

Part A - Q1

In order to establish as to whether religious experience proves the existence of God, we must first establish the definition of religious experience. Philosopher Rudolf Otto regarded religious experience as an encounter with the numinous - a feeling of the presence of an otherworldly being - whereas Richard Swinburne defined it as 'what appears to the subject to be an experience of the Holy, ~~and which~~ there is no clear definition of exactly what religious experience is, however it is believed to include both mystical experiences and

consequent conversion of ~~the~~ religious faith. However, secular perspectives have tried to refute the ~~over~~ authenticity of religious experience by explaining it through psychology, sociology and physiology. Philosophers Otto and William James also encountered the issue of language within describing a religious experience, with each ~~the~~ coming here terms to explain it. James also noted the stark variation in religious experiences - hence making it even more difficult to describe, and focussed on the fruits of (effects) of an authentic encounter with the Holy which leads to conversion. In this essay, I will

examine both philosophical and scientific perspectives of religious experience, contrasting their legitimacy in proving an authentic religious experience; and to what extent religious experiences prove the existence of God.

In his book "The Varieties of Religious Experience" (1902), William James encountered the difficulty of adequately explaining a religious experience, and so coined four key terms to describe it. Religious experiences are: ineffable - of great personal significance; ineffable - unable to describe using ordinary language; Transient - the memory of the

experience fades quickly ~~and~~ but remains in the unconscious; passive - occurs without will. He explored the varieties of religious experience, ~~as~~ ~~and~~ and how each experience is unique to the individual - with some including a mystical experience of God which leads to a non-volitional conversion such as that of St Paul the Apostle (formerly known as Saul) who, on the road to Damascus encountered the voice of Jesus urging him to change his ways. This can be contrasted to the more contemporary religious experience and conversion of C.S Lewis, who

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<p>through the study of religious doctrines, slowly & gradually converted to athe agnosticism and ultimately then from atheism, heists did not have a mystical experience, further enhancing the ambiguity of religious experiences and how they vary.</p>	
<p>James was also fixated on the fruits of an religious experience which leads to a consequent conversion, stating that the correct will experience: a feeling of reassurance, a sense of saintliness and a experience the reality of the unseen. Each of these things, present</p>	

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<p>in the context prove the authenticity of an experience with the Divine, with many individuals—such as St Paul—drastically altering their ethics and morals.</p>	
<p>James stated that this proved the existence of God: "God is real since He produces real effects." (Varieties of Religious Experience, 1902). Thus, perhaps religious experience does prove the existence of God as there is no other explanation for such a drastic change in character.</p>	
<p>Rudolf Otto</p>	

Theologian Richard Swinburne also argued for the existence of God through the argument from religious experience, despite scientific claims that there is a severe lack of evidence to support claims of religious experience. Swinburne developed the Principle of Credulity, which states that we should believe things as we perceive them until we have reason to believe otherwise - this applies to mystical experiences of God. He argued that Otto's feeling of the "numinous" and "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" came from our religious sense: "Just as you must trust your ordinary senses, so it is

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equally rational to trust your religious sense (The Existence of God, 1982). Thus, is empirical evidence really necessary to authenticate religious experience and the existence of God? Some may argue that it is not, and that faith is the ultimate form of proof.

Religious experience continues to remain prevalent in the modern day through the Alister Hardy Research Centre, an institution which measures the occurrence and variation of religious experience. They ~~conclude~~ subsequently concluded that over 30% of the adult population in both Britain and the

USA report experiencing a feeling of that which is at with their alternate everyday experience. The ANRC stated that this alone can prove the evidence of God - it is clear that religious experience is prevalent and occurs frequently amongst people from all backgrounds.

However, secular perspectives have argued that religious experience does not prove the existence of God, and can instead be explained through psychology, sociology and physiology. The renowned psychologist Sigmund Freud argued in "Civilization and its Discontents" (1929-1930) that religion is merely

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a neurosis in the brain, with religious experience being nothing else other than psychotic delusions to comfort the self. Freud related this to his

psychoanalytic Oedipus Complex, stating that people take refuge in the concept of an all-powerful God from the evil of the world as they suffer to progress from childhood to adulthood - God is the ultimate father figure.

Alternatively, Carl Gustav Jung argued that we are born with a God archetype, meaning that from birth we have an understanding of the concept of God - thus why so many people find belief in them rational. He also argued that

religious experience actually stems from conflict between the conscious and unconscious - this relates to James' theory of the Divided Self, in which there is internal conflict within the heterogeneous personality - and that experiencing conversion can help to cure Freud's "neurosis" and curify the self. Whilst each of these theories seem plausible, they each have a severe lack of evidence and cannot be empirically proven. However, they do provide ~~an~~ explanations to why "religious experiences" are so frequent, but do not prove the existence of God.

A further secular perspective on religious experience is that of sociology which Emile Durkheim argued that religious experiences are communal rather than individual. He proposed the idea of a "Collective Consciousness" in which during religious experiences a type of social effervescence is created, where beliefs are generated, recreated and communal faith becomes individual faith. This social effervescence could be used to explain the phenomena of the Toronto Blessing, in which people visit the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church and are overcome with the presence of the Divine, resulting in hysterical

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laughing, crying, joy and reports of being 'slam in the spirit.'
If cult who visit this area report these feelings, it could be due to the authentic presence of God however, Durkheim argued that it is no more than a sociological placebo effect, caused by the collective consciousness.

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	<p>Physiology, it could be argued, provides the most convincing secular explanation of religious experience with which tests out the evidence of God. Professor V.S Ramachandran argued in his book "Phantoms in the Brain" (1998) that there is a direct link between the limbic system and religious experience, suggesting that it is caused by temporal lobe epilepsy. Seizures occurring from the condition can result in hallucinations of God, as well as a feeling of unity - this may provide explanation for Otto's 'numinous', experiences and Freud's 'Oceanic Feeling'. However, whilst his theory appears plausible, the ZOF of</p>	

With Ramachandran stating: "The activity of specific neural circuits in the limbic system makes these patients more prone to religious belief." This ruling out the idea that God is the

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	<p>temporal coherence of the water, ultimately resulting in a perpetuation of her senses and a sense of unity with the Divine - each of these things reiterate James' fruits of religious experience. However, those who have worn the helmet and claimed to have had a religious experience very rarely display any characteristics of the fruits of religious experience, and are unlikely to go through a conversion experience. Thus, whilst Dr Pennington's theory has a wealth of empirical evidence to support it - e.g. through experiments - there appears to be an important spiritual aspect missing in the experience due to the lack of</p>	

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<p>long-term 'grants'. Furthermore if we are to accept this explanation we must ask, what stimulated the temporary lobe of St Paul on the road to Damascus? What stimulated Moses' temporary lobe when he saw the burning bush? Therefore, in my opinion, whilst this theory provides the most substantiated explanation of religious experience and how it does not prove the existence of God, it is not fully comprehensive, and features multiple issues.</p>	
<p>In conclusion, religious experience is a concept which is almost impossible to define, but can be</p>	

* Aquinas, Summa Theologiae

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with physiology being the most convincing argument against the existence of God as both Ramachandran and Peringer's theories feature empirical evidence. Although, it must be noted that in each of their theories, an authentic religious experience leading to conversion and the consequent miracles cannot be produced - this an important spiritual aspect is missing. Overall, I believe religious experience does not wholly prove the existence of God although it suggests the existence of a higher power - ultimately it leads to agnosticism in my opinion, but belief in God through any means comes down to a

question of faith: "For those who have faith no evidence is necessary, for those without it, no evidence is sufficient." - St Thomas

Section 1 - Q1

The origins of the Cosmological Argument date back to Ancient Greek philosophy, in which Aristotle noted that all matter that exists requires a cause - nothing can exist prior to its existence, thus there must be an ultimate cause which is the explanation of our existence. It is concluded that this cause is God. The Cosmological Argument is a posteriori; arguing backwards from the effect to the cause and is essentially a deductive method, making it difficult to disprove. St Thomas Aquinas proposed the Five Ways to prove the existence of God. The first

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Three of which are Cosmological Arguments for the existence of God: Motion and Existence or Contingency. However, it has been argued that Aquinas' ways do not prove the existence of God, but rather prove the existence of the first cause of the Universe. In this essay, I will analyse the effectiveness of Aquinas' argument in providing proof for the existence of God as ~~the~~ ~~existence~~ ~~of~~ ~~a~~ ~~first~~ ~~cause~~. I will compare and contrast this with other philosophical and scientific contemporary arguments which suggest that Aquinas' arguments only provide a first cause, and that perhaps the Universe did

not have a cause. Ultimately will come to a conclusion as to whether Aquinas' arguments prove the existence of God, and the validity of contemporary views.

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Aquinas suggests arguments from Motion - There must be an initial unmoved mover, moved by no other which initiated the sequence of events which ~~lead~~ led to the creation of the Universe. Causation - That all which exists requires a cause, as nothing can exist prior to its existence and thus must have a cause. Existence Contingency - That there is a non-contingent ~~being~~ being that exists above all and is necessary in the creation of the Universe. Aquinas concludes each of these things to be the result of God.

Aquinas' argument follows a logical structure, with each premise being true in that we can see from our experience that all things do indeed require a cause for their existence. However,

FIGURE	
	whilst countering criticisms
	provided by Hume, Kant and
	modern scientific theories of
	Cosmology such as the Big Bang
	Theory and the Multiverse
	model to come to a conclusion
	as to whether the criticisms of
	the Cosmological Argument
	are successful, and if so,
	to what extent.

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	<p>inductive reasoning allows for the premise of Aquinas' arguments to be true but not the conclusion. Thus, it has been argued that whilst his arguments do imply a first cause, to jump from the Universe requiring a cause to the cause being a non-contingent, all-powerful being is inadequate.</p>
	<p>Aquinas' arguments coincide with the more contemporary Kalam Argument first suggested in Islamic Philosophy and is recently restated by William Lane Craig in his book: "The Kalam Cosmological Argument 1979." The argument proposes the need for a first cause, and that the</p>

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	<p>* (in its simplest form)</p> <p>cause is God through arguing that contrary to see some scientific belief, the sequence of causes which created the Universe cannot extend ad infinitum. The argument states: all which exists has a cause; the Universe exists; thus, the Universe must have a cause. This argument too follows a logical structure, and thus is difficult to refute. However, it has the same criticisms of Aquinas' argument in that it does prove a first cause, but not that the first cause is God. The Kalam Argument uses the analogy of Hilbert's Hotel to illustrate that the Universe requires a cause. The hotel has an infinite infinite</p>	

number of rooms, so when another guest appears, all guests make up one room - this way, no matter how many guests

appear, there is always ~~two~~ a vacancy for them ~~as~~ as ~~finite~~ infinity plus one still equals infinity. Craig criticises this analogy, stating that just because infinity is possible in mathematics, does not mean it is possible in reality - thus the Universe must have an initial cause, and this cause is God.

Haeber, philosophers such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant questioned as to whether the Universe actually required a cause at all. Hume proposed in "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion" (1779)

That cause and effect is merely a habit of the human mind - we are used to attributing effects to causes, and thus, believe all effects require a cause. Kant also argued that searching for causes is a psychological necessity, rather than a ~~reason~~ and that humans cannot comprehend the possibility of an event occurring without a cause. Hume suggested that perhaps the Universe was self-caused through the random permutation of particles, or perhaps that it has always existed. This relates to the proposition of a 'Steady State Theory' as proposed by Hoyle,

Bondi and Gold which suggest the Universe is eternal and did not require a cause - it has always existed. Bertrand Russell supported this claim in a radio debate with F. Coplestone in 1948 in which he stated, "The Universe is just there, and that's all." Thus, perhaps we should not search for a cause as the Cosmological argument suggests is God, but rather attempt to ~~too~~ comprehend the possibility that the Universe has always existed.

However, philosopher al-Ghazali stated that there must have been a point where one of two

states were possible - then should or should not be a Universe, and the state which ensues must have had a cause. He concluded that the creation of the Universe must have been initiated by a personal agent, and thus that the Universe is finite.

A further criterion of the cosmological argument is the Big Bang theory, which states that the Universe was created by an exploding singularity, in which all space, time and matter was created. This theory, however ^{it could be argued} actually supports the religious arguments of Aquinas.

any belief that the Universe must have had a cause, and the belief of Al-Ghazali with the

exception that the cause was not God. The Big Bang Theory presents a wealth of evidence to support it, such as the Cosmological Red Shift which shows that the Universe is expanding from a central point, and background radiation ~~which~~ suggests an ~~explosion~~ ~~that~~ ~~this~~ ~~also~~. It could be argued that this theory removes the need for God as a first cause, however, some who attempt to reconcile faith and science have suggested the possibility of God initiating the Big Bang.

A further modern theory of

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	<p>cosmology which undermines the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God is the Multiverse theory, proposed by Stephen Hawking. Hawking suggested that there may be an infinite number of Universes which exist, and we live in one of the most successful Universes. It could be suggested that Hume actually referenced the theory in 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion' (1779) in which it was stated: 'For aught he knows, many worlds may have been betel'd and bungled: ere this system was struck out.' Cosmologist Alex Vilenkin provided an explanation as to the creation of the</p>	

*called 'Eternal Inflation'

Universes within the multiverse* by suggesting that ^{the} random instability of patches in the quantum vacuum causes the production of these Universes.

He states that Universes bubble up like Swiss cheese, and we live in one such bubble. Vilenkin stated: "all the evidence we have points to the Universe having a cause."

(Scientific American 2014)

Thus, this theory ~~is~~ is a mostly successful criticism of the Cosmological Argument as it provides an alternate scientific account of how the Universe was created without the need for a creator God.

However, the Multiverse Theory is severely lacking in empirical evidence, and it must be considered that all quantum theories are based on probability potentials. Paul Davies echoed these criticisms stating: "like a blunderbuss, it explains both everything and nothing."

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<p>In conclusion, there are many religious and philosophical arguments to support the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God such as Aquinas' the Five Ways (Motion, Causation and existence) and the Kalam Argument. However, it could be argued that these provide evidence for a first cause rather than God. Criticisms of the Cosmological Argument through both philosophical means and modern theories of cosmology are generally successful as they exhibit both logical reasoning and provide some empirical evidence. However, the theory of the Multiverse</p>	

which is often regarded as of the most successful criticisms of the Cosmological Argument lacks empirical evidence. Ultimately, belief in God through the Cosmological Argument is down to a question of faith, however, in my opinion is not successful in proving the existence of God. Richard Dawkins, however, criticised relying on faith in the face of a lack of evidence stating: "faith is the great cop out, the great excuse to evade to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is the belief in spite of, perhaps because of, a lack of evidence." (Edinburgh International Science Festival). This faith can be termed either "religious faith" or "faith".