

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD EDITED BY JOHN HICK (TEXT 12) (PUB.MACMILLAN)

(P.23). ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT by ST. ANSELM

Ch.2: God is conceived as "a being than which none greater can be thought", and even the non-believer can grasp that idea. Thus God exists in the understanding, even if not in reality. But to exist in reality is greater than to only exist in the understanding. If God exists in the understanding alone, then a greater being *can* be thought. Therefore the being of which we first thought must exist in reality as well as in the understanding.

Ch.3: Furthermore a thing which cannot be thought of as not existing is greater than one which can be thought of as not existing. Thus God cannot even be thought of as not existing. Only God has true existence, and everything else has less being.

Ch.4: But if God's existence is undeniable, how does the fool (in Psalm 14) deny it? To think of a word and to think of its meaning are two different things. The fool is thinking of God as non-existent, but is not clear that "God" means "a being than which none greater can be thought"; once that is understood, His non-existence become unthinkable.

3. Gaunilo claims that this argument could be used to prove the existence of some imaginary fertile island (*Lost Island*), but this is a misunderstanding. The "being than which none greater can be thought" is unique; if it could be thought of as non-existent, it could be thought of as having a beginning and an end, which is not the concept of God.

4. The reality of the greatest being is unimaginable ("cannot be thought of") rather than incomprehensible ("cannot be understood"). This is because the non-existence of something which actually exists is incomprehensible, because it is contradictory. Therefore it might be said that we cannot *understand* the non-existence of anything which exists, and not only of God. But we can always *imagine* the non-existence of something which happens to exist, with the sole exception of the greatest being of all.

(P.30). REJECTION OF ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT by THOMAS AQUINAS

Objection 1: Things are self-evident to us if the knowledge of them exists naturally in us, which the idea of God does.

Objection 2: Things are self-evident if they are known as soon as the terms are understood (e.g. that a 'whole' is greater than its 'parts'). 'God' means something than which nothing greater can be conceived. Something which actually exists is greater than something which only exists mentally. To understand 'God' makes him exist mentally, and we then see that actual existence must be one of his characteristics.

Objection 3: Truth must exist, because to deny truth would be to affirm *one* truth ('truth does not exist'). But "I am the way, the truth and the life", so God must exist (as truth).

If something is self-evident then its opposite is inadmissible. But the opposite of 'God is' *can* be admitted (by a fool). Therefore God's existence is not self-evident.

Aquinas says propositions can be self-evident *in themselves*, and self-evident *to us*. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject (e.g. 'man is an animal' - it is *analytic*). If we all know the essence of the subject and the predicate, then the proposition is self-evident to us. If those essences are obscure, the proposition may be self-evident in itself, but we don't know that it is. As we don't know the essence of God, the proposition 'God exists' is not self-evident *to us*, although it *is* self-evident in itself. We can only know the essence of God by his effects (hence *cosmological* arguments are needed).

Reply to Objection 1: God is man's happiness, and the desire for happiness is innate in us, so it might be claimed that this makes God's existence self-evident to us. But though the idea of happiness is self-evident to us, it is not self-evident to us that this happiness is God; some people think it is something else.

Reply to Objection 2: As some people believe God to be physical, not everyone believes God to be a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Even if we do believe that 'God' refers to a supremely great being, it only follows that he exists mentally. Atheists accept the idea, but deny the existence.

Reply to Objection 3: To admit that truth exists is not the same as admitting that the great Truth exists.

(P.33). RESTATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT by RENÉ DESCARTES

Whatever I clearly and distinctly conceive about an idea in my mind is true of that idea. The idea of a supremely perfect Being is in my mind, in the same way that mathematical ideas are. With most ideas we think of their existence and their essence as two separate things, but in the case of God existence is actually part of the essence of the idea - in the same way that angles-adding-to-two-right-angles is part of the essence of a triangle, or being-adjointed-by-a-valley is part of the essence of a mountain. Hence we can't have the idea of God without existence (or of a mountain without a valley).

It might be objected that it doesn't follow that God *does* exist, just because we can't think of him lacking existence, but this is a misunderstanding. If existence is inseparable from Him, then He really does exist. I can't think of the supremely perfect Being without existence, one of the supreme perfections.

It might then be objected that it is not necessary to think of God as having all perfections (including existence) just as not all quadrilaterals can have a circle drawn through their four points. But whenever I think of God I cannot fail to see that existence is a perfection, and that such a Being must contain all perfections. I could only be mistaken about the quadrilateral if I failed to conceive it clearly and distinctly, and similarly with God. I cannot conceive any other idea as having existence as part of its essence, I cannot conceive of two such Beings, and I cannot change any of the properties of this Being, even if I wanted to.

(P.37). ADDITION TO THE ARGUMENT by GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ

A *perfection* is a quality which is positive, absolute and unlimited. Consequently perfections cannot be analysed or defined in any other terms (because that would require constituent elements or limits). Hence all perfections are compatible and can exist together (as they have no constituent elements which could be candidates for overlapping and conflict). That two perfect forms A and B are incompatible is certainly not self-evidently true (true *per se*, or *a priori*), and we have just shown that it can't be

demonstrated to be true. Therefore their incompatibility is not necessarily true. Therefore they *can* exist in the same subject, and so are compatible. Therefore the most perfect being (containing all perfections) can be known. Since existence is a perfection, it immediately follows that the most perfect being must exist.

This overcomes the objection to Descartes that he takes it for granted that the most perfect being *can* be known, but it leaves the objection that it might not be within our power to conceive such a being. It is not enough for Descartes to say that *he* clearly and distinctly conceives the idea of the most perfect being; he needs to show the rest of us how *we* can conceive it, if the argument is to work.

(P.39). CRITICISM OF THE CARTESIAN ARGUMENT by IMMANUEL KANT

We cannot deduce an existence from the fact that a particular *idea* is necessarily true. It is easy to *define* something the non-existence of which is impossible, but that doesn't make its non-existence inconceivable. In the case of Descartes's triangle, the existence of the triangle is not being proved, only that any existing triangle must have certain features. If we cheat by including existence among these features, then of course we feel that its existence must be necessary. If we have included existence among the features of a thing, then of course when we contemplate its non-existence we will be faced with a contradiction. But if we 'reject' a thing (contemplate its non-existence) we must dispense with *all* its features, not just some of its features (or 'predicates'). To say 'God is not omnipotent' *is* a contradiction (because omnipotence is part of the concept of God), but to say 'God does not exist' is not a contradiction.

The only escape would be to say that it is impossible to contemplate the non-existence of God, because this unique concept contains "all reality". This is another way of saying that the concept of God contains existence. If this is an analytic proposition [*true by virtue of the meaning of its subject*] then it is merely a 'miserable tautology'; because it assumes the thing which we are trying to prove. If it is a synthetic proposition [*true because it asserts something outside of its own meaning*] then it would not be a contradiction to deny it (which is only the case with *analytic* propositions). There is a confusion between logical predicates (which have form but no content) and determining predicates. 'Being' is not a real predicate - the word 'is' is merely a link between concepts (as in "God *is* omnipotent"). In "a hundred real coins" and "a hundred possible coins", the term 'coins' must have identical meaning in both cases, or the two phrases wouldn't be talking about the same thing. Similarly the term 'God' can't contain the idea of existence, because I *add* that idea from my own mind when I assert that "God exists". When I say "the coins exist" and "God exists", the term 'exists' must function identically in both phrases, by adding a concept that wasn't in the subject. By asserting that the Supreme Reality exists, I don't add existence to the *concept* of this reality (any more than to the coins).

We don't have this problem (of muddling the concept of a thing with its actual existence) with objects of the senses, because it is obvious that the concept of such an object is not enlarged by the idea that it actually exists. We can't see any difference in concept between a possible object and an actual one. With objects of pure thought, however, which are only known *a priori*, we can learn nothing about their existence (or even their possibility of existence) within the world of real experience.

(PP.48-68) **NORMAN MALCOLM ON ANSELM'S ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS**

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(P.71). COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT by PLATO

Motion able to move itself is greatly superior to motion which can only move other things. Self-motion is the only way any motion could originate. Self-motion and soul can both be called 'life'; in fact, self-motion and soul are the same thing. Hence soul is the source of all motion. The body, which lacks self-motion, is born to obey the soul. The soul is the cause of everything, including good and evil. Soul gives order to the heavens, and there must be at least two souls, to account for good and evil. The order of the heavens corresponds to the activities of a mind, and the 'best soul' must guide the heavens. Disorder is caused by the evil soul. We can't know the movement of mind, but we can deduce it from corresponding motions. Circular motion is ordered and corresponds to mind, whereas linear motion can be erratic; the best mind must control the circular motion of the heavens. Each heavenly body has a soul to move it, perceptible only to our minds, not to our senses. The sun, for example, has a soul, which we must consider a god. The other heavenly bodies are the same. "All things are full of gods."

(P.80). THE FIVE WAYS by ST. THOMAS AQUINAS [omitted as it is covered in Copleston, p.86]

(P.86). COMMENTARY ON THE FIVE WAYS by F.C.COPELSTON

Aquinas's **first** proof says that everything which moves or changes goes from potential to actual, and to do that it must be "moved by another". So there must be an 'unmoved mover', which is God.

Aquinas's **second** proof says that there must be a hierarchy of causes, which must end somewhere, and so there will be a First Cause, which is God. This cause needs to exist *now*, not at the beginning of history (which Aquinas though might not exist). Movement and causation are inexplicable without the existence of God. There are problems with Aquinas's view of causation.

Aquinas's **third** proof says that since things come into being and perish they cannot have necessary existence. Therefore if time is infinite then at some time everything will cease to exist. Once things have ceased to exist there is no way for them to be recreated, so there would now be nothing in existence - unless there is a necessary being who could bridge the gap, and this is God. God would only have hypothetical existence (*if* ordinary things exist), but must be an independent being. This argument aims to show that there must be a God even if the universe is eternal.

Aquinas's **fourth** proof says that things contain degrees of perfection, and these degrees must approximate to and be caused by a true perfection. Perfection must be perfect in being as well as in quality, and this perfect being is God. This argument seems to derive from Plato's idea of the Good, and is attractive to people who like the moral argument for God's existence.

Aquinas's **fifth** proof says that as the universe is an ordered system composed largely of unthinking things, the only explanation of the way in which they co-operate together for a purpose is that there must be an intelligent being who creates this co-operation. Aquinas would consider that the theory of evolution supports this argument.

Aquinas arranged the arguments so that they mutually support one another. He apparently thought the first proof the clearest and best, though his modern followers (including Copleston) prefer the third. Like all *a posteriori* arguments for God, they are all based on the concept of *dependence*. The very existence of finite and contingent things points to a transfinite being as explanation. If existence is admitted to be a problem, that is the only solution.

(P.94). CRITICISM OF THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT by DAVID HUME

Demea: An a priori argument offer infallible proof, and shows God's unity and infinite attributes. The universe alone can't be used to prove God's unity or infinity.

Cleanthes: That the argument is useful doesn't make it right!

Demea: Whatever exists must have a cause, and nothing can cause its own existence. Therefore there is either an infinite chain of causes, or a necessarily existent cause. The infinite chain is impossible, because the chain as a whole also requires a cause - otherwise why was it *that* chain and not some other?. Without a necessary being all chains of causes are equally possible, or no chain at all. So what decided on one particular chain? It can't be yet another cause, or chance, or nothing. God is the only possibility.

Cleanthes: You can't demonstrate facts of existence by a priori arguments. A thing is logically valid if its contrary implies a contradiction. But anything conceived of as existing can equally be conceived of as not existing. So no being implies a contradiction by not existing. So no being can be proved to exist by pure logic. The words "necessary existence" are meaningless.

But if there *is* necessary existence, why couldn't the material universe have it? If we argue that any part of the universe *can* be conceived as not existing, the same argument will apply to God. We have no knowledge of anything which makes God's non-existence impossible.

It is absurd to look for the first cause of an eternal infinite series, as nothing can precede it.

The claim that the whole chain of causes must itself have a cause is also false. Seeing the chain as a unity is an arbitrary act of the human mind, not a fact which requires a cause. If you explain the individual members of a group, you don't require a further explanation of the group itself.

Philo: In arithmetic a pattern in numbers can appear to be design, but it turns out to be necessary, given the nature of numbers. The universe is probably similar (meaning it only had an *internal* necessity). You can't, though, apply such logic to the universe, and even religious people usually derive their belief from other sources.

(P.99). DESIGN ARGUMENT by WILLIAM PALEY

Finding a stone, I might think it eternal, but a watch obviously has a purpose in its mechanisms, and therefore it has a maker.

I. It wouldn't matter if I couldn't discern its purpose, as we see purpose in ancient artefacts and strange modern machines. It doesn't matter if the maker is not human.

II. It wouldn't alter the argument if the watch was defective.

III. It wouldn't matter if parts of the machine were baffling, especially if it is very complex.

IV. To say that everything must contain *some* structure doesn't alter the argument.

V. To say that there is a "principle of order" in it is no sort of explanation.

VI. We can't say the order is in our minds instead of in the watch.

VII. The order can't be explained by some law of metals, or a law of nature as a whole, because "a law presupposes an agent".

VIII. That we are ignorant of many things doesn't alter the argument.

Nature is identical in principle to the watch, but much more impressive in the ingenuity and complexity of design.

(P.104). CRITICISM OF THE DESIGN ARGUMENT by DAVID HUME

(V) **Philo:** It is claimed that if effects are the same then so are the causes, but this works both ways. Science reveals (through the telescope and microscope) that causes in the universe are very different from causes in the human world.

Cleanthes: Examples from science just reveal new examples of a great mind in action.

Philo: But we always see a mind like the human. Since we only see finite parts of the universe, we must infer that God too is finite. He also seems imperfect (if you insist on deriving God from the universe instead of from reason). We don't know how perfect the universe is, having nothing with which to compare it, or whether its perfections are due to its maker (should a carpenter get the credit for the design of a modern ship?). The universe may have resulted from trial-and-error. The design argument means there may not be one god but a team of them (by analogy with humans, this is more likely). We cannot tell whether it is one god or many, though the sheer power suggests that it is many. If gods are analogous to human beings, they presumably reproduce sexually (like the Greek gods). Why not go the whole hog, and think of the gods as physical humans? After all, humans are the only rational beings we know. Once you deduce your god from the universe's design then the god may be a mere infant, or incompetent and despised by other gods, or senile, or dead. This may sound shocking, but it follows from Cleanthes' deduction of a finite god.

Cleanthes: Despite all your bizarre imaginings, you can't get rid of the idea that the universe is designed....

(VIII) **Philo:** Normally reason points us to the truth, but with this problem there are endless plausible explanations. For instance, if the universe is eternal but contains a finite number of particles then every possible combination will have occurred an infinite number of times, including the present world.

Demea: That presupposes that matter acquires motion on its own.

Philo: Motion by mind and motion on its own are equally puzzling before experience, and equally straightforward after it. Motion might also be eternal, like matter. The present world shows that order and stability are possible, even while eternal motion continues. Such stability requires a complex interrelation of balancing parts (which will look like design).

If some force launches a chaotic universe, that force will continue to endlessly change the configurations of matter. Among these changes it seems possible that some order might emerge, even though change continues (like our present world). Animals and plants die without this organisation, so it is not surprising.

Cleanthes: But the universe contains far more perfections than are needed for mere survival, especially perfections that benefit men and women, such as two eyes, horses, cattle, food, camels and magnets.

Philo: My theory (unlike yours) doesn't claim to explain everything. Ideas are merely copies of objects, but you are claiming that design involves objects being copies of ideas. All our experience suggests that this is impossible unless mind and body have an equal influence on one another. If I am to tolerate such failings in your theory, you must do the same with mine.

Theology gives the impression of always being victorious by always being on the offensive, but it ought also to defend itself against sceptical criticism. A suspension of all judgement seems to be the only secure position.

(P.114). THE PROBLEM OF EVIL by JOHN STUART MILL

Nature seems indifferent to the sufferings of creatures. All of them are killed, often painfully. Nature shows no mercy and no justice. The value of the victims seems irrelevant to nature. Even ordinary childbirth is very painful and dangerous. Nature also destroys our means of life, such as a harvest. Nature does what the most immoral people do. It contains as much chaos as order. The fact that such events may have good side-effects does not excuse them, any more than human crimes. The ancients made deductions about divine purpose from disasters, but we are reluctant to do so. Good may well come out of disasters, but equally some good actions can have unpleasant side-effects, especially when life is so complex. There is no justice in nature, but on the contrary most benefits come to people who already have them, and evil just leads to more evil.

[*bottom of 118*] It is no defence to say that present suffering prevents something even worse. This might be true of a limited God, but not an omnipotent one. If misery exists, God must have willed it. If God wills our virtue rather than our happiness, that plan seems to be failing. And our happiness seems quite unrelated to our virtue. The main purpose of life after death seems to be to introduce the justice which this world lacks. If virtue is the greatest good, it should be allocated according to merit, not produced by a bad upbringing or environment.

(P.120). COSMIC TELEOLOGY by F.R. TENNANT

The claim of design is not based on individual cases, which could all have explanations, but on the coincidence of so many examples. It is a good objection to this that we only know a tiny portion of the universe, and that most of the universe may actually be chaotic. But our portion is clearly linked to the whole (where, incidentally, the law of entropy makes the evolution of order seem unlikely), and, given the existence of minds and values, our portion of the universe seems more significant than any vast chaos. There are two distinct questions: whether there is intelligence behind the universe, and whether the universe has a goal.

We can more easily deduce intelligence than we can the goal (as when examining a machine). Not every detail of a designed universe has to have a purpose.

The main evidence for the existence of design is **i)** that thought matches the world, **ii)** the efficiency of living things, **iii)** the way the environment supports life, **iv)** the beauty of nature, **v)** the presence of morality, and **vi)** that evolution leads to rational moral beings.

The **first** one is not a good argument, as we would expect thought to derive from the world, which is the basis of science. Darwin offers opposition to the **second** claim, but he only gives an explanation of the selection of species, not their origin, and he cannot explain the original mutations, which may be the product of intelligence.

Darwin has also undermined the **third** claim, as creatures are obviously closely matched to their environment, but he has no explanation of why the universe as a whole provides the perfect and unlikely conditions needed for life. We have no grounds for claiming that a life-bearing universe has evolved in the same way that organisms do. It appears to be an extraordinary one-off case. It might be replied that as the universe is unique we cannot say whether it is likely or unlikely, but the teleologist is appealing to intuition, not mathematics. Science relies on exactly the same sort of intuition.

It may be objected to **four** that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but it is undeniable that nature plays a part in our individual responses to it. The argument is strong because beauty is found everywhere in nature, and in excess of anything that is useful for survival. Its purpose seems to be to attract the minds of men and women.

(P.137). THE MORAL ARGUMENT by IMMANUEL KANT

Reason tells us that the highest good (morality) must necessarily be complete, and so there must be immortality. Happiness proportional to goodness must also be possible. So the highest good is impossible without God.

Complete happiness is the fulfilment of all our wishes, which is only possible if God controls nature, which moral principles alone could never do. As nature must be controlled to achieve complete happiness (as a necessary part of the highest good), God must exist to achieve this harmony. God must have intelligence and will, in order to harmonise with nature's laws. There must be an origin of goodness for a best world to be possible. As morality consists of promoting the highest good, we *must* assume that this is possible, which requires God's existence. We don't acquire the concept of duty from God, but from pure reason; a rational faith in God follows from our acceptance of duty.

Although the best we can achieve in life is ordinary virtue, moral perfection must bring happiness (although these are unconnected in nature). Christianity provides the correct understanding, by seeing the world as God's kingdom, in which nature and morality are made to harmonise. Our duty directs us merely to a holy life, though we may hope for happiness as a result. In this way it is morality which leads us to religion, not through fear or hope, but through duty. We realise that we must harmonise our own will with that of a Creator in order to achieve the highest good. My own desire for happiness is restricted by this aim. We aim not to be happy, but to be worthy of happiness, which depends entirely on morality. Morality is not a method of achieving happiness, though it contains the hope of happiness (through religion). God's aim, too, must be the highest good, rather than our happiness. "The glory of God" best describes the end of all things. Man is an end in himself (and never a means) because he is the subject of rational moral law.

(P.143). THE MORAL ARGUMENT by HASTINGS RASHDALL [1907]

Moral thought requires certain presuppositions. If the self is a real thing, then moral ideas are also real; this must be believed, whatever the basis for the reality. Psychologically, morality can be accepted as real without belief in God. Similarly, *truth* can be believed without knowing the nature of reality. We may be compelled into certain beliefs, though, in order to fit morality into our scheme of ideas. Indeed, we couldn't be sure of moral truth until we had fitted it in with our other beliefs. Agnostics are in danger of dishonesty, by not comparing their morality with their lack of religion. [bottom 146] Suppose someone believes in a spiritual self (which seems essential for morality), but only as an evolved part of a material world: in that case we can't fully trust our knowledge, because reason and truth may not be essential for evolution. If truth is unreliable within evolution, morality is even more so. (Of course we could expect truth and reality to be in harmony if reality is just an idea, but not otherwise). In an essentially material world (even if a few minds have developed within it) all moral ideas may well be illusions. It would certainly not be unreasonable to reject morality, if the world itself does not contain any reason. [bottom 148]. We tend to be committed to a belief in absolute morality, but is this justified? It can't exist in individual humans, as we have different opinions about morality. We believe scientific truth exists because there is an objective reality with which our ideas can correspond, even though we may disagree about it. Moral law, on the other hand, can't be found in physical reality (or in individual minds). It must, therefore (if it is to deserve the authority which we say it has), exist in a Mind which is its source. [150] Though morality is possible without God, absolute morality is not. The highest, soundest morality, the morality which makes us recognise obligation, is absolute morality. This requires (first) a belief in a spiritual self, and then a belief in God.

The Mind which is the source of morality must also control reality to give the Universe a rational end. The end we perceive in morality through reason must also be the end of God's purpose. Our reason must coincide with the source of all reason. To act morally we need faith that the ends of morality are attainable. For us to be rational, the universe must be rational. Admittedly morality might still seem the most rational thing, even in an irrational or evil universe, but that would give little motivation for morality. Only an absolute morality teaches people to be good, and even unphilosophical people can see that this requires that the universe have a rational end.

(P.153). THE ARGUMENT FROM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE by A.E.TAYLOR [1926]

This argument is open to abuse, just as people claim to have "seen" things that weren't there (such as ghosts). To some extent the relevant experiences are not isolated, but complete experiences of life. There are, though, experiences of special significance (as there are for an artist). But, as with the artist, the capacity for such experiences may need developing. We may have key artistic (or moral) experiences which illuminate everything, and so with religion. But, of course, the experience could be an

illusion. In sense experience, aesthetic experience and moral experience we distinguish the real from the illusory; religious experience is the same, and we recognise that some people have more expertise in recognising the real thing, and we should defer to such people. We can mistake various feelings for religious experience, and these cause alarming religious misunderstandings.

We need to know which "data" should be taken seriously, and which "experts" can judge its value. False data may come from dreams or youthful sexual feelings. And yet we develop genuine new understanding during adolescence, so such data doesn't *have* to be false, though its value it hard to establish. Music is a mix of largely sexual feelings, and painting is built on story-telling, but there is a core of "pure" music and art. It is a fallacy to think that because our feelings are *like* fear or sexual attraction, that they therefore *are* those feelings. Even primitive religions may contain more than primitive feelings. We have to use our worldly language when describing 'other-worldly' feelings. It is a mistake to assume that "fear" and "love" of God are the same as worldly fear and love. The words "holy" and "uncanny" and (best of all) "worship" give some indication of a feeling beyond this world. Such feelings might be inspired by a sacred object, a vision of God, or a meeting with Jesus. The language of the Bible reveals such feelings. We all understand the feeling of wanting to worship something (even if we don't act on the feeling). Only humans appear to have this feeling (though dogs (*apparently!*) acquire the attitude from us). A sense of worship is most commonly found among the most highly respected people, and is usually absent in people we despise. Social progress is usually achieved by people with other-worldly aims. This suggests that religion is not an illusion.

Religious experience requires interpretation, and absurd interpretations should not discredit this, any more than absurd theories discredit science. All ways to God are not false, and nor are they all equally valid. Not all religions are equally true, though even the most primitive contain some truth. Missionary work is justifiable, as it respects the capacities of all peoples to grasp complex truth. Religious experience is not enough on its own - it needs the support of science and self-awareness. Religious experiences certainly do not seem to need any special moral or intellectual abilities. Possibly humility is the main requirement. We must fit such experiences in with our theoretical beliefs about God. And we can only act on an experience of the "holy" if we already believe it is important. Christianity, derived from Judaism and the Greek philosophers, has given us a framework for interpreting religious experience. But fresh thinking is also required. The true 'experts' are those who are already steeped in religious feeling, thought and experience.

(P.217). THEOLOGY AS MEANINGLESS by A.J.AYER [1936]

The existence of any god outside nature cannot be proved. Proof must start from premises, which will either be uncertain empirical observations, or uninformative logical truths (which can only lead to other logical truths). Even the probability of God cannot be shown. The proposition that he exists would be an empirical hypothesis, and certain experiential hypotheses ought to follow from it, but they don't.

If regularity in nature is the only evidence, then the claim that God exists says no more than that nature seems regular. "God exists" cannot be true or false, because it goes beyond any physical evidence. Theism, agnosticism and atheism are all equally meaningless, because the claim that God exists lacks meaning. At least the believer cannot be accused of saying something false.

Claims that God can be perceived in the world (e.g. in thunder) certainly *are* meaningful. But a being with non-empirical attributes is unintelligible. The word "god" doesn't refer to anything, although it appears to.

The assertion that people contain immortal (but imperceptible) souls has no meaningful content either. Because religious language makes no real assertions it is not in opposition to science, although science reduces the sense of mystery which motivates religion. Some physicists have turned to religion because their subject has recently increased rather than decreased the mystery.

Religions sometimes concede the charge, that God is a transcendent mystery depending on faith, but that means that religious claims are impossible in words. It is possible that a truth may be reached by intuition rather than reason, but it still needs to be meaningfully expressed. If it can't be expressed it isn't a fact. Mystics merely describe their own states of mind. This is why religious experience is not a good argument - it makes no distinction between internal mental claims and external empirical ones. Religious experience does not imply religious knowledge.

(P.225). THEOLOGY AS MEANINGLESS by ANTONY FLEW [1950]

If two explorers find a clearing in the jungle full of flowers and weeds, and one believes there is a gardener and the other doesn't, then the unbeliever can't take the believer's claim seriously if experiments reveal no evidence at all of the gardener's existence. Similarly, to think of sexual behaviour as the goddess "Aphrodite" tells you nothing extra. As soon as you admit that the gardener or goddess analogy aren't *quite* accurate, you eventually admit that they are quite false.

An assertion is equivalent to the denial of it opposite ("p" means "not not p"). So in order to understand an assertion we can search for something that would count against it. Possible evidence against an assertion is part of its meaning. A statement must deny something if it is going to assert anything.

It is not clear what evidence could count against religious assertions. If the painful death of a child is thought to count against God's love, religion retreats into qualifying the love (e.g. as "not human", or "inscrutable"). But the concept of God's love gradually disappears. What evidence will ever be accepted as disproof of God's love or existence?

(p.252) Summary of Theology and Verification by John Hick (also in Mitchell, p.53)

<u>Item</u>	<u>Idea</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.	Though 'verification' is problematical, divine existence is in principle verifiable.	53
2.	'Verification' means removal of grounds for rational doubt.	53-4
3.	We will assume that 'verification' involves a person, and a psychological event.	54
4.	Like 'know', 'verify' also has logical requirements.	55
5.	It is unclear whether other people must verify a thing, or could in principle.	55
6.	Prediction does not always precede verification, but it must when meaningfulness is concerned.	55

7.	Sometimes a prediction is conditional in a complex way, sometimes not.	55-6
8.	The conditions for verification arise from the logic of the concept (e.g. of 'God')	56
9.	If an active condition must be met, many people will never achieve verification.	56
10.	'Falsification' is not necessarily the same as failure of verification (e.g. in maths).	57
11.	Life after death could be verified but not falsified - but it is meaningful.	57
12.	Verification only gives contingent truth, but it still excludes rational doubt.	58
13.	[<i>Summary, then:</i>] Eschatological verification of theism is possible (verification at the end).	58
14.	The Christian picture (an interrelated group of ideas) makes predictions which can be verified.	59
15.	For a theist and an atheist journeying to a Celestial City, different expectations and plans are appropriate.	59-60
16.	Eschatological verification requires, however, an afterlife.	60
17.	Some deny the afterlife, either as a contradiction, or because body and soul are inseparable.	61
18.	Gilbert Ryle analyses mind as behaviour, leaving no room for a separate soul.	61
19.	The earlier belief, found in St Paul, of bodily resurrection evades the problem.	61
20.	Paul actually believes God completely recreates people with a 'spiritual body'.	62
21.	Consider i) X vanishes then reappears, ii) X dies and a duplicate appears, iii) X dies and a resurrection of X appears in another world.	62-4
22.	After investigation, X would become convinced that he is resurrected.	64
23.	Only indirect evidence would assure him of being in heaven and not on another planet.	65
24.	The concept of continuous personal identity in a resurrected world is not self-contradictory.	65
25.	The verification of post-death survival does not, however, verify God's existence.	66
26.	Post-death visions of God may be ambiguous, but the situation could clearly show his existence	66
27.	Our present world is religiously ambiguous, but we could understand a religiously clear world.	66
28.	Fulfilment of God's purpose for us, and communion with God (as Christ) would be proof.	67
29.	Fulfilment of God's purpose would be a Christ-like quality of life.	67
30.	This fulfilment must be recognisable by us, but its expectation couldn't be falsified.	67
31.	It is recognisable though unknown, like adulthood as seen by a child.	67
32.	We could recognise communion with God, because Christ has been in the world.	68
33.	The doctrine of Incarnation enables us to recognise the infinite faculties of God.	68
34.	God's infinite being can be indirectly verified in the teaching of Christ.	69
35.	The verification would not be logical, but would be beyond rational doubt.	69
36.	Such verification requires our direct contact with Christ, through the Church.	70
37.	We aren't compelled to verify God, and may need faith as an essential preparation.	70