

Theme C: Existence of God and Revelation.

✓ You should be able to explain and evaluate the Design argument, including its strengths and weaknesses

Design (TELEOLOGICAL) Argument: The Argument that God designed the Universe because everything is so intricate and detailed that could not have happened by chance. It is too ordered and complicated and must have been designed. Intricate interdependence is evidence of this. (I.e. bees and pollen) Paley used a watch to argue this. He argued if we found a watch we would know it had been designed for a purpose. If we look at nature then we can see evidence of design. Isaac Newton used the fact that we have opposable thumbs as evidence of design (moved to touch other fingers – can grasp things) this movement is only found in humans and primates – evidence of God's design. Also our unique thumb prints are evidence that God has planned each human separately. He said 'In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence.' Most Christians believe that the Bible supports the Design argument and that God designed the world.

The Anthropic Principle: This is a modern version of the design argument developed in the 1930's by F.R. Tennant. **Tennant argued that God planned the world so that everything was just right for human life to develop.** The gravitational force was just right for the universe to come into existence. If the force had been greater, the stars would have been too hot and burned out before the universe developed. If the force was smaller then the stars would have been too cool and would not have formed. As the universe expanded, it was the correct rate for the development of galaxies and eventually planets. Once the earth formed, it had all the conditions for intelligent life to develop. **Theists believe that this fine tuning cannot be chance but is the deliberate action of God.**

Arguments against design: Natural disasters could indicate that the world has not been designed as no design would have such flaws. Atheists also point to the existence of cruelty and suffering found within nature. Why would a creator design animals that are specially adapted to hunt and hurt other animals. If it was designed there is still the further question of how can a loving, creator God allow his design to cause so much human suffering. Just because something looks designed doesn't guarantee that it was. The discovery of penicillin was an accident. Not everyone believes that humans are the result of design. Even if the world is designed we cannot prove that the designer is God. It may be the work of many gods. Many atheists use Darwin's theory of evolution to account for apparent design in the world.

Arguments for design: Some theists argue that if humans had evolved through natural selection then we would not need to write books, paint pictures or create music to survive. The fact we do these things suggests we are designed. Theists would argue that God is beyond human understanding and there will be an explanation for natural evil and suffering which human beings do not yet understand, or perhaps will never understand.

Evolution-Scientific belief that life forms changed over time, developing from simple to complex creatures. The animals or plants best suited to their environment survive, '*survival of the fittest*' and those that are not suited or do not adapt die out. This is called Natural Selection. This means that animals adapt and evolve and could mean that they were not designed on purpose. This could mean that they were not designed on purpose. This theory argues that the world has always been changing. Species were not made in a fixed way but living organisms have adapted and changed in order to survive in changing environments. If this is the case then there is no designer and the design of the world is not evidence for the existence of God. Some Theists may argue that evolution was God's plan for the development of life. They believe that it was the process through which God's creation took place. God's design is found in the processes of evolution.

✓ You should now be able to explain and evaluate the First Cause argument, including its strengths and weaknesses

First Cause (COSMOLOGICAL) argument -This argument says that there is a perfect and well- ordered universe rather than nothingness because God brought the cosmos into existence. St Thomas Aquinas said that things could not cause themselves to come into existence so something has to cause them. The universe exists and therefore must have been caused by something outside the universe. There had to be something eternal (without beginning or end) that was not caused by anything. The eternal first cause was God. Aquinas argued that this first cause of the universe was God. If God had not caused the universe to begin then there would be no universe and therefore we would not exist.

Arguments for First Cause-Some theists (Christian's) argue that the measurement of time is evidence that the universe had a beginning. This beginning was caused by God. If we apply this theory to the Big Bang, could argue that God is the First Cause, the cause of the Big Bang and the universe could have evolved from this. They would argue that as scientists do not know what caused the Big Bang, then why could it not be God? The Big Bang describes how God caused the Universe. Islam accepts that scientific findings support Allah's existence and the creation of the Universe. Many Christians believe that the Cosmological argument is supported by the creation story found in Genesis 1:1-3. It says that before the Universe was created only God existed and at the command of God the process of creation began.

Arguments against First Cause- Just because events/things have causes doesn't mean that the universe itself has a cause. It is possible that the universe does not have a beginning, it is infinite. (Steady State Theory – universe is eternal it has always existed. Atheists and agnostics would challenge the argument saying it contradicts itself. It still does not answer 'who or what caused God'? If God is eternal then why can the universe not be eternal? Big –Bang Theory – Atheists could use this to argue that the universe resulted from a

random spontaneous event, not an action by God. The religious accounts of creation are simply myths.

Big Bang– Scientific theory that argues that the world and universe resulted when a singularity exploded. From this explosion all the matter that makes up the universe came into being. Tiny ripples of radiation detected by scientists have been used as evidence to back up this theory. It is suggested that at one point all the matter in the universe was at a single point, there was an explosion and matter is now moving away from this point. This says that the world is not made in the same way as the seven day account in Genesis in the Bible. Big-Bang Theory is a challenge to First Cause argument only if it is thought to be a spontaneous random event without reason or cause. Can it be compatible with first Cause.

✓ **You should now be able to explain and evaluate the argument from miracles, including its strengths and weaknesses**

Miracle: a seemingly impossible occurrence, usually good. Theists use the term ‘miracle’ to refer to an event performed by God that appears to break the laws of nature. It may be the cure for a terminal illness or disability that doctors cannot explain. It may be survival from certain death by a freak event. A miracle needs to have some religious significance or purpose, such as the strengthening of faith or the demonstration of God’s love. Shows God is immanent – interfering in our world. Miracles are often very personal. God is showing himself. No natural explanation for what happened then it must be a supernatural event. The miracle must have been caused by something outside of nature, and as only God is outside nature, then it must be the result of God’s intervention in the world. Therefore God exists.

Miracles– Amazing events which can’t be explained by the laws of nature. Jesus was renowned for his miracles and people claim that miracles still occur and bring people to God. They show God’s power and presence. (special)

Two types of miracles: Events that break the laws of nature and cannot be explained by the sciences. E.g. Jesus is said to have turned water into wine at the marriage of Cana. Events in which no laws of nature are broken but a **coincidence occurs at just the right time to cause a good outcome**. This is believed to be because of God’s intervention.

Reasons for rejecting miracles: coincidence. Science might be able to explain it in the future. Theists want them to happen so interpret ordinary events as miracles. Power of the mind (healing). Wrong diagnosis. Fake ‘miracles’ by people wanting fame or money. Some theists do not believe in miracles because God would be picking and choosing who is helped and this does not seem fair and loving.

Arguments supporting miracles: Miracles are for the benefit of everyone they are signs to prove the existence of God and teach people about God. Most theists would argue that miracles occur. There are too many accounts of miracles for them not to happen. Don’t always happen to believers. Miracles can cause people to convert. Miracles are investigated e.g. Roman Catholic Church investigates miracles that happen at Lourdes—checked by priests and doctors. (66 occurred since 1882)

✓ **You should now be able to describe one example of a miracle**

Lourdes: Bernadette Soubirous / St Theresa of Avila/ Jesus’ miracle (John 2v 1-11, John 21, Matthew 14v22-36) / Fred Ferrari

✓ **You should be able to explain and evaluate the arguments against the existence of God posed by science and by the problem of evil and suffering**

Atheist– a person who believes that there is no god.

Agnostic– A person who believes that we cannot be sure whether God exists or not.

Theist - A person who believes in God

Someone who is a **theist** believes in God. A **theist** is certain that God exists because; they are certain that they have been in contact with God directly, they accept accounts of other people of their experience of God as evidence that God exists, believe that God is the only logical explanation for the origin of the universe and the order within it.

An **atheist** is a person who believes that there is no God. An **atheist** does not accept that any evidence accepted by theists is sufficient proof that God exists.

An **agnostic** is a person who believes that we cannot be sure whether God exists. An **agnostic** believes that any evidence produced by theists does not prove the existence of God one way or the other. They believe that it cannot be known whether God exists

Arguments against belief in God: Science can provide all the answers and so belief in God is no longer needed. Atheist and Humanists use the developments in science to challenge the belief in God. In the past origins of the universe and life on earth could not be explained, so people thought that God created and controlled everything in the universe. Floods and crop failure were believed to be God punishments for wrongdoing. Now that science can explain things people in the past could not understand, people may no longer look to religion for answers and have turned away from belief in God. Atheists argue there is no need to invent God to make sense of what we do not know at the moment. Eventually science will have all the answers. Also science is now close to creating human life—atheists see this as further evidence that God does not exist.

Arguments against belief in God

Suffering: When people have to face and live with unpleasant events or conditions.

Man-made suffering-Suffering caused by the actions of humans e.g. through war, pollution, crime.

Natural Suffering-Suffering caused by nature e.g. because of earthquakes, volcanoes, floods.

Natural Disasters-Disasters caused by nature e.g. earthquakes, volcanoes.

Evil-That which is deliberately bad or harmful, or goes against the will of God

Responsibility: Duty; the idea that we are in charge of our own actions.

Unjust suffering unfair or not right. Difficult to see how the suffering of innocent children can ever have a purpose.

Free will— having the ability to choose one's own actions.

The Problem of Suffering: Suffering raises a problem for theists: If God is loving, all-knowing and all-powerful then why is there suffering? If he was all-loving then he would want to stop it, if he was all-powerful then he would be able to stop it, if he was all-knowing then he would know it exists and therefore stop it. Either God isn't all of these three or God does not exist. (Both are problems for the Christian understanding of God.)

Questions suffering raises: What is God's purpose in suffering—if God is all-good then surely he would want the best for people. If God wills our suffering then he is cruel. Knowledge brings responsibility, if God knows about our suffering how can he stand by and do nothing? Why did God create a world with so much suffering? Why do innocent people suffer? Why did God give humans free will if they hurt each other?

Theist responses: God is powerful and created the earth but is not to blame for earth-quakes. They are the same forces that formed the earth in the beginning. Human freedom is part of our nature, if not we would be robots and lose all that it means to be human e.g. relationships, love etc.

Purpose of suffering: A punishment. Some suffering keeps us alive and well, pain tells us something is wrong. Stops us doing serious harm. Can make us appreciate things that we take for granted. Can make us a better person. To achieve a goal e.g. child birth. Test of faith. Part of God's mysterious plan.

Christian explanations for why we suffer: Suffering is a result of free will. If we didn't have free will then we would be robots and life would be pointless. Free will means that sometimes humans choose to do the wrong thing and hurt others. The story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) shows the consequences of free will. By disobeying God Adam and Eve brought suffering and evil into the world. Suffering could be a punishment for the things we have done wrong, or a test of our faith in God. (Job) It could be to develop our personalities and enable us to grow and become stronger. Suffering could just be part of the balance of nature or it could be necessary for us to appreciate goodness. Pain is a test from God. Suffering could be caused by an evil being called the devil who opposes God.

How does God help those who suffer: Christians believe that God supports and helps them through their suffering, giving them the strength to manage. Through praying and reading the Bible they find strength. Others argue that God comforts them. Some Christians see suffering as an opportunity to show God's love in the world practically to others. It is their responsibility to help those who suffer. Christians point to the life of Jesus and the suffering he went through during his life and death on the cross. They argue that God understands our suffering and goes through it with us. The Bible also promises that there will be no suffering in heaven. **The example of Jesus**. Christians believe that Jesus suffered in his life and that he was innocent. This means God has suffered through Jesus (died on the Cross, friends betrayed him, friend died). Jesus also worked to prevent suffering in the lives of people who suffer. Christians believe that God will take away suffering in heaven.

Christianity: Evil came into the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience, sometimes called 'original sin'. When Satan tempted them to eat the fruit from the forbidden 'tree of knowledge of good and evil', they realised that they had freedom to choose right and wrong and would now be responsible for their own actions. When people rebel against God evil results. People need salvation (rescuing) from sin. Christians believe that Jesus was the 'second Adam' who restored people's broken relationship with God.

Christian responses to evil: Jesus commanded Christians to love God and their neighbour. He taught people to love their enemies and, when evil is done to them, 'to turn the other cheek'. The Lord's prayer says that people must forgive others so that God can forgive them. 'forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us....' (Luke 11:4. Bible). **Many Christians worked tirelessly against the evil of racial discrimination in the USA and in South Africa. In the USA Martin Luther King, a Christian minister was one of the leaders of the civil rights movement and used non-violent protest.**

THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE AND REVELATION

- ✓ **You should be able to explain what is meant by special revelation and enlightenment as sources of knowledge about the divine (God, gods or ultimate reality)**

Special Revelation— God making himself known through direct personal experience or an unusual specific event.

Enlightenment—the gaining of true knowledge about God or self, usually through meditation and self-discipline: in Buddhist and Hindu traditions, gaining freedom from the cycle of re-birth.

Buddha – example of enlightened being- lived a life of privilege / saw the four sights / went in search of truth / lived a life of deprivation / reached the middle way/ gained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree after resisting Mara.

Hinduism – goal of life is to achieve Moksha- oneness with Brahman

Strengths of Special Revelation– discloses the whole of what God wants people to know, direct and often has a stronger and more immediate impact, people who experience Special Revelation have an authority and confidence that enable them to lead others.

✓ **You should be able to describe one example of a vision**

Saul on the road to Damascus, saw a light and a voice asking why do you persecute me? This vision converted Saul to Christianity, changed his name to Paul to acknowledge this change (Isaiah 6v1-10 / Acts 10 v 9-16 / Acts 9v1-19)

✓ **You should be able to explain what is meant by general revelation, including nature, as a way of understanding the divine**

General Revelation - God making himself known through ordinary, common human experiences. Available to all. Indirect experience

Nature - God can be known through the world around us because he created it. E.g. design of a flower shows that God is a creator and designer, Thunderstorm that God is powerful. (General)

Holy Books or Sacred Writings – Writings which are believed to originate from God or a god. E.g. Bible (General)

Strengths of General Revelation– indirect and available to everyone, available at all times to everyone in all places, continuous and on-going so can up-date as new issues arise and conscience is available to all religious believers.

✓ **You should be able to explain the different ideas about the divine that come from revelation and explain the meaning of the terms omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent, personal, impersonal, immanent and transcendent**

Nature of God - What God's character is like.

Monotheism– Belief in one God.

Personal - (when applied to God) is the belief in a conscious individual or person with whom people are able to have a relationship or feel close to. Christians believe that they can pray to God in a personal way e.g. Father

Impersonal -(when applied to God) means that the believer does not think that God has any 'human' characteristics. God is unknowable and mysterious. God is regarded more like an idea or a force rather than a person.

Immanent - to believe that God is present in the world and involved with life on earth and in the universe. Christians believe that God is active in the world through the Holy Spirit and was active in the world through Jesus, healing people.

Transcendent - is to believe that God is outside time and space. God is beyond and outside life on earth and the universe.

Omnipotence - refers to God's complete powerfulness, beyond anything we can know.

Omniscience - refers to God's total intelligence, beyond anything we can know or copy.

Benevolence-goodness, being all loving.

Compassionate-one of the qualities of God; showing concern for the sufferings of others; literally 'suffering with'.

Merciful-a quality of God that stresses God's willingness to forgive the wrongdoer.

Christian beliefs –One God who can be seen through three different aspects, the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit. Father –Creator, the eternal mighty God, Son-came to earth in the form of Jesus, Spirit-God as he works in the world.

✓ **You should be able to explain the value of revelation and enlightenment as sources of knowledge about the divine**

Power of Revelation -Proof of Gods existence. Help to start off the religion. Helping people to know what they must do to live as God wishes.

Impact of Revelation-Conversion. Way a person lives their life (way they behave, eat, drink, dress, treat others). Way a person worships God. Becoming a monk or nun.

Evidence to support the reality of any revelation-religious people might look at - does it correspond to what can be seen in the real world? Does it fit with earlier Revelations? Does it convert people? They may accept it because of : the effect on individuals or groups, no reason to doubt the person if a trustworthy person, common core of beliefs found in any revelation because it matches scientific observations.

✓ **You should be able to explain and evaluate the difficulties in accepting the reality of some examples of revelation**

Illusion-a false belief; something wrongly believed to exist, deceptive appearances, 'all in the mind'.

Why does God reveal himself to some and not others / Hume: lack of evidence / unreliable witnesses / all religions can't be right!

✓ **You should be able to explain and evaluate the problems of different ideas about the divine arising from these experiences**

Why would God reveal himself to some and not others? How can God be transcendent and immanent at the same time? If God is a personal God is he worthy of worship? How can we relate to an impersonal God? Have we the language to be able to describe an all-powerful God? Why would God heal some people- see miracles, and not others? – question whether he is a just God

✓ **You should be able to explain and evaluate alternative explanations for these experiences and the possibility that these people are mistaken or were lying**

Religious experiences: reality or illusion? Some people argue are an illusion because there could be alternative explanations or there

in no empirical evidence that the experience happened. Others argue that you cannot prove they did not happen and that the person who experienced it has enough evidence to believe it is real. They also may point to any changes that have happened as evidence of the event

Why atheists consider any revelation to be an illusion - false experience (may be the result of drugs, alcohol or mental illness.) The mind can play tricks, wishful thinking, conflicting revelations, ordinary events interpreted as revelations, cases of fraudulent revelations, conscience is not from God –Freud argues result of up-bringing and social influences.

Case Study: Ellen G White

Problems with Revelation: Conflicting claims to truth from different religions (Christians and Muslims disagree about the nature of God)

- ✓ **You should be able to explain contrasting perspectives in contemporary British society to all the above issues.**

For each of the ticks above could you show both sides of the argument?

- ✓ **You should be able to explain contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society to the three issues of**
- ✓ **Miracles**
- ✓ **Visions**
- ✓ **Nature**
- ✓ **as a source of revelation (with reference to the main religious tradition in Britain (Christianity) and non-religious beliefs such as Humanism or atheism**

<u>Source of revelation</u>	<u>Christianity</u>	<u>Non-religious</u>
<u>Miracles</u>	Christianity has recorded many miracles, where God has intervened in his creation to make something good happen, often healing the incurable. Mother Teresa was a Christian Nun who had devoted her life to helping the poor and needy, In Calcutta. On the first anniversary of her death a non-Christian Indian women was cured fg a huge abdominal tumour- it simply disappeared overnight as she slept. Members of the Missionaries of Charity had prayed to Mother Teresa for this cure. The belief is that the prayers showed the necessary faith to allow Mother Teresa's soul to bring God's power to the problem. Doctors have been unable to find an alternative explanation.	<u>Humanists:</u> would look for non-supernatural explanation They can show that events previously classed as miracles are now explainable through medical science, and that those calling them miracles already has a religious bias to affect them_ <u>Atheist:</u> An atheist would dispute that God performs miracles, as (to them) God does not exist. They may see events like these s something which can occur naturally (spontaneous regression) though is not yet understood by medical science._
<u>Visions</u>	Visions are a form of revelation from God, allowing humans to have a relationship with him. Many Christians have written about their revelation and given an insight because if it, for example St Teresa of Avila, Bernadette Soubirous and Fred Ferrari. Christians believe that God speaks directly to humans through these revelations, telling them religious truths and helping them to understand his wishes The vision can have a profound effect on their live and causing great change.	<u>Humanists:</u> take a non-theistic stance, and do not look for supernatural explanations for events. A vision may be caused by hallucination, illness, drugs, or many other reasons- but not a divine source <u>Atheist:</u> Might see these experiences as hallucinatory, they believe there is no God, and so there can be source for this revelation other than our own brain.
<u>Nature</u>	Revelation is when God reveals Himself. Nature is seen as a source of revelation by Christians because it is God's creation. Just as an artist leaves clues about themselves in their work, so God has left clues in His creation. For example the beauty of nature, the fact that it seems to have been designed (see Design argument Many Christians see a beautiful sunset etc and see God at work – this is God revealing himself via nature / his creation)	<u>Humanists:</u> A Humanist would say there is no such thing as God and therefore a non-existent being cannot be revealed in anyway. We should appreciate the patterns and the beauty but not see it as a source of revelation_ <u>Atheist:</u> An Atheist would say that as much as nature might reveal to a believer that there is a God, it reveals nothing to others especially those who believe there is no divine being.

