Your notes

GCSE Religious Studies: revision notes

The existence of God and revelation

Contents

1. Arguments for God's existence
2. Arguments against God's existence
3. Revelation
4. Key terms
5. Quick questions
6. What to do next

Arguments for God's existence

- The **Design argument**: the complexity and order of the world suggest a designer. William Paley (1802) compared the world to a watch, which must have a watchmaker. Critics say evolution explains apparent design, and point to imperfections and suffering.
- The **First Cause argument**: everything has a cause, so the universe must have a first cause, which is God (Thomas Aquinas). Critics ask what caused God, and say the universe may not need a cause.
- **Miracles**: events that seem to break the laws of nature, such as healings at Lourdes. Critics, such as the philosopher David Hume, say there are better explanations, such as coincidence or mistakes.

Arguments against God's existence

- Evil and suffering: **natural evil** (such as earthquakes) and **moral evil** (such as murder) challenge belief in a God who is all-powerful and all-loving. Believers respond that free will explains **moral evil**, that suffering can be a test, and that God's plan is beyond human understanding.
- Science: many things once explained by God are now explained by science.

Revelation

- **Special revelation**: God revealing himself directly, such as through visions (Paul on the road to Damascus, Acts 9), dreams, prophets and scripture.
- **General revelation**: knowing God indirectly, through nature, conscience and reason ('The heavens declare the glory of God', Psalm 19:1).
- Some people explain religious experiences as hallucinations or wishful thinking. Buddhists speak of enlightenment rather than revelation from God.

Key terms

Theist	A person who believes in God.
Atheist	A person who believes there is no God.
Agnostic	A person who believes we can't know whether God exists.
Design argument	The argument that the world's order and complexity show it was designed by God.
First Cause argument	The argument that God is the first cause of the universe.
Miracle	An event that seems to break the laws of nature, thought to be caused by God.
Special revelation	God revealing himself directly, as in a vision.
General revelation	Knowing God through nature, conscience or reason.
Natural evil	Suffering caused by nature, such as earthquakes.
Moral evil	Suffering caused by human actions.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is an atheist?
2. What is an agnostic?
3. What is the Design argument?
4. Who used the watch analogy for the Design argument?
5. What is the First Cause argument?
6. Which thinker developed the First Cause argument?
7. What is a miracle?
8. What is natural evil?

Answers

1. Someone who believes there is no God
2. Someone who believes we can't know whether God exists
3. The order in the world suggests a designer, God
4. William Paley
5. The universe must have been caused by something, which is God
6. Thomas Aquinas
7. An event that seems to break the laws of nature, thought to be caused by God
8. Suffering caused by nature, such as earthquakes

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Your notes

Your notes