

religious studies exam. The candidate has drawn a genuinely evaluative conclusion, which is logically derived from the material discussed. The result is a worthy A-grade essay.


Remember to learn Hume's arguments and the counter-arguments to them in detail. He is a named scholar on the specification and it is legitimate for examiners to set questions asking directly about his views.

The problem of evil (1)

- (a) For what reasons may evil and suffering cause problems for a religious believer? (8 marks)
- (b) Examine two solutions to the problem of evil and suffering and comment on their success. (32 marks)

- (a) The problem of evil and suffering poses a serious challenge to those who believe in an all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful God. If God is omnipotent, has created the universe and is totally responsible for it, and can do anything that is logically possible, then he could end evil and suffering. Furthermore, if God is omniscient and knows everything, he must know how to stop evil and suffering. Moreover, if God is omnibenevolent he would wish to end all evil and suffering. No all-loving God would wish his creation to suffer for no reason. Yet evil and suffering do exist, so either God is not what he is claimed to be or he does not exist: 'Either God cannot abolish evil or he will not: if he cannot then he is not all-powerful, if he will not, then he is not all good' (Augustine). Thomas Aquinas also recognised the power and logic of such arguments in his *Summa Theologica*: 'But the name of God means that he is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.' The problem poses an inconsistent triad: only two claims of three can simultaneously be true: God is all-loving; God is all-powerful; evil exists.

Different types of evil pose different problems. Natural evil raises the question of why God created a universe capable of acting in such violent and unpredictable ways. Moral evil demands an answer to the question why God created human beings who could freely, and invariably did, choose evil as well as good.

 In questions where part (a) contains relatively few marks, do not spend too long on lengthy description. Answer the question directly. The candidate makes a positive start here, making immediate reference to scholars, religious concepts and language. The answer is crisp and to the point and no time is wasted, referring to different types of evil but avoiding unnecessary lists.

- (b) However, such logical argument only works if we regard God's goodness as being the same as human goodness. In fact, it can be argued that God's goodness is very different and that he allows evil to exist as part of his greater plan of love. In a sense, God has a reason for evil and suffering to exist. A theodicy serves to offer an explanation why God would permit evil and suffering, possibly in the cause of a higher good that cannot otherwise be achieved. Such arguments suggest God is right to allow the existence of evil and suffering because, in some way or another, they are essential.

The Augustinian theodicy was developed by Augustine in *Confessions* and *De Genesi ad Litteram*. He argued that God is wholly good and that, according to Genesis 1, he created a world that was perfectly good and contained no evil and suffering. Augustine believed that evil itself is not a substance and God did not create it. Evil is the going wrong of something that is good. Augustine said evil came from those beings who had free will — angels and humans who turned their back on God, the supreme good, and settled for lesser goods. As a result, the perfect world was ruined by human sin. Natural evil was the result of the subsequent loss of order in nature and moral evil came from humanity's knowledge of good and evil.

Augustine argued that evil was a punishment and that all humans deserve to suffer because they are 'in the loins of Adam'. Christians refer to this as original sin. As a result, God does not stop evil and suffering as the punishment is justice for human sin and God is a just God. However, in his infinite love and grace, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die so that those who believed in him could be saved.

The Augustinian theodicy has been criticised on a number of grounds. Schleiermacher argued that it was a logical contradiction to say that a perfectly created world had gone wrong. Either the world was not perfect to start with, or God made it go wrong. If this is the case then it is God, not humanity, who is to blame. The theodicy can also be criticised on a scientific level. Augustine's view that the world was made perfect and damaged by humans is contrary to the theory of evolution, which suggests that the universe has been developing continually. Moreover, suffering is essential to survival — things must die in order that others might eat and live and God must bear the responsibility of this.


The existence of hell as a place of eternal punishment for those who do not accept salvation through Jesus seems a contradiction for an all-loving God. If hell were part of the design of the universe, did God know that the world would go wrong anyway and still allowed it to happen? If so, surely this is malevolent. This view is known as theological determinism. Although it allows for both God's sovereignty and human freedom, it teaches a limited atonement or salvation, which, to some, is counter-intuitive. However, theodicy is appealing to those who seek a traditional, biblical answer to the problem of evil and who are not put off by its lack of consistency with modern scientific views of the world.

A more modern concept is process theodicy, which stemmed from the views of A. N. Whitehead and was developed by David Griffin in his book *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy*. It is a radical theodicy which suggests that God is not omnipotent and did not create the universe. The universe is an uncreated process that is part of a bipolar God, who is bound by the natural laws of the universe. God started off the evolutionary process that led to the development of humans, but God does not have total control of the world and humans are free to ignore him. Like humans, God also suffers when evil happens because he is part of the same universe. Whitehead described God as the 'fellow sufferer who understands'.

God cannot stop evil because he does not have the power to change the natural process. However, because God started off the evolutionary process, he does bear some responsibility for it, as Griffin observed: 'God is responsible for evil in the sense of having urged the creation forward to those states in which discordant feelings could be felt with greater intensity.' God acts to try to ensure that the universe produces sufficient good to outweigh evil and believers are encouraged to fight alongside God against evil.

Critics of process theodicy argue that it brings into question the issue of whether such a limited God is actually a being worthy of worship. If God cannot prevail over evil, what is the point of human efforts? Although it may be true that good has outweighed evil, this is little comfort to those who have actually suffered and, since there is no promise of heaven, there is no certainty that the innocent sufferers will be rewarded. Nevertheless, the theodicy does address one logical problem: if God possesses the logical limits of power (all the power there is to possess), how can anyone else, humans included, possess any degree of power at all? We are aware of our freedom so it is reasonable to suggest that God's power may not, after all, be total.

In conclusion, the problem of evil and suffering offers a major argument against the existence of God, which religious believers find difficult to explain. They resort to unsatisfactory arguments in an attempt to understand the ways of a God whose purpose we cannot comprehend. The problem challenges the power of God and there are no easy answers. If God exists and wishes us to share in his creative activity and to enable us to live valuable and useful lives, evil is the price that has to be paid. As Richard Swinburne observed: 'The problem is that God cannot give us these goods in full measure without allowing much evil on the way.'

 An informed and coherent description of the different theodicies is made and the range of scholarly argument is impressive. The choice of process theodicy is a good contrast to Augustinian theodicy, although there is no intrinsic extra value in offering this instead of a more traditional solution. The candidate evaluates the differing viewpoints and leads the reader nicely from one to another. The student offers a conclusion that broadens the scope of the answer by considering more generally whether the problem of evil can be solved. The answer is fluent, with a good range of scholarship and appropriate technical language — a secure grade A.

This question is usually answered well by most candidates who attempt it. You need to make yours really stand out, so try to include an unusual piece of information or scholarship to catch the examiner's eye and convince him/her to give you full marks.