



Year 7 Is there a God?

1. How do we prove things exist? How do you know you are real? How can you prove that you are not an illusion or part of a simulation? Philosophers have battled with the question for thousands of years. To prove someone's existence we look for evidence in the form of birth certificates, passports, photographs, written texts, word of mouth etc. However, how do we prove the existence of a non-human, non-animal existence? Evidence for God is a widely debated subject and again people have debated this for thousands of years. What evidence would you look for? For people who have a faith in God, they believe that God is not a physical body like you and me, but a force that is in the world and outside the world. God can be felt by the believer and so proof by sight is not needed, but God can be seen in the world around us through creation.

2. The First Cause Argument

The First Cause Argument (also known as The Cosmological Argument) is a famous argument put forward by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century. Aquinas argued that you need to start by asking the question 'How did the universe get here?' We know that the Universe couldn't have come out of nothing, something cannot come out of nothing. Therefore, you are forced by your own reasoning to the conclusion that the Universe was caused to exist by something that existed before it. He used the example of dominoes and said that a line of dominoes cannot just fall by themselves, something must cause them to fall.

If you ask yourself: Who made you? Who made your parents? Who made your grandparents? Who made humans? Who made life? Who made the Earth? Who made matter? Who made the Universe? Who made the Big Bang? You would keep asking Who made... forever.

Aquinas argued that there must be a 'First Cause' that was uncaused by anything else existing before it. Aquinas argued that this 'First Cause' could only be God.



3. The Design Argument

The Design Argument (also known as The Teleological Argument) is a famous argument put forward by William Paley in the 18th Century. Like Aquinas, he argued that you could prove God's existence. Paley suggests that you should imagine walking across a field and suddenly coming across a watch hidden in the grass. You pick it up and realise it is a very fancy old pocket watch. You ask your friend, 'Who made this?' They tell you 'no one, it's always existed'. Paley argues you would know that this was not the case. Watches don't just exist; they need a designer to have made them. There is too much evidence of design and purpose to not accept this. Paley argues that the Universe is the same. It shows too much evidence of design and purpose and therefore it too must have had a designer. Paley argues that the only possible designer that could have made our complex universe is God.



4. Miracles

Unlike religious experiences, miracles are not private things going on inside a person's head. Miracles, if they happen, happen in a real world and so it should be straightforward to check and find out if they are true or not.

One of the greatest Christian thinkers and philosophers was St Augustine who loved about 400 years after Jesus. In his book *The City of God*, he argues that miracles are a sign from God. God does certain things that go beyond what we normally see going on around us so that we are amazed. These amazing things are what we call miracles. As God is not visible to our eyes, some people are sceptical and do not believe. Others would argue that miracles are visible. God makes miracles happen so that people may believe. A miracle, then, is a sign from God. Miracles are God's way of rousing our minds so that we see the invisible God in visible things on around us.

Miracles in the Bible

The healing of the paralysed man (Mark 2: 1-12; Matthew 9: 1-8; Luke 5:17-26)

The blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)

The feeding of the 5000 (Mark 6: 30-44; Matthew 14:13-21; Luke 9: 10-17; John 6: 1-14)

The resurrection of Jesus (John 20: 26-29; Luke 24:39) William Paley provides what he believes is a great amount of historical evidence to support his claim that the resurrection really happened: he argues that witnesses who saw Jesus resurrected did not rush into belief but were first 'reluctant to believe'. He claims that the witnesses who saw the resurrection appearances had no motive to lie. They would have been persecuted and killed.



5. Religious Experience

If we see something, is that enough evidence to say that it is real? If you told your friends that you saw something, you would expect them to believe you as your eyes actually saw it. The fact is that the evidence of our senses most of the time is good enough for us to trust what we see or hear is real. If we see flames or smell smoke, we would believe our senses. We wouldn't say, 'Is this room really on fire? Can I believe the evidence of my senses?' The religious experience argument takes the same practical approach. If you feel the presence of God, or see an angel, or hear a heavenly voice, such an experience is good enough that after the experience you would say 'I have had a religious experience and I know God is real'.

Famous religious experiences:

Christianity

The Burning Bush: Moses hears the voice of God coming from a burning bush.

Jesus' baptism: Jesus at his baptism hears a heavenly voice and experiences the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The day of Pentecost: The disciples experience the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The road to Damascus: St Paul is blinded by a light and hears the voice of Jesus.

The grotto at Lourdes: Bernadette sees a vision of the Virgin Mary.

Islam

The Night of Power: Muhammad sees a vision of the Angel Gabriel (Jibril) and is given words of revelation: Qur'an.

6. Christian Beliefs about God

Christianity is a monotheistic religion. They believe in one God. They believe in The Trinity which is the belief that God is 3-in-1: Father, Son & Holy Spirit. They believe that God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent & omniscient. Christians believe that all humans are given freewill by God which explains why there is evil & suffering in the world.

Many people who believe in God will be inspired in their own lives to do things and live in a way that reflects the things that Jesus did.

On 10th September 1946, Mother Theresa, while travelling on a train heard a voice telling her to work with the poor. As a result, she moved to India and spent the rest of her life helping those in poverty. Christians often get baptised, take Holy Communion, marry in Church as a symbol of their beliefs about God.

7. Muslim Beliefs about God

The word 'Islam' means 'surrender', 'obedience' or 'submission'. Muslims believe that they should surrender to the will of Allah (God). One of the most important beliefs in Islam is Tawhid: the belief that there is only one God. This makes Islam a monotheistic religion. This belief is expressed in Chapter 112 of the Qur'an "He is one, God the eternal. No one is comparable to him". This belief is also repeated in the Shahadah- the Muslim declaration of faith "There is no God but Allah". Muslims believe that God is an undivided entity. This means that God is not made up of different persons nor has a son. God is unique. There is nothing like God.

Keyword	Meaning
Deity	Another word for God
Evidence	The way in which something is thought to be true because there is good information or signs
Causation	The relationship between cause and effect
Analogy	Compares two things and a similarity between them is suggested
Miracle	Something that cannot be explained by science and so makes people think that God did it
Conversion	Changing one's religion or beliefs
Numinous	Something that indicates the presence of God
Prayer	A way of communicating with God, usually through words
Monotheism	The belief in one God
Trinity	The Christian belief that God is 3 in 1: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Omnipotent	The belief that God is all-powerful
Omniscient	The belief that God is all-knowing
Omnibenevolent	The belief that God is all-loving
Just	The Christian & Muslim belief that God is fair and does what is right
Tawhid	The Muslim belief about the oneness of God
Merciful	The Muslim belief that Allah is loving and forgiving