracle are generally uneducated and as a result their testimony becomes questionable.</td>
<td>Swinburne’s principle of testimony Swinburne appeals to a basic rational and verifiable idea - that people usually tell the truth. The principle of testimony suggests that I should accept your statement of what you experienced unless I can demonstrate positive grounds showing it to be mistaken.</td>
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<td>4) The final point Hume gives to discredit the validity of a miracle is that there must be a number of witnesses to validate the miracle. This basically means that the witnesses must all give the exact same testimony of the facts of the event. This is, according to Hume very rarely the case.</td>
<td>Swinburne also defended the possibility that religious experience could be proof of God by suggesting factors which would offer grounds to disbelieve. If these factors weren’t apparent then we could accept the experience:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) There may be a good reason to disbelieve the recipient due e.g. drugs/ alcohol, notorious pathological liar or the recipient is very young/has a barrier to understanding e.g. educational needs.</td>
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<td>2) It is possible to show that whatever/whoever the recipient is claiming to have experienced was not there e.g. no clear evidence or trace during or after the event.</td>
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<td>3) There is evidence to show that the event was not caused by God e.g. lucky coincidence or as Swinburne suggests being mistaken by what you saw.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### John Mackie’s arguments against...

**Argument 1:** John Mackie argues that people who claim that God is the cause of their religious experiences are mistaken about the cause. He argues, using the example of Peter Sutcliffe, the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’ that it is not easy to decide whether a religious experience is caused by God or the product of a faulty mind. Furthermore, what separates Peter Sutcliffe’s experience from other types of religious experience? If Sutcliffe is regarded by society as being mentally unstable and did not experience God then surely this applies to all other claims.

**Argument 2:** Mackie’s next argument against religious experience being caused by God is to argue that we interpret experiences in the light of ‘cultural conditioning.’ In other words, we believe that something is what we have been taught to believe it is. One of the key problems in religious experience, is that people in ‘Christian countries’ tend to experience God/Jesus/the Virgin Mary and people in ‘Hindu countries’ tend to experience Brahman/Vishnu/Shiva. In the light of all this, it is very difficult to argue conclusively that the object of a religious experience is an objectively existing supernatural power that many people call God.

**Argument 3:** Mackie likens people’s experience of God to examples of pain and dreams. The similarity is that they may seem real but they have no existence apart from our experience of them. Therefore, God is a product of our mind/body and people do not really experience God as it is unlikely that God exists.

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### William James’ arguments for...

William James offers a strong argument to suggest that people can and do experience God. This can be divided into three areas:

1. Normal people have religious experiences
2. Religious experiences have a profound effect
3. The quality of a person’s testimony

1) He argues that all normal persons have religious experience. Religious experiences are common throughout all religions and cultures and cannot all be the product of a faulty mind or medical problem. He also believes that experience is the final arbiter (area) of truth. Therefore, if God is the object of religious experiences then we must accept God as factually true.

2) James further observes that religious experiences tend to have a profound effect on the lives of people and even whole societies. This implies that such effects cannot reasonably be attributed to hallucinations. Instead, it is much more reasonable to believe that a real God is responsible for religious experiences than to attribute the profound effects of those experiences to a mere imaginary being.

3) In a lecture, entitled ‘The Reality of the Unseen’, James considers many testimonies of people who have claimed to have had religious experience. It is the sheer certainty of these testimonies that is most compelling. James believes we cannot dispel people’s accounts of religious experience as simply lies or hallucinations. The testimonies of recipients offer quality assurance that the person did undergo some form of religious experience.
Section 4 – God and the Human Situation

A01 - Different understandings of the human situation in relation to God

- Thomas Aquinas – Dependent on God
- St Augustine – Fallen from God’s grace
- Irenaeus / John Hick - Soul Making
- John Calvin – Predestined by God
- Under Judgement – Reward and Punishment

A01 - Secular understandings of the role of God and their influence on society

- Sigmund Freud’s understanding
- Emile Durkheim’s understanding
- Karl Marx’s understanding

A02 - The positive and negative impact of such beliefs on the way people live their lives and on their attitude towards life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent – prayer / existence / miracles</td>
<td>Dependent – too dependent / alienation / scientific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fallen – free will</td>
<td>Fallen – underserved punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soul Making – genuine love / altruism</td>
<td>Soul Making – magnitude of suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under Judgement – morality / justice / forgiveness</td>
<td>Predestined – church / apathy / morality / freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under Judgement – omnibenevolence / mental health</td>
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</table>

A02 – The religious challenge to the secular understandings

- Sigmund Freud - the challenges to his theories
- Emile Durkheim - challenges to his theories
- Karl Marx - challenges to his theories
A01 - Different understandings of the human situation in relation to God

What is the human situation in relation to God:

- The human situation is the relationship between God and humanity.
- Throughout the history of Christian philosophy many have attempted to offer valid ways in which humans share a relationship with God.
- This section will cover the different attempts and also focus on the impact of such beliefs on the way people live their lives:

St Thomas Aquinas – Dependent on God:

- St Thomas Aquinas argued that the relationship between God and humanity is one of complete dependence.
- In other words, humans depend on God for their initial and continued existence.
- The concept of dependence is clearly shown in Aquinas’ Cosmological Arguments.
- In each of his ‘Three Ways’ Aquinas rejects the concept of the universe existing infinitely and argues that a necessary being (God) was responsible for bringing everything into existence.
- Therefore, as God is the efficient cause of the universe then we are dependent on God for everything.
- Aquinas also believed that God was not only an initial cause of the universe but that God was also the sustainer of motion, cause and existence.
- This type of cause is referred to as ‘Cause in Esse’.
- Cause in esse can be illustrated by the relation between the electricity supply to keep the image on a TV screen.
- The electricity supply keeps the image on the screen in the sense that the supply has to be there continuously here and now to keep the image there. If the supply is cut off the image will go.
- This is the sense in which Aquinas argues humans are dependent on God.
- He is needed as a constant presence to keep all causal chains working.
St Augustine – Fallen from God’s Grace

• St Augustine believed that the relationship between God and humanity began in a state of total perfection.
• However, this perfection was corrupted by the actions of humans and their relationship with God was tainted; in other words, humans fell from their state of perfection by using their free will to make choices that drove a wedge between God and the world.
• Augustine based this concept on the Genesis account of the fall of man when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
• Though not named in the Bible, the concept for the ‘Fall’ comes specifically from chapter 3 of Genesis. Adam and Eve live at first with God in a paradise, but the serpent tempts them into eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which God forbade.
• After doing so they become ashamed of their nakedness and God consequently expelled them from paradise.
• Augustine’s understanding of the human situation in relation to God is best understood through his theodicy.
• A theodicy is a way in which philosophers try to reconcile the existence and nature of God with the problem of evil and suffering.
• His theodicy is referred to as a ‘soul deciding theodicy’ which means that humans were created with free will and can choose to have a relationship with God.
• Our relationship with God is based on our ability to make free decisions.

Augustine’s Theodicy:

• Augustine argues that the world was created to be wholly good, but has fallen short of this since then.
• In other words, evil does not come from God but arises when God’s creations fail to live up to the standards God expects of them.
• The world is now imperfect because it has been corrupted (a) by humans themselves and (b) by other spirits (fallen angels).
• The corruption of human beings happened to our remote ancestors (Adam & Eve, according to the Book of Genesis) and is passed on down the generations through the sexual act as original sin.
• Augustine focuses on God’s justice.
• Augustine says that it is precisely because God is ‘Good’ that He must insist we are punished for our wicked behaviour and won’t just perform a miracle to return the whole human race to its unfallen, good state.
John Hick - Soul Making:

- John Hick developed his understanding of the relationship between God and humanity from the views of the early Church father Irenaeus.
- Irenaeus argued that God created the world imperfectly so that every imperfect immature being could develop through a soul-making process into a ‘child of God,’ in God’s perfect likeness.
- For Irenaeus, God could not have created humans in perfect likeness of himself because achieving the likeness of God requires the willing co-operation of humans.
- God thus had to give humans free will in order for them to be able to willingly co-operate.
- Since freedom requires the ability to choose good over evil, God had to permit evil and suffering to occur.
- John Hick highlighted the importance of God allowing humans to develop themselves.
- He reasoned that if God made us perfect, then we would have the goodness of robots, which would love God automatically.
- God wants humans to be genuinely loving and therefore gives them free will.
- If God interfered or became too close, humans would be unable to make a free choice and thus would not benefit from the developmental process.
- Therefore God created humans at an epistemic distance from himself, a distance of knowledge.
- This concept is summed up adequately by Peter Vardy’s analogy of the King and the Peasant girl. Vardy accepted that if humans are to have a truly loving relationship with God then the relationship we have with God has to be completely free.

“A King falls in love with a peasant girl. If the King wanted to force her to marry him, she would not have any choice but to do so. The peasant girl could feign or manufacture feelings for the King but the King could not force her to give genuine, unrequited love. However, the King wants the girl to love him freely and truly, so he disguises himself as a peasant and allows her to fall in love with him, not because he is King, but because she loves him freely of her own choice, which gives that love true value”

- God as the omnipotent King opts not to force humanity into a relationship because it would not be genuine.
- Our relationship with God is then one which is truly loving because it is built on a faith that has been freely chosen rather than programmed and switched on when God saw fit.
John Calvin – Predestined by God:

- The protestant reformer John Calvin believed the human situation in relation to God was based on an idea known as predestination.
- Christian theology teaches that God is both omniscient and omnipotent and many people have interpreted this as meaning that he not only knows what choices individuals will make but that he may also control those choices by virtue of his omnipotence.
- Calvin famously argued that predestination is “the eternal decree of God, by which he determined that he wished to make of every man.”
- Calvin focused on the idea that God alone determines who will be saved.
- This is known as the Doctrine of Divine Election.
- By this Calvin meant that some people are destined for a relationship with God while some are not.
- What is noticeable is that whether one is saved or goes to hell is not a matter of human choice.
- Calvin ultimately argues that whether a person is among God’s elect is a matter for God, who is omnipotent and omniscient, and is thus a mystery beyond human comprehension (Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion).
- Calvin’s understanding of predestination is often termed ‘Double Predestination’.
- This refers to the dual concept of his view that God has elected some to be saved and others will not.
- It is important to note here that double predestination is not God ‘helping’ some and ‘harming’ others.
- In fact, the concept should be viewed as God acting in the lives of the chosen and not in the lives of those who have not been chosen.
- God’s inaction in the lives of those who have not been predestined is simply that; inaction.
- For example, a teacher may choose students in a class who they believe to have superb potential (The Elect).
- Due to this choice the teacher will then offer more attention to this group, perhaps give them more responsibility or even offer them more help than the others (The Non-Elect).
- Thus, if we now apply this analogy to God; God will positively intervene in the lives of those he has chosen thus giving this group the opportunity to have a relationship with God.
- On the other hand, God does not negatively intervene but rather does not offer the same opportunity.
Under Judgement:

- For many Christians, the concept of predestination and Divine Election is an uncomfortable belief.
- This is due to the idea that some are chosen to have a relationship in heaven with God irrelevant of how they have lived their lives whereas others will go to hell even if they have led a moral life.
- Instead, many Christians maintain the belief that God holds everyone to account and judges them according to their actions.
- Hence, God’s punishment for some is to send them to hell because that is what they deserve, and justice demands that they are appropriately punished.
- The concept of being under God’s judgement derives from the Bible.
- The Bible paints a very clear picture that the relationship between God and humanity is one in which the actions of humans throughout their lives will be taken into account and used by God to make a final judgement.
- E.g. Noah and the Great Flood, Jesus’ teachings on how we live our lives (Good Samaritan) and St Paul on judgement (resurrection)
- The important aspect of the biblical picture of God as judge is that He accepts people as they really are.
- So if people lead a good life and choose to be in a good relationship with God and other people, they go to heaven.
- Equally, if people choose to live a life of wrongdoing, God recognises that they have chosen to live in a state of disharmony and bad relationship with God and other people, so they bring hell on themselves.
- Within Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions no one is predestined to go to hell; God loves everyone, and wishes to forgive everyone and be in a good relationship with everyone if that is what they want.
- **God predestines no one to go to hell; for this to happen, a willful turning away from God is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. (Catechism of the Catholic Church)**
A01 - Secular understandings of the role of God and their influence on society

Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx:

- Even though none of these three men was particularly religious, the power that religion holds over people and societies interested them all.
- They believed that religion is essentially an illusion; because culture and location influence religion to such a degree, the idea that religion presents a fundamental truth of existence seemed rather improbable to them.
- They also speculated that, in time, the appeal and influence of religion on the modern mind would lessen.

Sigmund Freud’s role of God:

1. Guilt (Oedipus Complex / Primal Horde)
2. Helplessness

Guilt:

- Freud feels that the Oedipus complex led to an act in the past which led to the creation of God.
- The guilt of the past act has been passed on to all human beings.
- Freud describes the past act which led to the repressed guilt shared by all humanity.
- He draws on the ideas of Charles Darwin, who suggested that primitive men lived in hordes like apes.
- These hordes were ruled over by a powerful father.
- The father was jealous of the sons, as he wanted all of the women for himself.
- He drove them out of the tribe to prevent them from having sex with any of the women.
- The sons felt a mixture of feeling towards the father both admiration and bitterness. (Oedipus Complex)
- One day the sons get together and kill the father.
- They feel incredibly guilty for the crime they have committed.
- They create a totem animal to worship as a father substitute.
- The animal is sacrificed each year in the special totem meal which commemorates the original crime of killing and devouring the father.
- For Freud, this act is the beginnings of God/religion.
- The guilt of the action of killing the father is passed on to all future generations.
- As time passed, emphasis on the totem proved unsatisfactory.
• As longing for the father grew, so did his reputation.
• Eventually he took on divine significance and became transformed into the gods of religions.
• Freud points out that the gods of religion are treated with the same ambivalence as was the original father figure, proving that there is a connection.
• “Totemic religion arose from the filial sense of guilt”

Helplessness:

• Freud argues that the main characteristic of an illusion is that it is “derived from human wishes.”
• There is no real proof or evidence for God and yet sensible men and women continue to believe.
• For Freud, this suggests that God persists because He contains within himself the wishes of those men and women which are so important to them that they cancel out any doubts they may have about the truth of the religion itself.
• Freud believed that humans wish to defend themselves against the power of nature by creating divine beings. God can help people to deal with suffering and feelings of helplessness in their lives.
• Even death is not to be feared for the religious, who regard it as the start to a new life where those who have had a good but painful life will be rewarded.
• Freud felt that every human being faces a conflict between what society expects from him/her and his/her own human instincts.
• God, according to Freud, helps us to deal with this helplessness, as it teaches that he is watching over us and will make up for our suffering.
• It encourages believers to ‘love their enemies’ rather than being aggressive towards them.
• God also gives humans a conscience which prevents them from acting on their instincts, promising that controlling the instincts in this way will be rewarded in the afterlife.
• Freud felt that childhood was characterised by a feeling of helplessness. In childhood, one is comforted by the protection of the father.
• In adulthood we no longer have this protection. In a response to this helplessness, humans respond by turning to God as a supreme father figure, seeking the same comfort they felt in their childhood due to the protection of their own father.
• For Freud, God is nothing more than wishful thinking, an illusion.
Emile Durkheim on God:

- Durkheim focused on the earliest religious tradition he could identify, the Australian Aborigines and wrote his ideas in the book ‘The Elementary Forms of Religious Life’.
- Durkheim defined religion as:
  - A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life)
- As this definition makes clear, Durkheim believed that religion has a unifying role in society – it unites groups of people in a moral community who share a set of beliefs.
- However, Durkheim does not say that religion relates to a God that exists.
- For Durkheim, religion is a reality that exists in society – religion cannot be separated from society.
- He described religion as a ‘mode of action’, meaning that it was something that united people in society and enabled the people to act together as a society.
- For example, if you want to build a bridge, you need to work with other people.
- Durkheim was arguing that religion was in some ways like glue that held society together so that it could achieve its results.
- Through his investigation of Aboriginal society he found that its beliefs were linked with a totemic object, most commonly an animal.
- A totem is a sacred thing; that is, a totem is set apart from and different from things in ordinary life.
- Durkheim called things in ordinary life ‘profane’ which means they are not sacred.
- The totem unites a group and is treated with respect.
- Durkheim concluded that totems were the symbol of a tribe (a modern example would be the cross for Christians).
- Durkheim’s theory challenges religious belief in God because the origin of God is from the social interaction between people.
- The earliest tribesmen invent God in their discussions and represent God through the totem.
- Therefore, religion/God has no divine origin; God does not found religion, instead belief in God is a product of society and people interacting in society that is passed on down the generations.
- If we did not live in societies then God would not have been invented.
Karl Marx on God:

- Karl Marx argued that religion is like other social institutions in that it is dependent upon the material and economic situation of a society.
- Religion/God has no independent history; instead it is the creation of society.
- As Marx wrote, “The religious world is but the reflex of the real world.”
- Marx’s opinion is that religion is an illusion that provides reasons and excuses to keep society functioning in a certain way.
- He suggests that there is a conflict between the ruling classes (those who hold the wealth and control the production), and the working class (those who sell their labour but are largely alienated from the results of the work they do).
- Marx’s main criticism of religion was that, in the face of real oppression on earth, it offered spiritual blessings in heaven.
- People would therefore put up with their present suffering in the hope of a spiritual reward – using it like a drug to ease the pain of their situation.
- Marx is saying that religion creates illusory fantasies for the poor.
- Economic realities prevent them from finding true happiness in this life, so religion tells them this is acceptable because they will find true happiness in the next life.
- The problem is that opiates fail to fix a physical injury — you only forget your pain and suffering.
- This can be fine, but only if you are also trying to solve the underlying causes of the pain.
- Similarly, religion does not fix the underlying causes of people’s pain and suffering — instead, it helps them forget why they are suffering and causes them to look forward to an imaginary future when the pain will cease instead of working to change circumstances now.
- Even worse, this “drug” is being administered by the oppressors who are responsible for the pain and suffering. Marx famously described religion as:

“The sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The people cannot be really happy until it has been deprived of illusory happiness by the abolition of religion. The demand that the people should shake itself free of illusion as to its own condition is the demand that it should abandon a condition which needs illusion.”
A01 - The impact that these views have had on society

Sigmund Freud and the rise of atheism:

- Before Freud, the rise of atheism had come from biology, physics and cosmology.
- Freud’s challenge to God and religion offered perhaps the first psychology based case for atheism.
- In his 1927 ‘The Future of an Illusion’, he argued that religious belief is a confusion of wishful thinking and reality.
- Adults are frightened by things such as death so they defensively invent a divine parent who will protect them, just as their biological parents did when they were young.
- But since there is no evidence for the existence of such an entity, belief in it is an “obsessive infantile neurosis”.
- Freud was confident that as science progressed, the fears that drive humans to religious superstition would diminish.
- Consequently, he concluded, the future of the religious “illusion” would eventually disappear.
- The reason why Freud’s ideas led to a rise in atheism was because it was a conflict model of psychology.
- His approach as we have seen was to reject religious belief and to reduce the religious impulse to one that can be explained in entirely materialistic terms.
- Therefore, Freud’s views were adding to a world view that God would be slowly squeezed out with each new discovery.
- This process leads some to conclude that belief in God can now be abandoned entirely because the concept of God is a manifestation of a faulty mind which can be cured.
- If the cure is found then God will no longer be needed and people will become aware that their feelings of helplessness and guilt can be dealt with far more appropriately than turning to God / religion.
- In addition, according to a 2005 poll only 52% of European citizens responded that they believe in God.
- In the most recent census in the UK (2011) 32% of the UK population said they had no religion and only 18% are said to be a practicing member of an organised religion.
- These statistics highlight that atheism has risen, especially if we compare these to the 2001 census where 22% of the population said they had no religion.
- Therefore, Freud’s ideas (along with other scientific worldviews) are impacting the UK as we were once considered a Christian country and this belief is steadily decreasing.
Durkheim and the challenge of functionalism:

- The functionalist perspective, also called functionalism, is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology.
- It has its origins in the works of Emile Durkheim, who was especially interested in how social order is possible or how society remains relatively stable.
- Emile Durkheim explained his idea of functionalism by comparing society to the human body.
- Just as the body consists of different, interrelated organs that enable it to survive, society consists of different components that enable it to survive and which depend on each other.
- For example, a functionalist might argue, for instance, that every society will have a religion, because religious institutions have certain functions which contribute to the survival of the social system as a whole, just as the organs of the body have functions which are necessary for the body’s survival.
- The impact that Durkheim’s idea has upon society is that the concept of God / religion became viewed as a social structure that contributes to society as a whole.
- Durkheim does not say that religion relates to a God that exists.
- He argues instead that religion is linked completely with society.
- Durkheim’s views have led many people to question the origin and purpose of organised religion.
- This is because the concept of God existing objectively (having an actual existence or reality) is called into question as Durkheim suggests it has been cultivated and developed by people within societies.
- Therefore, it leaves people questioning why they attend places of worship.
- Is it because of the existence of a divine being or because it helps them to integrate within society?
- Durkheim’s impact is that more people now see it as the latter and as a result they are beginning to leave the religious life behind.
- However, Durkheim saw social life as impossible to achieve without the shared values and norms achieved through collective conscience.
- Instead of people turning to religion to achieve this collective conscience we are now seeing people moving toward a more civil religion.
- Instead of the concept of God people look to other institutions such as the Royal Family or national sports.
- If we look at the events of the past few years such as the royal wedding, the Queen’s jubilee and the London Olympics we see that people in the UK were united over a common cause.
- The impact we have here is that this common cause was secular and no longer associated with religion.
Karl Marx and Liberation Theology:

- Although Marx believed that God / religion was an illusion that keeps society functioning in a certain way (i.e. keeping the poor, poor) the biggest impact that his views have had on religion has been a positive one.
- Marx’s views have close links with a movement within the Catholic Church known as ‘Liberation Theology’.
- Liberation theology was a radical movement that grew up in South America as a response to the poverty and the ill-treatment of ordinary people.
- The movement was caricatured in the phrase ‘If Jesus Christ was on Earth today, he would be a Marxist revolutionary’.
- It is a movement in Christian theology, developed mainly by Latin American Roman Catholics, that emphasises liberation from social, political, and economic oppression.
- Most controversially, the Liberationists said the church should act to bring about social change, and should ally itself with the working class to do so.
- Some radical priests became involved in politics and trade unions; others even aligned themselves with violent revolutionary movements.
- A common way in which priests and nuns showed their solidarity with the poor was to move from religious houses into poverty stricken areas to share the living conditions of their flock.
- The primary architect of liberation theology in the Latin-American and Catholic context is Gustavo Gutiérrez.
- A Catholic priest who grew up in grinding poverty in Peru, Gutiérrez employed Marx’s critiques of ideology, class, and capitalism as part of his theological analysis of how Christianity should be used to make people’s lives better here and now rather than simply offer them hope of rewards in heaven.
- Gutiérrez’s theology is one that places action first and reflection second, a big change from how theology has traditionally been done.
- The late Pope John Paul II was frequently criticised for the severity with which he dealt with the liberation movement. His main objection was to stop the highly politicised form of liberation theology prevalent in the 1980s, which could be seen as a fusion of Christianity and Marxism.
- He didn’t mean that the Church was not going to be the voice of the oppressed, was not going to champion the poor.
- But it should not do it by partisan politics, or by revolutionary violence.
- The Church’s business was bringing about the Kingdom of God, not about creating a Marxist utopia.
A02 - The positive and negative impact of such beliefs on the way people live their lives and on their attitude towards life

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<th>Negative Impact on people’s lives...</th>
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<td><strong>Dependent:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Too dependent on God.</strong> The negative impact that the understanding of dependence can have is that we come to depend on God for too much. For example, in terms of religious experiences such as prayers and miracles there are some who may simply expect God to intervene rather than trying to improve their situation themselves. If humans see the relationship between God and humans as one of dependence then there is a danger that we begin to blame God for his lack of intervention rather than looking at how we ourselves could intervene.</td>
<td><strong>Supplication and Intercessionary Prayer.</strong> Supplication prayers are a type of prayer where we ask God for help. Intercessionary prayers are where we ask God to care for another person or part of his creation. Therefore, if humans share a relationship with God based on dependence then we can rely on God to answer these types of prayer. This offers great encouragement to Christians, especially in times of great crisis.</td>
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<td><strong>Karl Marx and Alienation.</strong> Marx believes that those in society who are extremely poor will remain in this social class if they maintain an understanding that they depend on God for their salvation. Marx is suggesting that many people depend on God to change their fortune and will be content in the belief that God will reward them in heaven if they have suffered in this life.</td>
<td><strong>Existence.</strong> Aquinas suggests that God is the sustainer or motion, cause and existence – if this understanding is to be accepted then we should look positively on our relationship with God. The fact that the universe exists and continues to exist highlights that we can depend on God to maintain the causal chain within the universe and thus maintain our existence. The positive aspect of this idea is that humans know they can depend on God because our very existence proves his dependability.</td>
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<td><strong>Rejection of scientific ideas.</strong> Richard Dawkins believes dependence on God leads to the rise of Christian fundamentalism. It is this fundamental approach to dependence on God that causes the most problems toward scientific advancement toward the origin of the universe. Dawkins acknowledges: “I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world.”</td>
<td><strong>Miracles.</strong> Most people who believe in God would say that miracles can and do occur. The positive impact that being dependent on God has in the lives of many Christians is that God can and will perform miracles to help his creation. This means that we can depend on God during our most desperate times and know that miracles, although uncommon are a possibility. This possibility leaves us with a clear hope that we, for example, can share in the resurrection that Jesus showed us when he returned from the dead.</td>
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Fallen:

Underserved punishment. If God was an all-loving creator who gave humans freedom then why should we suffer for the sins of Adam and Eve? Can we be held responsible for the sin they committed in Eden? Is this fair? The answer is a firm no as it makes no sense for free individuals to be made to suffer for other people’s faults. For instance, imagine your mother committed a crime before you were born and that she was never caught and brought to justice. Now imagine, years after her death, the police find evidence that your mother was responsible for the crime. As your mother is no longer living the court decides that you should accept the guilt and be punished on her behalf. Would this punishment be acceptable?

Soul Making:

Magnitude of suffering. The negative impact that the understanding of soul making has is concerned with the magnitude of suffering in the world. Many philosophers ask the question: is the extent of suffering really necessary for soul making? Does the wonderful future down the line really justify the seemingly overwhelming current amount of suffering and evil on earth? Couldn’t God have set things up so that the wonderful future doesn’t require quite as much extreme suffering?

Predestination:

Church’s authority. If salvation comes through God’s predetermined it doesn’t matter what the local priest thinks of your actions - the salvation of your soul is God’s decision. Whatever was being taught to Christians in church on a Sunday lacked any real impression on the congregation because they felt that their fate was already predestined. This led to a reduction in Church attendance.

Fallen:

Free Will. The positive impact that this understanding of the human situation in relation to God stresses is the value of free will. This was the best choice God could have made for mankind and God is therefore not responsible for man’s evil choices. This means that God’s nature is not called into question; for example, definitions such as omnipotence and omnibenevolence are not affected because God decided to give humans free will and then was willing to stand back and accept the consequences. The philosopher Alvin Platinga argues that if humans were created so that they can only choose good they would not be free.

Soul Making:

Genuine loving relationship. John Hick’s understanding of ‘soul-making’ outlines that God has created us with complete freedom. This means that if we choose to believe in God then it is a truly loving choice as we have not been programmed or predestined to love God. As Vardy’s parable of the ‘King and the Peasant Girl’ highlights our relationship with God is one which is truly loving because it is built on a faith that has been freely chosen.

Truly altruistic acts. Pure altruism consists of sacrificing something for someone other than the self with no expectation of any compensation or benefits. Therefore, if God has created us with complete moral autonomy then any act we perform for the sake of someone else can be classed as truly good. This is because the act was not governed by a belief that we are duty bound to God or that God will offer us some form of reward. If we accept Hick’s understanding a charitable act such as giving a homeless person money would be truly moral as I freely chose to help another person.
Apathy. Predestination can lead to spiritual apathy or even despair. The notion that many people may be categorised as the ‘non-elect’ renders people disillusioned and increases their sense of alienation from their faith. If a person cannot change their fate through work and action then faith seems pointless.

Moral Implication. The Gospel message as proclaimed by Jesus suggests that as well as faith in God there are specific moral actions that humans should undertake. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a clear indication that faith in God is not enough. We must also do what we can to help in this life to help those most in need. However, if predestination is accepted then moral actions such as those proposed in the parable could lose their appeal. Instead, people could become inherently selfish as the needs of others are not important.

Impact on human freedom. Christian theology teaches that God is both omniscient and omnipotent and many people have interpreted this as meaning that he not only knows what choices individuals will make but that he may also control those choices by virtue of his omnipotence. If this is what Calvin believed predestination to be then can humans really consider themselves to have free will? The fundamental problem with God having knowledge of the future actions of human beings is that it would suggest that future events that we think are contingent on present events and choices actually are not contingent but necessary.

Under Judgement

Promotes moral actions. If Christians accept that their relationship with God is one of being under his judgement then this could inspire them to lead a more moral life. The positive impact of this understanding is that humans will aim to fulfil the teachings of Jesus from the Gospels which will have an extremely positive effect on society. For example:

- The Greatest Commandment
- The Golden Rule
- Sermon on the Mount

Justice. Many religious people accept the relation between God and humanity as under judgement due to the positive view on the concept of justice. There seems to be a great injustice in life due to the fact that innocent people tend to suffer when they do not deserve it. However, those who seemingly deserve punishment escape it. However, if we accept that our relationship is under judgement then we can expect justice at the end of our lives. Christianity is clear in its teaching that God will reward the virtuous (good) and punish the wicked (bad).

Opportunity to achieve forgiveness. The positive aspect of being under the judgement of God as opposed to the concept of predestination is the opportunity for people to seek forgiveness from God. If we accept that humans will often fail then this would mean that God would be in the business of punishing everyone for all the sins that they have committed. However, if people turn away from sin, repent and believe in God, they can rebuild their relationship with God. This is positive as it means that humans have the chance to redeem themselves. For Christians, through the person of Jesus we’re giving an opportunity to change our lives and he offers a bridge between humanity and God.
Under Judgement

Threat of punishment does not fit with God’s Omni-benevolence. The God of classical theism is believed to withhold the characteristic of being all-loving. If our relationship with God is one that is under his judgement then this love can be questioned. If God will reward people with eternal life in heaven because they accept him and believe in him then this supports the view that God is ‘all-loving. However, what does that mean for people who do not accept God and who don’t believe in God? Does this mean that God will punish these people with eternal punishment in hell? If so, then we have a contradiction as it seems improbable that a being that is considered omni-benevolent would be willing to see people suffer for eternity.

The impact on mental health. According to the prominent atheist Richard Dawkins, the threat of being judged by God and sent to hell has a dangerous impact upon the mental health of individuals. In his book, ‘The God Delusion’, Dawkins refers to a correspondence he received from a young lady recounting the traumatic time in her life when she was abused and taught about hell as a punishment. The following extract highlights the impact:

"Being fondled by the priest simply left the impression (from the mind of a 7 year old) as ‘yucky’ while the memory of my friend going to hell was one of cold, immeasurable fear. I never lost sleep because of the priest – but I spent many a night being terrified that the people I loved would go to Hell. It gave me nightmares."(The God Delusion)
A02 – The religious challenge to the secular understandings

Sigmund Freud’s weaknesses:

- **Religion as a force for good.**
  - Freud offered a critique of his own position in ‘The Future of Illusions’ (1927).
  - In it he acknowledges the argument that religion has done much that is good.
  - For instance, religion offers people real consolation during difficult times.
  - Religion provides certainty and order in an otherwise chaotic world.
  - Therefore, rather than being the cause of neurotic behaviour it could be argued that God/religion can help people to overcome neuroses.

- **Criticism of the Primal Horde.**
  - Freud’s idea would only work if guilt could be passed down generationally.
  - The ambivalence and guilt that leads to religious activity would need to be present in every generation.
  - Even if the primal crime of patricide actually happened, guilt for the act cannot be passed on.
  - While the Oedipus complex theory might account for some remarkable attitudes to sexuality and sexual activity in society, it creaks under the weight that Freud places on it.
  - Therefore, Freud’s argument that religion arises out of repressed sexual guilt, appears to be false.

- **Issues with the father figure.**
  - It was also pointed out that Freud’s argument that religion arises out of the worship of a father figure neglects to consider the religions in which the point of worship is a woman, or the religious systems that have no deity at all.
  - Freud focuses on religions with male deities such as Judaism and Christianity.
  - He ignores religions with important female goddesses, such as Hinduism and religions which do not have a deity at all, such as Buddhism.
  - The issue here is that Freud is using a small amount of evidence and applying this to the concept of God/religion as a whole.
• **Malinowski and the Oedipus Complex.**
  - Malinowski is a famous Sociologist who discredits Freud’s Oedipus complex.
  - He argues that the family is not the same in every society and so the Oedipus Complex cannot be universal.
  - If it is not universal, then it cannot be the cause of all religion. For example, in Trobriands, the family is matrilineal and the Father has nothing to do with the upbringing of the children.
  - Therefore, there is no Oedipus Complex there and their religion must require a different explanation.
  - Freud’s attack that religion is based on sexual guilt is thus called into question.

• **The Historical and Anthropological Evidence.**
  - Freud’s theory of the horde was based on the ideas of Darwin.
  - However, they were just ideas.
  - It is now generally accepted that there was more variety in primitive societies than Freud suggests.
  - For example, not all tribes had totem animals.
  - This suggests that Freud’s idea that guilt was handed down from generation to generation is incorrect.
  - Therefore, he is wrong to suggest that religion is based on this guilt.
  - The crime of the killing the father probably didn’t happen and if it did, the guilt could not be passed onto everyone in the way that Freud suggests.
  - This also brings the Oedipus Complex into doubt.

**Emile Durkheim’s weaknesses:**

• **John Hick.**
  - The philosopher John Hick concluded that Durkheim’s theory that God is society may be true in the setting of the Aboriginal group but it cannot be applied to all religion.
  - This attempt at a naturalistic explanation of religion is ‘not proven’.
  - Durkheim had studied the behaviour of groups of Aborigines, with a close-knit community and a primitive form of religion.
  - Like Freud, Durkheim has been criticised for making the mistake that the way in which the Aboriginal groups live could be extended to a universal theory of religion and society.
**Popularity of religion.**
Durkheim predicted that religion's influence would decrease as society modernises.
His view may apply to many European countries such as France, Spain and Great Britain.
However, the influence of faith, notably the Catholic faith in the developing world proves that religion is still a very important concept for millions of people.

**Society and religion are not identical.**
Society and religion are clearly not identical in our multi-faith pluralist society.
It is clear that different religions have different relationships with society.
Our society tolerates different views; it does not expect people to behave in the same way.
We just have to look at the many different religious faiths that are present in the UK to understand that society and religion cannot be identical; if they were then surely the faith that we all practice would be the same.
This is not the case, although religious groups share certain characteristics we simply need to observe the cultural differences between followers of Islam and Christianity.
These differences are clear in how people dress, the food they eat and the worship that they undertake.
Therefore, society and religion are not identical.

**Religion challenges society.**
The holiest people, the closest to God, are often prophetic voices that criticise society.
If society were God, why would leaders such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad have stood up against the injustices within their societies?
They should simply have stood back and accepted society as it was because this is how God had intended it.
As this was/is not the case it offers a clear challenge to Durkheim and gives religious people a way in which they can argue against the sociological view of God / religion.
Karl Marx’s weaknesses:

- Religion and social change.
  Karl Marx argues that the concepts of God and religion were simply social institutions that kept society functioning in a certain way.
  That way was to maintain a distinction between the working and ruling classes.
  In other words, it made those in the working class accept the lot they had been given and rather than try to change their future it kept them content in the knowledge that something better awaited them.
  However, many sociologists and philosophers have argued that Marx neglected the role that religion could play in social change.
  The teachings of Jesus, rather than keeping people in suffering, do the opposite.
  They inspire people to act against oppression and fight for a more equal world.

- Are working class people duped by religion?
  Is there any evidence to suggest that the working classes in the UK have been duped by religion?
  In other words, there are millions of religious people within the UK alone who would argue that their religious beliefs have little to no impact upon their social status.
  Therefore, Marx’s arguments don’t apply to everyone; it is not possible that poor religious people remain poor because of their faith as so many other factors apply e.g. education / family background / economy.
  Moreover, many religious people in the UK are also in the ruling classes and have achieved financial success irrelevant of the teachings of their religion.

- Neo-Marxism - Liberation theology.
  Marx’s critique of religion suggests that people would therefore put up with their present suffering in the hope of a spiritual reward – using it like a drug to ease the pain of their situation.
  Marx is saying that religion creates illusory fantasies for the poor.
  However, many have turned Marx’s ideas into a force for changing the situation of the poor.
  This form of Neo-Marxism is known as Liberation Theology.
  Therefore, the views of Marx, rather than decreasing the appeal of God / religion has in fact given it extra impetus to carry out the message of Christianity they believe Jesus wanted from the world.