**Knowledge of God’s Existence**

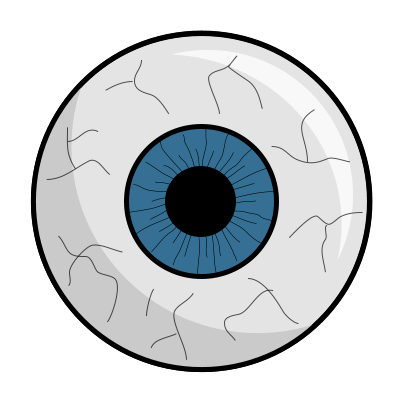
**Introduction:**

* We question why and how we gain knowledge? How do we know the truth?
* Ancient Greece = why are we in a certain state of motion and change (ie. Plato and Aristotle).
* Do we learn through senses, **empiricism**?
* Do we learn through **reason** and logic? **Mathematics** + **Science**?
* Do we have **a PRIORI** knowledge?
* Do we learn from **sources of authority**? If so how do they learn?
* When we do learn from others we have to have a degree of **faith** in what they are telling us is true.
* Some believe that genuine knowledge one comes from reason, experience or sense. Theists however believe these methods are limited as we only gain knowledge of the physical world not the spiritual world. Others will argue back that there are no “supernatural truths” as they are unprovable, maybe only the physical world exists.
* If there are supernatural truths and there is a God, how is knowledge of God gained?

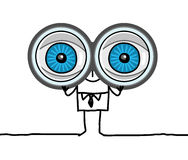
**How can God be known, according to Christianity?**

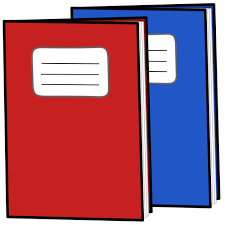
* In many religions, such as Christianity, God is understood to be **unavailable to the five senses** because God isn’t physical.
* For those who believe truth through empiricism then God cannot be proven and questions about him are **meaningless**.
* For those who believe truth through reason and logic then God cannot be known at all because he is said to be **beyond the realms** of the rational and capabilities of the human mind.
* A distinction has been made between ‘natural’ and ‘revealed’ theology.

**Bonaventura:**

* French Monk, 13th Century,
* ***‘The Minds Road to God’***
* Believed the human mind had three different ways of knowing God’s existence.
* Used an analogy of an **eye** to represent different ways of ‘seeing’.
* **‘Eye of the Flesh’ –** incorporates empiricism. This is the eye we use to gain knowledge of the physical world.
* **‘Eye of Reason’ –** lets us work out mathematical and philosophical truths through the use of logic.
* **‘Eye of Contemplation’ –** allows us to come to knowledge of God by going beyond the scope of both sense and reason by gaining knowledge of god through faith.

**Polkinghorne:**

* Cambridge physicist + Anglican Priest
* Used Bonaventura’s analogy of eyes.
* Says we look through two different eyes – “binocular vision’.
* We see science through one eye.
* We see spiritual truths about God through the other.
* Both eyes need to work together to give a complete picture.
* Says its foolish for theists to discount science and vice versa for atheists.

**Robert Boyle:**

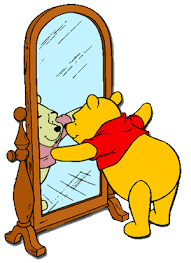
* Created a **metaphor** as to how God can be known.
* Metaphor = ‘God’s two books’
* These two books were the **‘natural world’** (science) and the **Bible** – both created by the same author.
* Both are **complimentary** of each other, each enhancing each other.
* They allow us to deepen our understanding of God.

**Natural Theology:**

* Give proof through human experience and reason.
* Looking at the **beauty** of the world.
* William **Paley** – **design argument** – is an example of looking at the world’s beauty for proving God’s existence.
* Psalm 8-9 – “how majestic is your name in all the earth!”
* We simply have to look at the natural world.
* Aquinas – Christianity was not in opposition to reasonable common sense, they can be employed together.
* Cause & Effect – uncaused causer’s proof of existence.
* Swunburne – proof through order, regularity and purpose means there must be an intelligent being.

**Natural Theology As Arising From An Innate Human Sense Of The Design:**

* Places in the Bible that seem to support we are born with a sense of God.
* Genesis – 1:27 God makes people in his own image, 2:7 breathes into Adam with his own breath.
* **John Calvin –** ‘sensus divinitas’ (seed of divinity, innate sense of God) – we just understand Him so there is no excuse not to worship God. This means universally everyone is aware of him.
* **Calvin –** world is created as a ‘mirror’ of God.
* **Epistemic Distance –** for Calvin this distance between God and us is created by ourselves, God has made it impossible to ignore him, so it our own fault if we cannot see him.
* **Innate sense of morality –** must come from God. Thinkers such as Joseph Butler, John Henry Newman and C.S. Lewis says we all have feelings of guilt and satisfaction when we know we have doing either the wrong or right thing.
* **Counter: people have different morals?**



**Natural Theology As Arising From The Order Of Creation:**

* God can be clearly seen in the order and beauty of creation.
* Cicero ‘On The Nature Of God’ – “lifted our eyes to the sky…exists some divine power of exalted intelligence”.
* We naturally recognise beauty comes from God.
* John Calvin – the natural beauty of the universe is a ‘sort of mirror’ of God.
* God is NOT nature itself, but nature is a means we can learn something about God.

**Revealed Knowledge of God:**

* Revealed theology is what God decides to show people (time and manner of Gods choosing)
* Available for everyone through faith, no matter your background.
* Confirmed natural theology but uncovered further truths- so not through reason alone.
* Christians believe teachings of faith have been given to them by God as revelation.

1. What is **revealed theology**?
   1. Name given by Christians to ideas about God that they believe God has chosen to show people.
2. What distinction was made between natural and revealed theology in the **Middle Ages**?
   1. **Natural Theology** – could show the existence of God, the existence of the human soul, and the existence of human free will; even people who believed in religions other than Christianity had managed to work out these truths.
   2. **Revealed Theology –** was very special. It did not rely on people having particularly strong intellectual gifts, but was available for everything through faith. It confirms the findings of natural theology, but also uncovered further truths that were unavailable to reason alone. These truths can only be worked out if God chooses to reveal them to you.
3. Why is there no distinction between natural and revealed theology in the Bible?
   1. The Bible was created years before this distinction was made.
4. What does revelation mean in terms of the fundamental distinctive teaching of their faith?
   1. That their teachings come from God, things are uncovered.
5. Describe fully the differences between immediate and mediate revelation with some examples.
   1. Immediate Revelation – where God makes himself directly known to people. For example, Adam + Eve had immediate revelation with God before and just after The Fall; everyone who met Jesus had IR with God too.
   2. Mediate Revelation – where someone learns of God in a secondary, non-direct way. For example, those who heard from those with IR were receiving MR such as those who listen to prophets; the Bible is also considered a MR.

**Immediate + Mediate Revelation:**

* Immediate Revelation: God makes himself directly known
* E.g. Prophets, Adam & Eve, Jesus, Abraham, Moses
* Mediate Revelation: knowledge of/from God gained indirectly
* E.g. through someone who had Immediate revelation, the Bible.
* People have argued that the Bible could be considered Immediate as is the ‘word of God’, so it’s more of an opinion.

**Revelation Through Faith + God’s Faith:**

1. Why is faith and grace needed **in addition** to natural theology, experience and reason?
   1. Humans are seen as sinful and having finite minds in Christianity, natural theology, experience and reason are not enough to show us the full truth.
2. Describe faith fully.
   1. **Faith** – a type of belief held even with a lack of conclusive evidence or is against reason. It is considered to be the bridge between experience and reason. It is a voluntary commitment based on trust.
3. What does **Aquinas** say about faith?
   1. Summa Theologica – he explores how empirical and logical knowledge, which he called ‘scientia’, is certain because we can see the evidence in front of us, either through our senses or by using our reasons.
4. Explain how Christianity does not see faith and reason standing in contradiction to each other.
   1. Christianity sees faith as a **virtue**. They see faith as a leap that can be taken once sense experience and reason have gone as far as they can.
5. What does **John’s gospel** say on the relation between faith and knowledge?
   1. Has a significant difference to other three gospels in the Bible. Makes a distinction between what ‘believe’ and ‘know’ are but then puts them together to show it is possible to do both at the same time.
6. How and where does **God’s grace** fit into all this above?
   1. We are able to have knowledge of God through faith because of God’s grace: God’s unconditional giving to humanity.
7. What does God, the Holy Spirit, graciously choose to give people?
   1. Gives us full knowledge: gives the prophets of the OT the right words to say at the right time; guide the writers of scripture; give people wisdom through revelation; give people faith in which to believe the Christian message; give people the confidence to share the Christian faith even in times of danger; enable those to live Christian life on a personal level; strengthen the Church as a community of believers; bring people to salvation.

**How revelation is understood in the Bible:**

1. Through the events of **history**…
   1. Belief that you can gain insight into the purposes of God by looking at the past. The events of history are seen as the work of God because we can see what God wants or displeases Him. In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet summarises how the people of Israel ignored the past God gave them and now they will be punished.
2. Through traditional **wisdom**…
   1. In the Bible, especially in ‘wisdom literature’, there is the idea that God can be revealed through insights of wise people. Those who have many years of experience of trying to live a moral life gain an understanding of God that is revealed in their sayings and writings for anyone who is willing to listen.
3. Through the words of prophets…
   1. They are chosen and commissioned to reveal God’s words to the people; they said they were speaking “the very words of the Lord”.
4. Through **religious experiences** and visions…
   1. God is said to reveal himself through personal experiences, in dreams, in visions, in voice.
5. Through **the natural laws** and design of the material world…
   1. The natural laws of physics are evidence that God exists and the nature of Him.
6. Through the person of **Jesus**…
   1. Jesus is seen as the incarnation of God; God in human form. God came into the world as human form so that people can understand Him at their own level, because the infinite power and love of God is impossible for limited, finite human minds to comprehend. Jesus is (said by John’s gospel) the “word made flesh”.
7. The Bible **itself**…
   1. Reveals truth about God, some take it literally others take it symbolically. Supposedly the bible reveals knowledge that we would never have known otherwise; for example the creation story, it reveals the stories of prophets and founders of religions and most importantly it reveals the purposes of God.
   2. Bible contains ‘wisdom literature’.
   3. Can create issues – is it reliable, is it their own words? There are some inconsistencies and factual errors. Should be treated as myth.
8. The Life of the Church…
   1. Catholics = scriptures reveal truth. Protestant = superior truths are in the Bible.
   2. Church safeguards the word of the Bible.

**Can the existence of God be known through reason alone?**

**Karl Barth –**

* Protestant Theologian
* Natural Theology = almost fanaticism, we worship false ideas.
* Form of arrogance to believe we could perceive any knowledge of God.
* Perhaps Barth’s belief came from his upbringing around Nazism, he witnessed human reason alone could lead people in wrong directions.
* Believed we could only know God when he chose to reveal himself.
* We need God’s commandments; we are incapable of working out right and wrong.
* Believed God was revealed through Christ, so there is no truth in other religions that don’t follow Jesus.

**Defenders:**

* Natural Theology is a sound and rational basis for faith.
* Provides opportunity to share discussion about God, everyone can see the natural world so is able to discuss.
* Argue that Barth’s view is too extreme – if human reason is given no part to play in the knowledge of God, then people have no way of judging right and wrong.

**Is faith sufficient reason for belief in God’s existence?**

**Richard Dawkins –**

* *“Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think…”* – feels it is harmful to humans to avoid thinking
* Likens belief in God to the tooth fairy or a teapot orbiting Mars – neither can be proven or disprove, but the lack of evidence means you shouldn’t believe it.

**David Hume –**

* *“A wise man…proportions his belief to the evidence”*
* Used this when talking about miracles, they cannot be empirically proven.

**Christians –**

* Faith is essential for belief in God.
* Feel that faith BUILDS on knowledge.
* Belief in Christianity is not like believing the teapot idea, because there is literally know evidence to support this. But there is evidence for God in nature.