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The Problem of Evil at a Glance

A-level Religious Studies
OCR H573/01 · The problem of evil

Sample factfile

IN A NUTSHELL **If God is all-powerful and wholly good, why is there evil and suffering? The logical problem says God and evil cannot both exist; the evidential problem says evil makes God unlikely.**

1 Key terms

Moral evil
caused by human choice

Natural evil
caused by nature

Theodicy
justifying God

Privatio boni
evil as lack of good

2 The problem

- Logical: Epicurus' questions (Hume, Dialogues X, 1779); Mackie's inconsistent triad (1955).
- Reply: Plantinga's free will defence (1974).
- Evidential: Rowe's fawn (1979); Gregory S. Paul on the deaths of children (2007).

3 Augustine (354–430)

- God made a perfect world; evil is a privation of good.
- Angels and humans fell through free will; natural evil followed the Fall.
- All sinned "in Adam" (Romans 5:12): a soul-deciding theodicy.

4 Against Augustine

- Schleiermacher: a perfect world cannot go wrong.
- Evolution: suffering existed long before humans.
- Is inherited guilt just?

5 Hick (Evil and the God of Love, 1966)

- Irenaeus: made in God's image, growing into God's likeness (Genesis 1:26).
- A "vale of soul-making"; epistemic distance; a world of real risk; all saved in the end.
- Against: the Holocaust; Phillips (2004): "love can never be expressed by cancer".

6 Exam tip

Judge moral and natural evil separately. Free will answers moral evil far better than natural evil.

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