Arguments for the existence of God: the Design Argument

William Paley’s analogical argument
1 *A posteriori* refers to arguments based on sense experience.
2 Inductive arguments are based on probability.
3 Just as the complex and purposeful design of a watch requires explanation outside itself, so the even greater complexity of and evidence of purpose in the world requires such an explanation. In the case of the watch, the explanation is a watchmaker; in the case of the universe, the only appropriate explanation is God.

Criticisms of design arguments
1 Mechanical analogies are inappropriate: Paley used a watch analogy; humans cannot know how universes are made: the watch analogy encourages an anthropomorphic understanding; design often entails teamwork: this does not suggest Paley’s idea of one God.
2 ‘Belief that’ is concerned with knowledge about; ‘belief in’ is concerned with personal commitment.

Arguments for the existence of God: the Ontological Argument

Anselm’s Ontological Argument
1 It is *a priori* and deductive whereas Paley’s argument is *a posteriori* and inductive.
2 ‘That than which nothing greater can be conceived.’
3 ‘The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”’
4 The greatest conceivable island.
5 A necessary being is a being that cannot fail to exist; a contingent being is one that may or may not exist.

Criticisms: Kant
1 That of Descartes.
2 Existence is not a predicate; something cannot be defined into existence.
3 There is no difference between 100 possible and 100 actual thalers; the concept is the same.
4 Just because God’s existence could be logically necessary, it does not mean that it is factually necessary.

Arguments for the existence of God: the Cosmological Argument

Aquinas’ Way 3 – the argument from contingency and necessity
1 It is inductive and *a posteriori*.
2 Contingency and necessity.
3 Everything in the world was contingent, which means that at one time there was nothing. But since nothing can come from nothing, there must be something that is necessary. This cannot be a caused necessary being, so there must be an uncaused necessary being responsible for all caused necessary and contingent beings. That is what is meant by God.

Criticisms: Hume and Russell
1 What is true of the parts is not necessarily true of the whole.
2 It is just a brute fact; there is no need for explanation.
3 The idea of God as a necessary being turns it into a form of the Ontological Argument; at best it indicates a deist divinity.
4 Occam’s Razor states that where there are competing theories, the simplest explanation is preferable. Those who support the Cosmological Argument claim that a single God is preferable to Hume’s suggestion of a multiplicity of deities and that God as the explanation of the universe is simpler than attributing it to chance.

Evil and suffering

The problem of evil and suffering
1 Beliefs in God’s omnipotence and omnibenevolence.
2 If God wants to but cannot remove evil, then he is impotent. If God can but does not want to remove evil, then he is malevolent. If God is both able and willing to remove evil, then what is the source of evil?
3 The sheer amount and the pointlessness of evil suggests that God does not exist, or is uncaring or is not omniscient.
4 Evil is the lack in something of a good that is natural, in the same way that blindness is a defect in a human or animal but not in a stone.
Responses to the problem of evil and suffering
1 The existence of suffering enables humans to develop/respond with compassion or callousness. This means we can choose to respond with compassion and so to grow morally. The existence of both pleasant and painful experiences is necessary to enable this moral growth, though of course it can lead to the opposite. God is therefore justified in permitting evil within the universe, since it allows us the freedom to choose or reject what is good and so teaches us to be morally responsible.
2 Mackie claims that God could have created humans who were both free to choose and always choose good.
3 To allow humans to choose to have a loving relationship with God.
4 Because it means that ultimately God, by persistence, overrides a person’s freely made choice to reject God.
5 Had God avoided the process which could lead to evil, the result would have been a world devoid of value.
6 Most Christians think that omnipotence is an essential characteristic of God. Griffin’s rejection of God as omnipotent reduces him to the level of humans, so he is no longer the kind of Being that most Christians would think worthy of worship.

Religious language

Background to religious language
1 The horrors of the First World War and the empiricism of Locke and Hume.
2 Cognitive statements give factual information. Non-cognitive statements do not convey factual information but may convey emotions, give orders or make moral or religious claims.

The challenges of the Verification and Falsification principles to the meaningfulness of religious language
1 Analytic and synthetic statements.
2 Wisdom’s ‘Parable of the Gardener’.
3 The continual modifications to belief in God to meet philosophical challenges diminish God so that the concept no longer has any significance.

Responses to these challenges from verification and falsification
1 The ‘Parable of the Celestial City’.
2 A deeply held, life-changing and crucially significant interpretation of the world that is non-falsifiable.
3 It allows religious language to have a range of meaning; it allows religious statements to be ‘belief in’.

Other views of the nature of religious language
1 Despite the essential difference between God and the universe, it is possible for humans to say something about God.
2 Because of the essential difference between God and the universe, humans cannot know what it means for God to be good; human goodness is a remote approximation to God’s goodness.
3 Religious language that describes God in terms of what he is not.
4 It avoids anthropomorphism and is true to the mystics’ experience of God as ineffable.
5 A sign simply points to something; a symbol contains in itself something of what it represents.
Miracles

Differing understandings of miracle
1 Realist views see religious claims as objectively true or false, but anti-realist views see them as subjective interpretations of the human mind.
2 ‘An event we cannot forecast or expect with our current understanding of nature.’
3 A ‘god of the gaps’ approach.
4 As a remarkable coincidence.
5 It is subjective and reduces God to the interpretation of human minds.

Comparison of the key ideas of David Hume and Maurice Wiles on miracles
1 Evidence suggests that the occurrence of a miracle is virtually impossible.
2 Insufficient witnesses with the right qualifications for giving a valid assessment; humanity’s natural credulity; miracles come from ‘ignorant and barbarous peoples’; different religions lay claim to miracles.
3 Creation.
4 It suggests a God who made a flawed world, not a good one, and a selective God, who cures trivial ailments but let six million die in the Holocaust.
5 Hume adopted a realist approach to miracles while Wiles adopted an anti-realist approach.

The significance of these views for religion
1 They are signs of God’s sovereignty over the universe.
2 They are a demonstration of God’s love and power.
3 They reinforce their faith in God’s goodness and love.
4 They are intended to encourage Christians to play their part in overcoming evil and suffering in the world.

Self and life after death

The nature and existence of the soul; Descartes’ argument for the existence of the soul
1 The charioteer analogy.
2 The rational, spirited and appetitive parts.
3 They are different substances with different essential properties.
4 He could doubt his body’s existence. His capacity for doubt meant that he could not doubt his existence as a thinking being. So as a thinking being he was not identical with his body.
5 Most view the mind as a product of the brain, which is itself part of the physical body.

The body–soul relationship
1 Many people think of themselves as an integrated whole.
2 In the pineal gland.
3 We should not expect to find an extra something (the mind) over and above the parts of the physical body.
4 Human bodies are just ‘survival machines’ for genes. Consciousness developed because of its survival advantages, but it is just a part of the physical body and perishes with it. The only form of survival after death is in the form of the DNA that is passed on.
5 Dual-aspect monism claims that there is one entity which has two aspects: mind and body. Hard materialism makes no distinction between the two: the mind is identical with the brain.

The possibility of continuing personal existence after death
1 Out of an instinctive fear of death.
2 It is contrary to the scientific fact that bodies perish at death.
3 If a light bulb does not work because of a faulty socket, it simply needs plugging into a different socket. Similarly, when a person dies, all the soul needs for its survival is something to replace the function that the brain performed.
4 Past life regression and direct past life recall.

Introduction to normative ethical theories

Normative ethical theories
1 An absolutist theory based on duty, rules and rights.
2 Natural moral law.
3 A theory concerned with purpose and consequences.
4 Fletcher’s situation ethics.
5 A theory that concentrates more on ‘what kind of person should I be’ than on ‘what action should I take?’
6 Virtue ethics.
Normative ethical theories: natural moral law

Natural moral law and the principle of double effect with reference to Aquinas; proportionalism

2 They show people how to apply the primary precepts to specific situations in their lives.
3 Giving medication is not morally evil; the intention is to relieve suffering and although a shortened life is foreseen, it is genuinely not what was intended by giving the morphine; the person’s death is not the means of relieving the suffering; the good and bad effects are proportionate.
4 Intention and value weighed against disvalue.
5 Because of its claim that there are no intrinsic evils.

Evaluation of natural moral law

1 Everything seems to be relativised.
2 A focus on the person’s character.
3 It can make moral judgements hair-splitting.
4 The claim that all humans have a common nature.
5 The ban on contraceptives in some parts of the world has contributed to the spread of HIV.

Normative ethical theories: situation ethics

Situation ethics with reference to Fletcher

1 Legalism and antinomianism.
2 Selfless love.
3 Whether an action works in achieving agape.
4 Apart from agape, there are no moral absolutes; every rule may be broken if it is in the interests of agape.
5 It cannot be proved that the theory’s basis in agape is right; it stems from the conviction that God is love and so requires an act of faith and commitment.
6 It claims to put the needs and interests of people before rules.

Evaluation of Fletcher’s situation ethics

1 It avoids the rigid approach of absolutist rule-based morality and the potentially random nature of decision-making in theories such as existentialism.
2 It mirrors the New Testament portrayal of love as self-giving and concerned with the interests of others.
3 It is often subjective and close to antinomianism.
4 Theories such as natural moral law are not as rigid as Fletcher thought. They allow for exceptions to rules and for prioritising where rules conflict.
5 Recent history suggests that humans are not as capable of making decisions purely on the basis of agape as Fletcher thought.

Normative ethical theories: Aristotle’s virtue ethics

Virtue ethics with reference to Aristotle

1 Virtue ethics focuses on the kind of person one should be; other ethical theories focus on what the right action to take is in a particular moral dilemma.
2 Every action is aimed at attaining some good.
3 It alone is rational.
4 Through education.
5 Through habit and imitation of a virtuous person.
6 Practical wisdom.

Evaluation of Aristotle’s virtue ethics

1 Its focus is on the person.
2 Justice and temperance.
3 The virtues are based on individual character.

Application of ethical theories to issues of theft and lying

Theft

1 Living in an ordered society.
2 The interests of people take priority over rules.
3 It is always wrong.

Lying

1 Courage and justice.
2 Whether or not it affirmed agape.
3 Excess is boastfulness; deficiency is putting oneself down.

Application of ethical theories to issues of human life and death

Embryo research, cloning and designer babies

1 14 days.
2 On medical grounds.
3 Both the action and the intention must be good; here, the destruction of embryos is not a good action.
4 The embryo is not a person so has no rights.
5 He viewed humans as in full control of their own reproduction.
6 Compassion.

Abortion
1 The strong Sanctity of Life Principle.
2 Preservation of innocent life, worship of God, living in an ordered society.
3 No unwanted child should ever be born.
4 If there were already too many children.
5 Before life and sense had begun, i.e. very early.

Voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide
1 Preservation of innocent life, worship of God, living in an ordered society.
2 Enabling spiritual growth.
3 Whether there was free and rational choice behind the request; whether some temporary physical or psychological reason lay behind the request.
4 The Hippocratic Oath included the promise never to give a deadly drug to someone who requested it.
5 Courage and justice.

Capital punishment
1 It could easily become an act of revenge.
2 Living in an ordered society.
3 Justice.
4 The concerns and interests of all involved.
5 As putting right a loss that someone had suffered unfairly.

Application of ethical theories to issues of non-human life and death

Outline of the four ethical issues to be considered
1 Whether or not it is right to use sentient animals for something to which they have not consented; whether animals have a right to life; whether or not they have a right to protection from unnecessary and avoidable suffering.
2 Because there are other and more reliable ways of gaining information than through animal testing.
3 Transplanting organs or tissues from one species into another.

Application of natural moral law
1 Preserving innocent life.
2 Because of its value to human well-being.
3 Suffering must be kept to a minimum and it must be ‘within reasonable limits’.

Application of situation ethics
1 It promotes human well-being and saves lives.
2 Agape demands compassion, not cruelty.
3 Because of its potential for helping great numbers of people.

Application of virtue ethics
1 It might encourage greed and promote cruel practices.
2 Animal concern.
3 It could lead to a greater understanding of diseases such as cancer and could save lives.

Introduction to meta-ethics: the meaning of right and wrong

Naturalism: utilitarianism
1 Maximising pleasure and minimising pain.
2 The greatest happiness for the greatest number.
3 Bentham’s assessment was quantitative while Mill’s was qualitative.
4 Its focus is on actions, not rules.
5 They were made because they could be seen to result in the greatest benefits for society.

Non-naturalism
1 Both are cognitive.
2 It is a non-religious theory.
3 Yellow cannot be broken down further; people just know what yellow is. In the same way, good cannot be analysed or defined; people just know what it is.
4 From our fundamental moral intuitions.
5 Morality consists of subjective attitudes of personal approval or disapproval and not of objective fact.

Divine Command Theory
1 God is the eternal, omnipotent and transcendent Creator.
2 Human reason has been corrupted by the Fall.
3 The Bible and conscience.
4 This is the answer to all moral questions.
5 The commands of God as revealed in the Bible take priority over secular ethics. Divine Command Theory cannot compromise with secular approaches.

Free will and moral responsibility

The conditions of moral responsibility
1 Free will and understanding the difference between right and wrong.
2 Full, diminished and no responsibility.
3 Innate, product of upbringing.
The extent of moral responsibility: Libertarianism, Hard Determinism, Compatibilism
1 Limitations of human knowledge; it is an illusion.
2 Pavlov, in his work with dogs.
3 The personality consists largely of a person’s character and temperament, and these are largely subject to the causal influences of heredity and upbringing; the moral self is concerned with a decision between self-interest and duty, and may go against the tendencies of personality.
4 Human experience of making choices that go against a person’s inclinations and of regretting decisions.
5 External causation is where a decision is caused by something that the person cannot control; internal causation is where a decision is caused by the person wanting to do it, i.e. by the personality. Both types are caused, but in the first type the decision or action is not free, whereas in the second it is.

The value of conscience as a moral guide
1 It threatens the security and well-being of society.
2 Living in an ordered society.
3 An evasive truth is acceptable in exceptional circumstances.
4 It could be subjective and unreliable.
5 Conscience-based actions can lead to dire results.

Bentham and Kant

Jeremy Bentham’s Act Utilitarianism
1 Happiness/pleasure.
2 To help people measure pleasure and pain.
3 Minority interests can be sacrificed to those of the majority, which can result in injustice for minority groups.

Kant’s Categorical Imperative
1 It is part of what it means to be a rational human being.
2 Because all of them are subject to change.
3 An absolute and unconditional moral demand.
4 Universalisability of the principle underlying the action; people never to be treated solely as a means to an end; act as if making rules for a society that treated people as ends in themselves.
5 The supreme good, where virtue meets its appropriate reward of perfect happiness.

How far the ethical theories of Bentham and Kant are consistent with Christian moral decision-making
1 Compassion is a key feature in both; Jesus on occasion set rules aside, when human need demanded it, and this is in line with Bentham’s views.
2 It is entirely secular, as Bentham had little time for religion; the place of rules in decision-making is downplayed in Bentham’s theory, whereas they are a key feature of many Christian approaches, such as natural moral law and Divine Command theory.
3 Both Kant’s Categorical Imperative and Aquinas’ natural moral law are based on the use of reason; Kant’s first formulation of the Categorical Imperative (universalisability) is similar to Jesus’ Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you).
4 It is a secular theory in which humans’ sense of moral obligation comes from their nature as human beings; belief in God is central to natural moral law and Divine Command theory, and Situation Ethics’ concept of agape is based on the life and teaching of Jesus.

Conscience

Differing religious and non-religious ideas about the nature of conscience
1 It is based on respect for universal principles.
2 The super-ego, which manifests itself as guilt or shame.
3 It consists of society’s views of what is good and bad.
4 As an internalised response based on fear to the demands of an authoritarian society (authoritarian conscience); as the search for what will lead to human flourishing (humanistic conscience).
5 As the voice of God whispering to us.
6 Conscience must always be obeyed, so it is important that it is not mistaken through ignorance.
7 It is the ultimate moral decision-maker.
8 Whereas other theories of conscience regard it as something a person has or develops, Fletcher regarded it as the activity of a person in making moral decisions through using the agapeic calculus.