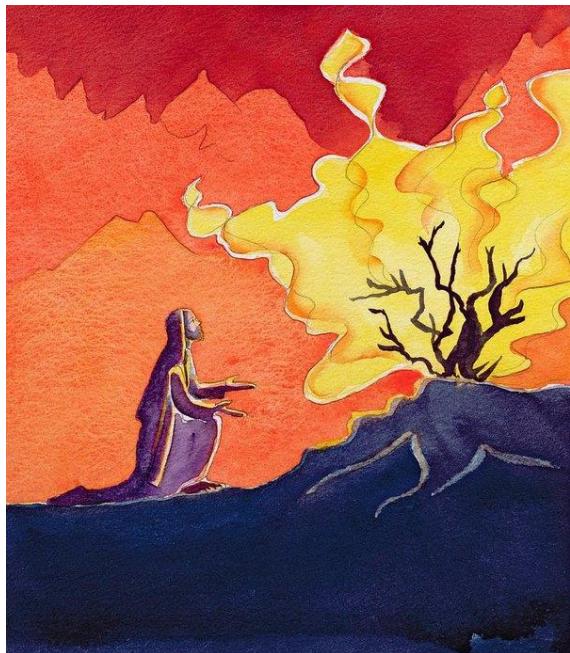


Year 11 RE

Revelation & the Existence of God

NAME TUTOR GROUP



THEME C: THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND REVELATION

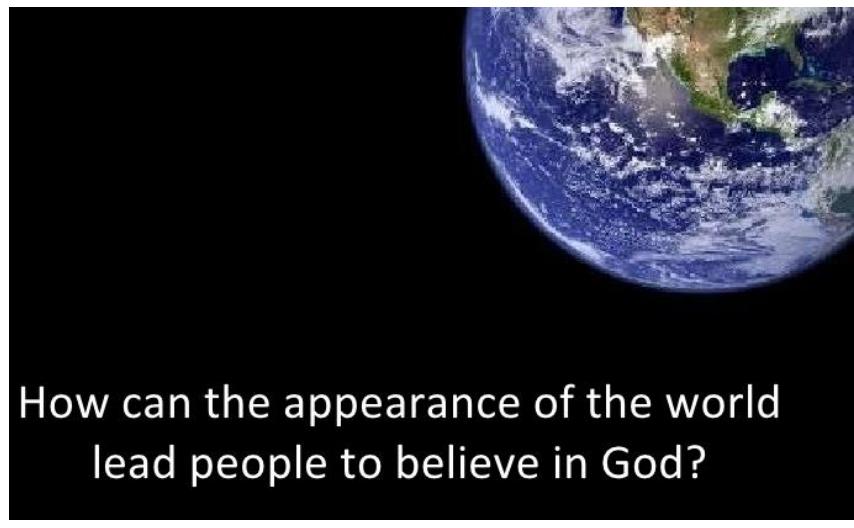
1. The Design Argument

Essential information:

- The **Design Argument** says that because everything in the universe is so intricately made, it must have been created by God. Therefore God exists
- Jews and Christians are **theists**. They believe that God planned and created the universe. **Atheists** believe that the universe was not created but evolved naturally. **Agnostics** believe there is not enough evidence that God exists or not, or that God created the universe or not



▲ Are the heavenly bodies kept in place by God?



How can the appearance of the world lead people to believe in God?

Key terms

- **Design argument:** the argument that God designed the universe, because everything is so intricately made in its detail that it could not have happened by chance
- **theist:** a person who believes in God
- **atheist:** a person who believes that there is no God
- **agnostic:** someone who thinks there is not enough evidence for belief in God

Draw an image or object to help you remember these key terms...

Theist	
Atheist	
Agnostic	

“ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **”**

Genesis: 1:1 [NIV]

Different versions of the Design Argument



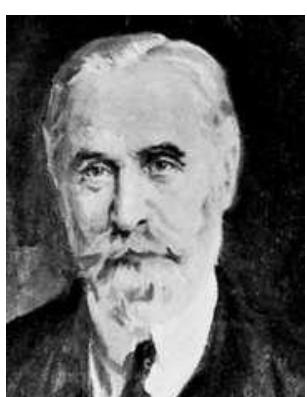
William Paley...



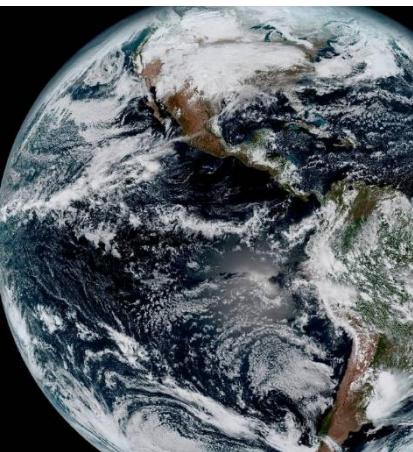
Isaac Newton...



Thomas Aquinas...



F. R. Tennant...



Explain the Watch analogy in your own words...

Religious views on the Design Argument

Jewish views

Christian views

Why might some people object to the Design Argument?

2. The First Cause Argument

Essential information:

- The **First Cause Argument** or **Cosmological argument** states that there has to be an uncaused cause that made everything else happen

Key terms

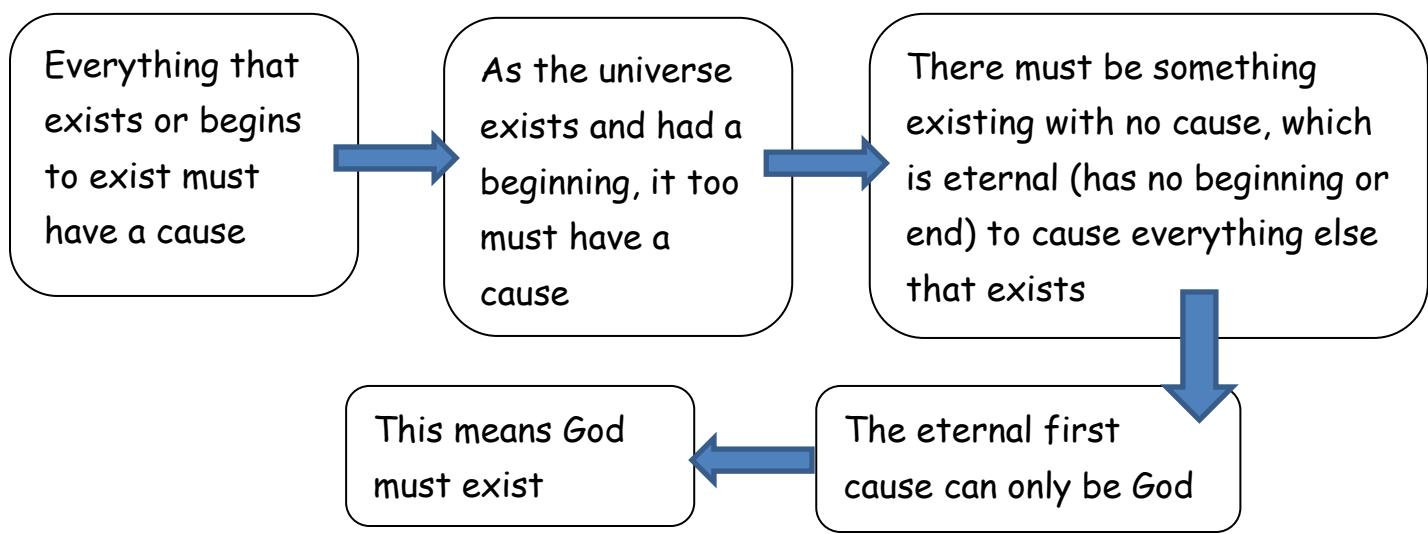
- **First Cause argument:** also called the Cosmological argument; the argument that there has to be an uncaused cause that made everything else happen, otherwise there would be nothing now
- **eternal:** without beginning or end
- **creation:** the act by which God brought the universe into being

Cause and Effect

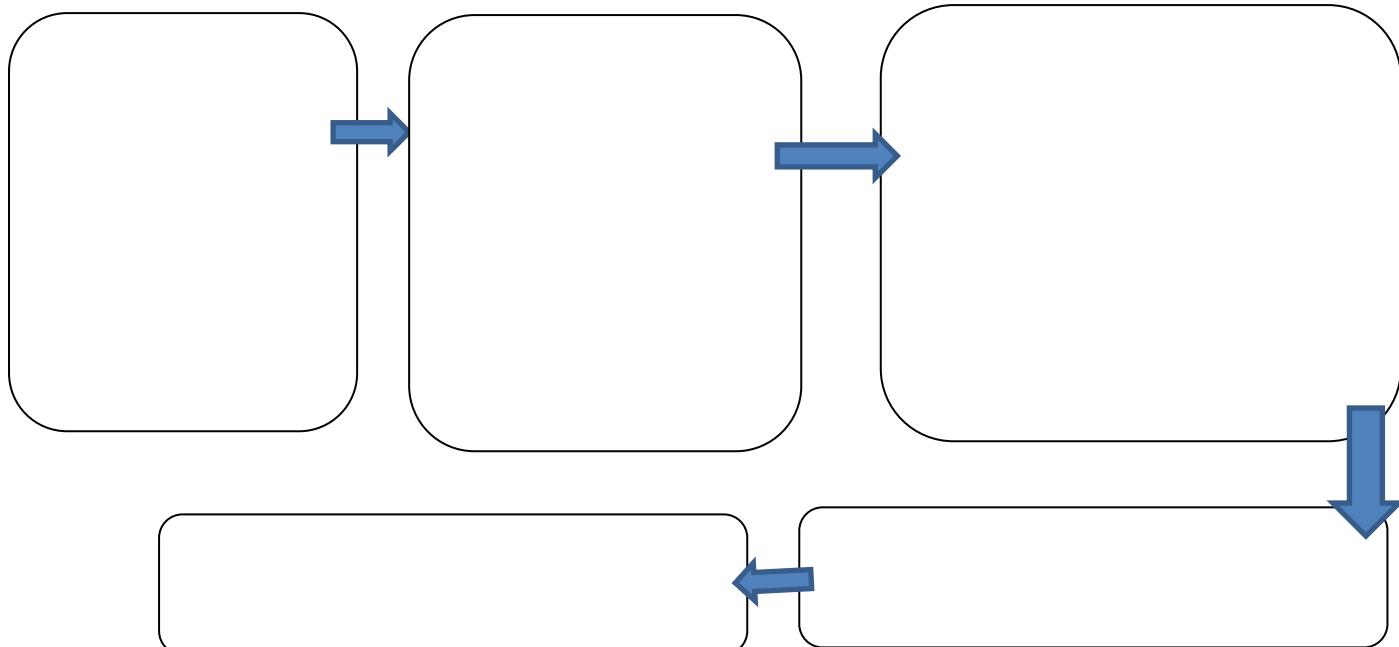
There must have been a first cause.



The logical chain of reasoning for the First Cause argument runs like this...



Cover the above information and complete the boxes below





▲ Did God cause the Big Bang?

“ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. **”**

Genesis 1:1-3 [NIV]

The key assumption in the First Cause arguments is that the universe had a starting point or cause, like all other things that exist. Christians and Jews say the starting point was God, who set a chain of events into motion that created the universe. Theists ask what existed before the Big Bang. They believe the answer is God. As God is eternal, he has no starting point.

Christian views about the First Cause argument - Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas argued that...

Jewish views about the First Cause argument - Rabbi Bachya ben Joseph

Rabbi Bachya argued that...

What are the possible objections to the First Cause argument?

Some people will **object** to the First Cause argument because...

3. The argument from miracles

Essential information:

- Miracles are seemingly impossible events that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws
- Theists believe miracles are the action of God and prove his existence. They show God's love and help to strengthen a believer's faith



Arguments from miracles and objections to it

Stairwell B, 11 September 2001

Sixteen people survived the collapse of the North Tower of the World Trade Center during the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. The fact that these people survived when nearly 3000 people died makes many people regard this as a miracle. Others argue that they survived because they were protected by the stairwell and ended up near the top of the debris.

Key term

- **miracle:** a seemingly impossible event, usually good, that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws, and is thought to be the action of God

Theists argue that:

- If there is no scientific explanation for an event, it must be caused by something outside nature.
- God is the only thing that exists outside nature.
- These events must be the result of God's intervention in the world.
- **Therefore God must exist.**

Atheists and agnostics may argue that:

- Miracles are no more than luck coincidences
- They may have scientific explanations we don't yet know about.
- Miracle healings could be the result of mind over matter or misdiagnosis.
- Some miracles are deliberately made up for fame or money
- **Therefore what appears to be a miracle have nothing to do with God, so they cannot prove God exists.**

What does David Hume say about Miracles?

Marie Bailly

Marie Bailly was from Lyons in France. Her parents had died of tuberculosis and she suffered ill health from 13 years of age. Finally, aged 22, she was diagnosed with tubercular peritonitis, a condition which made her abdomen swell, and she was unable to eat anything. She pleaded to be sent to Lourdes where she believed she would be cured. Upon arrival she was taken to hospital in a critical condition. After no improvement the doctors told Marie she was dying, so she asked to be taken to the baths where the holy waters were poured on her abdomen. She prayed to Mary, the mother of Jesus and declared, 'I am cured.' Her colour returned, her abdomen reduced in size and although she was very thin, she returned to good health. The cure took place on 28 May 1902.



▲ The grotto at Lourdes where Marie Bailly prayed for healing

How might a Theist respond to this account?

How might an Atheist respond?

Christian responses to miracles...

Jewish responses to miracles...

4. Further arguments against the existence of God

Essential information:



- Some people use science and the existence of suffering and evil to challenge the existence of God.
- Jews and Christians respond by saying there does not have to be a conflict between religion and science, and that evil and suffering exist because of free will.

Key terms

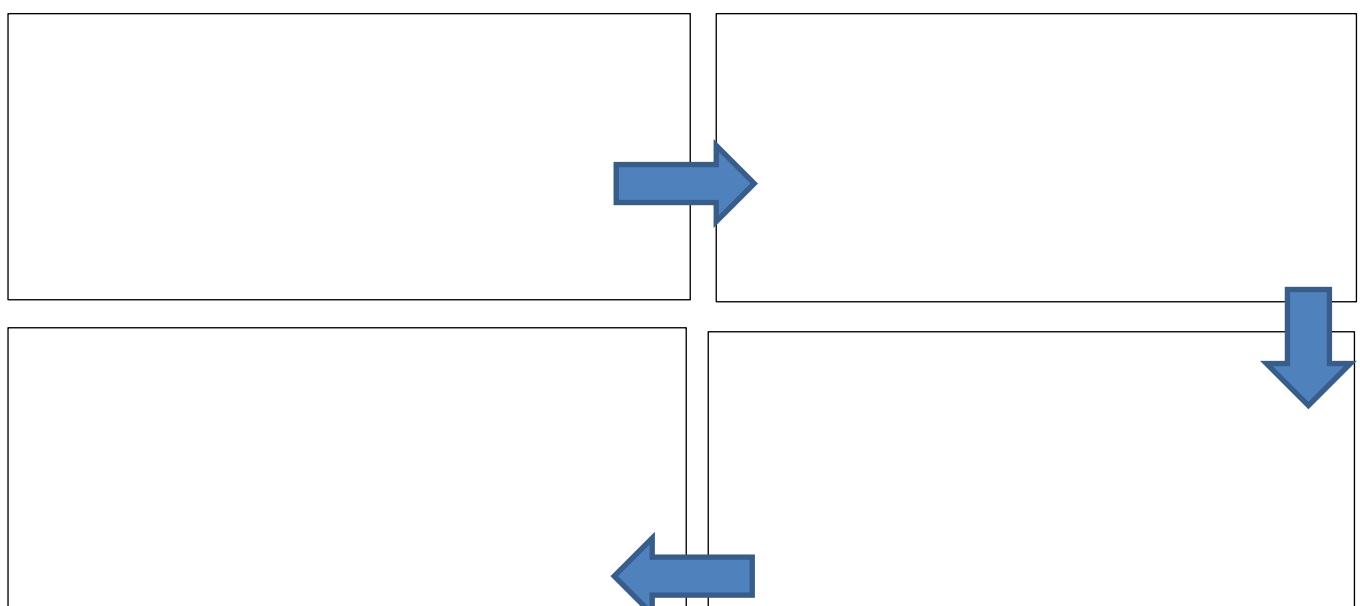
- **proof:** evidence that supports the truth of something
- **faith:** a commitment to something that goes beyond proof and knowledge, especially used about God and religion
- **evil:** the opposite of good, a force or the personification of a negative power that is seen in many traditions as destructive and against God
- **suffering:** when people have to face and live with unpleasant events or conditions

Examples of natural evil

Examples of moral evil

Evil and suffering as an argument against the existence of God

Atheist argue that the existence of evil and suffering proves God does not exist because:



Jewish responses to the problem of evil and suffering...

Christian responses to the problem of evil and suffering...

How science is used to challenge the belief in God

What are some of the reasons how science is used to challenge belief in God?

Jewish response

Christian response

*'Science takes things apart to see how they work.
Religion puts things together to see what they mean.'*
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

“ The big bang [...] does not contradict the divine act of creation; rather, it requires it [...] When we read the creation story in Genesis we run the risk of imagining that God was a magician, with a magic wand which is able to do everything [...] But it is not so. He created beings and let them develop according to internal laws which he gave everyone, so they would develop, so they would reach maturity. **”**

Pope Francis, speaking at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 2014

'Evolutionary theory, properly understood, is not incompatible with belief in a Divine Creator, nor with the first 2 Chapters of Genesis.' **Rabbinical Council of America**

'We are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, secondly, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories.'

Emil Fackenheim (Jewish philosopher and Reform Rabbi)

5. Special revelation and enlightenment

Essential information:

- Most religious people believe there is supreme, final, fundamental power in all reality, an **ultimate reality**. This ultimate reality could be a God or gods, which are referred to as being **divine**.
- **Special revelation** is God making himself known through direct personal experience
- Special revelation and enlightenment are both sources of knowledge about the divine



▲ Mary received a special revelation from the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26–38)



Moses and the burning bush...

Key terms

- **ultimate reality:** the supreme, final, fundamental power in all reality
- **the divine:** God, gods or ultimate reality
- **revelation:** God showing himself to believers; this is the only way anybody can really know anything about God
- **special revelation:** God making himself known through direct personal experience or an unusual specific event
- **vision:** seeing something, especially in a dream or trance, that shows something about the nature of God or the afterlife
- **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 rebirth

Saul on the Damascus road

Many Christians consider the story in Acts 9:1–19 an example of a vision. Saul, who had sworn to wipe out the new Christian Church, was traveling with colleagues to arrest any followers of Jesus in the city of Damascus. On their way they were all struck by a blinding light, but only Saul was spoken to by Jesus. Saul's life-changing experience on the Damascus Road led to his baptism, changing his name to Paul, and his new-found commitment to the Christian faith.



▲ While on the Damascus road, Saul was blinded by a vision of the risen Jesus

How may God be known? – General and Special revelation

Types of special revelation: hearing God's call, dream, vision, prophecy and miracle

Christianity: explain the meaning of **special revelation** and give two examples. How does each one lead to belief in God?

Judaism: explain the meaning of **special revelation** and give two examples. How does each one lead to belief in God?

What are the alternative explanations for special revelation and visions?



What do Buddhists believe about the **enlightenment**?

You might be asked to compare beliefs on visions between Christianity (the main religious tradition in Great Britain) and another religious tradition

6. General revelation

Essential information:

- Some seek to understand the divine by using **general revelation** - God making himself known through ordinary experiences. These ordinary experiences could be through **nature** or **scripture**.

Key terms

- general revelation:** God making himself known through ordinary, common human experiences
- nature:** the physical world including plants, animals and landscape; the environment or natural world
- scriptures:** the sacred writings of a religion; for Christians these are the Old and the New Testament

■ What is general revelation?

Not everyone receives a direct, personal message from God (a special revelation). Many people come to know God through **general revelation**, that is, through ordinary, everyday human experiences. General revelation comes to people through seeing God's presence in **nature** or through a person's reason, conscience or sense of right and wrong. People say they experience God when they worship or when they read the **scriptures** of their religion, or through the lives and work of religious leaders who seem particularly close to God. These experiences are available to everyone, but they do not convince everyone that God is real because they depend on people's interpretation of them.

Some examples of revelation can be both general and special, depending on the circumstances. For example, reading scripture is open to anyone (general) but it may be the means of a direct personal experience of God for an individual (special).

From the passage on the previous page, what are the FOUR ways in which people can get general revelation?

Nature as a way of understanding the divine

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. **”**

Psalm 19:1–4 [NIV]

“How many are the things You have made, O LORD; You have made them all with wisdom; the earth is full of Your creations.” Psalm 104:24 (Tenakh)



▲ Does nature reveal the power of God?

Why might Jews believe that nature reveals the divine?

Why might Christians believe that nature reveals the divine?

Why might Atheists and humanists object to the view that nature reveals the divine?

Scripture as a way of understanding the divine

Both Jews and Christians believe that scripture reveals what God is like, how God acted in the past, and how God wants people to live. It is another form of general revelation. In both the Tenakh and the Bible, God's nature is revealed as powerful, loving, just, forgiving and transcendent.

For Jews, there are TWO main ways of using or reading scripture (the Tenakh):

Liberal Jews will say...

While Orthodox Jews will say...

For Christians, there are two ways of reading scripture (the Bible) too...

While Fundamentalist Christian will say...

Liberal Christians will say...

Some people (Atheist and Humanists) might object to the use of scripture to understand the divine because...

7. Different ideas about the divine

Essential information:

- Religions have different ideas about the divine
- Christianity and Judaism see God as omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent, personal, impersonal, immanent and transcendent



▲ God depicted as creator on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Rome

What are the qualities of God portrayed in this painting by Michelangelo?

The limitations of language make describing a God without limits very difficult. However, certain terms can be used to help describe God's nature.

Key terms

- **omnipotent:** almighty, having unlimited power; a quality of God
- **omniscient:** knowing everything; a quality of God
- **benevolent:** all-loving, all-good; a quality of God
- **immanent:** the idea that God is present in and involved with life on earth and in the universe; a quality of God
- **transcendent:** the idea that God is beyond and outside life on earth and the universe; a quality of God
- **personal nature (of God):** the idea that God is an individual or person with whom people are able to have a relationship or feel close
- **impersonal nature (of God):** the idea that God has no 'human' characteristics, is unknowable and mysterious, more like an idea or force

Cover the key terms and try and remember their meaning... write them down.

Omnipotent...

Omniscient...

Benevolent...

Immanent...

Transcendent...

Personal nature (of God)...

Impersonal nature (of God)...

Can God be both personal and impersonal, immanent and transcendent?

"You have searched me
Lord and you know me.
You know when I sit and
when I rise; you perceive
my thoughts from afar."
(Psalm 139; 1-2)

"For God so loved the
world that he gave his
only Son, that whoever
believes in him shall not
perish but have eternal
life." (John 3; 16)

"I am the Lord and there
is none else, I form light
and darkness, I make weal
and create woe - I the
Lord do all these things."
(Isaiah 45; 6-7 [Tenakh])

How might Jews respond to this question?

How might Christians respond to this question?

8. The value of revelation and enlightenment

Essential information:

- Theists believe that revelation and enlightenment are valuable sources of knowledge about the divine
- Revelations are difficult to prove because they are subjective, personal experiences. What some theists may regard as revelations, non-theists may understand in other ways

Individual revelations have a great impact on the lives of those who receive them, even to the extent that they change their religious thinking completely.

Nicky Cruz



▲ Nicky Cruz

Nicky Cruz was leader of the 'Mau Mau' gang in Brooklyn, NY in the 1950s. His life revolved around drugs, alcohol, and brutal violence. When his friend was stabbed, beaten and died in his arms, he began to have nightmares. He was arrested many times and a court-ordered psychiatrist said that Nicky was 'headed to prison, the electric chair, and hell.'

No one in authority could reach Cruz – until he met a Christian street-preacher named David Wilkerson. David showed Nicky something he'd never known before: love, care and interest. This was despite the fact that Nicky

beat him up, spat on him and once threatened to kill him.

At a religious meeting which Nicky attended with his gang, Wilkerson's preaching of the gospel message of Jesus' love and forgiveness got through to him. He felt called to go up to the front with some of his gang where he prayed with the preacher and asked God to forgive him. He and some other gang members converted to Christianity and handed their weapons in to the police. Nicky subsequently went to Bible college and became a minister in his old neighbourhood, even converting the new leader of the Mau Mau to belief in Jesus.

What does this story show about the value of revelation?

Revelation: reality or illusion?

Revelation cannot be proved, so how do believers know it is real? They may ask themselves these questions:

Question	Religious responses
Does their revelation match the real world?	The more the revelation aligns with what actually happens, the more likely it is to be real. For example, a revelation that claims people can fly is unlikely to be believed. A revelation that claims the water in a holy place can cure, and it then does, is more likely to be real.
Does it fit with other revelations accepted by a religion?	If it contradicts a long-held belief of a religion, it is less likely to be a true revelation. However, beliefs may change over time (e.g. about slavery or homosexual relationships) so this is not always the case.
Does it change the faith or the life of the person?	God's revelation to Abraham caused him to abandon his belief in idols, follow the one God and travel to Canaan to establish the Jewish nation. Such revelations are more likely to be accepted as true because they have such a powerful influence on a person's life.
Does it contradict the sacred text?	Different religions offer different paths to the divine. Within a faith there are different interpretations of sacred texts and how these apply to moral issues. If a particular interpretation or revelation disagrees with another verse in the Bible/Tenakh, then the interpretation or revelation may be questionable.

How might some people object or disagree to revelation as a way of knowing the divine?

Exam Practice Questions...

Give **two** weaknesses of the First Cause argument (2marks)

Give **two** possible causes of suffering (2marks)

Explain **two** contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about the Design argument for God's existence. In your answer you must refer to one or more religious traditions. You may refer to a non-religious belief. (4marks)

Explain **two** contrasting beliefs about miracles (4marks)

Explain **two** similar beliefs about general revelation (4marks)

Explain **two** religious beliefs visions. Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. (5marks)

Explain **two** religious beliefs about special revelation. Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. (5marks)

Explain **two** religious beliefs about God. Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. (5marks)

Evaluation questions (12marks)

'The First Cause argument proves that God exists'

'Evil and suffering proves that God does not exist'

'Miracles prove that God exists'

'It is easier to think of God as personal rather than impersonal'

In your answer you:

- Should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
- Should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- Should refer to religious arguments
- May refer to non-religious arguments
- Should reach a justified conclusion