

Candidate 1 evidence

To what extent are St Thomas Aquinas' three ways the most convincing cosmological argument?



Image source: <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Key-Concepts-of-the-Philosophy-of-St-Thomas-Aquinas>

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“The Universe is just there, and that’s all there is to say”, once said British mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell in his book, *Why I Am Not A Christian* (1927)¹. This view was opposed by English priest and philosopher Fredrick Copleston, stating, “If one refuses to even sit down at the chess board and make a move, one cannot, of course, be checkmated”². No matter your stance, the question regarding the origin of the universe has withstood the test of time, and remains in contention amongst academics to this day. A notable theory, also prime subject of this works discussion, is the cosmological argument. Dating back to philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) whose work differentiated ‘actus’ and ‘potentia’³, the cosmological argument remains relevant as a topic for discussion regarding its meaning and purpose. Historical versions include St Thomas Aquinas’ ‘Three Ways’ in *Summa Theologica* (1274); the Kalam argument, originating from medieval Islamic scholars al-Kindi and al-Ghazali and, ‘The Principle of Sufficient Reason’ by German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. More recent contributions include American philosophers Richard Taylor and William Lane Craig. However, Aquinas’ a posteriori premises: motion, causation and contingency have potentially been most key in popularising the cosmological argument, resulting in numerous questions which this dissertation aims to tackle as follows: Is Aquinas’ contribution the most convincing account? Has it become out- dated in the present day? Does scrutiny from fellow philosophers and academics undermine one version(s) of the cosmological argument significantly more? This essay will seek to determine whether Aquinas has formulated the most convincing version of the cosmological argument.

¹ P. Cole, *Philosophy Of Religion* (Hodder & Stoughton, United Kingdom, 1999), p30

² Ibid.

³ M. Palmer, *The Question Of God* (Routledge, London and New York, 2001), p51

Aquinas' First and Second Way

Thomas Aquinas, a well- educated theologian and philosopher (1225- 1274), attended the University of Naples Federico II in 1272. He maintained that universal experiences of existence were dependable in providing proof for the existence of God. This led to Aquinas' works, *Summa Theologica*, including his 'Five Ways'. The first three - motion, causation and contingency - are relevant to this discussion.

Aquinas' 'First Way', motion, asserts whatever is in motion, was put into motion by something else. Aquinas states "Motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality"⁴. By 'motion', Aquinas refers to change as quantity or quality, demonstrated using observations of fire heating wood. When in contact with wood, fire (actuality) allows the wood to obtain its potential of becoming hot. Thus, change only happens when acted upon by something of actuality, otherwise something is both actual and potential simultaneously. For example, the wood had the ability of becoming hot. Christian doctrine refers to the universe having a beginning. However, Aquinas affirmed a chain of movement cannot infinitely regress. Therefore, the universe must have had an unmoved mover who started the succession of movement, God.

British 20th century philosopher Anthony Kenny, former lecturer at Oxford University, was sceptical of Aquinas' 'First Way'. Newton's first law of motion states, "An object at rest remains at rest, and an object in motion remains in motion at constant speed and in a straight line unless acted on by an unbalanced force" . Thus rather than motion always being actualised by an external force, motion can be induced by pre-existing inertia. I disagree

⁴ A. Jordan, N. Lockyer, E. Tate, *Philosophy Of Religion* (Stanley Thornes, United Kingdom, 1999), p65

with Kenny's viewpoint as Newton is referring to inertia and physical motion, while Aquinas is referring to motion in the broader sense of size, quality and quantity.

Aquinas' 'Second Way' focuses on causation. Being an a posteriori argument, it starts with the premise all things observed appear to have external causes. It is unfeasible that something can be the cause of itself, explained when Aquinas states, "There is no case known (neither is it indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for it would be prior to itself, which is impossible"⁵. He then further explains there cannot be an infinite regression of causes, thus, there must be a first cause out-with the universe, this being God.

Motion and causation are often discussed jointly amongst academics, hence, they shall be analysed and evaluated together. In his book *The Puzzle Of God* British theologian Peter Vardy reveals recent advancement in Quantum Field Theory shows, that in the presence of strong electro-magnetic fields, charged subatomic particles come in and out of existence with no visible cause⁶. This would contradict Aquinas' causation argument. It invalidates that something self-moving/causing is an absolute impossibility. The implication being that it is possible the universe may have come into existence naturally, rather than by God. However, I find Aquinas' first two ways to still have strong grounds. Although scientific progress is a constant, it may be that the cause for subatomic particles simply lays undiscovered as yet. Therefore, although scientific advancements might currently undermine Aquinas' causation argument, there is still potential for his rationalisation's to remain convincing.

⁵ *ibid*, p66

⁶ P. Vardy, *The Puzzle Of God* (HarperCollins, London, 1999), p78

Scottish philosopher and historian, David Hume, takes issue with Aquinas' a posteriori premises, insisting worldly observations do not provide empirical evidence or any relation to the happenings external to it. Hume outlines this in his book *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, stating, "The unity too of the Divine Nature, it is very difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to deduce merely from contemplating the works of nature"⁷. Hume saw as problematic, the assumption the universe is accordant to what is beyond. I think there is validity to this point, for despite Aquinas inferring association between the real world and that of the divine, he nonetheless attributes this as being unmoved and uncaused, contradicting what we observe. This would suggest he himself accepts differences exist between universal and external laws. Additionally, Hume notes "there is a 'determination of the mind', a psychological disposition from us, that there must be an actual link between one event and another"⁸ which we ill-apply to the universe to force flawed conclusions. This is supported with an analogy by Australian philosopher John Passmore as follows: a baby boy who has only ever played with soft toys receives a bouncy ball from his uncle. He is not anticipating the ball to bounce back up once dropped. However, the uncle has already observed the connection between rubber balls dropping and bouncing and, thus, is expecting the ball to do just that. Thus, making causal links external to the universe is illogical due to our epistemological limits, restricted by the laws of nature we experience. This therefore, suggests a posteriori premises cannot explain what brought the universe into existence making Aquinas' cosmological argument less convincing.

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his book, *The God Delusion*, disagrees with attributes Aquinas ascribes to God. While Aquinas labels the divine 'the unmoved mover'

⁷ D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural religion* (Amazon, 2020), p57

⁸ M. Palmer, *The Question Of God* (Routledge, London and New York, 2001), p65

and 'the uncaused causer', his theistic approach also describes God as omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent. Dawkins states, "calling it God is at best unhelpful and at worst perniciously misleading"⁹. He observes omniscience and omnipotence are incompatible concepts. If God is omniscient, He already knows the future which He achieves with His omnipotence. Yet God cannot use this omnipotence to change the future. Therefore, this questions the credibility of Aquinas' presumption that the only possible 'uncaused causer' and 'unmoved mover' is a Christian God, the implication being that a deist God is more plausible. As suggested by Richard Dawkins, I agree Aquinas' viewpoint leads to more questions than answers, making the first two ways less convincing. Using the Franciscan theologian William of Occam's principle of Occam's Razor (when confronted with two theories regarding the same phenomenon, we should place our trust in the simplest choice)¹⁰, Aquinas has made numerous unnecessary assumptions resulting in an elaborate, and equally puzzling theory. Thus, I think Aquinas' first two ways are not convincing enough to accept a theist unmoved mover and uncaused causer, as an alternative to the universe as brute fact or a deist God.

Aquinas' 'Third Way'

Aquinas' 'Third Way' focuses on contingency and how everything in the universe is contingent. It either exists or it does not. If it does, there must be a chain of events that lead to its' creation. However, there must also have been a point in time when nothing existed, contradicting our perception of the world. It therefore implies there is a 'being' who brought all contingent matter into existence for, "If at one time nothing was in existence, it would

⁹ R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Transworld, London, 2006) , p78

¹⁰ C. Simms, Occam's Razor, *NewScientist*, < <https://www.newscientist.com/definition/occams-razor/#:~:text=Occam's%20Razor%20is%20a%20principle,should%20prefer%20the%20simpler%20one> > [23/03/24]

have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist”¹¹. This ‘being’ has a necessary existence which the whole universe depends upon, a necessary being Aquinas calls God.

Immanuel Kant is a German Philosopher who took inspiration from David Hume when addressing his main objections to contingency in his book, *Critique Of Pure Reason* (1787). Kant distinguishes two types of reality: ‘phenomenon’, experiences we can verify with our senses, and ‘noumenon’, reality in its true form. Kant rejects Aquinas’ concept of contingency, citing that a necessary being would have to be part of ‘noumenon’ reality, as one can only have conclusive reasoning for any reality that is of ‘phenomenon’. While I agree with Kant that no one knows definitely what is beyond the universe, I do not find this to render Aquinas’ argument unconvincing. This is because Kant’s viewpoint does not necessarily make it more wrong to speculate external entities if there is good reasoning, than arguing the universe is a brute fact, as according to Kant, we cannot be certain on either. Kant defines three concepts of a ‘necessary being’: logical necessity (God is actual based on certain logical principles); model necessity (God is true in any universe); and factual necessity (if God exists, He is an absolute infinite, if God doesn’t exist, His existence is an impossibility). Kant implies that God cannot be a ‘logical necessity’ as His non- existence is easily believable. Therefore God has neither ‘model necessity’ (as he does not exist in all universes) or ‘factual necessity’ (as God coming into existence would be an impossibility¹² since he is either an absolute infinite or non- existent). The implication being since Aquinas’ conception of a ‘necessary being’ has no ‘logical necessity’, his ‘Third Way’ is weak and unconvincing.

¹¹ A. Jordan, N. Lockyer, E. Tate, *Philosophy Of Religion* (Stanley Thornes, United Kingdom, 1999), p67

¹² ‘Key Thinkers: Immanuel Kant, *Philosophy Dungeon*, <<https://philosophydungeon.weebly.com/scholar-kant.html>> [08/02/24]

Furthermore, Craig seeks to prove God as a personal creator. He determines one can either accept the universe to be self-sufficient or caused. If the belief were that the universe was caused, then one must determine whether it be the result of natural forces or external supernatural entities. Since modern science has established that, prior to the universe, the laws of nature we now know were absent, the cause of the universe must be God who is, "a personal agent who freely chooses to create a universe in time"¹⁹.

I find Craig's argument to be more convincing than either Aquinas' 'Three Ways' or the POSR. Aquinas, Leibniz and Taylor concluded a theistic God with no logical reasoning, perhaps due to their personal religious beliefs. Craig on the other hand, seeks a logical explanation for a personal God, making the beginning argument more convincing.

The Kalam argument interlinks with the most supported modern scientific cosmology explanation, the Big Bang Theory (BBT). In basic terminology, the BBT suggests that the universe began as a single, intensely hot point 13.8 billion years ago. This singular point created stars, galaxies and planets over millions of years. This ties in with both the Kalam argument and Aquinas' 'Three Ways' which assert the universe had a beginning, for which there is now a scientific explanation. However, other recent cosmology theories support the idea of an eternal universe, leaving the BBT subject to further investigation. Since both Aquinas' and the Kalam cosmological arguments are dependent on a finite universe, science could now prove their theories to be less reliable. I feel, on balance, Taylor's POSR is most compatible with such scientific theories, for his arguments support both a finite and infinite universe.

¹⁹ W.L. Craig, 'Five Arguments For God', *Christian Evidence*, < https://christianevidence.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/five_arguments_for_god.pdf >, [15/02/24]

example, stones) when rubbed together also produce heat. Additionally, Aquinas presents no logical conclusive reasoning as to why a 'necessary being' should be a traditional Christian conception of God. Why not multiple Gods? Or a deist God? This discredits Aquinas' arguments, for not all elements of his first three ways have been justified, therefore, rendering them unconvincing.

The principle of Sufficient Reason

To perhaps gain a more convincing understanding of Aquinas' first three ways, it is necessary to consider alternative variations of the cosmological argument. For example, Leibniz (1646-1716) was an advocate of the 'Principle Of Sufficient Reason' (POSR). Leibniz believed science, philosophy and the entire universe would be non-comprehensible without an explanation for all monads, whether those explanations be known or unknown. Leibniz rejected an absolute infinite universe, stating, "If you suppose the world is eternal, you will suppose nothing but a succession of states and will not find in any of them a sufficient reason"¹⁴. The universe does not appear to contain within itself a reason for its own existence, therefore, the explanation must be external to it. Since time, matter and space ceased to exist prior to the beginning of the universe, Leibniz accepts "the whole universe depends on God, who is uncaused and does not depend on anything else"¹⁵.

Hume outlines his opposition to the POSR in his work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume states, "I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable, should you afterwards ask me, what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the

¹⁴ Principle Of Sufficient Reason, *Philosophy Dungeon*, < <https://philosophydungeon.weebly.com/sufficient-reason.html> >, accessed [25/11/23]

¹⁵ P. Vardy, *The Puzzle Of God*, (HarperCollins, London, 1999), p73

cause of the parts”¹⁶. Hume suggests that the existence of all elements within the universe can be sufficiently explained, thus, it is inadequate to question the existence of the whole universe. It implies that relying on a ‘necessary being’ to account for the existence of the universe is futile, rendering it more plausible, therefore, to accept the universe as brute fact. This is similar to the viewpoint of Bertrand Russell on Aquinas’ ‘Three Ways’, thus, suggesting the POSR is no more successful or convincing than motion, causation and contingency in the scrutiny it attracts.

Further analysis of the POSR by Richard Taylor outlines a parallel between finding a ball in woodland and the universe. He observed that if, when walking through woodland, one discovered a large polished ball, there would be an element of surprise. Thus, one would expect an explanation. It might also be true that any natural objects, such as rocks and trees, require an explanation. However Taylor questions why it is the non-existence of something requires no explanation. The ball ‘simply’ always being there is not a sufficient reason according to Taylor, as it offers no explanation. Taylor dismisses the idea of the world being responsible for its own existence as it fails to correspond with everything else in the world being contingent. Therefore, Taylor concludes that a self-caused necessary being, something that was not born nor can it die, is the reason for the world’s existence. By this he means God¹⁷.

I find Richard Taylor’s viewpoint more convincing than that of Aquinas. This is because Taylor affirms the universe, whether eternal or finite, still requires God. Taylor illustrates this with his analysis of light arising from a flame. The existence of the light is dependent upon the

¹⁶ D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural religion* (Amazon, 2020), p57

¹⁷ D. Purgatory, ‘NOTES on Richard Taylor (1919- 2003): The Argument from Contingency’, WorldPress.com, <<https://cosplayvideos.wordpress.com/2018/04/11/richard-taylor-1919-2003-the-argument-from-contingency/>> [12/02/24]

flame, while the flame is not dependent on the light. Thus, implying the universe's existence is dependent on God, but God is not dependent on the universe. This makes Taylor's argument plausible as it aligns more with scientific cosmology theories. Furthermore, unlike Aquinas, Taylor's argument is not necessarily dependent on a universe with a beginning in time.

Richard Swinburne, an English philosopher and professor at the University of Oxford, supports Leibniz and Taylor. Swinburne identifies two explanations for the existence of God: inanimate (scientific, dependent on the laws of nature); and personal (based upon belief, powers and purpose). Swinburne argues theistic personal explanations are more simple to accept than scientific explanations. He states, "even if the hypothesis of one physical first substance were just as simple as the hypothesis of God, its propensity to create the good could not explain certain more particular features of our universe"¹⁸. Swinburne insinuates, with the use of Occam's Razor, that God being the creator of the universe is more rational and probable than any scientific counter-argument on the basis that 'God' is more comprehensible.

John Hick, however, an English philosopher and theologian, rejects Swinburne's viewpoint and, thereby, the POSR. Hick identifies a human need for rational, rounded explanations derived from science and philosophy, resulting in limitations of the mind. He argues that the perception of God, as conclusive reasoning for the universe, is due to the unexplained reality being less comprehensible. Despite humans being capable of imagining reality beyond God, the want for concrete answers is greater. Furthermore, the 'God' concept has evolved over

¹⁸ R. Swinburne, 'God As The Simplest Explanation Of The Universe', *University Of Oxford*, <https://users.ox.ac.uk/~orie0087/pdf_files/Papers%20from%20Philosophical%20Journals/Swinburne_2010-simplest.pdf>, [12/02/24]

time (regarding what God is and His involvement in the universe), meaning we are unable to produce a rational conception of God as the ultimate explanation for the universe.

On balance, I find the POSR to be more convincing than Aquinas' cosmological argument to a small extent. However there are some weaknesses. Swinburne's use of Occam's Razor is subjective, as it is a matter of opinion which theory might be 'simpler'. However, Swinburne is supporting a theist God with reasoning, but without religious bias, making his viewpoint of the POSR more convincing than Aquinas' 'Three Ways'.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

The Kalam cosmological argument dates back to Islamic scholars al- Kindi (9th century) and al- Ghazali (12th century) and is widely referred to as the 'beginning argument'. The premises for the Kalam cosmological argument are all which begins to exist has a cause, the universe began to exist, and therefore must have a cause. This being God.

Christian American philosopher, William Lane Craig, in his book *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (1979), expands on these premises to prove the 'beginning argument' still upholds relevant rational proof for God. He considers the first premise to be intuitively obvious, therefore, placing greater focus on the second premise. Craig affirms the concept of the 'absolute infinite' (a set of numbers or events with no beginning or end) is only plausible in a mathematical realm, for its existence is impossible. He illustrates this by supposing a library holding an absolute infinite number of books. If every second book were to be removed from the shelves, rather than halving the absolute infinite, the result would be two absolute infinite piles of books- an outcome which goes against logic and experience.

Hume's analogy does not agree with the Kalam's premise that all which begins to exist has a cause. He views this a causal link, stating, "A ship going through the water may not cause the wake, the wake may occur at the same time as the movement of the ship"²⁰. This implies the Kalam argument to be assuming connections between events where there may, actually, be none. I find this renders the Kalam argument to be on a par with Aquinas' 'Three Ways' for both, regarding unconvincingness, are subjected to similar criticisms (hence, flaws) by philosophers.

Australian philosopher John Leslie Mackie (1917-1981) in his book, *The Miracle Of Theism*, identifies inconsistencies in Craig's Kalam argument. Mackie contends that anything coming from ex nihilo raises scientific and philosophical questions. Thus, he affirmed that God creating the universe out of nothing is as equally improbable to claiming the universe itself came out of nothing. Alternatively, if one were to accept God to have an absolute infinite existence, Craig would be contradicting himself, for even he agrees that the 'absolute infinite' only stands a chance of existing in a mathematical realm.

Overall, I find Craig's Kalam argument to be significantly more convincing than Aquinas' cosmological argument. This is because Aquinas relies somewhat on sacred texts to back his viewpoint that the universe had a beginning. The use of sacred texts as 'proof' is ineffective, for it will only convince those who believe such texts to provide the truth - a view not so widely held in modern society. Craig uses logical and philosophical reasoning to affirm a finite universe – a reasoning which we can all potentially agree on, whether religious or not. Thus, making the Kalam argument more convincing than that of Aquinas' cosmological argument.

²⁰ P. Vardy, *The Puzzle Of God*, (HarperCollins, London, 1999), p78

Conclusion

Aquinas' cosmological argument is not the most convincing. Aquinas' 'Three Ways' are considered less proof of God in modern society. Flaws include the logical question- what caused and moved God? According to Aquinas all that is potential is actualised by a state of actuality, making the notion of an uncaused causer and unmoved mover significantly problematic. Additionally, devout Roman Catholic Aquinas, draws on some sacred texts to justify the universe having a beginning and the creator being a theistic God. This lends itself to reproval as many no longer consider the Bible as 'valid evidence'. Leibniz's POSR is equally unconvincing by affirming all monads need an explanation - the obvious question being, 'what is the explanation for God?'. This misaligns with the self-sufficient theistic perception of God Leibniz upholds, whilst also assuming the universe to have a beginning without any justification. Richard Taylor's explanation is more convincing than that of both Aquinas and Leibniz. This is because he accepts both an eternal and finite universe, while not relying on sacred text's to back his view. Taylor's version, however, still fails to explain God. The Kalam argument reasons that only something with a beginning needs a cause, and since God is an infinite being, questions regarding the cause of God are eliminated. Therefore, making Taylor's argument more convincing. However, overall, it is William Craig's version of the Kalam argument which I believe to be the most convincing, by addressing why an absolute infinite is impossible while justifying a theistic God, without preconceived religious beliefs. Therefore, on balance, I find Craig's Kalam argument to be more convincing than Thomas Aquinas' 'Three Ways'.

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Candidate 2 evidence

To what extent is God responsible for evil and suffering?

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When perceiving God as the creator, it is important to recognise what type of world he made. This includes a world filled with evil and suffering. This dissertation will explore the extent that God is responsible for actions people take to cause harm and natural events that result in suffering. Can he be responsible for the actions a man with freewill commits? And is it his fault if there is a natural disaster that affects humans as a product of itself? Additionally, God's will is often morphed by the cultural setting he is placed in, therefore how his morality is viewed often contradicts itself. This boundless ideology of God's benevolence is even harder to define once other religions are introduced, such as the idea of Karma within Hinduism and the differences Abrahamic religions contain for the same God. The debate on evil in the world, and if God has accountability over it, is a centuries long debate with many philosophers voicing their opinion in a hope to understand it.

In order to understand the root of suffering, it is important to define it. Suffering is a complex issue that changes face for everyone, therefore, to name it and its origin creates debates not answers. Philosophers such as Hume have speculated God's part in it, however despite centuries of thought, questions still prevail.

There are two types of evil. Natural and moral. Moral evil is brought upon the world to humans by humans, committing actions that result in pain and suffering. For example, murder, terrorism, and assault. Emanuel Kant¹ regards evil in human nature as a lack of will. By his definition we are only morally good if we actively choose and wish to be. Kant categorises the types of evil people hold within them.

The first type being "frailty". This occurs when people decide to complete morally good actions, however due to lack of will, fail and instead complete a morally wrong action. The second stage is "impurity". A person will have an impure will, despite completing a morally good action. Their morality is corrupted by their ill intentions. To analyse why this is worse than frailty, it is because despite doing the morally correct action their intentions are corrupted, therefore tainting any actions that stem from their ill will. Frailty is better than this because they had the right intentions originally. This shows how Kant views the intentions behind an action in higher regard than the consequences.

The third, most severe type of moral evil defined by Kant is "perversity" or "wickedness". This is defined as prioritising inwardly as opposed to looking at the moral law for guidance.

¹ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 'The Concept of Evil', 26th November 2013, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/#KanTheEvil>

This occasionally aligns with what is morally correct, however their actions are dismissed as morally right because their intentions are based solely on how they will benefit.

There is also natural evil. Natural evils are disasters that are the result of the land, sea, and sky. Over these, humans have no control and can only try and contain. It is an unavoidable part of living on Earth, however, I believe there are benefits from natural evil, such as the fertile land a volcano produces after an eruption or greater appreciation for summer after a long winter. Natural evils can be a balancing force, as without any bad experiences, people wouldn't be able to recognise or appreciate good experiences. To further this point, C.S. Lewis writes "for while it may be true that the least sin is an incalculable evil, the evil of pain depends on degree, and pains below a certain intensity are not feared or resented at all. No one minds the process "warm — beautifully hot — too hot — it stings which warns him to withdraw his hand from exposure to the fire: and, if I may trust my own feeling, a slight aching in the legs as we climb into bed after a good day's walking is, in fact, pleasurable." ² Which shows the necessity for suffering to enjoy life. Additionally, I believe that natural evil is more connected to God because moral evil can be excused as free will and God keeping an epistemic distance, however, as God is the one who made Earth, he is the one to blame when Earth's natural disasters cause suffering. As natural disasters aren't sentient and have no control to the suffering they bring; it is fully in God's will as to how much suffering will occur as a result of them, therefore their suffering is God's fault. In contrast, in recent years moral evil has increasingly contributed to an acceleration of the rate of climate change and thus the line between natural and moral evil is becoming increasingly blurred as natural disasters can now be blamed on human actions, therefore taking away responsibility that previously belonged to God for recent natural disasters and their suffering.

In classical theodicy, God is attributed with being omnipotent, omniscience and omnibenevolent³, this, however, can lead to contradictions when the existence of evil is presented. This was coined as the inconsistent triad due to incompatibility of these traits and evil existing simultaneously. This presents three possibilities:

² Lewis, S. C 'for while it may be true that the least sin is an incalculable evil, the evil of pain depends on degree, and pains below a certain intensity are not feared or resented at all. No one minds the process "warm — beautifully hot — too hot — it stings', Lewis, S. C, 'The problem of Pain (Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis)' P. 23. 19th January 2001

³ Crichton, Laura, 'Atheism RMPS Advanced Higher (paperback)', 29th June 2019

- God is all powerful and all-knowing but not all good as he allows the suffering caused by evil to exist.
- God is all powerful and all good but not all knowing as he is unaware of suffering, thus allowing him to remain good through ignorance.
- God is all knowing and all good but not all powerful as he unable to stop suffering.

This shows how God can be interpreted as having a failing and can be morally faulted.

Epicurus posed the questions “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God ?”⁴ in relation to the contradictions.

God being all knowing would also result in him knowing everyone’s actions before they are decided, thus predetermining the commitment of said action. This theological fatalism prohibits God being omnibenevolent as then he has already decided who he is to have a relationship with and save, and who is to be damned, before people have an opportunity to decide for themselves. In contrast, it can be argued that God lives out of the timeline we exist in; therefore, he does not know how our actions will play out until we, ourselves know, leaving humanity with free will and allowing God to remain omnibenevolent. Calvin states “when we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things have ever been, and perpetually remain, before his eyes, so that to his knowledge nothing is future or past, but all things are present: and present in such a manner that he does not merely conceive of them from ideas formed in his mind, as things remembered by us appear present to our mind, but really beholds and sees them as if actually placed before him.”⁵ In support of this argument, I believe that evil is necessary for humanities’ freewill to remain because if God were to strip

⁴ Bishop, James. “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?” 27th June 2016. Bishop’s Encyclopedia of Religion, Society and Philosophy (online) [accessed 21st March 2024]. <https://jamesbishopblog.com/2016/06/27/answering-the-epicurus-dilemma/>

⁵ Calvin, John ‘when we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things have ever been, and perpetually remain, before his eyes, so that to his knowledge nothing is future or past, but all things are present: and present in such a manner that he does not merely conceive of them from ideas formed in his mind, as things remembered by us appear present to our mind, but really beholds and sees them as if actually placed before him’ 21st March 2005 Institutes of the Christian religion (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://abetterpossession.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/quote-calvin-on-gods-foreknowledge/>

evil from this world, as it currently exists it would remove a person's choice of freewill, because a person who is incapable of committing an evil action cannot be good as they have no wish to be good, they simply are. Therefore, God must allow the existence of evil, and remain at an epistemic distance to suffering, if humanity is to have total free will. This relates to Kant's definition of impurity because if God were to disallow evil in our world and stop humans from committing evil actions, then while actions would be ethical, they wouldn't be considered morally good because of the lack of pure intention behind them.

David Hume⁶ was an empirical philosopher in the 18th century with atheistic tendencies. He used the problem of evil as evidence that God didn't exist. Hume had four main criticisms of how suffering infiltrates the world and offers alternative to the reality which would minimize world suffering, such as God limiting humans' ability to feel pain. Hume ponders the necessity of the ability to feel pain, especially the extremities of the pain that humans are capable of feeling. He instead offers the alternative solution that we feel an absence of pleasure or that the amount of pain possible of being felt is limited. However, I would argue that pain is necessary for humanities' survival because pain is what alerts people to problems within their bodies which allows people to seek help. Moreso, to limit the amount of pain felt or to have an absence of pleasure in replacement of pain would be ineffective, as without exposure, humanities collective pain tolerance would decrease and what would currently be considered a small pain like a paper cut could instead be felt as a bullet wound as there would be nothing greater to compare it. Hume also critiques how the laws of nature can bring about suffering to humans. For example, the law of gravity allows people to stay grounded to Earth, however, it also results in people falling over and harming themselves. To analyse, this implies God specifically made the laws of nature with the risk they could bring harm and therefore is responsible for deaths and suffering that occur as a result to the laws of nature. This shows how God made the world with the possibility of suffering and, therefore claims responsibility over it. Thirdly, Hume reviews the biological adaptations of animals and in turn humanities evolution and determined that we are only equipped with the qualities necessary for survival. Hume argues that we should have biological traits greater than this. If God genuinely cared about humanities survival rate, we would have greater physical traits such as advanced strength and endurance, which would create greater overall less suffering in

⁶ Philosophy Dungeon, "key thinkers, David Hume" (online), [accessed 21st March] <https://philosophydungeon.weebly.com/scholar-hume.html>

life, especially at the beginning of evolution. Finally, Hume argues that the world is separated in too great extremities. It could be argued that summers are too hot and cause heatstroke. Winters are too cold and cause frostbite. Floods bring too great an amount of water and droughts bring too little water. The world is like an unbalanced seesaw, God is capable of remedying these boundaries to always be in a tolerable limit for humans and yet he doesn't, therefore is directly responsible for the suffering caused by the extremes. However, I believe that this view is too human centric, as what would be intolerable for a human can be optimum for another species. God gave us tools to cope with these extremes, such as fire to warm us, whilst creating a planet for all his creatures to live, therefore humanities fixable suffering is necessary for all life to flourish. Hume's beliefs as an empiricist, rest solely on his experience and as he had experienced evil, it has provided him with evidence suffering is in the world and God has allowed it.

Abrahamic religions all believe in the same God yet their views on his morals and his reasons for the continued allowance of evil differ, based on their differing histories, philosophers, and messiahs (or messiahs yet to come). Despite all these differences however, all three of these religions hold an understanding that evil is amongst us. This means that they can share the question of, does evil come from God? Despite if their answers and reasonings are ultimately different.

To a theist, God existing is undeniable, however evil also exists in our world. This poses the question of how they coexist? Augustine of Hippo attempted to defend God from criticism for evil through his theodicy. He declared that God created a perfect world with no evil. Evil was brought about by the fall of Lucifer and then further cemented into the cosmos by Adam and Eve committing the original sin, concluding, it was the failing of God's creatures and them straying from his path that added evil into our world. The key principle being that evil did not come from God. Augustine's theodicy⁷ states that God cannot rid the world of evil else he be unjust, as natural evil has continued to punish God's creatures for the failing of their predecessors. I believe that this mentality was only accepted due to the nature of the society that Augustine lived in. In ancient Rome, it was customary for children to be punished for

⁷ Opt, Cit. 4

their parents' actions, and as Adam and Eve are the common ancestors of all of humanity it is fair for us to be punished for their sin, however due to the nature of today's individualistic society, it is more commonplace for people to only accept repercussions for their personal actions, therefore framing God as vengeful instead of just, by this theodicy.

There is also the matter of Irenaeus' theodicy⁸. Irenaeus' theodicy excuses the existence of evil as God allowing us to have the ability to become like God through our choices. He created a world in which humans require free choice and an experience of evil, yet have the potential to develop perfect morality, tested by this evil. He believed that without knowing evil, we would never be able to choose to live by God's guidance, which is necessary to have an honest and genuine relationship with him. This relies on the idea that people must experience evil to be good, however, this cannot mean God is omnibenevolent if he is content to allow the suffering of humanity so that some may be saved. Moreover, the suffering in the world is not evenly distributed, this can be construed as God giving some people greater opportunities to become like him by exposing them to greater suffering, however this also means that they experience harder lives than those God has ignored. To further my point, it puts into question God's personal history with suffering, because if we are to suffer to be like him, has he suffered? And if not, how did he become Godlike?

In Islam it is taught that evil did not come from God but rather by Shaytan (also named Iblis) who refused to bow to Adam under Allah's command. As punishment for his disobedience Iblis was cast out of Heaven. In response, Iblis vowed to tempt humanity towards evil for the rest of eternity as an act of insolence towards Allah.⁹ This is very similar to the Augustine's theodicy as both deny that it was God that introduced evil but rather blame it on one of God's creatures falling from his grace. This shows how in Islam, Allah is allowed to remain pure of moral as he has no domain over the evil introduced, thus evil cannot be blamed on him. This also shows that Muslims believe they have free will if it possible to be diverted from their chosen path from Allah by Shaytan. They can commit acts of sin, but Allah guides them not

⁸ Opt. Cit. 4

⁹ BBC, 'what does Islam say about the origin of evil?' BBC bitesize (online) [accessed 21st March 2024]
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zhsjscw/revision/6>

to and has power over any situation when he so chooses. So, despite having free will in a general sense, this freedom is by the choice of Allah and Allah can take it away. Another reason for evil accepted by Muslims, is that evil is a test by Allah which they must endure to earn an afterlife in paradise. Evil is used to determine a person's moral values and faith. By enduring the challenges set by God, it shows devotion and acceptance to him and his plan. I believe that this shows God's acceptance that there is evil in the world, which he has recognised without removing it, therefore despite God not introducing evil, he plays a part in its continued existence and thus can be partially blamed for its impact. However as Allah instructs his followers to help those in need and strive to live life without evil's influence, it shows his condemnation of suffering.

In Judaism, similarly to the Islamic response to suffering, Jewish theists believe that suffering is a test from God on whether they will run to or from him in times of hardship. Passing the test will reap them rewards in death. This causes many Jewish people to appreciate suffering because it connects them to God. They believe their suffering proves their devotion to God and his cause.¹⁰ The Holocaust caused a shift in this mentality. The scale of the suffering the Holocaust brought, made it hard to view the suffering of so many, from the elderly to infants, as just. Six million Jewish adults and children died from 1941 to 1945. The Shoah caused people to reevaluate their relationship with God because of the volume of suffering and pain he abandoned his people with. Many people felt a letdown in faith that God allowed such prosecution to continue without intervention. This feeling of abandonment is explained by Mr Menachem Daum stating "I don't think my mother felt the strong need for God's forgiveness. On the contrary, she told me when she's called before God in final judgment, she will turn the tables. She will demand to know why he stood by silently during the Holocaust as her large family was being destroyed."¹¹ regarding his mother's stance after she survived the Holocaust. To further support this feeling of abandonment felt by the Jewish community on this mass punishment of suffering, Ms Dora Lefkowitz: Holocaust survivor, states "Why? What did they do so terrible that they had to perish? I think if God is so great and so powerful, he could have struck Hitler down before he killed so many Jews. That's my

¹⁰ BBC, 'Jewish responses to the Holocaust', BBC bitesize (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqjqrwx/revision/3>

¹¹ Daum, Menachem. 'I don't think my mother felt the strong need for God's forgiveness. On the contrary, she told me when she's called before God in final judgment, she will turn the tables. She will demand to know why he stood by silently during the Holocaust as her large family was being destroyed'. 3rd August 2001. Religion and Ethics Newsweekly (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2001/08/03/august-3-2001-holocaust-survivors-the-search-for-faith/13853/>

feeling.”¹² This, showing how those who suffered, and their kin felt anger and sadness about how God reacted to their tragedy.

There is also the suffering mentioned in the Book of Job¹³, in regard to scriptural suffering in Judaism, in which God forced Job to suffer to prove a point to Satan. This quote by Ash analyses this “The Lord, the covenant God, is the one who brought these sufferings upon Job. He did not simply allow them; he caused them to come upon Job”¹⁴ which explains that this suffering is God’s fault. I believe this shows how God has been a bystander in many accounts of suffering, therefore through his complacency has been forced to shoulder the blame of suffering. This story also shows how he places his pride over his compassion to his people and is content to let them suffer to prove a point to the devil.

The Old Testament explores much of God’s wrath in his search to cleanse the world and punish the sinners that lay upon it. To analyse this, Richard Dawkins explains the God portrayed in the Old Testament as “arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust unforbearing control freak; a vindictive bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, fanatical, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully”¹⁵ which supports the idea that God is the root for suffering. Examples of the suffering was caused by God in the Old Testament includes but is not limited to him; releasing the plague of locusts upon Egypt, where the Israelites were enslaved as the 8th of 10 plagues and God commanding every first-born son to be culled. However, many Christians do not view this suffering as negative, they believe that because those who suffered were sinners, and as such they deserve the pain therefore God was justified in his actions, therefore despite him in enacting the suffering, his morality is untouched by evil. In contrast, I believe that God was unjustified in causing such

¹²Lefkowitz, Dora. ‘Why? What did they do so terrible that they had to perish? I think if God is so great and so powerful, he could have struck Hitler down before he killed so many Jews. That’s my feeling’. 3rd August 2001. Religion and Ethics Newsweekly (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2001/08/03/august-3-2001-holocaust-survivors-the-search-for-faith/13853/>

¹³ BBC, ‘Evil and suffering’, BBC bitesize (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zf9g4qt/revision/2>

¹⁴ Ash, Christopher ‘The Lord, the covenant God, is the one who brought these sufferings upon Job. He did not simply allow them; he caused them to come upon Job’ 7th April 2018. Desiring God (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/who-causes-your-suffering>

¹⁵ Dawkins, Richard, ‘arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust unforbearing control freak; a vindictive bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, fanatical, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully’ October 1st 2001. The God Delusion

suffering. He created suffering to teach his creations a lesson as they had strayed too far from his path, however, there were other ways that to teach people to be better without resorting to violence. This was shown when God presented himself to Saul, who was persecuting and causing suffering to Christians. An experience which caused no harm to Paul and stopped Paul from being the root of pain for Christians. This shows how God is capable of redeeming sinners without inflicting pain however chose not to, showing how he is at complete fault and bears all the responsibility for suffering he causes. Additionally, many branches of Christianity favour studying the New Testament, in which God portrayed as less vengeful. This is encapsulated in the quote "One common way this belief is stated is to claim that the God of the Old Testament is a god of wrath, whereas the God of the New Testament is a god of love."¹⁶ This demonstrating how God is perceived by his own followers as more ruthless in the Old Testament.

Evil exists to all those in the world and does not limit its impact based on faith, thus it is important to recognise how non-Abrahamic religions interpret the coexistence of evil, suffering and their deities. All religions have different origins yet evil exists beyond their points of creation with misfortune following humanity through all its time, therefore the question of God's responsibility over it and how it came to be, can be answered differently depending on if a Buddhist monk or a Hindu swami is asked. This poses numerous questions on how different religions seek to assign evil and its creation. How do other religions understand the simultaneousness of higher beings and evil?

In Buddhism, there is no direct God, yet suffering is important to the philosophy, nonetheless. Dukkha is one third of the three marks of existence which translates to dissatisfaction and represents the suffering in life. In order to achieve nibbana, this suffering must be overcome. I think this is an accurate depiction of suffering in life as it shows it cannot be avoided as everyone experiences suffering regardless of the size. It is necessary for people to experience suffering to better understand the joy that can be taken from life. Suffering is a crucial aspect of the Buddhist faith due to the buddha experiencing and embracing suffering for five years through starvation whilst he attempted to reach enlightenment. This is important as it showed that suffering alone will not bring about nibbana as it takes a mixture of suffering and

¹⁶ Harmon, Matt 'One common way this belief is stated is to claim that the God of the Old Testament is a god of wrath, whereas the God of the New Testament is a god of love.' 8th July 2022. Grace Theological seminary (online) [accessed 21st March 2024] <https://seminary.grace.edu/old-testament-vs-new-testament-god/>

pleasure (the middle way) to gain clarity on the human condition as both are experienced throughout life. Buddhism is heavily influenced by Hinduism as the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, was Hindu and saw Hindu deities during enlightenment. In Hinduism suffering is believed to be brought about by Karma and the suffering you experience in your current life is determined by your actions in your past life. I believe this allows humans to have free will whilst maintaining that the divine is good, because it is the self that determines the extent of suffering it feels. To live a good life will be rewarded whilst to bring suffering on others will only result in the self-experiencing suffering. This is a balanced approach to evil that is completely fair that places responsibility on the self not the divine. In contrast, this can cause people to be kind out of immoral and selfish motivation. This links back to Kant's idea of impurity as despite people completing good actions, if they are only doing so to gather good karma, their actions are corrupt. This means that people must do kind things for the desire to do kind things to achieve good Karma without caring for how their actions will affect their Karma which is difficult to achieve.

In the ancient Greek pantheon, humans and Gods were often entangled in myths. This often resulting in harm being put upon the human involved or humanity, for example Poseidon raping Medusa and Apollo and Artemis killing Niobe's children for her having more children than their mother, Leto. Additionally suffering as a concept was introduced to the world in ancient Greek religion by Pandora, Prometheus, and Zeus. After the Gods overthrew the Titans, Prometheus stole the Gods' fire and gifted it to humans, thus incurring Zeus's anger and dooming himself to eternal punishment. To add balance back into humanity, Zeus and other Gods create the first woman, Pandora. Pandora is then gifted to Prometheus' brother, Epimetheus with a box. It is this jar that Pandora eventually opens which, unknown to her, releases all manner of suffering into the world, leaving only hope contained.¹⁷ I believe that despite Pandora being the person who released harm into the world, she is not responsible for the suffering it caused, as she only passively partook in its introduction. It was the fault of Zeus due to him being the creator of Pandora and the box, and it was always his intention to have pain introduced, he just did so indirectly. Thus, the Gods are who are responsible for the continued suffering of society. Moreso, suffering only came about because Zeus was angry at Prometheus for helping humanity flourish in survival. As Prometheus means foresight, he knew the importance of fire to humanities advancement, this showing how Zeus placed his

¹⁷ Haynes, Natalie, 13th May 2021. (paperback) Pandora's Jar, women in Greek myths.

pride over utilitarian goodness and is at fault for the suffering that came as consequence of his temper.

To conclude, God is the reason for suffering throughout many religions, despite this, he is often not faulted for pains existence as many theodicies from many religions have shown cause that sufferings existence is necessary for human growth which has led theists to believe Gods is justified in his part of its creation. However, the idea that God is the root of suffering turns many people against religion, which introduces the concept of strong atheists, who based on their observations on the world reason there is not an all-good deity compatible with the world and its suffering to maintaining existence with an image as all good. Dystheism is the compromise between the atheist: who believes the idea of God to be cruel, and theist: who believes in a morally good God. It is the idea God is neither good, nor evil, He simply is. He created the universe with suffering but left it in humanities hand to how extreme the suffering becomes, from their actions alone. This dissertation's stance based on the explored knowledge is that God is responsible for evil and suffering as he understands for humans to have free will and the option to be good, suffering must prevail thus, it is a benevolence for God to allow suffering, so that we may exist freely.

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Candidate 3 evidence

Dissertation

**'The God of Classical Theism is incoherent.'
To what extent do you agree?**

Word Count 3910

‘The God of Classical Theism is incoherent.’ To what extent do you agree?

Many find it complicated to understand parts of God’s nature, due to different religions, moral issues and interpretations of God, causing people to question their faith. Challenging questions about freewill, suffering and morality are a few of many issues that cannot fully be explained, meaning the god of classical theism is incoherent. It is challenging to understand why an omnipotent and all-powerful God can co-exist with evil. In this dissertation I aim to focus on the concepts of omnipotence and omniscience to examine whether the God of classical theism is incoherent. I aim to examine the issues that arise from these, in particular, the challenging questions that arise from the morality of God, the existence of suffering and evil, and the existence of freewill.

Omnipotence

God is displayed as all powerful and is said by many to be omnipotent. Omnipotence means having unlimited power, therefore the ability to do absolutely everything. There are many examples of God’s omnipotence. For example, the Bible shows God created the universe in seven days:

“And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.”¹

This means that God has unlimited power over the universe as he created it, and therefore nobody is more powerful than him, there is nothing he cannot do. An implication of this belief is that God can do whatever he wishes as nobody is in control of him and so religious people

¹ Genesis 2:1-3 (KJV)

'The God of Classical Theism is incoherent.' To what extent do you agree?

believe that everything in existence should listen to him. Another example of God's omnipotence is found in Jeremiah:

"Ah, Lord GOD! It is ^ayou who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by ^byour outstretched arm! ^cNothing is too hard for you."²

This shows that God can do whatever he desires, there is nothing too difficult as he is in control meaning that nothing is too much of a challenge for him as he is much bigger and more powerful than all our problems. He made the earth in seven days, he can do anything as he is the one who created it all, he has power over all things at all times, he is greater than the universe.

However, an implication of God's omnipotence is that everything God does has to be morally good as God has the highest level of morality, due to being the most powerful being, therefore God being good means there are certain things he cannot do such as lie, sin, or contradict himself. For God to be coherent, God has to be morally good, why would anyone worship a God who sins? This is a problem however as can he really be omnipotent if there are things he cannot do? The significance of God's power is crucial, this means that there is nothing that God cannot resolve. However, there are difficulties with God's omnipotence. If God can do anything, why can't he lie, sin, or contradict himself? He should be able to do all the above, he made all these rules, therefore he can change and disregard these rules as well. The paradox of the

² Jeremiah 32:17 (KJV)

'The God of Classical Theism is incoherent.' To what extent do you agree?

stone ³asks can God create a stone so heavy that God cannot lift it, either way shows that God is not omnipotent as he can either create a stone that is too heavy for him to lift meaning he is not omnipotent as he cannot lift it, or he can create a heavy stone that he is able to lift meaning he is not omnipotent as he cannot create the stone too heavy to lift. There are other related questions such as can God create a wall he cannot climb, or can God beat himself in a race? God cannot perform or do anything that is logically impossible, he made all the rules to do with logic and order. This is emphasized in John:

'All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.'

⁴

This shows that God invented everything, therefore, he should not undo them, such as he cannot make a square circle. A square circle is contradictory, something cannot be square and circle at the same time, as it would not be a square circle, he would just be inventing a new shape, however, it seems like something that God should have the power to create, maybe the definition of omnipotence should be changed as many things cannot be brought about, even by an omnipotent being. The definition should be similar to *'the power to do anything, logically possible, that does not contain any contradictions'*.⁵ This definition was created by St Thomas Aquinas, it is a logical view as it would solve many issues and questions, such as can God do anything evil? Or can God create a stone that is too heavy for God to lift? God may not be able to do these things as they are logically impossible, all whilst still being omnipotent. It can be argued that an omnipotent being may not even exist, if God really were omnipotent, he would

³ <https://iep.utm.edu/omnipote/> [Accessed 28.2.24]

⁴ John 1:3 (KJV)

⁵ St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274_Thomas_Aquinas_Summa_Theologiae_%5B1%5D_EN.pdf [Accessed 29.2.24]

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be able to do anything, even if it was logically impossible, as nothing would have limitations, showing that God's omnipotence is limited as he also has limitations. This then shows that the God of classical theism is incoherent.

There is a further issue with the concept of omnipotence being coherent. Suffering and evil in the world challenges God's omnipotence: how can a perfect being, who has the power to solve all issues in the world let all these horrible things happen? Many Christians believe when God originally created the world suffering did not exist, suffering began in the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's rules, as a punishment God introduced suffering, however this is not what the Bible states, Genesis 3:16,

*"To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.'"*⁶

This shows that pain already existed before they disobeyed God, as if pain was going to be multiplied then this concludes there was already slight pain that could be experienced prior to the fall. This implies that pain existed before sinning did, meaning there is still no logical answer to why pain and suffering exist. One of the most commonly questions asked about God is if he is so powerful why does he not remove suffering in the world? Christians may answer this by saying suffering strengthens their faith in God or that suffering is a consequence of free will and the majority of pain is self-inflicted as it is just caused by our own actions. However, this is not always the case - what about diseases and disasters? These do not exist due to someone's

⁶ Genesis 3:16 (KJV)

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actions. Cities are destroyed and villages are flooded, innocent civilians are the ones left suffering, why does God not help these people? This suggests he is unable to, meaning God is not omnipotent. Religious people may answer these questions by saying God is testing us or he wants to make people stronger, with many arguing that evil is a necessity in a world with free choices and natural laws. However, I disagree with this view because if God is all powerful and he has the ability to create a world with free will whilst not allowing any evil, pain or suffering, yet he chooses not to create this world. This implies that if God really could do anything, why does he not resolve suffering in the world, meaning God clearly has limitations therefore is not omnipotent. Therefore, I think that the concept of omnipotence is incoherent as God has been unable to resolve suffering. Hume argued that the evil in the world can be used as an argument against the coherence of God as he is powerful enough to stop suffering, yet he just lets it continue so, as a consequence, it is impossible for evil and omnipotence to co-exist. Hume stated that suffering and evil proves that God does not exist by arguing that if God is so powerful and can solve anything, then why does he not stop the evil - does he not want to or is he physically unable to do so? In his book '**Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion**', 1779, Hume stated:

"If God is omnipresent then He must see all the suffering, so why doesn't He want to help people? If God is omnipotent then He must be powerful enough to stop the suffering, so why does He continue to let it happen? If God is omnibenevolent, He must love everyone

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*enough to stop all the suffering, surely a loving God wouldn't want to see people suffering?*⁷

He argues does suffering have a reason or is God just unable to resolve suffering that humans experience. Pain is unavoidable and everyone suffers, but why? Pain is usually a result of actions, but this is not always the case. Suffering does not have a real purpose, making people suffer does not teach anything. I do not believe a good God would want people to be in physical pain or have their life ruined just because of one wrong action, instead a loving and powerful God would be compassionate and understanding, instead of punishing people.

In conclusion I do not believe the God of classical theism is omnipotent, if God is omnipotent, he should not have limitations, he should be able to do the logically impossible as the power he has over the full universe is limitless. The contradictions of God's power limit his omnipotence and show the God of Classical Theism is incoherent.

Omniscience

In this section of the essay, I will research God's omniscience and examine if this is coherent. Omniscience is the capacity to know everything and having unlimited knowledge. This would mean that nothing can be hidden from God, as he sees everything. This includes beliefs that God must therefore be eternal and exist outwith time. This means that he will know the past,

⁷ 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion', 1779, David Hume, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4583/4583-h/4583-h.htm> [Accessed 8.3.24]

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coherence as the God of Classical Theism knows everything, he would have known that Adam and Eve were going to sin, yet he did nothing to stop this. It would be possible for God to create a world where freewill exists, but suffering does not and if God is omnipotent and omniscient, he can do anything, therefore God can bring about a world with no evil or suffering. Why would a good God create evil, if God created earth and everything within it, he must have created evil too. In Colossians, it states:

*"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."*⁸

This quote shows that God created everything that exists on earth. Many people disagree, saying God created humanity, who are capable of doing evil things, however God must have created people allowing them to do bad things, meaning in a way God created evil, as he allows evil to exist in the world, which he has full control over. I believe a good god who is omniscient would not want evil to exist, even with freewill, there is no explanation for why God created natural evil, humanity could not have created this. Is God a bad God or is he neith omniscient and omnipotent.

In my opinion, freewill does not provide a reasonable explanation for all types of suffering such as disease, natural disasters, and epidemics are not a result of humans having freewill.

This links to the Epicurean paradox, stating that evil existing proves God does not exist,

⁸ Colossians 1:16 (KJV)

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"If God is willing to prevent evil but is not able to, then he is not all-powerful. If he is able to prevent evil but is not willing to, then he is not all-good. If he is both willing and able to prevent evil, then why is there evil and suffering in the world?"⁹

This argument was developed further by John Mackie, a philosopher who defended atheism and argued with religious answers to the problem of suffering and evil, who argued that suffering is too high a price to pay for having freewill.

The argument for freewill, is because God has gave the gift of freewill, everyone must have the choice to choose between either the correct or incorrect choice, Mackie argues with this and states

"if God has made men such that in their free choices, they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good?"¹⁰

This means that God can create humans who do not sin, so why didn't he? The inconsistent triad argues against the theory of God being omnipotent and omniscient because if God is all-powerful and knows everything yet evil still exists, then he can't be all-loving, powerful, and omniscient. Mackie stated,

"God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the

⁹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/> [Accessed 6.3.24]

¹⁰ <https://www3.nd.edu/~jspeaks/courses/2017-18/10100/lectures/7-free-will-defense.pdf> [Accessed 7.3.24]

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third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once must and cannot consistently adhere to all three."¹¹

Showing Mackie believes not all three of them can be true. If evil exists through God's choice, this would make him a bad God, showing that he does not care for everyone, meaning he is not an all-loving God.

However, St Augustine believes freewill is a completely reasonable argument in response to suffering and evil, stating that when all humans were created, they were made to be perfect, though they were still given freewill, if humans were perfect, it would remove their freedom. Is this compatible with omniscience? An omniscient God would not want a world involving evil, meaning the God of classical is incoherent as if the God of classical theism really were omniscient, he would know how to remove all suffering, however the world still contains it.

But does omniscience then mean that nobody really has free will? If God already knows how we are going to act and what decisions everyone is going to make, then are we able to freely choose what decisions we make and how we act, or can we only act the way that God wants us to, as all our future actions are fixed, are humans just like puppets? An example of this is choosing between pizza or pasta for dinner, we get to make the choice, but God knows what our final decision will be, is he just looking into the future or is he making the decision for us. However, the choice cannot be different as if you were to ask God what you were going to have for dinner earlier in the day, he knows its pizza, this cannot be altered. An implication of this is

¹¹ <https://www3.nd.edu/~jspeaks/courses/mcpil/201/mackie-evil.htm> [Accessed 7.3.24]

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that humans' freedom is restricted as God is omniscient, reducing the ability to make choices, meaning the God of classical theism is incoherent.

A solution Boethius came to was suggesting God is outside of time, meaning humans can still have free will due to his eternal presence, meaning God's omniscience and human's freewill can co-exist. God knows everyone's future, but everyone still has freewill, choosing what will happen. Boethius recognized that God has a divine plan for humans and the universe, the plan is eternal and part of God's providence. Providence is timeless and the overall order of things. God knows everyone's plans and wishes; nothing can exist without him knowing about it.

Boethius shows the difference between knowledge and cause, for example, I can know there will be a general election in 2024, but this does not mean my knowledge is the cause of the event. If God knows my future, it does not follow that he causes it.¹² This shows that God only knows the outcome of the actions, meaning everyone still has the ability to make choices, he is not influencing anyone's choices as everybody still has freewill. I think providence provides a reasonable explanation, because everyone can make their own choices, without God choosing, allowing God to be omniscient and allowing freewill. However, philosophers such as Locke argued that humans do not have freewill, with Locke stating that freewill is an illusion, no one has control over their choices or their future, even though they think they do as they think before making a decision, however they are actually not the ones making the choice. He created an analogy to help people understand this concept:

¹² <https://laurenrevisesphilosophy.wordpress.com/2019/02/25/the-nature-of-god-god-free-will-and-eternity/>
[Accessed 10.3.24]

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“a man who wakes up in a room that, unknown to him, is locked from the outside. He chooses to stay in the room, believing he has chosen freely to stay there. In reality, he has no option but to stay in the room — it is only his ignorance of the fact that the door is locked which gives him an illusion of freedom.”¹³

This shows that freewill is an illusion, choices are not our own, we are just unaware that choices are out of our control. I agree with this statement, there is no way to really tell if we have freewill, although I feel like I can make my own choices, there is no way to prove that all the choices we make haven't already been determined.

Swinburne disagreed with Locke's view, he believed God knows everything we have done and what we are doing, however he only knows the different routes everyone's futures can take, God is a temporal being, who is outside of time. Swinburne believes it is impossible for God to know the decisions a person is going to make in the future, God knows everything possible, but only when it is logical, however issues arise from this if God sees everything at once, the past and present, this means that all events in the world are taking place at the same time, this is irrational.¹⁴ Consequently, all big world events are taking place at the same time, meaning God already knows the result of everything, this links back to issues with freewill if he knows everything outside of time, he must know choices that people are going to make. I believe that if God is always correct, he must know the decisions we will make in the future, as to him there is no future, due to him seeing everything at once, God knows decisions because he is already

¹³ https://www.hoddereducation.com/media/Documents/magazine-extras/RS%20Review/RSRev%2014_3/RSReview14_3_Free_will.pptx [Accessed 14.4.24]

¹⁴ <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:1f47aef6-84c9-45b3-abb2-c96d9490f187/files/mf555f7e2210774a186cb706f85cf0b72> [Accessed 15.4.24]

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seeing our future. I think Boethius' view is reasonable as it is open for religions people, meaning it provides a religious explanation, allowing freewill and God to be omniscient, the explanation is simple for everyone to understand.

I think there are many issues that arise from God being omniscient. If God has made decisions for us, then why are some people more moral than others? Why does he create and allow these evil people to exist. If God has preplanned everyone's life why are there inequalities from health, wealth, political and education, without question a good god would want equality, inequalities are not a result of sins. An issue with God being omniscient is how some people suffer more than others, why would a good god want this. Earth was created by a loving God, is the consequence of freewill suffering? This is an inaccurate response to suffering, how can something as fatal as a plane crash or someone losing their life be a part of God's plan, this would not be in a good God's plan, religious people use God's plan as an answer no matter what the final outcome is, life or death the response is always it was part of God's plan. Instead of this all being part of a 'plan' why does God not prevent this evil, he knows everything and is powerful enough to stop everything yet evil and suffering remains. Therefore, the limits of God's omniscience convince me that he is incoherent.

In conclusion, I agree that the God of Classical Theism is incoherent. I think this because of the existence of evil and suffering because if God is omnipotent and if he could get rid of evil but doesn't then he cannot be that powerful – if he was fully powerful, he could just get rid of it. I agree with Mackie's inconsistent triad because he clearly shows how evil, and omnipotence and omniscience cannot coexist. I think that the Augustinian theodicy does not help convince me that there is a purpose in suffering and evil because there is no evidence that backs up the

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Adam and Eve story. I think the Genesis story is metaphorical and teaches people about the relationship with God and is not really about why we suffer today. Therefore, the concept of God is still incoherent.

'The God of Classical Theism is incoherent.' To what extent do you agree?

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Candidate 4 evidence

To what extent is the treatment
and use of embryos morally
acceptable?

Word Count: 4388

Medical Ethics: Embryology

Once IVF has occurred, Human Leukocyte Antigen typing is carried out. Within this procedure, they look for matching HLAs -which indicate to the immune system whether the cell is from within or external- to the sibling in need of a transplant. This ensures that allograft rejection of the organs, blood, bone marrow and more is less likely as the HLAs won't seem foreign to the immune system. In the US the acceptance rate of a donation from an unrelated individual is 0.25%. Yet among siblings, these odds go up to 6.25% due to the likelihood of 1 in 4 siblings having the same HLAs. However, due to the smaller family sizes in the west the saviour sibling technology would be needed due to a lack of choice.¹

However, this pre-implantation choice brings up moral implications as the question of when to draw the line when making the choice of viable embryos is highly debatable. Whilst the technology of pre-implantation screening is an amazing advancement which can help save lives yet be used as a tool for prejudice. We are made to question whether as a society we can be trusted with the technology that can select for characteristics irrelevant to the health and well-being of the foetus and others. The Roman Catholic Church strongly disagrees with the use saviour siblings. This is due to a multitude of reasons including saying: "Children are a gift and a blessing from God and that although science makes some things possible it does not make them right,"² thus believing that the playing of God and the use of another person is deeply problematic. The Roman Catholic Church would emphatically disagree with the pre-implantation screening as despite it trying to help have a healthy baby who can support their sibling they are still going against God's wish as each embryo will have been designed by God and as thus disgorging them would be disrespectful to God.

In January 2011, Umut Talha was born as a saviour sibling to his sister suffering from beta thalassaemia- a disease which affects the production of beta thalassaemia. The Bishops Conference of France released a statement saying that whilst it is understandable to try "to cure a sibling for humane reasons"³ it is still abhorrent "to legalize the use of the most vulnerable human beings to cure another."³ Whilst I understand the bishops' views, I view it

¹ Althorpe, Caleb, and Elizabeth Finneron-Burns. *Are Saviour Siblings a Special Case in Procreative Ethics?*

² Ratzinger, Joseph Card, and Alberto Bovone. "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation Replies to Certain Questions of the Day Vatican City 1987." *The Linacre Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 2, May 1987, pp. 24-49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00243639.1987.11877891>. Accessed 2 Oct. 2023.

³ "Bishops of France Reject Manipulation of "Savior Sibling."" *Catholic News Agency*, 14 Feb. 2011, www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/21952/bishops-of-france-reject-manipulation-of-savior-sibling.

as a complete contradiction especially in this particular case. It is hypocritical to go against the most loving action and is a blatantly false accusation. Umut wasn't used to cure another but was instead a byproduct of the cure: the umbilical cord's blood. Thus, the use of embryos must always be allowed as it is providing a better life for a loved one. In the unlikely events that organ procurement is allowed from a saviour sibling I would heavily disagree as this could present adverse effects for their lifetime. A Rule Utilitarian would agree with the use of saviour siblings as they focus on creating a set of moral laws that can provide the greatest good in most cases. This means they would heavily disagree, with the bishops even saying "Utilitarianism is always a step backwards. It is dangerous for a society not to respect the primordial interests of the child as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of Children."³ I would mostly agree with a rule utilitarian but would struggle to look past the carefree nature they would address the situation due to the lack of view on a case-by-case basis meaning some morally questionable actions could survive as in other situations it would be the right action.

Whilst many critics of saviour siblings would point to the potential harm towards the child it is a rare occurrence. In actuality, the legal forms of saviour siblings are harmless ranging from blood collection from an umbilical to harvesting bone marrow. The focus of the anti-saviour sibling is the use of a saviour sibling for organ donation. This, however, is outlawed by IZA (1d) of the 2008 amendments to the HFEA act which says "in a case where a person ('the sibling') who is the child of the persons whose gametes are used to bring about the creation of the embryo (or of either of those persons) suffers from a serious medical condition which could be treated by umbilical cord blood stem cells, bone marrow or other tissue of any resulting child, establishing whether the tissue of any resulting child would be compatible with that of the sibling."⁴ The belief that medical mistreatment is an attachment to fiction instead of actual cases. Instead, Saviour Siblings being outlawed is a rarity with the case in America of *Corran vs Bosze*⁵ being one of few. In this case, it focuses on already existing siblings that could donate. As thus it seems comical to suggest the banning of saviour siblings as there is not only a lack of evidence but also precedence. Immanuel Kant, despite the

⁴ "Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008." *Legislation.gov.uk*, 2024, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/22/schedule/2/crossheading/embryo-testing-and-sex-selection?view=plain. Accessed 12 Mar. 2024.

⁵ Illinois. Supreme Court. "Curran v. Bosze." *North Eastern Reporter. Second Series*, vol. 566, 20 Dec. 1990, pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12041204/#:~:text=A%20bone%20marrow%20transplant%20has.

established basis that it doesn't harm the child, would view the use of a saviour sibling as morally abhorrent. This is due to his deontological viewpoint in which his second categorical imperative states goes as followed : "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."⁶ I heavily disagree with Kant as whilst initially they may be unaware as to what they are contributing to, if the contributions are prolonged they will recognise what they are doing and in almost every case be prideful in the fact they are helping their sibling.

Chapter 2: The Sanctity of Life

The Sanctity of life is a major moral question when becoming involved in embryology and abortion. It often correlates with the view on personhood. Eight weeks into pregnancy the baby's brain has developed to a state in which the "Neurons proliferate and begin their migration throughout the brain."⁷ At 23 weeks the foetus can now survive out of the womb with medical support with full term being post 37 weeks. The question on the sanctity of life is one which will never truly have an answer and is instead one that each person must confront. It is a moral question in which we weigh the value we give a foetus at different periods throughout pregnancy and after birth right up to death.

The Abrahamic religions believe we gain value from God's involvements in our creation. Thus, they view the sanctity of life as something that is uniquely sacred and valuable within every life. Due to the creative input God put into every characteristic they view the use of embryos outside of implantation as sacrilege as it is the destruction of God's favoured work. Thus, this is a religious dogma for most as we are viewed as the pinnacle of God's creations and as thus the destruction of further creation should be viewed upon as sinful. This means that when it comes to the treatments and uses of embryos a large number of Abrahamic religion followers would heavily disagree with it due to it being seen as a sign of disrespect to God. However, I believe this is too simple of an argument and would argue that it is part of Gods wishes to preserve the lives of those already here and thus we should be willing to

⁶ Kant, Immanuel. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1797.

⁷ Gazzaniga, Michael. "The Ethical Brain." *The New York Times*, 19 June 2005, www.nytimes.com/2005/06/19/books/chapters/the-ethical-brain.html. Accessed 20 Nov. 2023.

use an 'early life' for an existing one. This means that they would argue against the sanctity of life to help further god's will by allowing for further use of those created in his image.

In 2008, the Dicastery of the Doctrine of Faith- a department within the Roman Curia- released the *Dignitas Personae*. *Dignitas Personae* was the Roman Catholic Church's response to the advancements in embryology including in vitro fertilisation, pre-implantation screening and the uses of stem cells. Within *Dignitas Personae* it is said "By treating the human embryo as mere 'laboratory material', the concept itself of human dignity is also subjected to alteration and discrimination."⁸ Thus, the Roman Catholic church takes up the viewpoint that embryos should not be used for reasons other than for birth. They believe that using embryos for research and treatments is abhorrent as it lowers the status of what they believe to be people to that of a material. I slightly disagree with the Roman Catholic Church as I view their comparison of embryos to lab material as too far as it is undergone for the betterment of others and therefore, I believe we can look past the implications a bit more as it doesn't cause any inherent pain. However, I can still understand the Roman Catholic view as if they do genuinely believe that an embryo is the same as a baby then it would seem morally abhorrent to cause the destruction of it as it would be equivalent to murdering a baby. I, however, don't believe that an embryo is akin to baby so I disagree with them as the comparison as it would deter their followers from helping others with research and transplants.

However, Gradualists oppose the Roman Catholic Church, instead believing that as the embryo develops into foetus it gains more value. They believe that as time passes, we gain more value, so an embryo has some value. However, an issue I have with the Gradient Theory is that they still don't define where they view it acceptable to conduct embryology or abortion. This means that whilst telling us that they view the sanctity of life as something that progresses with time, they don't give us a point at which the use of embryos can become acceptable. I view this as a weakness as it still allows for one to define it themselves due to no guidelines making decisions unlike with other viewpoints.

A situation ethicist such as Joseph Fletcher believes we should take up the most loving approach in any situation even if it means going against the guidance of the church. Joseph

⁸ "Does Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis Violate the Catholic Church's Teaching on the Dignity of the Human Person? | Saint Joseph's University." *Www.sju.edu*, www.sju.edu/centers/icb/blog/does-preimplantation-genetic-diagnosis-violate-the-catholic-churchs-teaching-on-the-dignity-of-the-human-person#:~:text=By%20treating%20the%20human%20embryo. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

Fletcher was an episcopalian priest who created the idea of situational ethics. It is a consequentialist theory meaning that Fletcher would act based on the potential consequences. Thus, in the case of research, Fletcher would encourage the donation of embryos as it could result in the discovery of new methods that could help others in their attempt to have children, cure disease and understand the development of humans. I agree with Fletcher as I believe that the 'sacrifice' of a byproduct of gaining children is something we should all be willing to do for the betterment of others in dire situations as it means little to us but could mean as much as saving their lives for others. Fletcher clearly defines his criteria for humanhood in his Hastings Center Report saying: "in the absence of the synthesizing function of the cerebral cortex, the person is non-existent."⁹ This makes Fletcher's stance on Embryology confusing as he values humanhood as the emotional and intellectual capacity but has completely different requirements for personhood. Can we have personhood without having humanhood? I would argue no as I would define humanhood genetically whilst personhood is about the interactions and as thus Fletcher's view is slightly tainted due to his contradictions. Thus, Fletcher views the sanctity of life as something which may already occur within the embryo but also as something we should be willing to look past in order to help others. I really agree with Fletcher as I think his view is one with the ultimate sacrifice. Whilst I don't believe that Embryos have personhood, I still think that Fletcher has the ultimate view as he does not deny the potential that embryology could have by focusing on the unknowns of embryos.

Chapter 3- Who has the right to produce?

The advancements of embryology have come with major cost. This makes us consider who has the right to reproduce as we question at what stage funding should be cut off. The NHS follows the guidelines set by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE.) NICE decided that for IVF to have the best chance of success there should be limits to who should be potential recipients. These standards include under the age of 43, being a healthy weight, not smoking and not having previous children. They also state that to receive IVF on the NHS whilst under the age of 40 there should have been 2 years of unprotected sex, and

⁹ Fletcher, Joseph. "Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man." *The Hastings Center Report*, vol. 2, no. 5, Nov. 1972, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3561570>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

Fletcher was an episcopalian priest who created the idea of situational ethics. It is a consequentialist theory meaning that Fletcher would act based on the potential consequences. Thus, in the case of research, Fletcher would encourage the donation of embryos as it could result in the discovery of new methods that could help others in their attempt to have children, cure disease and understand the development of humans. I agree with Fletcher as I believe that the 'sacrifice' of a byproduct of gaining children is something we should all be willing to do for the betterment of others in dire situations as it means little to us but could mean as much as saving their lives for others. Fletcher clearly defines his criteria for humanhood in his Hastings Center Report saying: "in the absence of the synthesizing function of the cerebral cortex, the person is non-existent."⁹ This makes Fletcher's stance on Embryology confusing as he values humanhood as the emotional and intellectual capacity but has completely different requirements for personhood. Can we have personhood without having humanhood? I would argue no as I would define humanhood genetically whilst personhood is about the interactions and as thus Fletcher's view is slightly tainted due to his contradictions. Thus, Fletcher views the sanctity of life as something which may already occur within the embryo but also as something we should be willing to look past in order to help others. I really agree with Fletcher as I think his view is one with the ultimate sacrifice. Whilst I don't believe that Embryos have personhood, I still think that Fletcher has the ultimate view as he does not deny the potential that embryology could have by focusing on the unknowns of embryos.

Chapter 3- Who has the right to produce?

The advancements of embryology have come with major cost. This makes us consider who has the right to reproduce as we question at what stage funding should be cut off. The NHS follows the guidelines set by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE.) NICE decided that for IVF to have the best chance of success there should be limits to who should be potential recipients. These standards include under the age of 43, being a healthy weight, not smoking and not having previous children. They also state that to receive IVF on the NHS whilst under the age of 40 there should have been 2 years of unprotected sex, and

⁹ Fletcher, Joseph. "Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man." *The Hastings Center Report*, vol. 2, no. 5, Nov. 1972, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3561570>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

they haven't been able to get pregnant after 12 rounds of Artificial Insemination¹⁰. For women aged 40-42 they have to jump through further hoops where they have to prove that they do not have low ovarian reserves of their eggs and are also informed of the risks implicated due to their age. Despite these rules seeming strict it can go further with each local care board reserved the right to make stricter guidelines to receive treatment. If accepted, then treatment will be undergone yet there is still major disparity with a wealthy county such as Sussex allowing 3 cycles of IVF whilst Lancashire and many others only allow for 1. For those who either get rejected from the programme or who have undergone the NHS treatment without success they face a costly road to reproduce. IVF treatments outside of NHS Care can range from £5000 upwards. Yet the £5000 is just for the IVF neglecting to mention the screening needed before the procedure that would skyrocket the costs to around double. Thus, it is clear that there are obvious barriers for a large proportion of the population seeking IVF as the astronomical costs for something with such a low success rate forces hopeful parents into acceptance that their dream is impossible. We must question if we can be trusted with the editing and screening technology. Finally, there is also a major issue recently raised on our methods when trying to achieve pregnancy. Is surrogacy as morally acceptable as IVF implantation within the egg donor?

Jessica Hepburn, aged 43 at the time, had undergone 11 rounds of IVF which cost £70,000. Yet despite the access to such technology, she was still unsuccessful in her aim for pregnancy and birth. However, this wasn't the end of the costs for her as she had a further £30,000 built up due to therapy and debt acquired from the IVF.¹¹ A common argument against IVF is against the cost as they view the quest for parenthood a waste of money as they believe we should instead be using those funds to strive for counteractions of more serious medical conditions. Yet Peter Singer says: "if fertile couples are free to have large families of their own, rather than adopt destitute children from overseas, infertile couples must also be free to do what they can to have their own families."¹² I would slightly agree with Singer as I agree at face value that the infertile should be able to have their own families. However, I doubt I would support how caught up in the pursuit for a genetically similar family one can be as it

¹⁰ NHS Choices. "Availability - IVF." *NHS*, 2019, www.nhs.uk/conditions/ivf/availability/.

¹¹ Hepburn, Jessica. "Why I'm Finally Accepting I'll Never Be a Mother." *Mail Online*, 16 May 2018, www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5737279/Why-11-rounds-IVF-Im-finally-accepting-ill-never-mother.html. Accessed 12 Mar. 2024.

¹² Singer, Peter, and Deane Wells. *The Reproduction Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 1984.

can plummet them into debt when I personally believe in nurture is what makes family instead of nature. The costs presented by IVF are not fair either with them being thrust upon the poor earlier. In the UK, each county offers different cycles of IVF. In Sussex, where the median wealth is £263,200, 3 cycles of IVF are available through the NHS. Whereas in Lancashire, where the median wealth sits under the UK average of £135,000, they are limited to just one cycle of IVF.¹³ Whilst the argument against my case would be that each county is spending their money differently, I would instead run on it based on equity. The counties with the poorest should have access to the most cycles of free treatment as the struggle to receive it without financial aid would be too much. A utilitarian would struggle with my view as I believe they would agree that those who have the least accessibility when on their own should be helped by the NHS to achieve parenthood. The utilitarian would consider what the life of a child conceived through IVF would be. Due to their financial status would the child have as good of a life? However, I believe this would be too far. A utilitarian looks too far into the future thus dealing with too many possibilities that may or may not be true. This makes me believe that they get too hung up on the minute details thus making their calculations close to impossible to be correct.

With IVF comes the implications that it could have on our future. We must question how far we are willing to go with IVF and its technology. With the invention of IVF, the first nature step was to try and ensure the health and well-being of the baby via choosing embryos without genetic disorders. However, as technology has progressed, gene editing has become a focal point of the future for IVF. Gene editing for IVF has become a tool which will enable physical and mental characteristics to be changed. Society is one that follows trends which could mean a uniform society if designer babies come to fruition. This could result in a campaign akin to the Nazi's eugenics programme. Thus, it becomes clear that in this case, embryology is morally unacceptable as it would lead to discrimination before birth and potentially to a uniform society due to a possible trend in choices. However, as a whole embryology must be embraced, and this is merely one dark side which can be misused. However, Steven Pinker wouldn't take the potential issues as seriously as he says, "anyone who has been turned down for a date has been a victim of the human drive to exert control

¹³ "NHS-Funded in Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) in England." *GOV.UK*, www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-funded-ivf-in-england/nhs-funded-in-vitro-fertilisation-ivf-in-england.

over half the genes of one's future children."¹⁴ Whilst based on the fundamentals I agree with Pinker due to the fact that the choice of genes is part of everyday life, I view this point as an oversimplification of something which could be detrimental to everyday life as a uniform society could prevail if the technology is used harmfully. In an equal world IVF helps provide a lifeline to women as it can allowed the continuation of careers without the forfeit of family. Thus, the growth of IVF infrastructure can be the key to the promotion of an equal society as women can focus on the stability of their life before pursuing parenthood. Joseph Fletcher believes: "a baby made artificially, by deliberate and careful contrivance, would be more human than one resulting from sexual roulette."¹⁵ Thus, it is clear that Fletcher sees no issues with the selection and editing of genes and would be a staunch supporter especially during the early periods of designer babies. I however, view Fletcher's view as dangerous as he chalks up a world defining resource into a simple small-scale creation such as natural conception.

The right to reproduce may be a contentious topic for embryology but the truly hard-hitting questions do not question embryology but its access. Thus, it must be stated that embryology is ethically acceptable, and we must instead increase its outreach so all may have access if needed. We must instead focus on our own goals when using embryology as the technology itself is a major benefit to society and it is instead us who needs to be questioned for it uses.

Conclusion

Whilst it cannot be denied that IVF is a scarce luxury, the accessibility does not taint the advantages gained from the outcomes of IVF and embryology research. The use of embryology is one where we must look at it with a utilitarian point of view. The research that can be obtained with the use of embryos benefits a vast number of the population with the destruction of something which only had a 3.75%¹⁶ chance of even making it to the

¹⁴ Steinbock, Bonnie. *Scholars Archive Scholars Archive Philosophy Faculty Scholarship Philosophy*. 2006.

¹⁵ Fletcher, Joseph. "Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man." *The Hastings Center Report*, vol. 2, no. 5, Nov. 1972, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3561570>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

¹⁶ Jarvis, Gavin E. "Misjudging Early Embryo Mortality in Natural Human Reproduction." *F1000Research*, vol. 9, 14 July 2020, p. 702, <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.22655.1>.

stages of forming a fetus. Thus, we should not be wary of lifesaving technology if it only sacrifices the hope of a human rather than anything tangible. Embryology can provide comfort for those who have longed for families, or who wish to see again, or even save those who have received medicine tested on stem cells which ensured their safety. The question of embryology's morality is one which looks towards the potential of human life instead of focusing on preserving and improving the lives that are guaranteed. Embryology has the chance to enable a fair world where each person has an equal chance of life when born. The likes of genetic diseases could be irradiated but instead we focus on the harm done to an embryo which is not even guaranteed life. I believe the Roman Catholic Church takes up a viewpoint that is too pessimistic and as thus is trying to turn down the future despite being the most loving approach possible. I understand that they are hesitant for the destruction of embryos as they view them as people, but I would challenge their view on the personhood of embryos as there is no scientific basis for that belief. Instead, I would urge them to take up a view similar to Simon Fishel where he does view the embryo as life but also views it as a sacrifice worth making for the betterment of others. Embryology is currently hindered by outdated regulations with limits such as the 14-day rule preventing possible groundbreaking discoveries. Thus, I view embryology as a completely morally justifiable process as of now and with further changes regulation especially with possibly expanding the 14-day rule to 28 days in the future it will continue purely for the betterment of humanity with little risk of moral mistakes.

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"Is assisted dying morally acceptable?"

Assisted dying is the action where a person for whatever illness/condition takes their own life. This action is normally done by the means of lethal drugs. However, a common misconception with the topic of assisted dying is the idea of Euthanasia. This is when a person would go to the doctors and helped to be killed. Emphasis on the word "helped"-assisted dying is when you kill yourself, whereas euthanasia is when you get someone else to help kill you. But what does the law say? Well, the law says that euthanasia is illegal and those that participate will be prosecuted as murder or manslaughter. In Northern Ireland, according to section 13 of the Criminal Justice act 1966, 'assisting or encouraging' another person's suicide is illegal¹. The same is in England and Wales where assisting in someone's suicide is prohibited by section 2 of the suicide act 1961, which was amended by the coroners and justice act of 2009. Moreover, reports say that since 2009 up till March 2023, there have been 185 cases referred to the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service). Out of those, 125 weren't carried out with and 35 were withdrawn from the police². In Scotland, there is actually no specific offence for assisting or encouraging someone else's death. Nonetheless, it is still illegal and could be prosecuted as murder/ manslaughter³.

Although the UK consider assisted dying illegal, there are a number of areas that consider this concept legal. For example, US states like: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington DC. "But how does it work?" It seems that it's not as easy as phoning your local GP and booking an appointment, then the next day you are six feet in the ground... it's a lot more complex than that. Firstly, there is an eligibility criteria that you must meet. This would typically entail being a resident of that state, being mentally stable,

¹ <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/4400/bma-pad-map-and-uk-legislative-proposals-aug-2021.pdf>

² <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/assisted-suicide>

³ <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/4400/bma-pad-map-and-uk-legislative-proposals-aug-2021.pdf>

and having a terminal illness with limited time to live (normally 6 months or less). Back in 2018, a poll suggested that 72% of Americans supported the idea of assisted dying⁴. However in the UK of the year 2021, YouGov conducted a poll on public views of assisted dying to those that have a terminal illness. The results were quite interesting as 73% supported some form of doctor assisted death⁵. Moreover, as of 2023, the Guardian have released a poll showing that 66% of the population support assisted dying⁶.

I believe that assisted dying is an important topic as evidently, the majority of the UK support the process. But why isn't it legal? The last attempt to change the law in Scotland was by liberal democrat MSP Liam McArthur. He proposed that adults who are terminally ill should be afforded the option of assisted death. Obviously, this came with certain criteria: for example they must be at least 16 years old and live in Scotland for at least 1 year.⁷

I will approach this dissertation by highlighting the key issues involved with assisted dying and provide the necessary viewpoints. I will then analyse and evaluate said issues and viewpoints, to which I will then produce a valid conclusion to whether I think assisted dying is morally acceptable.

Issue 1: palliative care services

I feel that palliative care is an important factor that questions the morality of assisted dying. It is an independent field within the health sector that aims to enhance the quality of life for patients with life threatening illnesses, such as heart failure, cancer, and dementia. It is a comprehensive approach to healthcare that attends to the patients and their families mental and emotional needs in addition to the visible signs of their illnesses. Regardless of diagnosis, the goal of palliative care is to improve comfort, minimise pain, and encourage general well-being during the course of a medical condition.

⁴ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235145/americans-strong-support-euthanasia-persists.aspx>

⁵ <https://yougov.co.uk/health/articles/37358-three-quarters-britons-support-doctor-assisted-sui>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/aug/28/two-thirds-of-britons-support-legalising-assisted-dying-poll-shows>

⁷ Laura Crichton & Susan Woodshore, Medical Ethics, Amazon, 2023 (page 114)

Palliative care is a subject that has many negatives and positives. Palliative care manages symptoms of pain which could improve the quality of someone's life as it alleviates their suffering. It questions the morality of assisted dying as it can decrease the desire for someone to take their own life as the person may feel more comfortable and supported due to this specific type of care. A statistic by the state of hospice services in England showed that 95% of the public found palliative care good to outstanding, compared to the NHS with 6%⁸. But why is this? Well, the main difference is that hospices place a higher priority on the patients comfort and quality of life than hospitals, which mainly focus on treating or curing illnesses. This means that in their final days, patients receive palliative care that is intended to improve their overall well-being, manage pain and symptoms, and increase their comfort. This therefore questions assisted dying as if someone is receiving excellent care to feel comfortable in their final days, then what is the actual need for assisted dying? The majority of people that actually work in palliative care services are opposed to assisted dying. This is because they feel that there is a risk that will harm the most vulnerable, such as those in poverty that don't have access to the social services that are needed for a comfortable death.⁹

One religious view that supports palliative care is the Church of Scotland. Professor John Swinton was ordained and he argues against assisted dying. He put forward an argument that suggests that the reason why people want to die is because they see no value in their life. However, when they are given the chance to express how they feel and are part of a community, those same people stopped asking for death¹⁰. This is exactly what palliative care is all about. It offers counselling and therapy for the patients and offers shared experiences so that patients and families can connect with each other if they are facing similar challenges.

Moreover, the director of St Christopher's Hospice, Rob George argues that "one of the easiest ways to waste a dying persons time is to offer them treatments that will make very

⁸ [https://www.cqc.org.uk/news/releases/hospices-offering-more-'outstanding'-care-other-services-regulated-cqc#:~:text=The%20State%20of%20Hospice%20Services,services\)%20being%20rated%20as%20Good.](https://www.cqc.org.uk/news/releases/hospices-offering-more-'outstanding'-care-other-services-regulated-cqc#:~:text=The%20State%20of%20Hospice%20Services,services)%20being%20rated%20as%20Good.)

⁹ 'Conversation with prof Scott Murray, 7 March 2024

¹⁰ Laura Crichton & Susan Woodshore, Medical Ethics, Amazon, 2023 (page 120)

little difference"¹¹. This supports palliative care and just says that the people that are being given ongoing medical treatment, such as continued chemotherapy when they know they will not be able to recover is just a waste of time. Instead, they should receive palliative care which is the better option. In relation to how palliative care questions if assisted dying is morally acceptable, the statement suggests that denying someone the chance to end their suffering in a calm and respectable way is immoral. It argues that enforcing ineffective treatments may amount to moral pressure. This is therefore depriving the individual of their autonomy in determining their preferred way to dying.

I personally agree with Rob George as I think palliative care brings about joy and happiness as it is an option of prolonging life. Granted it may not cure the illness, but it at least puts a smile on the face that will die in the next few months. Even the statistics agree with me- 87.1% were satisfied with what palliative care can offer.¹²

Moreover Katherine Sleeman, a hospice researcher would agree with me as she says that "palliative care isn't doing nothing. It is doing something really important for people where there are no curative options left... It's about choice, and realising that the choice doesn't mean giving up"¹³. As we can see, Katherine Sleeman is also on a similar wavelength to Rob Georges claim of how palliative care isn't a waste of time, rather it's an option when there are no other options left. It's an option that provides comfort when you know you are going to die.

I think this is important as it's easy for us to come up with a conclusion when we don't know what it's like. Personally, if I knew I was going to die in 6 months or less, I'd want palliative care services because it offers not only pain management, but premium comfort which you can't get if you pursue the act of assisted dying.

¹¹ Rob George quote- "we need to talk about death", BBC Documentary, presented by Kevin Fong, 2019

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6315663/>

¹³ Katherine Sleeman quote- "We need to talk about death, BBC documentary, presented by Kevin Fong, 2019

According to Hospice UK, it said that 25% of people that would greatly benefit from palliative care services don't end up receiving it¹⁴. The Scottish government as of 2010 said that "palliative care to be provided to persons with a life limited condition and to members of such person's families". This will definitely question if assisted dying is morally acceptable as if a person is unable to receive the proper care services needed, then their only option is to pursue the act of assisted dying which some would therefore think is morally acceptable. Although I don't generally agree with assisted dying, I do think there is a point here. If one has only 6 months to live and they have no access to palliative care services, then I think that it makes assisted death understandable and to some degree morally acceptable. I stand by this as patients who lack access to palliative care may experience unmanageable pain, which can therefore have a serious negative effect on their quality of life. Moreover, the lack of support and isolation can really affect one's mental health. Palliative care services offer these things but if someone can't get access, it may just enhance their pain.

However, some may disagree and say that assisted dying is definitely morally unacceptable. They may say this because it might hinder or put a hold on the progression for palliative care services. If the government did legalise assisted dying and the numbers for assisted dying increased, then there would be no reason for more investment to improve palliative care services. Not only that, but advocates for palliative care services may argue that it pressurises the patient into ending their life due to the societies or their families' expectations which again questions their autonomy. They also might put up an argument saying that the legalisation could impact vulnerable people like the elderly or the poor. A religious view that will support this is Proverbs 31:8-9 which says that we should "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."¹⁵ This clearly suggests that we should be defending those who are in need of help rather than suggest that they should access assisted dying.

¹⁴ <https://www.hospiceuk.org/our-campaigns/policy-and-influencing/influencing-parliamentarians/promoting-equality-end-life-care>

¹⁵ <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-life/are-we-to-speak-for-those-who-cannot-speak-for-themselves.html#:~:text=Proverbs%2031%3A8%2D9%20tells,in%20our%20present%2Dday%20lives.>

I think that if people need palliative care and want palliative care, then who are we to stop them. I want to reference autonomy again as people should be given the right to choose their own actions. Therefore, if the public want palliative care, then they should get it; and if they want assisted dying then they should be entitled to it, regardless of what other people like me think... It's their choice! However as showed above, it is a problematic problem which could lead to more people ending their life just because they don't enjoy it (as Professor John Swinton claimed).

Although I have said that I think assisted death is understandable under some situations, I still don't consider it morally acceptable for a number of reasons. One, would be that I believe it will create more suffering than relieving it. We've all got loved ones and if they went seeking for help to kill themselves it would destroy us. Furthermore, if they actually carried out the action and killed themselves then it would tear us to shreds as the person that we once knew is now no more. I couldn't live with that feeling for the rest of my life. For that reason I don't personally agree with the legalisation of assisted death as it would just create more hurt.

John Wyatt agrees with me here as he said that because we as humans depend on each other and other people, if someone close to us were to die it would definitely have an impact on us. He said that "although driven by desperation and hopelessness, the one who commits suicide hurts those who survive"¹⁶.

I do however believe that if the government were to legalise it and the public like me had no say in the matter, then I think there should be strict measures and rules set in place. I think Canada have it right when they ask for a written request that must be signed with 1 independent witness; but if the UK were to legalise it then they should maybe up the witness number to at least 3 close family members. This then means that the closest people/ loved family members to the patients can mentally and emotionally prepare for what their life is now going to look like.

¹⁶ John Wyatt quote- Right to die, IVF, 2015, 98-111

Kevin Yuill agrees with me and says that assisted dying is morally unacceptable as he says that “it is stepping off a moral precipice to approve of suicide in certain cases”¹⁷. This clearly implies that allowing the act of assisted death is morally unacceptable. Part of the reason is that if people were allowed to kill themselves, then anyone that is feeling depressed or wants to die in general would want to end their life. This links to what was said previously but it obviously something that needs to be addressed if the government ever want to legalise assisted dying.

However, he does mention that “it is not possible to say that individuals may freely choose death if we state that they may only do so in these certain situations. That is not freely choosing death”¹⁸. This suggests that even implementing these strict rules and regulations goes against the persons autonomy as the person still can’t kill themselves when they want- only when they fit the criteria which clearly makes the act of assisted dying morally unacceptable in this situation.

Issue 2: religious and cultural perspectives

Many religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism believe that human life is sacred and it is impermissible to intentionally end your life- only God can. Theists argue that even when experiencing unimaginable pain, humans do not have the right to take another person's life prematurely since life is a gift from God. Chris Buttenshaw (Christian background) said that “to choose assisted suicide or euthanasia for ourselves or for another is to entirely undermine and ignore our astonishing grace-divined Godlikeness”¹⁹. He is essentially implying that those who take their own or someone else’s life are disregarding Gods word, and most importantly the fact that we were made in the image of God. I do agree with this coming from a religious background myself, but not just because of my religion but because life is sacred and we shouldn’t just waste it. I think that life is like a

¹⁷ Kevin Yuill (moral precipice quote), From Timandra Harkness, Steelmannig, BBC radio documentary 2021: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000rdzr>

¹⁸ Kevin Yuill, Assisted suicide: the Liberal, Humanist case against Legalisation, 2013 (page 57)

¹⁹ Chris Buttenshaw, Live and Let Live: a Biblical Discussion of End of Life Issues, 2014
https://issuu.com/care/docs/live_and_let_live_biblical_discussi

rollercoaster which we can't control. It will always have its ups and downs, and the main thing to remember is that every situation in life is temporary so we have to live it to the fullest. Therefore I think that if we as humans know someone that is struggling with depression or a terminal illness, we should help them no matter what... regardless of if they want to kill themselves. St Augustine said that "it is never licit to kill another, even if he should wish it"²⁰. This suggests exactly what I said previously- even if someone wants to die, it is still a sin which means we have to help them. By helping, I'm referring to encouraging them to seek help via therapy which do have promising results- 75% of people that experienced psychotherapy showed improvements²¹. With therapy, maybe they can understand that their life has meaning and hopefully then will no longer want to die which is the best end result.

On the contrary, even though assisted death is a sin in the religions previously stated, there are lots of mixed reviews regarding to the fact. For example, Joseph Fletcher who comes from a religious background said that once a person's dead, they are no more. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether they died naturally or unnaturally. He brings an example into the mix regarding self-defence: "You may end your neighbour's life for your own sake, but you may not do it for his sake"²². He finds this ridiculous as it is suggesting that you can end a life for yourself but not for someone else even when in situations where self-defence is needed. As we can see there are loopholes when it comes to assisted dying being a sin, but what's interesting is that a survey by the guardian showed that "large majorities of believers are in favour of legalising assisted dying."²³ This clearly questions if assisted dying is morally acceptable as even though it says in most religious texts that it's not allowed, people still think a change is necessary. The survey showed that only the Muslims and Baptists are against the change. According to the Quran 17:33, it states that "do not take life, which Allah made sacred, other than in the course of justice"²⁴. This suggests that we are not allowed to

²⁰ St Augustine, quoted in Philip Robinson, *Euthanasia from a Catholic Perspective*, 2003, 65.

²¹ <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/psychotherapy#:~:text=About%2075%20percent%20of%20people,show%20some%20benefit%20from%20it.&text=Psychotherapy%20has%20been%20shown%20to,in%20the%20brain%20and%20body.>

²² Joseph Fletcher, *Humanhood, Prometheus*, 1979, 151.

²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/apr/30/assisted-suicide-poll-religious>

²⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/euthanasia.shtml>

take our own or other people life, unless in situations like self-defence. This is on the lines of what Joseph Fletcher was saying, but I think the Quran makes it clear what the rules are. Furthermore, the Quran specifically states that assisted death is not allowed as it says "destroy not yourselves. Surely Allah is ever merciful to you"²⁵. As we can see here, the Quran is strictly against euthanasia or assisted death which explains why Muslims don't want the law to change. As a result of this, we can conclude that the Quran doesn't think assisted dying is morally acceptable as the punishment for carrying out the act is to be forbidden entry into heaven (sahih Bukhari 4.56.669)²⁶. We can understand from this that assisted death is just interfering with what God has planned for us therefore ending a life is a sign of disrespect as at the end of the day we should respect life as a gift.

Someone that would disagree with the Islamic view point is preference utilitarian Peter Singer who voices that "there is no intrinsic moral difference between killing and allowing to die."²⁷ This implies that those who do the killing are as bad as those who stand by and let it happen. Singers point here, is that both situations end up with a death, therefore there is no difference in whether you are the killer or you aren't. I don't agree with this as if I were to take part in someone's death, it's morally wrong as I'm playing Gods role because I've got no say if someone dies or not, therefore assisted dying in general is not morally acceptable. He then goes on to say that "withholding treatment but refusing to kill, would obviously be wrong"²⁸. I don't think he makes sense here as withholding treatment and refusing to kill are the same. I say this because me withholding treatment may kill the person, and me refusing to kill someone and letting them die is still killing them. The only difference is that I didn't kill them therefore I can't be held morally responsible for someone's death which means I didn't sin. But me playing God and help kill someone is sinning to which I can be morally held responsible. Singer introduces another point to which he says that killing animals should be held on the same gravitas as killing humans- "It is only our misplaced respect for the doctrine of the sanctity of human life that prevents us from seeing what is obviously wrong and to do a horse is equally wrong to do to an infant"²⁹. I respectfully disagree with his

²⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/euthanasia.shtml>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Peter Singer, Practical Ethics, 1979. (all Peter Singer quotes are from here)

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

analogy for a number of reasons. The most important one being that human life is more sacred and important as they can run and change the world, whereas a horse cannot. I am justified to say this as you will never see a horse run for presidency, only humans. Therefore, to question if assisted dying is morally acceptable and to bring Singers point into the mix, I would have to say that assisted death to animals is morally acceptable. But to bring the same argument for human life is absurd as they are just not comparable. Despite this, when he says that “the killing of one category of human beings leads to a breakdown of restrictions against killing other humans”. This is one of the few times where I would actually agree with him as I genuinely believe that he has a point. If the government were to legalise assisted dying, the question of whether it's morally acceptable would be thrown out of the window. I say this because killing other people would be easy as you could say that they are depressed or wanted to die which therefore justifies the death in the eyes of the law.

Given this, I feel that I'm justified to say that the government shouldn't legalise it, but if they were to then they would have to have the correct measures in place (stated previously) as it will just open the gates to an array of other problems which will cause even more issues than the ones we have now. Bringing back Professor Swinton, he would agree with me as the Church Of Scotland voiced that they “continue to oppose any changes to the legal position with regard to assisted suicide because of concerns about the effect of any such change would have on the way society views its weakest and most vulnerable members”³⁰.

Issue 3: autonomy

Essentially, autonomy refers to a person's ability to make their own decisions for their own life. Advocates of assisted dying argue that those who are suffering from a terminal illness or other excruciating pain deserve to have the freedom to choose how and when to terminate their life.

Terry Pratchett supports this view as he stated, “I believe passionately that any individual should have the right to choose, as far as it is possible, the time and the conditions of their

³⁰ Laura Crichton & Susan Woodshore, Medical Ethics, Amazon, 2023 (page 121)

death³¹. This fits with the whole concept of autonomy as it suggests that people should be free to make their own decisions about how and when they die according to their specific values and beliefs. However, someone that would disagree with Terry Pratchett is Kevin Yuill. His quote of: "it is not possible to say that individuals may freely choose death if we state that they may only do so in these certain situations. That is not freely choosing death."³² This directly contradicts what Terry Pratchett said as Pratchett talks about how people should have the ability to choose their own decisions when they are about to die which supports the idea of autonomy; but Yuill says that the idea of full autonomy is compromised when restrictions or requirements are placed on the decision to be able to undergo the process of assisted dying. Miro Griffiths (spokesperson, right to life UK) had the same line of thinking to Yuill as she said that "these laws offer only an illusion of choice"³³. This suggests that you do not really have true autonomy, but only we think we do. Therefore going off this line of reasoning, if people are truly not being given freedom of their choices due to governmental laws, then their decisions aren't based on their own values and ethics, rather their decisions are based on the external factor of the government which they can't control.

From this, I agree with Miro Griffiths and Kevin Yuill as I feel that if the government were to legalise assisted dying, then it wouldn't be morally acceptable as the decisions that are made by the patients, are crafted with the aid of the government rather than what the actual patients' want.

Overall Conclusion

Personally, I think assisted dying is morally unacceptable in most circumstances. The only time I think its morally acceptable is if the patient has a terminal illness and only has a few months to live. However, I do still believe that there are better solutions than assisted death in situations like these. For example I am a firm believer in palliative care, because although they may want to die because they only have a few months left of living, maybe palliative care can change their mind as it offers more than just support- it offers that sense of

³¹ <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Euthanasia-humanist-perspective.pdf>

³² Kevin Yuill, Assisted Suicide: the Liberal, Humanist case against Legalisation, 2013 (page 57)

³³ <https://righttolife.org.uk/news/academic-and-disability-rights-activist-dr-miro-griffiths-speaks-out-against-assisted-suicide>

community and family which is so important in one's final days. Just having closure can help a lot in situations like this.

From this, I can say that I definitely agree with Professor John Swinton's view as he highlights that those that wanted assisted death stopped asking for it once they found a purpose in life and that sense of community. John Wyatt also had a similar view in which I agree with as he emphasised that with proper palliative care, many people could find relief from their pain without taking their own lives. Yet, a person that I don't agree with is Joseph Fletcher which said that "at the end of cerebration" the person is dead already so "such noncerebral processes might as well be turned off"³⁴. I don't agree with this because I think that people should have faith in themselves in case they recover. But if they kill themselves, then they will never find out.

I also believe that people should have autonomy as well, therefore if the patient wants assisted dying, then it's up to them. I just think that there are better options, but that's my opinion and my opinion shouldn't get in the way of other people's judgments.

However, I would like to mention that the question of "is assisted dying morally acceptable?" depends on the person whose answering. What I'm saying is that people have different views if they have personal connections to the subject. For example, as an outsider, I can say that assisted dying isn't generally morally acceptable unless they have a terminal illness. I say this because it's easy to have an opinion when you don't have any personal ties to the discussion. For example, if a random person wanted to die because they only had 2 months to live due to a terminal illness, I would think its morally acceptable if they chose assisted death or palliative care services as I'm a firm believer of free choice. However, if it were someone like my grandad who I've known my own life, and he only had 2 months to live then I wouldn't think its morally acceptable as I would like to spend whatever time I have left with him. Therefore, the question of "is assisted dying morally acceptable?" isn't just a simple yes or no answer. It all depends on who the patient is to you as you will have all these other personal views and matters that will create a clear bias for your answer.

³⁴ Joseph Fletcher, Humanhood, Prometheus, 1979, 151.

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Candidate 6 evidence

“Abortion is immoral and should be illegal” Discuss.



Introduction

Overall aims:

- To explain the meaning of abortion.
- To discuss the morality and legality of abortion.
- To analyse differing viewpoints on foetal personhood and draw conclusions, as well as explore why they tie into the morality and legality of abortion.
- To analyse religious stances and explain why these do not provide evidence that abortion is immoral and should be illegal.
- To conclude that abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal.

The topic of abortion has been a relevant and controversial debate in the eyes of ethics, laws, medicine, and overall society for decades. Abortion is defined as the deliberate ending of a pregnancy, and over the last 30 years, over 60 countries have relaxed abortion laws¹. In UK law, abortion can legally be carried out before 24 weeks as long as two doctors have approved the procedure. This is under the 1967 abortion act². Various abortion methods are used, including early medical abortion and vacuum aspiration. Early medical abortion involves taking two pills 48 hours apart; the first blocks the hormone preparing the womb lining, and the second breaks down the lining and embryo. This method is typically used up to 10 weeks. Vacuum aspiration, usually performed within 7-15 weeks of pregnancy, involves inserting a tube into the womb through the cervix to suction out its contents.

The morality and legality of abortion remains a relevant issue in Religious, moral, and philosophical studies as ongoing efforts to outlaw abortion can harm women's mental and

¹<https://reproductiverights.org/maps/worlds-abortion-laws/>

² [Abortion Act 1967 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

physical well-being along with overall dignity, whilst also leading to an increase in unsafe abortions.

Personhood

A key topic of ethical discourse within the abortion debate is the discussion of personhood, and when personhood begins. Personhood is interpreted differently by many. The Cambridge Dictionary defines personhood as the state of being a person³, however in terms of moral philosophy, a person is a being that has 'moral rights,' specifically, a right to life. There are three main perspectives on foetal personhood: the foetus is a person, a non-person, or a potential person. In this chapter, I will argue that the foetus is a non-person.

Throughout the abortion debate, it is often argued that personhood begins at conception, when the egg is fertilized. Advocates of this view typically support the pro-life movement, such as bioethicist Dr Teresa Iglesias, who believes pregnancy signifies the development of a person rather than into one. Iglesias states:

"I hold that the existence of a human being, say my own existence, began when my bodily existence began, that is when I was conceived"⁴.

This can be interpreted to mean that the foetus' existence is no different from a human, and should be regarded equivalently, despite it not being born. Since our bodies started developing at conception, personhood must begin then. It also implies that Dr Iglesias believes abortion is morally unacceptable as it equates to murdering a human and should be treated as such. A negative consequence of believing this is that it could limit access to certain methods of contraception such as the morning after pill, as it would be seen as killing a human. This would result in unsafe methods of contraception which would harm women's health as no safety barriers would be in place to prevent pregnancy.

³ PERSONHOOD | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary

⁴ What does it mean to be human? T, Iglesias. The Dignity of the Individual: Issues of Bioethics and Law, Dublin 2001

On the other hand, some would disagree with Iglesias' stance as they think that personhood begins at birth. American philosopher, Michael Tooley is a prime example of this viewpoint.

Michael Tooley believes that you become a person when you develop a consciousness and self-awareness of being alive.

Tooley puts forward an idea known as the 'Kitten Example⁵.' This theory states that if a kitten were injected with a chemical that caused it to develop into a cat with psychological traits of a human, no concerns would arise from killing the kitten before it developed these characteristics. This example supports his argument as it shows that there would be nothing wrong with killing a kitten who could potentially develop human qualities, which applies to fetuses as it shows there would be nothing wrong with aborting them, since they have not yet developed human-like psychological traits and an understanding and awareness of being alive.

This contradicts Dr Iglesias as Tooley disagrees that bodily development makes a foetus a person, but instead psychological development does. A drawback of Dr Iglesias' argument is that bodily existence alone doesn't guarantee personhood as complex cognitive function is required for a right to life. Foetuses consist only of cells but more than this is needed for foetuses to be considered as people, like thoughts and feelings, which is why I disagree with Dr Iglesias' stance on foetuses and personhood within the abortion debate. However, Tooley's view, which ties personhood to psychological attributes, excludes certain groups like those in vegetative states or new-borns, which leads to dehumanization. I do however strongly agree with the 'kitten example' as it convincingly illustrates that abortion is moral as foetuses lack consciousness and therefore do not suffer harm as they aren't aware of it, so abortion is not immoral and shouldn't be illegal as it does not harm foetuses. Michael Tooley's argument convinces me that abortion is moral and should be legal as foetuses are not aware of being aborted, thus preventing harm. If the mother consents to the abortion, no one is harmed as entities without awareness cannot suffer mental harm.

⁵ Tooley, M. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Abortion and infanticide [1972] p40

Dr Teresa Iglesias' argument fails to convince me that abortion is immoral and should be illegal, as foetuses lack the cognitive complexity of humans, and are incomparable to them. Therefore, abortion does not get rid of complex beings, as foetuses' brains are far less developed. 4

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There are many people who argue that a foetus is a non-person, such as Peter Singer, who believes that personhood begins once a foetus can feel pleasure or pain. He says:

"Abortion is ethical, because even a viable foetus is not a rational, self-aware person with desires and plans, which would be cut short by death; hence it should not have the same rights as humans who have such qualities⁶."

Singer's statement suggests that since a foetus lacks aspirations and conscious thoughts, its abortion would have a lesser impact compared to the death of someone with life experiences. He argues that the absence of goals diminishes the foetus's value, as the foetus carries little significance to the world and has no societal impact, suggesting he believes that abortion is moral as the foetus is not a person. If this perspective was widely accepted, then societal stigma surrounding abortion would be reduced, since the foetuses are not people, which would improve access to safe procedures and empower women with reproductive choices.

The pro-life organisation 'Society for the Protection of Unborn Children' oppose Singer's stance. They believe that life begins at conception and that foetuses should be treated with the same care as humans. They state,

"Babies in the womb do not become more human when they implant in their mother's womb, or when they grow from an embryo to a foetus or when their mother can feel them kicking or at any other developmental stage until birth. It also matters because we cannot decide that a baby in the womb should be protected at one stage of his or her development

⁶ Peter Singer, *Taking Life: Humans*, Excerpted from *Practical Ethics*, 2nd edition, 1993

and not at another. In the same way, we do not think that a two-year-old is more worthy of protection than, say, a fifty-two-year-old⁷.”

This quote can be interpreted to mean that foetal life holds value at all stages of pregnancy, and should be treated no differently to an adult, thus abortion is considered as killing a person, regardless of the stage of development. All stages of pregnancy should be equally protected and mirror the equal protection of children and adults. SPUC believes that a foetus is undeniably a person, and that abortion is immoral and should be illegal as it is equivalent to homicide.

I agree with Singer’s stance on personhood, and that abortion is moral and should be legal, because to be classified as a person, you must have had some experiences and aspirations, which is unattainable in the mother’s womb. For example, how can a foetus envision a career without understanding its implications, or even being aware of it? This tells me that a foetus is not a person due to its lack of worldly experience and understanding, since they have never properly lived in it. Professor John Harris shares my view that personhood requires an understanding of your life’s value, and experiences can allow you to realise your life’s value. Therefore, abortion is morally acceptable since a foetus can’t comprehend the value of its eventual life since it has no experiences to allow for this, so aborting it does not contribute to any experience. However, Singer’s position holds some flaws. Since new-born do not have goals and aspirations, does this mean that they lack personhood? Does this justify new-born babies losing their lives? This could also mean that humans who have no goals are not deserving of a life since they may not have things they want to do, like go to university. Lack of goals does not diminish the value of one’s life, so why should a foetus be deemed a non-person due to lack of goals? However, while goals play a significant role, they do not define a person entirely. Therefore, abortion is moral and should be legal because not everyone has goals. Even if the foetus is born, it may have no plans and if it did, even people with plans may die before fulfilling them. The presence of plans doesn’t solely determine the value of someone’s life and shouldn’t determine the legality of abortion either.

⁷ Society for the Protection of Unborn Children. Available at: <https://www.spuc.org.uk/50questions>

I do not agree with SPUC's stance on personhood as it is unfair to equate a foetus who has not yet exited the womb to a human who has lived for many years. It devalues everything the human has learned and disregards all their experiences. Society teaches us to respect our elders, but this argument suggests that we should treat elders the same way we treat a foetus. Surely this would leave elders feeling deeply patronised. Therefore, abortion is moral and should be legal as foetuses differ from humans and are incomparable, so abortion is different from killing a person and should be accessible due to its limited societal impact.

The third argument is that the foetus is a potential person and should be valued for its future growth and development after birth. Clinical geneticist, Nicola Poplawski and professor of biomedical ethics, Grant Gillett are firm believers in this argument. They argue that embryos are owed respect as they have the potential to become a person and should be respected because of what it can become, rather than their current state⁸.

This implies that what foetuses are when they are inside the mother's womb is irrelevant, however their potential as individuals after birth is what really matters. This argument could serve as a pro-life argument to deter people from aborting, emphasizing that aborted foetuses could turn into valuable individuals capable of solving world hunger and promoting universal peace.

Joel Feinberg, an American political and social philosopher disagrees with the potential person argument, he concludes that potential rights in the future don't grant current rights, and the possibility of having future legal rights does not mean you have them now⁹.

This can mean that expecting entitlement to something, say human rights, does not guarantee certainty of getting them.

For me, the potential person argument is illogical and weakens the anti-abortion argument, as only positive examples are ever used. For example, how is it known that the foetus will

⁸ Poplawski, N & Gillett, G, Ethics and embryos: Journal of Medical Ethics, 1991

⁹ J Feinberg 'Potentiality, development and rights' 1984

not become a murderer or rapist? The future of a foetus is uncertain, and we cannot predict its outcomes, making this argument irrelevant as the foetus could go down many routes in the future, and if it is born into unstable circumstances, how can we ensure positive outcomes? This proves to me that abortion is moral and should be legal as not every human is a saint, and we cannot determine someone's future so early on in life.

To conclude, I believe a foetus becomes a person only after birth, when it has a consciousness of being alive and an understanding of the world. I agree mostly with Micheal Tooley's argument within the personhood debate as the kitten example provides a strong and logical argument. I disagree with the potential person argument as it is overly optimistic and unrealistic. Overall, abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal as it doesn't equate to killing a person, since foetuses are not people and lack the depth of personhood. My views on personhood solidify my views on abortion as I don't think that humans are comparable to foetuses as people are far more complex, therefore the loss of a human is more significant than that of a foetus.

Religious Viewpoints on Abortion

Abortion is a divisive topic within religion; with many religions classing it as an unwarranted sin and some having a more lenient outlook. This chapter delves into three religion's viewpoints on abortion: the Christian Orthodox Church's stance, the Catholic Church's stance, and Islam's stance. Counter arguments to these stances will be investigated and I will explain why I agree with the counter arguments and believe the religious viewpoints are contradictory.

Many traditional branches of Christianity, including the Christian Orthodox Church believe that abortion is immoral and goes against God's will, so should be illegal. The Orthodox Church believes that killing an innocent human is a crime against both the person and the

Holy Spirit, and that being a member of the Orthodox Church whilst being pro-choice is unattainable¹⁰. In Canon II, the first Canonical Epistle of our Holy Father Basil, it says:

"Let her that procures abortion undergo ten years' penance, whether the embryo were perfectly formed, or not¹¹."

This can be interpreted to mean that regardless of the foetus's condition, abortion is unacceptable and should be entirely prohibited. Even if the foetus is severely disabled and where the birth of a foetus may pose extreme risks, abortion remains completely immoral with zero justification. Any woman who undergoes an abortion should be punished and realise what they have done. There are no exceptions to the immorality of abortion and both recipients and providers of abortion are considered blasphemous. A negative consequence of this belief is that even if a foetus is severely disabled and will have no quality of life when born, the mother still cannot abort, causing extreme guilt or scrupulosity, due to breaching religious beliefs, however even if the foetus is born the mother may still feel guilty and helpless, making it a losing situation.

However, some people oppose the orthodox Christian stance on abortion and believe it is moral and should be legal, such as Laura Ellis, a project manager at Baptist Women in Ministry says:

"Making abortion illegal is going to disproportionately affect young women, women in poverty, women of colour, in rural areas, women who don't have a support system that some people are privileged to have. These are the kind of people that Jesus was always advocating for in his life and ministry¹²."

This can be interpreted to mean that by criminalising abortion, it will disproportionately harm women rather than assist them, which contradicts Jesus' message of unconditional help for all. By illegalising abortion, it may go against Jesus' teachings, and due to his

¹⁰ [The Orthodox Church's View on Abortion » Saint John the Evangelist Orthodox Church \(saintjohnchurch.org\)](#)

¹¹ [Basil: The First Canonical Epistle to Amphilochius \(orthodoxchurchfathers.com\)](#)

¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/25/us/abortion-christian-debate-blake-cec/index.html>

influential status in Christianity, his wishes should be a priority. Therefore, Christians should follow in Jesus' footsteps and support women who seek abortions.

I oppose the Christian orthodox view on abortion as it unfairly shames women for potentially preventing a life of suffering for the foetus. The mother should not endure a further ten years of suffering after already undergoing trauma regarding the foetus and facing a difficult decision. I think that the Orthodox stance contradicts the "love thy neighbour" viewpoint of the bible by only focusing on shaming those who have suffered enough when making a difficult decision. I agree with Laura Ellis that the Orthodox viewpoint contradicts Christianity's emphasis on love and support by punishing, rather than helping women. Christianity's basis on love should encourage support for women who seek out abortions, therefore abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal as it can help women and shows that they are cared for. Ellis demonstrates that it is possible to be both Christian and pro-choice, which could influence opinions of Orthodox Christians to accept that diverse beliefs can coexist.

The Roman Catholic Church takes an absolutist opposition to abortion. This is due to bible teachings such as the sanctity of life; the teaching that life is precious and sacred since God created it¹³. This belief supports the ideology that human life begins at conception and should be valued, loved, and treated gracefully thereafter. The term 'imago Dei'¹⁴ is often used when discussing the sanctity of life. This is the Latin translation of 'image of God', and it means that humans are connected to God, since we were created by Him, so should be protected. The belief of the 'sanctity of life' and 'imago Dei', prohibits abortion, as it takes away 'a life' since in the Catholic Church, life begins at conception. On the 3rd of December 2005, Pope Benedict XVI gave a speech on abortion to bishops in South America. He said: "Children truly are the family's greatest treasure and most precious good. Consequently, everyone must be helped to become aware of the intrinsic evil of the crime of abortion. In attacking human life in its very first stages, it is also an aggression against society itself¹⁵."

¹³ <https://www.christian.org.uk/theology/apologetics/the-sanctity-of-life/>

¹⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-image-of-god>

¹⁵ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249172/pope-francis-abortion-statements>

This can be interpreted to mean that family is a blessing from God, which holds value and warrants protection. Pope Benedict XVI considers abortion is crime that should be illegal, and everyone should be educated on the evils of abortion. He views it as a violent procedure that unfairly ends a sacred life and destroys the chance of a foetus living a life. The Catholic Church's stance indicates that abortion is immoral and should be illegal as it is evil and rips away someone's chance of a life that God granted. An implication of this belief is that if a woman is aborting for her health, it is still frowned upon, despite the birth of the foetus potentially ending one of God's creations that has been alive longer. If this belief influenced law, it may lead to higher fatalities for women, as they would be a prohibited from aborting since it is s a crime that destroys God's creatures and violates the sanctity of life.

However, not all Catholics hold this belief. American organisation 'Catholics for Choice' advocate for the moral and legal acceptability. The president of the organisation, Jamie L. Manson, says this:

"Giving a woman a legal right to have control and agency over her body translates to other aspects of her life, namely her freedom to claim political, economic, and social autonomy. The bishops reject the notion that women are equal to men. So how could they possibly support any right that would lead women into that kind of power and liberty¹⁶?"

This can be interpreted to mean that granting women bodily autonomy, empowers them to control other elements of their life too, which will allow for equal treatment to men as women can also make independent life decisions. It can also be interpreted to mean that bishop's pro-life stance stems from the belief that men and women are unequal and by granting women abortion rights it could lead to greater gender equality, which conflicts with bishops' traditional teachings. This shows that Catholics for Choice believe that abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal as women deserve the choice and by giving them this choice, it will enhance women's equality in society.

I disagree with the Pope's argument as if all human life is sacred and valued, and everyone is a creation of God's, then why do many people get given a better hand at life than others? So

¹⁶ <https://www.catholicsforchoice.org/issues/abortion/>

many of 'God's creations' grew up facing abuse, wars, natural disasters, or trauma while others do not. This inconsistency is contradictory, surely God would want all his creations to be treated equally and have the same safety, however the reality is, that for many this is far from reality. Surely abortion protects a potential sacred life from growing up in poor conditions, as the mother is preventing a foetus from experiencing an unsafe, or disadvantaged upbringing compared to God's other creatures. I disagree with Pope Benedict XVI's stance as I believe it is not a crime for women to have a choice regarding whether to carry a pregnancy for nine months and go through with a potentially traumatic birth. I believe the decision regarding abortion should lie with the woman since the foetus is in her body; therefore, should not be criminalised. Instead of deeming abortion as evil, attention should be directed to labelling significant factors for abortion, such as rape, evil. I agree with Catholics for Choice's stance on abortion. Bishops' emphasis on gender inequality, and the influence this has on their stance on abortion, detracts from the issue of women's bodily autonomy. Legalising abortion can safeguard women's sacred lives and uphold the sanctity of life, by enabling decisions regarding abortion to be made that protect lives.

Within Islam, abortion is generally forbidden, however there are some exceptions. Abortion may be permitted up to 120 days, if the women's or foetus' health is at risk¹⁷. Abortion is restricted to 120 days, as the 120th day marks the foetus becoming a human, since the soul enters its body. This is called ensoulment¹⁸. Many scholars take a pro-life stance and believe that abortion is immoral and should be illegal. In the Qur'an 17:32 it states:

"Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Surely killing them is a heinous sin¹⁹."

This can be interpreted to mean that women should only resort to abortion for health reasons and should trust Allah to take care of all other challenges. It implies that abortion

¹⁷ [Controversies and considerations regarding the termination of pregnancy for Foetal Anomalies in Islam | BMC Medical Ethics | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

¹⁸ https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/abortion_1.shtml

¹⁹ [Surah Al-Isra - 31 - Quran.com](#)

should not be the solution to a potentially temporary problem. Allah has a plan for everyone no matter the situation they are in, therefore abortion is immoral as it displays a distrust in Allah, and trusting Allah should always be a priority, regardless of extraneous circumstances. A negative consequence of this viewpoint is that it could lead to a dilemma for women who know they are not in the right situations to be mothers. Despite knowing that abortion is the best option, societal pressures against abortion persist. This could lead to an increase of children in care, as when the child is born, the mother will still feel unable to be the mother that her child needs, as Allah may take a while to improve their situation.

Islam's stance solidifies my view that abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal, because its view can result in issues for the foetus and the mother. Forced birth may result in a disadvantaged life for the child, as the mother was not prepared to have one. This could lead to mental health issues and less opportunities for the child, all because abortion is deemed immoral. It may also lead to the mother experiencing mental health issues and guilt for not being able to provide an ideal upbringing because of her circumstances.

To conclude I find both the Christian Orthodox Church's and Islam's stance on abortion invalid, and they do not prove that abortion is immoral and should be illegal. The Christian Orthodox stance contradicts Christianity's core beliefs of love and support for each other. Laura Ellis' response is effective as it proves that being a Christian and being pro-choice is attainable, since the bible preaches protection, therefore abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal since it protects women. I oppose Pope Benedict XVI's view that abortion is immoral and should be illegal as he overlooks the potential for the procedure to save lives, uphold the sanctity of life, and protect potential lives from harm. Catholics for Choice provide a valid response to Pope Benedict XVI by exploring benefits of legalising abortion and effectively explaining the Catholic Bishop stance. Islam's stance that abortion is immoral and should be illegal is invalid as it doesn't take living conditions into account and only makes small exceptions for some.

Investigating religious responses to abortion has strengthened my pro-choice views as I recognise how they can contradict themselves and don't take all women into consideration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, research on foetal personhood and religious responses to abortion has solidified my view that abortion is not immoral, and should not be illegal. Abortion should be legal due to foetal personhood, as the foetus is a non-person. Peter Singer supports this, by arguing that since the loss of foetuses have minimal impact on society, then abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal. Michael Tooley also backs this up, by arguing that since foetuses do not have a consciousness of being alive, then they are not yet a person. Religious responses to abortion are effective in proving that abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal. The Orthodox Christian viewpoint focuses on punishing women for having abortions rather than understanding why it was had. Laura Ellis effectively demonstrates that it is feasible to be religious and pro-choice and argues that criminalizing abortion would harm more women. Catholics for choice argue that abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal as it enhances women's opportunities, whereas Pope Benedict XVI argues that abortion is an evil crime. Islam argues that abortion is immoral and should be illegal as Allah should be trusted to handle things instead of the woman.

Overall, abortion is not immoral and should not be illegal. The rights of living women should not be overshadowed by a foetus who is not yet even a person, and religion should not influence laws that govern women, and may harm them more than help them.

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Candidate 7 evidence



Conversion experiences are the most convincing evidence for religious experience.' How far do you agree?

WORD COUNT: 4359

'Conversion experiences are the most convincing evidence for religious experience.' How far do you agree?

A religious experience is an encounter with the divine, a non-empirical occurrence that brings with it an awareness of something beyond us. However, the variety of religious experiences is such that it is difficult to find a common theme. There is a wide variety of religious experiences which will go on to be described, visions, miracles, and conversions as the three types of religious experience. In this essay the aim is to analyse each of these examples of religious experience in turn and discuss why conversion is the most convincing through investigating the views of philosophers William James and David Hume. Alongside this the opinions of scientists Mark Blagrove and Daniel Gordon Ang are evaluated as a counterexample to religious experience.

Visions as religious experience

Visions as a religious experience involves seeing or hearing something beyond normal experience. Visions are unusual as they are described in terms of ordinary perceptions because as a religious experience voices and visions are close to usual human perceptions and things, we would usually experience so they can be described as such. However, visions or voices are not usually witnessed by other people even if the individual who is experiencing them is in a room full of people only, it is a personal experience.

There are two main divisions of visions, intellectual and sensory. 'Intellectual' visions have an intellectual quality where the vision brings the recipient a message of inspiration, insight, or instruction or a warning. An example is Peter's vision in which he claimed that he

'Saw heaven open, and the lord spoke to him in which he was told to kill and eat animals rejecting previous belief of animals being impure and unclean. The voice explained to him'¹... "do not call anything impure that God has made clean"².

This changed Peter's life and is an example of an intellectual vision as he was given a warning and instruction to kill and eat the animals, something that was previously not done as it was claimed as an unclean way to eat so his life and beliefs were changed due to his vision.

¹ Acts of the Apostles, chapter 10:11 (Holy Bible)

² Act 10:11 verse 15 (Holy Bible)

'Conversion experiences are the most convincing evidence for religious experience.' How far do you agree?

Dreams are an intellectual vision as some dreams can involve visions where the unconscious state experiences a series of images or dream narrative which is unavailable to the individual in conscious state. An example of this is when 'Joseph has a dream telling him not to be afraid of marrying Mary despite the fact she is pregnant, and he is not the father.'³ A consequence of this belief, is that Joseph's life was severely impacted due to the vision he received as this was a pivotal time where Joseph decided to stay with Mary and embrace the divine intervention happening. However, an implication of this belief is that despite many studies, there is a variation of theories to answer why we dream what we dream. Mark Blagrove commented,

*"One of the oldest theories is that it's to do with our memories being interconnected while we sleep, and that we're connecting our recent experiences with past experiences to consolidate or make permanent and make interconnected the memories."*⁴

Out with science, people widely believe that dreams are unconscious thoughts, desires relating to personal experiences. To claim a dream is a vision is less convincing as dreams cannot be used as a source of reliable information. Visions in dreams have the implication of having little to no provability. I believe visions in dreams are less convincing as dreams are often about things you generally think a lot about or are very present in your life. The assumption that a religious person would dream about the divine or religious figures is relevant as they would think about such things more so they would be in the forefront of their subconscious, hence the dreaming about it. Overall, I think that visions in dreams are too difficult to explain with the lack of science behind why we dream to be convinced by them as a religious experience.

William James analysed religious experience and as part of his research analysed visions where he went on to comment that visions "...defy expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words".⁵ Explaining that James believes that, as described in his qualities of religious experience, visions are ineffable meaning they cannot be explained with human ordinary language. I agree with James in that visions are an extraordinary

³ Mathew 1:18-20 (Holy Bible)

⁴ 'Speaking of psychology: why do we dream what we dream podcast' by the American psychology association.

⁵ William James- Varieties of religious experience page 300

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experience so to try and place them in ordinary terms and labels. This causes issues because an individual is taking an out of explanation experience and tampering with its reality by trying to describe it. This then becomes fabricated when being described. For comparison it is like trying to explain a dream you had it becomes less 'true' because you either are adding extra detail to make it make sense consciously or subconsciously applying knowledge because you don't remember. I believe the same applies for religious experience such as visions as they become less convincing when they are trying to be described not only because you are trusting an individual entirely but also because as they describe the experience, it will change making it difficult to be convinced of.

A sensory vision is when a vision has a sensory characteristic if it is to do with sense experience, meaning it is when there is external objects, sounds or figures appearing before the recipient. These sensory visions are divided into individual experience or group. An individual experience, which can be described as corporeal, meaning an object is external and appears to be physical in nature but only visible to an individual. For example, St Bernadette saw Mary as a form or image like a physical person in her many cases of visions with Mary.⁶ An implication of this belief however is that it is difficult to prove an individual vision as true, there are factors that could influence a person's reason for having visions, such as drugs, alcohol or mental illness. There are varied responses to the validity of visions when under the influence, for Christians the Bible explains, "*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit*"⁷ This showcases the belief that Christians follow that the Bible condemns drunkenness as it can cloud one's judgement so they would not find a vision convincing if these factors were apparent. William James goes on to comment, "*In the natural sciences and industrial arts, it never occurs to anyone to refute opinions by showing up their author's neurotic constitution.*"⁸ This explains his belief that a person's neurological state does not influence in his view the validity of a person's experience. This would mean that as a religious experience visions can be considered convincing despite other influencing factors to the individual. An implication of this, is if an individual who had a mental illness, was hearing voices or seeing people informing them to do horrific things, if the individual acted upon this would that be okay. I think that James'

⁶Ruth Harris- Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular age

⁷ Ephesians 5:18 (Holy Bible)

⁸ William James- Variety of religious experience

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belief only works for visions that have a positive outcome, I think there would be a different perspective when examples such as cult leaders seeing God and do horrible things because of this divine intervention. Overall I disagree with James as visions are more unconvincing when other influences could explain why a vision occurred, instead of divine intervention. An alternative explanation comes from Swinburne, who in his 'principle of credulity' suggests that we should believe that things are as they seem unless evidence is provided to suggest otherwise.⁹ Despite this I disagree as I think I am able to use my conscious to decide whether I believe something because if following this belief a lot of our foundational beliefs would be changed as there is conflicting evidence for them.

Groups refers to a sensory vision that is seen by a group of people, for example the 'Angel of Mons'. During WW1, a vision of a group of angels was seen by British soldiers and were believed to be protecting the soldiers. Although since the story of the angels of Mon was well known at the time many believed it to be a fabrication overall. Either to boost morale within the troops on the front line or as propaganda at home. Due to it claiming that God and his angels were looking out for these soldiers they must be doing good for the country. Between all the categories of sensory visions overall, 'groups' seem the most believable as there are fewer implications to do with telling the truth, it is difficult to see what a group of people would all gain from making up a supposed vision. However, an implication of group sensory experiences if there may be other accounting factors as to why the group is having the experience. The example of the soldiers is not as convincing as a religious experience, due to the amount of affecting factors towards why the men had the vision. So overall I think how convincing a group vision is would rely entirely on the circumstances surrounding the vision and what other factors may have influenced the vision, this could be ones like previously mentioned, or things like drugs, mass hysteria etc. I do think that overall, it is less convincing just because of the sheer number of factors to analyse, I think the individuals may have less to gain from lying about a group vision, but it also must be considered how easy it is to influence other people. For example, if one person was to claim speaking or seeing the divine, would the rest of the group be inclined to wish to have seen the same thing so perhaps would feel pressured or influenced to then claim the same vision.

⁹ Davis, Caroline Franks, - 'A Cumulative Case', The Evidential Force of Religious Experience

'Conversion experiences are the most convincing evidence for religious experience.' How far do you agree?

Miracles as a religious experience-2

Miracles are an extraordinary and unexplainable event, outwith natural or scientific law which makes them a religious experience. There are varying forms of miracles as I will examine and through the analysis of Philosopher David Hume and scientists, will evaluate why miracles are unconvincing as a religious experience. Miracles are described by St Aquinas as, "*done by divine power apart from the order generally followed in things*"¹⁰, showing that some believe the cause of the event is God and such event is beyond the normal observable pattern of nature.

The first form of miracles is something done by God that nature cannot do alone, such as the sun reversing its course in the sky. This would be seen as a miracle because the laws of nature do not allow for this to happen independently so is assumed as a divine power. However, this is less convincing as it is an example of something that has not happened it is simply taking something that would be extraordinary in the laws of nature and assuming if that was to happen it would have to be from a divine intervention. This is not a convincing enough explanation as it is simply based on assumption of something happening with a potential explanation.

The second variation of miracles is something done by God that nature can do, but not in that order, like living after death. An example of such miracle is Jesus' resurrection¹¹. This is seen as a miracle because nature cannot bring people back from the dead. As an example of a religious experience, Jesus' resurrection is more convincing as it is a literal example due to the evidence that would have been present. If, at this time, I had seen Jesus dying on a cross and three days later he was alive, I would be inclined to believe in a greater intervention. Despite this, I find this example of miracles less convincing as most of the cases and examples are from a time when recording of information was not at a sophisticated level. An implication of the belief in miracles as a religious experience is that modern day miracles are viewed differently from the past version of miracles. It was previously easier to connect miracles to a divine intervention as they were completely outwith the laws of nature as we knew them at the time. Whereas modern miracles can more easily be explained as

¹⁰ Website- Archdiocese of Malta

¹¹ Matthew 28: 1-10 (Holy Bible)

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miraculous and unexpected events with probable explanation. But that has a scientific or easily explainable explanation using the previous example of the mother with the child and train, a religious person would refer that back to a divine intervention miracle. Whereas a non-religious person would see that as an astounding thing that can be described by our laws.

Alongside this I also think the advancement of modern science can sometimes provide convincing solutions or theories as to what may have happened. For example, Daniel Ang gives several theories for the resurrection: the disciples stole Jesus' body from the tomb; the visions of him were claims of mass hysteria.¹² or perhaps Jesus wasn't dead as science can explain him being unconscious then recovering. When considering these theories, I find it unconvincing to simply assume the Bible as the truth when there are other possible solutions, so because of this I believe that this form of miracle is less convincing as the evidence can be subjective.

The third version of miracles are something by God that nature can do but is done without the working of nature, like being cured of a fever. For example, when Jesus healed a blind man of Bethsaida¹³, this could potentially have been a natural cure and had no evidence to suggest it had to have been divine intervention this was simply the assumption. An implication of this, is that because it is able to be done by nature, does there have to be a form of divine intervention. Between all the forms of miracles as a religious experience, I believe this form is the least convincing as it is again simply an assumption built from a religious individual's opinion that despite the fact that nature could cause it, it was done by God instead.

Religious individuals are likely to accept that miracles occur as some sacred writings report miracles and many take them at truth value, if they claim divine intervention many will believe this. Miracles confirm existing beliefs as people see God as a personal, powerful, loving being so he may sometimes intervene in the world as a way of showing his presence and love to his followers. For many, religion is the simpler explanation as contact with the divine is more important or understandable than the laws of nature being violated. An

¹² A scientist's look at the resurrection – Harvard scientist, Daniel Gordon Ang

¹³ Mark 8:22-26 (Holy Bible)

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implication of this belief is that some argue that there is no agreed upon definition of a miracle and therefore the word is meaningless. This makes miracles as evidence of religious experiences less convincing as they are difficult to understand as there is not a universal explanation as to what a miracle is or entails. This is supported by the fact that for non-religious people miracles simply have an explanation without the divine even being involved, a non-religious person will see a miracle as a good thing to happen but will often not actually have a need for divine intervention.

Hume discussed miracles, stating,

*"because a miracle would be a 'violation of the laws of nature', miracles are impossible or that one cannot have a justified belief that a miracle occurred."*¹⁴

Hume believed that miracles are breaking the law of nature by the choice and action of a god or supernatural power. He commented that, *"a wise man proportions his belief to the evidence"*¹⁵. This quote implies that Hume believed a religious person believing in miracles is naive since they are believing an event with little evidence. Although I disagree with Hume's view as it is very dismissive of religious experiences, I agree with his argument about requiring more evidence in order to believe miracles are a religious experience. For example, Hume suggests that there with the miracle of Jesus' walking on water, there is more evidence to support the fact that people cannot walk on water rather than the one time that Jesus did, hence it should not be believed. Overall, Hume's argument is understandable as it makes sense to simply believe what we have most evidence of happening. However, the entire principle of a miracle is that it is out of the ordinary and makes little sense, so Hume's view can have different interpretations depending on what definition of miracles one believes.

Hume argues that in all claims of miracles, there is inadequate witness testimony because for Hume, witnesses must be well educated and intelligent. Alongside this there should also be a 'sufficient number' of witnesses for a claim to be considered, which leads Hume to state that many, if not all, claims of miracles are then inadequate and should be dismissed. A complication of this argument is that Hume's suggestion is that someone has to be

¹⁴ Enquiry concerning human understanding, section x- David Hume

¹⁵ Ibid

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intelligent to be worthy of believing, which causes issues not only because intelligence is subjective but because it then means a lot of our beliefs, particularly within religion, are entirely dismissed as they did not come from a supposed intelligent source. I do agree with Hume that for miracles to be convincing they must have multiple witnesses, and some form of proof otherwise they become cloudy and difficult to believe like visions. I believe that miracles are more convincing than visions as miracles are easier to have a material outcome of them, a miracle where Jesus turned water into wine would be something that the people around him could clearly have seen whereas a vision is difficult to prove. Despite this I still think that miracles are unconvincing because it becomes easy for a religious person to see a lot of things as a miracle that may have for a non-religious person a more feasible explanation such as science or just coincidence. As a non-religious person, I am unconvinced as other explanations can be applied rather than claiming divine intervention. However, I can understand why people will look for the explanation that gives them comfort. Miracles that happened in the past are unconvincing just as there is no evidence apart from word of mouth, which makes it difficult to be convincing.

'Conversion experiences are the most convincing evidence for religious experience.' How far do you agree?

Conversion as a religious experience 3

Conversion as a religious experience refers to an experience a person has in which they have a change in belief or religion which can be caused by a multitude of reasons. Experiences themselves can be caused by two main types of mental occurrence resulting in the conversion of an individual, these are active and passive.

An active conversion is when the individual has sought this - it is a conscious action a person makes. This could occur through going to evangelical meetings with the intention of responding to the preacher, investigating other religions, or reading different holy books. Passive conversion means the experience is not sought out and comes to an individual unexpectedly, it's involuntary and not a conscious decision. Conversion experiences can affect an individual in different ways such as, a conversion from one major religion to another such as a Christian converting to Buddhism, or it can also be from within one religious' tradition to another for example, from one branch of Christianity to another, Anglicanism to Catholicism. An example of a passive conversion is seen in Acts 9 where Paul, who was Jewish, claimed he had a vision and heard the voice of Jesus calling him to the ministry.¹⁶ This led Paul to go on and change his entire life as he acted on this calling and became an apostle of Christ. As a religious experience I believe this is more convincing because whether you believe in visions or not, the idea that Paul converted religion is convincing as that would have been a dramatic change. Alongside this there is further evidence of this conversion as Paul goes on to write Christian scripture and preach the way of Christianity, this is evidence of his conversion therefore its more convincing. William James carries a similar view, as he is a pragmatist meaning he is not interested in the truth. He instead aims to focus on what worked in improving an individual's life.¹⁷ James believes that conversion is the strongest evidence of religious experience as it is such a personal, inner experience. He believes and studies within his Varieties, that as a religious experience conversion will always be contested, however there are more profound records of conversion.¹⁸ I agree with James' view, conversion is more convincing as the effect of the experience contributes to the believability and validity of the experience. If an individual has

¹⁶ Acts 9:1-22 (Holy Bible)

¹⁷ The Teaching of philosophy in Our colleges (1876)

¹⁸ William James, part 4: The psychology of conversion, mark Vernon

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a conversion experience, there will often be a positive impact on the individual's life as they are changing their faith which will ultimately change their lives.

Conversions can also be gradual sometimes even taking years, this is often seen in active conversion. Whereas they can also be sudden which means it is a clear instant conversion, often seen in passive conversions. A positive consequence of an individual conversion as a religious experience is that the individual themselves gain a new perspective and potentially a better outcome of life as they are happier in their beliefs, and many find a new purpose. However, many believe like other religious experiences conversion itself cannot be described in ordinary or simple terms as it often as St John of the Cross observed '*Human language is unable to express the sense of mystical union with God.*'¹⁹ This means that some view conversion as such a personal change and connection with God that it cannot be described, and in doing so you are breaking and diminishing the level of connection you previously had. It is placing ordinary description on an extraordinary experience which following this belief may make conversion less convincing as you then cannot describe or explain your experience, making it less convincing to other people. Despite this I believe this does not impact how convincing conversion is as a religious experience as conversion is more about the observable changes you can see in an individual rather than believing what they have said happened.

Conversions may also be a communal experience; this means a group of people will experience a change in belief at the same time. An example of a communal conversion experience is when the disciples were gathered in a room and received the holy spirit,

*"They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."*²⁰

This shows a communal religious experience in that all of the disciples together had this experience and were changed because of it. As a religious experience, a communal conversion is a less convincing experience, as it may appear less genuine personally if an

¹⁹ The Ascent of Mount Carmel- Book 2, Chapter 28

²⁰ Acts 2: 1-4 (Holy Bible)

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entire group convert as they may have been influenced by one another. While this doesn't make their conversion less genuine, it is less convincing as a religious experience as it doesn't appear genuine if a group of people all subsequently change beliefs.

A conversion from theism to atheism could then show that God gives free will. Swinburne believed that a good god would seek to interact with his creations. However, an implication of conversions as a religious experience is that some may argue that people convert to religion to escape the horrors of the outside world, they use religion as a security blanket. Although some may argue that divine intervention is involved in people's conversion then that may take away free will and confuses as why would God only reveal himself to certain people, I don't believe this makes conversion itself less convincing. As whether there was divine intervention or not the evidence shows that an individual has been converted, it does not make it more or less convincing as to how they were converted.

Conclusion

Between all of the varieties of conversion, I believe group conversions are the least convincing as a change in faith is an individual and personal religious experience. Due to this a group conversion is less convincing because it lacks the personal connection with the divine that makes them convincing as a religious experience. Despite the idea that conversions may be caused by other religious experiences, the act of conversion itself is convincing because it doesn't matter why or how the conversion came about, the convincing part is the impact the conversion has. Alongside this, all conversions as a religious experience are convincing because of the predominant evidence that can be physically seen in the individual's change of faith and life. Due to this change in an individual the recording or plausibility of the act of a conversion becomes irrelevant as it is the experience of a converted individual, that makes it believable. This change is seen as convincing as someone would gain nothing from faking a conversion, alongside this, any influences or other factors that may impact a person's conversion, are again irrelevant to how convincing they may be. This is because whether a person is under the influence of something other, or not, the conversion itself cannot be falsified therefore will always be convincing as an experience.

'Conversion experiences are the most convincing evidence for religious experience.' How far do you agree?

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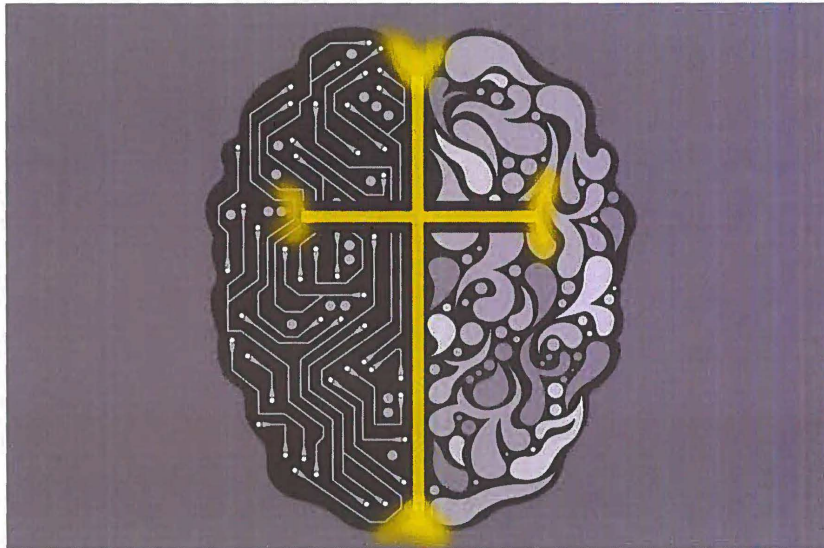
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Candidate 8 evidence

To What Extent are Religious Experiences Best Explained by Psychology?



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As our understanding of psychology has advanced greatly in recent times, we now have a far stronger ability than ever before to look at religious experiences through a scientific lens. New psychological theories give us improved explanations of psychological phenomena that can cause spiritual/ religious experiences. Considering that religious experiences are still widely relevant today, as people still claim to experience them and still popularly use them as evidence of a religion being genuine, it is especially important that we use recent psychological advancements and theories to determine the extent to which religious experiences can be best explained by psychology, so that we can get a more accurate understanding of whether claims of religious experiences should be trusted as being real encounters with the divine, or if they should be dismissed as fabrications of the mind caused by some form of psychological phenomena. In order to answer this question to the fullest degree the aims of this essay will be to explore the explanations given by a variety of psychologists for the existence of religious experiences, and to consider any limitations in these psychological arguments, as these limitations would help support the stance that religious experiences are genuine.

One of the most influential psychologists that dealt with religious experiences was the American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910). James believed that religious experiences were at the core of religion. He took an objective stance and surveyed many different religious experiences, aiming to observe the effects these experiences had on people's lives. James regarded religious experiences as being very important as he believed they indicated the probability of God. Wanting to test these religious experiences, he did so by observing the effects produced by them as he believed that the validity of the experience lay in the effects it had on the experienter – for example, did the experience cause them to change their life? (revisionworld networks, 2007) This suggests that James believed psychology could be used to help validate religious experience rather than dismiss them, as his line of logic here appears to be that religious experiences can be trusted as genuine if they had a profound psychological impact on the experienter, leading to outcomes like creating a turning point in the experienter's life. This is significant as it means that James would support

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many famous accounts of religious experiences, like the visions of St Teresa, as being genuine cases of a person experiencing a connection with God. St Teresa is a clear example as her visions resulted in her perspective of God being heavily altered, to a kinder and more forgiving being than she previously believed Him to be. This fits James's requirement of the experience having impact on the person as adopting this new view of God rid her of the guilt, she previously carried due to feeling like sinner. A lesser-known example of a religious experience that would also pass James's requirement is Malcolm X's Hajj pilgrimage. Beforehand he was very opposed to white and black people working together on the civil rights movement and co-existing. He wanted a separate black state. However, when on the Hajj he had a major religious experience as he witnessed how Islam could unite all Muslims – regardless of differentiating factors like race. This proved to be life changing and after he returned his views had entirely changed and he now fought for black and white people to be able to live together peacefully, as he had witnessed those on the Hajj do (Islam Channel, 2023). Notably, James did not put much importance on whether these religious experiences were true or not, rather, he concerned himself with whether they succeeded in providing benefit to people's lives. Unlike other psychologists, James does not appear to be arguing that psychology can explain away religious experiences, rather he seems more inclined to accept these experiences as genuine. This is further backed up by his quote from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* "God is real because he produces real effects" (James 2012, pg. 517) which suggests that, as long as a religious experience creates real impact in the person's life, for example, majorly changing someone's views, then it acts as proof of God's existence.

One problem with James's argument is that it is weak in proving the truthfulness of religious experiences. This is because his evidence of the experience comes from the impact said experience has on a person, which is a flawed and unreliable source. As the philosopher Bertrand Russell said, "the fact that a belief has a good moral effect upon a man is no evidence whatsoever in favour of its truth" (revisionworld networks, 2007). This suggests that religious experiences could be albeit strange, but still perfectly natural phenomena that is misinterpreted by some as having a greater meaning when in actuality there is none. An example of this could be the biblical event of Moses and the

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difficulties occur, however when the development is particularly 'painful' for the child it can become too much for the conscious mind to cope with, causing this to become repressed and pushed into the unconscious. Freud believes that we all experience some of this and that when we approach situations in life where too much strain is put on our personalities, we risk regressing into "a response appropriate to a stage in our development to which we never satisfactorily adjusted" (Thrower 1999, pg. 145). Freud believed religious belief is an example of this regression, calling it 'wish-fulfilment' and also specifically stating that religious belief is an infantile mode of response used as a defence mechanism against an alien and hostile world. By calling it a defence mechanism against our world Freud meant that some resort to religious belief as a way to protect themselves when faced with the world being confusing to understand and cruel to survive in. Freud called this religious response a 'infantile mode of response' because he points out that the religious person is responding much like a child. Like how in childhood, we respond to our hostile and strange world by craving a father-figure who acts as a protector, provider, and source of love; the religious person, in adulthood, also responds to our hostile and strange world by craving a father-figure which, this time, comes in the form of God. Freud labelled this as an example of wish-fulfilment (which was a phrase he coined that referred to the phenomenon of a desire being satisfied through an involuntary thought process) because the religious person is shown to have a desire (in this case, to be protected from this world by a parental figure similar to the one craved in their childhood), that they unconsciously satisfy by adopting religion, because religion is able to supply them with a figure that possesses these parental qualities they crave (this figure being God). Freud further emphasises his point that religion is wish-fulfilment through his quote that describes God as "*reminiscent of the real, or imagined or wished-for parent of our childhood*" (Thrower 1999, pg. 146). This highlights that Freud believed God perfectly fulfils the role of a parental figure, as he claims that God is even able to fully measure up to the imagined perfect parent.

One weakness of Freud's explanation is that it does not explain religious experiences like miracles. [Miracles are often used as proof of religion as they can be difficult to disprove, and while Freud's argument may be valid in giving a psychological explanation for religious belief, he does not explain how this could cause faked miracles

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that have stumped science.] For example, the stigmata of Padre Pio which involved Pio gaining wounds on his hands and feet that resembled the wounds of Christ. These wounds never healed for the rest of his life, they bled constantly yet he never suffered symptoms like anaemia, they never got infected, and they smelled like roses (catholic online, n.d.). His wounds confused scientists, and many sought to provide a natural explanation, but none was given. Freud's argument would not be able to explain away religious experiences like Padre Pio's, as there is no explanation for how purely psychological factors could affect the laws of nature like this and allow for what should be impossible phenomena to occur.

Ultimately, this strengthens the religious argument that these experiences are genuine, as this inability of Freud to provide a psychological explanation for miracles demonstrates that psychological arguments are severely limited in their ability to prove that all religious experiences can be best explained by psychology. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that religious experiences can be genuine, but the pool of genuine religious experiences is much smaller than generally believed. Freud's theories suggest that religious experiences which have no physical proof are likely to be fabrications that can be explained away by psychology. For example, mystical experiences which only involve feeling a sense of oneness with God and do not display any physical signs of a supernatural event occurring (which could have acted as proof). Instead, trusted religious experiences would mostly, if not exclusively, consist of well-tested miracles like Padre Pio's stigmata.

Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961) developed upon Freud's idea of the unconscious mind. [Freud claimed that the unconscious is a deeper layer of the consciousness that contains our primal instincts, personality components, early childhood experiences, repressed memories, and internal conflicts. And while we are not aware of it, it is significantly influential on our character and actions.] Jung goes onto describe a collective unconscious which consisting of components, awarenesses, and desires we inherit. All people possess this collective unconscious as it is inherited – a part of us that was created during the early development of humans. In relation to

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religion, Jung believed that the collective unconscious was *"the reservoir of the whole human memory out of which myth and religion springs"*. (Raeper & Smith 1991, pg. 78) He claimed this as he studied mythologies from around the world and found that they all possessed a collection of fables, legends and morality tales which carried common themes. Because he found such strong similarities in every culture's myths, *"Jung concluded that the contents of these myths must be generated from some inherent psychic substrate that must be shared by our entire species"* (Alper 1996, pg. 84), with a 'inherent psychic substrate' meaning our collective unconscious. The impact of this collective unconscious is that all cultures create its own mythology, and all these mythologies possess common themes which he called archetypes. Because of the universal nature of the archetypes Jung concluded that humans possess a religious function which is as influential as instincts like sexuality and aggression. Jung viewed this religious function as being something that cannot be neglected as he believed this instinct not only makes people naturally religious, but also makes them dependent on maintaining some kind of myth to believe in and live by – as he thought this myth was necessary to provide meaning and significance in their lives. One consequence of this is that Jung viewed those in modern day as being unhealthy because they can no longer believe in the myths. Significantly, while he himself claimed to be religious it was never clear if he believed in the traditional sense. This suggests that Jung may have never found traditional theistic belief to be convincing enough to think them true, and instead only encouraged religious and mythical belief as he thought this could provide benefit to the human mind. This links to James's idea that when regarding religious experiences our focus should not be on whether the experience is genuine or not, rather it is far more important to consider the impact the experience had on the person.

A limitation in Jung's argument is that he fails to specify if this religious function exists due to its creation by a God/ supernatural being, or due to it being a feature of evolution because religious/ superstitious inclinations proved beneficial to our survival. Notably, this may have been a purposeful choice as he may not have had an answer on which of these two options he found more believable. Ultimately, this vagueness disadvantages the argument that religious experiences can be best explained by psychology, as it means that not all plausible alternative explanations have been disproven, meaning that

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Jung's theory points towards religious experiences as being genuine as much as it points towards it being fake.

However, a counter argument to this could be that Jung's explanations actually strengthen the argument that religious experiences are best explained by psychology as it infers that while religious belief may provide benefit to mental health, it is entirely possible that the belief itself is fake – originally created by humans as a form of mental support. I believe this appears as an especially convincing argument when you consider the conditions the people living at the times of the creation of these beliefs were living in. For example, the world was generally far crueller with harsher rulers, intense and even torturous punishments for crimes, and many people living in inhumane conditions. The development of religious belief/ myths could help people cope with the cruel world and even help avoid mentally collapsing under the stress of it.

Jung's argument supports the idea that religious experiences can be best explained by psychology because if humans are naturally inclined to believe myth and religion as he says, then we are more susceptible to convincing ourselves that unusual and strange occurrences have supernatural/ religious roots rather than just being odd, but entirely natural phenomena. This implies that religious experiences are actually normal occurrences that have been misinterpreted: for example, mystical experiences may simply be cases of people misunderstanding the roots of significant emotional experiences and wrongly attributing them to a religious cause because their religious function pushes them to.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow's (1908-1970) idea of the existence of 'peak experiences' helps to invalidate religious experiences as it implies that the experienter has confused an ordinary peak experience with something supernatural that must be linked to a higher being. Maslow created a hierarchy of needs which demonstrated how people are driven to fulfil their basic needs before they move onto more advanced needs. This hierarchy starts with the lowest level detailing the most basic needs for survival: physiological needs like food, water, and shelter. Next there are safety needs, then love/ belonging needs, esteem needs, and lastly self-actualisation. Maslow details

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an important part of self-actualization called 'peak experiences', these are unique experiences that involve a feeling of pure joy and elation. Peter Cole explains peak experiences as, "*sudden feelings of intense happiness and well-being, and include a wider sense of awareness*" and says that "*The experience fills the individual with wonder and awe*" (Cole 2005, pg. 102). Additionally, Privette says that "*Peak experiences involve a heightened sense of wonder, awe, or ecstasy over an experience.*" (Cherry, Peak experiences in psychology, 2023). Even though very few people actually achieve the self-actualization need, Maslow believed that all people are capable of having peak experiences, those who have achieved self-actualization are just likely to experience them more often.

One significant aspect of peak experiences is that they appear similar in nature to mystical religious experiences. Peak experiences meet 3 of the 4 characteristics William James ascribed to mystical experience: being noetic (as these experiences create intense emotional reactions by filling the person with wonder and awe), being ineffable (as an experience this emotionally intense would likely be difficult to verbalise) and being transient (as peak experiences are short-lived).

Maslow identified a link between peak experiences and organised religion. He believed that the origins and essence of every major religion is the "*private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer*" (Maslow 1964, pg. 19). And he goes on to say that "*it is very likely, indeed almost certain, that these older reports, phrased in terms of supernatural revelation, were, in fact, perfectly natural, human peak-experiences*" (Maslow 1964, pg. 20). What Maslow is saying here is that it is possible that the communication with God experienced by major prophets/seers like Christ or Muhammad, which form the basis of major religions, are not genuine religious experiences, but rather, entirely normal and natural cases of peak experiences.

This suggests that all religious experiences of revelation and communication with God can be explained away by psychology. This has the impact of debasing a major argument used to defend mystical experiences – that the profound emotional impacts mystical experiences have on people are too dramatic and extensive for these

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experiences to be attributed to purely natural causes like a psychological phenomenon – as Maslow's argument explains that these people were just experiencing ordinary peak-experiences, which are characterised by the same intensely strong feelings of awe, wonder, and ecstasy. This strengthens the argument that religious experiences can be explained away by psychology because this theory provides a strong counterargument to all religious arguments that use the emotion involved in the experience to back up its validity, as it has shown that these arguments are unreliable as the emotions involved can be found to actually be connected to other causes like peak experiences.

One weakness with this is that peak experiences are not described as creating a negative reaction in people. All accounts of peak experiences, and all descriptors of the nature of peak experiences describe them as a positive experience that the person involved enjoys. In contrast, some religious experiences, particularly, many mystical experiences are described in a negative way – as an experience that involves stress, or fear for those involved. This was so common in mystical experiences that in Otto's description of the nature of numinous consciousness he described there not only being feelings of awe and fascination, but also fear and terror. A famous example of this is St Teresa of Avila who was recorded having multiple mystical experiences throughout her life. As she said she suffered during these experiences because the visions she received from God were disturbing and painful for her. Considering that the nature of peak experiences and the nature of religious experiences do not fully align, we can infer from this that only some religious experiences can be explained away as peak experiences that were misinterpreted. This means that Maslow's explanation of religious experiences is largely limited as it fails to explain away the high number of religious experiences that involve suffering, and it also means that these experiences that Maslow's theory fails to explain away must therefore be better explained by religion as psychology has failed here to give a non-religious reason for their existence.

Lastly, medical doctor and psychotherapist Alfred Adler's (1870-1937) theories explain away religious experiences as being a fabrication spurred on by the psychological need

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we possess for God. Adler's psychological theories and practices have been particularly open to spiritual and religious issues. He viewed religion generally positively. Adler believed God was the *"human understanding of greatness and complete perfection"* (Smothers 2014), and in this way, represents the perfection we aim to achieve. Adler created the idea of the inferiority complex, and regarding religion, believed that humans find a sense of inferiority in themselves due to struggling with things like, e.g., a lack of power. Adler claimed that God comes into this as He, in contrast to us, is often considered to be a perfect being: possessing traits like omnipotence (perfect power), omniscience (perfect knowledge), and omnibenevolence (perfect morality). In addition to this, this perfect being is often portrayed as telling us to aim for perfection as well and teaching us how to do so. Adler believed that those following God are aware that they can never achieve the same perfection that He holds but continue to follow Him because making efforts to achieve this goal and identifying with God like this helps them combat their feelings of inferiority and *"compensate for their imperfections"* (Smothers 2014).

Adler's theories about religion appear similar to Freud's. Just as how Freud believed that those who believe in religion have some kind of deficit, leading them to adopt the infantile defence mechanism of creating a protective paternal being (God) to shield us from an alien and hostile world, Adler believes that those who develop religious belief are motivated by a deficit in the form of a sense of inferiority. And like how Freud's protective paternal God comforts people, helping them to cope in a cruel world with the belief that there is an all-powerful being looking out for them; Adler's perfect God helps people by giving them a way to escape and combat their sense of inferiority, which in turn, may be largely beneficial for their mental health as otherwise living with a constant sense of inferiority and no way out of it could have led to serious mental health issues like depression.

This suggests that religious experiences may be best explained by psychology. If Adler's theories on religion are similar to Freud's, as they are shown to be above, then this means that you could use Adler's theories like how you could use Freud's to argue that religion is not genuine, because rather than being something that truly exists, any

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religious/ spiritual belief are a fabrication by the mind for the purpose of acting as a defence mechanism. Both Freud and Adler's theories show that religious belief benefits us psychologically as it provides us with what we need to avoid extreme mental health issues – for example, a protective figure that can make us feel safe in a cruel world, or a way to escape crushing feelings of inferiority. If religion is not genuine, instead something that is created by the mind to protect itself, this means that all aspects of religion, which includes all religious experiences, can be explained away by psychology – specifically, all as part of an advanced psychological defence mechanism.

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