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A-level Religious Studies
OCR H573/01 · Arguments based on observation

Sample factfile

Design and Cosmological Arguments at a Glance

IN A NUTSHELL **Can we reason from what we observe in the world to God? The design and cosmological arguments are a posteriori: they start from experience.**

1 Key terms

A posteriori
based on experience

Inductive
probable, not certain

Contingent
could have not existed

Necessary being
cannot not exist

2 The design argument

- Aquinas' Fifth Way: things without minds act for an end, as an arrow is aimed by an archer (Summa Theologica I, q.2, a.3).
- Paley (1802): a watch found on a heath must have a maker; nature shows far more design, as in the eye.
- Support: Tennant (1930); Swinburne (1979); fine-tuning (Rees, 1999).

3 Against design

- Hume, Dialogues (1779): weak analogy; the Epicurean hypothesis; many gods or an "infant deity"; evil in nature.
- Darwin (1859): natural selection explains adaptation without a designer; Dawkins (1986).

4 The cosmological argument

- Way 1: motion needs an unmoved mover. Way 2: causes need an uncaused cause.
- Way 3: contingent things need a necessary being.
- Aquinas denies an infinite essential (per se) series, not every infinite series.

5 Against the cosmological argument

- Hume: causation is habit (1748); the fallacy of composition (Dialogues IX).
- Russell (BBC debate with Copleston, 1948): "the universe is just there, and that's all."

6 Exam tip

Separate "prove" from "make probable". Both arguments are inductive, so the best essays judge them as evidence, not as proofs.

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