To put it simply, the Problem of Evil topic but simplified and sometimes a bit chattier than it should be.
The Specification

The problem of evil

• The concept of evil (natural and moral) and the logical and evidential problem of evil

• Religious responses to the problem of evil. Credit will be given for relevant knowledge of any theodicy, but candidates are expected to be familiar with the following:
  - The main themes of theodicies in the Augustinian tradition
  - The free will defence
  - John Hick’s 'vale of soul making' theodicy (from the Irenaean tradition)
  - Responses to evil in process thought

Issues arising

• The success of the theodicies as a response to the problem of evil

• What poses the greatest challenge to faith in God – natural evil or moral evil?

• Is free will a satisfactory explanation for the existence of evil in a world created by God?

• The strengths and weaknesses of these responses to the problem of evil
The concept of evil (natural and moral) and the logical and evidential problem of evil

- **Natural (or non-moral) evil** refers to evils caused by the natural state of things i.e. they are nothing to do with human intentions and choices. They are evils brought about by the laws of nature and the state of the world. We would include natural disasters and death under this definition.

- **Moral evil** refers to evils that have come about as a direct result of human intentions and choices. These are evils that simply wouldn't have occurred if it hadn't have been for humans. We would include war, crime, prejudice and genocide under this definition.

- It can get tricky, though, because some 'natural' evils have only had such damaging effects because of moral evils.
  
  e.g. Take the floods in Pakistan or the effects of the Boxing Day Tsunami (2004) on the people of Indonesia. Hundreds of thousands of people had built their homes on low-lying land because of poverty. Their houses were flimsy and especially vulnerable to the effects of these natural disasters. Why do we allow other humans to live in such poor conditions, placing themselves in such terrible danger, while others have far more wealth than they need? A Buddhist might say that the 3 poisons (craving, aggression, ignorance) have fed these situations. In this sense, some natural events are ultimately only damaging because of certain moral evils already occurring.

- It could also be argued that some moral evils are really natural evils e.g. remember when we looked at the effects of genetic mutations that cause violence. If these mutations exist because of the way the laws of nature work (in this case, our biological and chemical mechanisms) then it is hard to see why a human should be held accountable for what happens.

- So it's messy.

- St. Augustine believed that no such thing as evil even really exists. He believed that 'evil' is actually just a "privation of good". In other words, anything that does not have goodness in it we automatically call evil, but really there is no evil. It's probably because he realised that if there is such a thing as evil then God made it, and that makes God 's morality a bit questionable, so one way of sorting out the problem is to say that God can't really be held responsible for the creation of something that doesn't really exist as an entity. It becomes a bit contradictory later on though, when Augustine starts saying humans brought evil into the world after their disobedience in the garden of Eden. What did they bring in, again, Augustine? We thought evil isn't really a thing.

- Buddhist teachings are that suffering is ultimately a product of the human mind and that nothing is inherently evil. If we dealt with life and attachment better, we wouldn't be so upset when things go wrong. So they don't really see moral or natural evils, only humans who suffer and humans who have learnt how not to.
The Logical Problem of Evil

This was first put forward by the Greek thinker, Epicurus. Here are the possible options presented by the 'problem of evil':

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God knows about evil, wants to stop it but cannot stop evil in the world</th>
<th>God is not all-powerful (omnipotent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God knows about evil, is able to stop it but does not want to stop evil in the world</td>
<td>God is not all-good (benevolent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God can stop evil and wants to stop evil but does not know when evil exists</td>
<td>God is not all knowing (omniscient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God doesn't exist</td>
<td>This is why evil exists</td>
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So, either God is not all-loving, all-powerful or all-knowing, in which case he is NOT the God of classical theism (and not worthy of worship) OR there is no God.

- The logical problem of evil is what we call an *a priori* deductive argument. What this means is that, as long as we know the premises to be true (i.e. P1 that evil exists and P2 that an all-loving, all-knowing & all-powerful God would always stop evil) then, through reasoning alone, we can deduce the conclusion that there is no God, or that whatever being God is, it is not the God of classical theism.
- Deductive arguments are very clever and difficult to undermine. **If the premises are true in a deductive argument then the conclusion HAS to follow.** A premise is a piece of evidence that is used to support an argument. If the premises (either one) are undermined, the conclusion is no longer supported. Therefore, there are only two ways to successfully resolve the logical problem of evil and that is to undermine one or the other of the two premises. Therefore:
  - If you can prove there is no ‘evil’ in the world (e.g. as Buddhists believe, and as Augustine argues) then the 1st premise collapses
  - If you can prove that an all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful God would have a *good reason* not to stop evil, then the 2nd premise collapses
• So, the free will defence and the soul making theodicy both attempt to undermine the 2\textsuperscript{nd} premise, while the Augustinian theodicy tries to undermine the 1\textsuperscript{st} AND the 2\textsuperscript{nd} premise (a little confusingly). Process theodicy \textit{doesn’t} try to undermine either premise, but \textit{accepts} the conclusion that the being that we call God is not the God of classical theism.

\textbf{The Evidential Problem of Evil}

• This was first put forward by J.S. Mill, commented on by many thinkers and writers until finally being developed by William Rowe. Some thinkers, such as the Scottish philosopher David Hume, have called the problem of evil “the rock of atheism”, suggesting that the entirety of atheist belief could be built on the problem of evil alone. For this reason, Rowe calls his evidential argument \textit{An argument for atheism}, rather than the evidential ‘problem’ of evil.

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textbf{Premise 1:} There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse \tabularnewline
\textbf{Premise 2:} An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse \tabularnewline
\textbf{Conclusion:} [as instances of intense suffering do occur, despite the fact that God was able and had motive to prevent them] There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.
\end{tabular}

• Imagine this page represents all the evil in the world.
• Then this \textbf{oval} thing represents all the evil God doesn’t stop because it serves some greater good (e.g. we need to use our free will, or it helps us grow morally and spiritually).
• This \textbf{rectangle} represents all the evil that God doesn’t stop because if he did, something just as bad or worse would happen (e.g. if the Holocaust had never happened then maybe at some later stage some far worse genocide would have taken place)

\begin{tabular}{l}
Evil that exists because it serves a good purpose (condition 1) \tabularnewline
Evil that exists because otherwise something just as bad or worse would happen (condition 2 for not stopping evil)
\end{tabular}

• What Rowe is asking is: \textit{what about all the evil left over (i.e. the rest of the sheet of paper)? Why doesn’t God stop that?} He argues that an all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful God would want to stop any evil that doesn’t meet conditions 1 or 2. But as plenty of remaining evil doesn’t meet conditions 1 or 2, it looks like God is either cruel or non-existent.

• It is an \textit{a posteriori inductive} argument. This means that even if the premises are true, the conclusion- that God doesn’t exist- doesn’t necessarily follow, but is merely a \textit{probable} conclusion. The only way to undermine an inductive argument is to suggest that the conclusion is not the most probable explanation of the premises.
Hick responds that, because of epistemic distance, we simply don't realise that ALL the evil in the world meets conditions 1 and 2. The free will defence often (e.g. Swinburne) uses the same or a similar line of thinking.

Process theodicy explains that God is simply not able to stop all of the evil.

Augustine is faffing around with the whole what-is-evil discussion but, anyway, it serves us right for disobeying God in the garden of Eden etc. etc.

So, all of these responses argue that there are other probable conclusions as to why God doesn't seem to be stopping all the remaining evil.

J.S. Mill...

The British philosopher, John Stuart Mill, argued that evil alone is enough to prove that either God does not exist or that, if he does, he is not all-loving (perhaps even malevolent/cruel).

Mill's argument came in response to the design argument, which stated that the evidence of design in the world was proof of there being a designer. Mill's response is that, using the same logic, evidence of evil in the world can be used as proof of a malevolent creator.

He argues that the pain and suffering that humanity is put through on a daily basis must force us to question the existence of the God of classical theism. Mill argues that nature is even crueler than the human mind. By implication, the “evidence” of design in nature points to a cruel designer, or else no designer at all.

Mill writes:
"if the law of all creation were justice
and the creator omnipotent then,
in whatever amount suffering and happiness might be dispensed to the world,
each person's share of them would be exactly proportioned to that person's good
or evil deeds....
every human life would be the playing out of a drama constructed like a perfect
moral tale...
[yet] no one is able to blind himself to the fact that the world we live in is totally
different from this...
the order of things in this life is often an example of injustice, not justice”.
J.S. Mill, Nature and Utility of Religion (1874)

To rephrase: if everything God created was ruled by the law of justice and the creator (God) was omnipotent, then however much suffering and happiness was handed out in the world it would always be proportionate to that person's evil or good actions. It would seem like each person's life had a moral at the end of the story, whether positive or negative. Yet we can all see life is nothing like that; it would seem that injustice is the law that rules the world God created.

Mill was especially interested in the problem of natural evil, particularly the evils that exist in the animal kingdom. He felt these were particularly excessive and cruel and could not possibly be seen to be purposeful. He concluded there was no God and that such natural evils were the product of natural biological instincts.
Religious responses to the problem of evil:
The main themes of theodicies in the Augustinian tradition:

- One religious response to the problem of evil comes from the early Christian thinker, St Augustine, who lived in the 4th-5th century CE
- **The Free Will defence**: Augustine argued that when God created the world He made it perfect, but then humans misused their free will and bodged it all up. Originally, we were all happy in the garden of Eden without any knowledge of good and evil, but our naturally disobedient natures meant that we went ahead and did the *one* thing that God asked us not to do. Augustine also argues that evil isn’t really a thing in itself, but is actually a ‘privation of good’ i.e. an absence of good.
- After that, everything all went a bit weird. Suddenly humans lost their immortality and things actually became difficult for them. We were sad and annoyed about this at the time, but then it turns out that all of Adam’s descendants inherited that first sin of Adam’s (yep, Augustine created the concept of original sin). So, basically, we’re screwed. We’re naturally prone to doing immoral things and we experience immoral things because we’re being punished.
- To cap it all off, God knew it was all going to happen and He didn’t stop it. One thinker, John Calvin, went so far as to say that God actually orchestrated the original sin. Augustine himself also had this belief in pre-destination. According to this view, God knew in advance who would and wouldn’t choose to do good things so salvation is being offered to only a few of the nicer people. The rest are totally going to burn in hell. Sucks to be them. Or us.
- **Aesthetic theory**: Another idea Augustine has is what we call the aesthetic theory: that from a distance all the evil and goods come together to make a morally beautiful world. We just need to see the bigger picture then we would understand that evil is needed to balance everything out in the end. Because God exacts justice for both good and bad people in the afterlife, all actions will contribute to an overall moral perfection.
- The **Contrast theory** is similar. It states that evil and good are necessary opposites, that we could not know good unless we knew evil as well. In fact, the existence of evil means that we have some point of reference by which to know how to be good.
- This *Escher* painting demonstrates how both light and dark are needed to create the whole image and how the two exist in connection to one another. So, contrast theory seems to link well with aesthetic theory.
Analysing the Augustinian theodicies

- Generally speaking, these fragments don’t constitute a whole theodicy.
- One frequent problem is that a lot of people just don’t believe in the biblical creation account anymore so you have that whole prejudice to tackle (i.e. that it’s a "pre-scientific" view, as Hick argued).
- Also, the idea that we were all seminally present in Adam’s loins just sounds odd. There’s certainly nothing scientific about it. It has its origins in the Old Testament belief that descendants got inheritances of all sorts of weird and wonderful things, like Abraham’s ancestors inheriting the covenant, just by virtue of being related to Abraham. It certainly doesn’t appear to be genetically possible to inherit a sin (then again Richard Dawkins argues for the existence of “memes”, which are units of cultural inheritance - so maybe we’re talking about something similar).
- The contrast theory holds some appeal, though. Without evil it would be a funny old world and perhaps we just wouldn’t even conceive of doing anything good. So maybe it’s true that goodness needs evil to shine a spotlight on it.
- Maybe the more evil there is the more opportunities to do good there are too. That’s a nice way of thinking about it. It has a touch of the ‘vale of soul-making’ about it, too. So a bit of compatibility there.
- The salvation thing is tricky. Irenaeus and Hick believed in universal salvation (that everyone would be ‘saved’ and go to heaven) but Augustine believed that only some people will go to heaven: these are the people who accept Jesus died for their sins. Er, except, God’s already decided who is and isn’t going to accept that Jesus died for their sins. So, basically, God knows already whether you’re cruising towards heaven or on the fast track to burnin’ in hell. That’s because he’s all knowing and stuff. It’s not that you don’t have the choice of whether you do good or bad things. It’s just that God already knows every single choice you’re ever going to make and so he cut to the chase and reserved a place for you in heaven or hell in advance. It’s all a bit over organised. Divine OCD perhaps. But it does seem to undermine free will.
- The aesthetic theory that, from a distance, all goods and evils come together to form some overarching moral beauty (especially in light of heaven and hell and justice being exacted in the afterlife etc.) has some appeal. People don’t mind a bit of epistemic distance and here it is, being wheeled out again.
- Some people don’t like Augustine’s approach because these ideas about devils, angels, hell etc. don’t fit in with the more modern Christian understanding of God as completely just, loving and the source of agape. Basically, people are happier with God than they are with the other stuff. It can make people feel…icky. Like it’s all a bit superstitious.
- Lastly, there’s the punishment thing: it makes it all seem like God’s a petty, petty deity. Two people made one mistake thousands of years ago. Let’s just move on now, God. Take Irenaeus, for example, he doesn’t even care about the Fall. Besides, if sin adds to the moral beauty of the world, why punish us? Makes no sense.
Religious responses to the problem of evil: The free will defence

- One of the key themes in Augustine’s theodicy is the idea that evil is the result of human free will (or angelic free will), rather than God’s will. This theme has since been developed into a theodicy in its own right called the free will defence (FWD).

- Firstly, the FWD argues that free will is an essential part of humanity, without which we would be mere robots.

- Therefore free will is important enough to be worth the risk of evil.

- Secondly, the FWD argues that genuine free will comes with the genuine possibility of evil so for God to have taken away any possibility of evil He would have to have taken away our free will.

- The FWD then argues that all the terrible evils that have occurred through history have, in some way, been necessary to our free will.

- The FWD centres around the idea that for humans to have a meaningful relationship with God, it must be a relationship freely entered into; therefore they must love God of their own free will.

- This means that, ultimately, humans must have the choice to do good or commit evil.

- The ‘problem of evil’ is therefore resolved by arguing that moral evil occurs when humans abuse their God-given free will; God can therefore not be held accountable.

- The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard used the parable of the king and the peasant girl to support the FWD; in this parable the King represents God and the peasant girl represents humankind. A rich king falls in love with a peasant girl and plans to force her to marry him, then worries that he’ll never know if she loves him. Then he plans to impress her with his finest clothes, but worries she’ll only fall in love with his wealth and power. Finally he decides to be a peasant and try to win her love that way so that he can know her love for him is genuine. The parable illustrates that God’s only way of knowing we love him genuinely is to allow us to freely love him.

- However, the parable is problematic. If the king’s decision led to the murder of many innocent people we might question how the girl could, or why she should, ever love the king.

- The problem is left of why at least the most serious evils are not stopped. Swinburne argues that all evils are needed for us to develop a sense of moral responsibility and to develop (very Irenaean), “for he simply would not allow us the choice of doing real harm...he would be like an over-protective parent who will not let his child out of sight for a moment.” However, Swinburne does believe that God can and does perform a miracle...which seems a bit contradictory.
Analysing the free will defence

- The FWD provides a logical reason for the existence of **moral evil** in the world and removes the blame from God by placing it on humanity (and possibly angels, in the Augustinian tradition). Generally speaking, it is seen to not adequately account for natural evils as these could be prevented without infringing on human free will.

- Modern philosophers generally support the view that the possibility of evil is a **necessary condition** of free will.

- The philosopher Mackie argued that God could have created humans whose nature is such that they always freely choose to do good but Hick and Plantinga argue this isn't possible: we would simply not be free. If God *designed* us to always choose good our decisions would actually be predetermined, like programmed robots.

- There is some support for the FWD from those who believe that free will is **sufficiently good** to prevent God from intervening to lessen evil (which would involve taking free will away). What they mean is, free will makes evil **worth** it and makes evil ultimately purposeful. Many Christians feel that the reward of having a meaningful (freely chosen) relationship with God is the greatest reward of all.

- Richard Swinburne provides quite a clever explanation of how the FWD can respond to the problem presented by natural evils (which obviously are not caused by the exercising of human free will):

  "There must be limits to the intensity of suffering. A natural death...is a boundary to the power of an agent against another agent". Death limits the time during which an individual is able to inflict suffering on others, which could highlight God's **benevolence**. Swinburne’s FWD therefore explains death and perhaps other natural evils that are necessary to facilitate death (floods, tsunamis, hurricanes, disease etc.).

- Furthermore, Swinburne argued that God placed the earth under the governance of the laws of nature so that, to some extent, we can learn how to predict and manage the evils we come across. This way we can act freely but develop scientific and geographical knowledge that aids our moral decision making.

- William Rowe does quite a good job of highlighting evils that don't fulfil the role Swinburne outlines above. He uses the example of a fawn dying in a forest fire and says that many other instances of animal suffering have nothing to do with human free will. Death exists for all living beings and often occurs in a cruel, sadistic or just an arbitrary manner. Rowe argues that a God that chooses to ignore these instances of evil is either morally questionable or non-existent.

- Plantinga pops back in at this point to remind us that God might not be intervening in those instances as to do so would violate the free will of angels. Of course.
Religious responses to the problem of evil:
John Hick’s ‘vale of soul making’ theodicy
(from the Irenaean tradition)

- This theodicy finds its roots in the philosophy of Irenaeus, a 2nd century Christian thinker
- According to this approach God created the world to be imperfect from the start. This imperfection allows for humans to freely develop from the image of God to the likeness of God. In case you’re wondering what the difference is: to be in the image of God means to have taken God’s form i.e. to have the capacity to be civilised, rational and religious. To be in God’s likeness is to be morally good and spiritually developed.
- A human’s freedom gives him/her the potential to grow into the likeness of God through responsible choices and the exercise of this free will enables a human to make a difference to their environment
- Hick develops this way of thinking in far more detail, explaining that the best goods come from free will. We develop "virtues through hardship" and these freely developed virtues are infinitely better than any virtues God could have instilled in us from scratch. The cardinal and heavenly virtues are a good example of these.
- For Hick, it is not true to say that God made the world perfect and that we then ruined it (as Augustine says). Instead he says the perfect world is something we have to look forward to in the future, something we all create together. In fact, we might not even see our own moral perfection until the afterlife (the eschaton).
- Hick and Irenaeus both support universal salvation - the idea that everyone will be worthy of a place in heaven at some point. Hick suggests that those who are still not worthy at death will continue life in some form (this could be through reincarnation, for example) until they have earned their place. In fact, reincarnation would seem to be the best way to achieve this and is, of course, what Hindus and Buddhists already believe.
- Hick coined the phrase 'epistemic distance’. This is a distance in knowledge between what God knows and what we know. He claims this is incredibly important as, if we knew what God knows, we would have no choice but to always do the right thing and, actually, it’s important that we go ahead and make mistakes and learn from them (and that we learn from the mistakes of others, too). Free will is very important in this theodicy. The more opportunities we get to exercise our free will, the more opportunities we get to do the right thing. Even when we use our free will to do the wrong thing, we still grow in some way as a result.
- A world with moral evil in it directly pushes us to mature morally and spiritually.
- A world with natural evil is unpredictable and challenging; this indirectly helps us to develop certain skills and qualities.
Analysing the soul making theodicy

- Hick himself recognises the criticism that this much pain and suffering is simply not needed to bring about the perfected state of humankind. However, he responds that all extremes of evil serve a purpose in God's plan. If we want less evil, we must exchange that for our free will (see the free will defence on the same issue).
- Hick also recognises the criticism that evil seems to strike arbitrarily (as J.S. Mill pointed out - happiness and suffering are not handed out proportionately to good and bad people). In response Hick claims that if such obvious punishing and rewarding took place, it would be the same as God giving us direct knowledge of right and wrong, which would undermine our free will (see earlier on epistemic distance).
- Some argue that this theodicy is the most comforting and more useful for those with faith than any other theodicy. Here, God is an infinitely wise being who understands that although suffering is terrible, it also has the potential to bring about amazing goods. It might help us, as individuals, to cope with our own instances of suffering. The other way of seeing it is that even if I don't learn from this evil and suffering, someone else might.
- However, the Russian writer, Dostoevsky has something to say on this last point. As Ivan in his story Rebellion (part of the book The Brothers Karamazov) he does a great job at highlighting some of the problems of this theodicy. Whilst acknowledging the mystery of epistemic distance:

“I am a boy and I recognise in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is”

He is also indignant:

“surely I haven't suffered...[to] manure the soil of the future harmony for someone else”

- The concept of epistemic distance often comes under fire. It seems to be one of those concepts that just gets wheeled out all the time and it can be very, very irritating. Almost anything that reflects badly on God can be glossed over by suggesting we simply don't know enough to make sense of it. Why doesn't God answer my prayers? Only God knows. Why doesn't God perform miracles anymore? God must have his reasons- we just don't know them. Why does God allow small children and the innocent to suffer when they have done nothing wrong? God understands why it all has to happen; it isn't for us to question. It could be argued there is no epistemic distance, only a distance in existence i.e. that we do exist and God doesn't. Take the same 3 questions and respond because there is no God and the questions are more than adequately answered.
Religious responses to the problem of evil:

Responses to evil in process thought

- The key thinkers behind this approach are A.N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne and David Griffin
- In Whitehead's words, God is “the great companion- the fellow sufferer who understands”, so he is not separate from his creation but part of it and developing with it, influencing events but not determining them
- Process thought, far removed from standard Christian responses as we have seen here, is able to solve the problem of evil by surrendering God's omnipotence
- God remains able to affect his creation through his infinite persuasive powers but he cannot eradicate (i.e. get rid of) evil or even prevent it from happening. He has no coercive powers.
- Process thought has at its starting point a different understanding of the biblical creation story, which is more in line with the thinking of Hebrew scholars. Process thought claims that God did NOT create ex-nihilo ('from nothing') but rather he crafted the world from pre-existent matter and that is why it is fundamentally flawed
- God then set in motion the process of evolution, knowing how mankind would evolve (due to his omniscience) and fully aware that we would commit evils
- However, God also knew (see above omniscience) that it would all turn out OK in the end. Aw.
- Although God is not omnipotent, he is not impotent (powerless). God has infinite persuasive power over his creation and is constantly trying to guide us (and the natural world) to fulfil his will for us all. However, as he can only persuade and not coerce, humans, animals and matter constantly deviate from his will and basically do their own annoying thing. Still, at least God tries.
- In process thought all of the problems presented by moral and natural evil are resolved, along with both the logical (arguably) and evidential problems of evil. The problem is, it leaves us with this slightly disappointing God that many would say isn't worthy of worship. Griffin, however, believed this to be a God more worthy of worship, especially now he can't be accused of being unjust and malevolent and stuff. Griffin argued that God's lack of omnipotence is more than compensated for by his omnibenevolence
- According to process thought, then, God did not create evil for some overarching purpose. However, God crafted a world in which evil would come to exist, knowing that complex beings can experience great joy in a world that has within it great sadness. What we can gain through exposure to evils (even though they exist unintentionally) therefore justifies God's decision to go ahead with creation.
While every advance in the creative process has been a risk, since greater sufferings were thereby made possible as well as greater goods this has never been a risk which God has urged us creatures to run alone. It has always been a risk for God too. In fact God is the only being who has experienced every single evil that has occurred in the creation. This means that God is the one being in a position to judge whether the goods available have been worth the price. (Griffin)

### Analysing process thought

- Many reject this approach for not being a theodicy and instead it is normally referred to as process thought or process theology.
- It is frequently said that process thought does not resolve the problem of evil but merely sidesteps it. This is a tricky one. In one way it does fail to sort out the problem of evil in the way your average religious believer needs it to. But omnibenevolence is surely more important for belief in a good and just God (i.e. the God of the New Testament) than power. So, many feel that the trade-off is not hard to accept. God is not omnipotent, but as his omnibenevolence is preserved—even accentuated— he is still a God worthy of worship.
- The other part of this approach that people find tricky is that God did not create the world ex-nihilo. This makes this position impossible to accept for readers of the Bible who have a different understanding of the book of Genesis. Some Christians (creationists) also reject the possibility of God's creation taking the form of evolution. They believe that God made the world in 6 days. Evolution is key to Griffin's process thought as it is one of the processes that exists to shape humans into a diverse, joyful and moral species without forcing them.
- Many feel that a God that suffers alongside his creation is a God you can have a more meaningful relationship with. Also, you can trust God because he would not have started the process of creation unless he knew it would all be for the best in the end. So, there, you can trust him and you can relate to him.
- Some religious believers reject process thought on the grounds that other theodicies can fully explain the existence of evil without having to sacrifice one of the divine attributes. However, other theodicies such as those of Augustine and Irenaeus, particularly, are often accused of not fully defending God's omnibenevolence, especially when we look at the volume and severity of evil that exists to serve the purposes they outline. So, maybe the difference is just that process thought openly gives up omnipotence, while other theodicies flail around pretending they've sorted everything when really they've left massive question marks hanging over the loving and just bit.
- Peter Hare in his article *Evil and Persuasive Power* queried how so many humans remain unpersuaded [to act morally] even with God's persuasive power.
Non-religious responses to the problem of evil

- The evidential argument is an argument for atheism. It claims that the existence of evil is good grounds to believe there is no God, that evil can be used to rationalise atheism.
- When you think about it...atheism resolves every single aspect of the problem of evil. The inconsistent triad? Simply remove all of the divine attributes and this being we call God as well. The evidential problem? Yep, it IS evidence there’s no God. Moral evil? Bad humans. Natural evil? Unfortunate events. There’s nothing to defend but also nothing/no being to attack. Evil is terrible, but in the absence of a God, we just need to cope with it the best we can. Many atheists (such as Richard Dawkins) agree with Hick, that the existence of suffering does push humanity forward and help us to become better people. He says that no deity is needed for this explanation to make sense. However, it is not purposeful, merely a happy accident that this is what happens.
- A Buddhist response may also be seen as a non-religious response as it is an atheist belief system, often called a philosophy of life.
- In Buddhism there is no such thing really as 'evil'- neither moral nor natural, but suffering is accepted as real. Events are what they are, whether we suffer or not is ultimately up to our own attitudes and way of seeing the world.
- Buddhists claim that all of our mental states (and therefore our moral decisions) are vulnerable to the three poisons of craving, aggression and ignorance. These lead us to cause suffering but also explain why we experience suffering e.g. the suffering we feel in a grieving situation is really just a product of craving for/attachment to the person we’ve lost.
- Buddhists claim that by living according to the Noble Eightfold Path, by meditating to reduce the effects of the 3 poisons and by being more aware of who we are and what we do, we can drastically reduce the effects of suffering.
- So, here we have two alternative ways of looking at the problem of evil. Do they do a better job than the religious responses? That’s up to you to decide. However, seeing as the problem is a problem for religious believers it’s difficult to imagine they would want to just throw all of their beliefs to one side and take on atheism (though, of course, this does happen for many religious believers when they encounter evil and suffering in their lives). Likewise, Buddhism requires a whole shift in thinking, which many may not be prepared to take on.
Issues arising

The success of the theodicies as a response to the problem of evil

You're looking to answer two questions here:

1. Do any of the theodicies, individually or collectively, successfully resolve the logical problem of evil? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Do any of the theodicies, individually or collectively, successfully resolve the evidential problem of evil? If so, how? If not, why not?

Clever clog possible question: Do any of the theodicies, individually or collectively, respond to the problem of evil in some other way? E.g. providing comfort, purpose. If the answer is yes you could argue that it’s not the logic of the theodicy that counts but how its central ideas help a faith believer on a personal level.

What poses the greatest challenge to faith in God - natural evil or moral evil?

There are four possible answers here:

1. Moral evil poses the greater challenge
2. Natural evil poses the greater challenge
3. Moral and natural evil pose an equal challenge
4. Neither moral or natural evil pose any challenge

Each of these ‘answers’ need discussion.

Clever clog possible answer: It depends on how strong your faith in God is, or how greatly you’ve been personally affected by one or the other of these two types of evil. What does it mean to be challenged? Sometimes faith is made stronger as a result of challenge. Or, the greater the challenge, the more possibility for personal growth and sometimes we accept the challenge for that reason.

Is free will a satisfactory explanation for the existence of evil in a world created by God?

1. Draw out the free will elements of the different theodicies to consider this question
2. Consider Plantinga’s argument that the free will of all created beings could be taken into account
3. What would qualify as ‘satisfactory’?
4. And is ‘satisfactory’ enough for a God worthy of worship?

Clever clogs: It depends on which type of free will argument you’re looking at. Swinburne’s and Kierkegaard’s might be more satisfactory than Augustine’s, for example.

The strengths and weaknesses of these responses to the problem of evil

You need to:
1. Learn the strengths and weaknesses of the different theodicies
2. Decide in advance of the exam whether the strengths outweigh the weaknesses

Clever clogs: The weaknesses of one may be the strengths of another- you could conclude by proposing alterations to the theodicy you’re being asked about
Possible Revision Tasks

1. **Work synoptically**
   Using your revision cards of the four theodicies, prepare mind maps on how they all resolve common problems e.g. moral evil, natural evil, the logical problem and the evidential problem. To go further, evaluate which are the *most* successful (when in direct contrast to one another) at resolving these issues and why.

2. **Compare and contrast**
   Prepare compare and contrast notes on any two theodicies (or all four if you're feeling ambitious) to identify common features and clear differences.
   E.g. all four theodicies have a free will defence within them.
   This will prepare you for any questions that focus on general ideas rather than a specific theodicy.

3. **Practise conclusions**
   Imagine the question is 'Evaluate the success of __________ in resolving the problem of evil'. Write bullet points for your main arguments and then dedicate your main time to practise writing *just the conclusion* for all four theodicies. Aim for the conclusions to be half to two-thirds of a page long. Start thinking about how a conclusion draws together different points and concentrate on ensuring the conclusion is well supported by the arguments you put forward elsewhere.

4. **Test your memory**
   Make one set of smallish, one-sided flash cards that have the phrases: key thinkers, moral evil, natural evil, logical problem, evidential problem, strengths, weaknesses and conclusions written on them. On another set write out the name of the 4 responses: FWD, Augustine, soul-making, process. Put the two sets of flashcards next to one another. Turn over a card from the left pile and a card from the right pile and see if you know what the link is. E.g. turn over moral evil and process - *How does process thought explain the existence and purpose of moral evil?*

5. **Practise your analysis**
   Pick any aspect of a theodicy and explain it. Then analyse or criticise that point. Then, try to see if the original point can be defended against the counter argument. Then, see if the counter argument has a comeback also. Go backwards and forwards for as long as you can until finally deciding which wins (maybe neither wins - even more interesting for the conclusion). This should show you which points are the stronger and remind you that analysis can be very complex and should certainly be more complex than one argument and a counter argument.