

# Preparation for A-Level : Philosophy

## The Problem of Evil

Remember this is A-Level work, it is difficult and it is ok if you do not fully understand it. It often takes several lessons with a teacher to understand it so working on your own may be difficult but give it a go.

If Christians are going to believe in an all-loving and all-powerful God they MUST be able to explain why God allows evil... this is the Problem of Evil.

“Evil is a perpetual burden of doubt for the believer and an obstacle to commitment for the unbeliever.” **Hick**

“If the theist does not have a satisfactory answer to it, then his belief in God is less than rational, and there is no reason the atheist should share it.” **Swinburne**

### Types of Evil

**Moral Evil** : Where the actions of man cause suffering. In theological terms, it is the falling short of human purpose, given by God.

> *Quotation*: “Moral evil is the evil that we human beings originate: cruel, vicious, unjust and perverse thoughts and deeds”. **Hick**

> *Quotation*: “The evil constituted by deliberate actions or negligent failure” **Swinburne**

**Natural Evil** : Where the world appears to malfunction and events occur that appear out of our control.

> *Quotation*: “Natural evil is the evil that originates independently of human actions, in disease, in bacilli, in earthquakes, storms, droughts, tornadoes, etc.” **Hick**

**Natural through Moral Evil** : Where what is apparently natural evil occurs, but does so owing to the action of humans e.g. pollution causing global warming

> *Quotation*: “When man’s disregard for his place in the natural order causes grievous physical harm to God’s creation.” **Gina Akron**



Hole in the Ozone Layer?



### Suffering

The **result of evil is suffering**. Make sure that you do not confuse evil and its result. Sometimes suffering rather than evil may be used in the wording of a question – **beware**.

*Quotation*: “The state of mind in which we wish violently or obsessively that our situation were otherwise.” **Hick**

### The Problem of Evil



**Mackie**  
20<sup>th</sup> Century  
Philosopher

#### J. L. Mackie’s Inconsistent Triad

**Mackie** developed the problem of evil by responding to theodicies that have been put forward to explain the existence of suffering and evil. He maintained that the triad of (1) evil and suffering (2) an omnipotent God and (3) an omnibenevolent God was inconsistent and could never be reconciled. The only solution would be to reject one aspect of the triad.

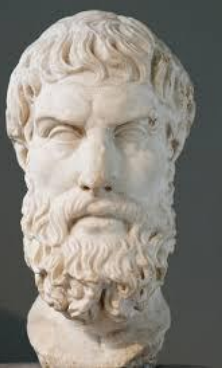
Mackie asserts that all theodicies are misleading because they weaken the meaning of the term ‘omnipotence’. The ‘Paradox of Omnipotence’ demonstrates this; God cannot make things which he cannot subsequently control e.g. ‘make rules which bind himself’ thus God cannot truly be omnipotent. “the Paradox of Omnipotence has shown that God’s omnipotence must in any case be restricted in one way or another” Mackie

Evil and  
suffering exists



God's  
Omni benevolence

God's  
Omnipotence

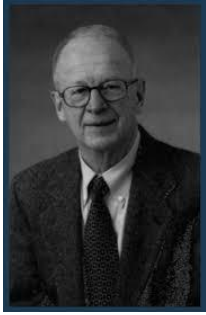


**Epicurus**  
4<sup>th</sup> Century BC  
Philosopher

### Logical Problem of Evil (Epicurus)

The 'logical' problem of evil and suffering arises when we consider the co-existence of evil and the belief in an all-powerful (omnipotent) and all-loving (omnibenevolent) God. If God is all-powerful He knows about evil and could stop it, if God is all-loving He should want to stop it but evil exists. This is a theistic problem because without the belief in an all-powerful or all-loving God one wouldn't have to explain the existence of evil.

"Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to"  
**Epicurus**



**William Rowe**  
20<sup>th</sup> Century  
Philosopher

William Rowe asserted..

1. There exist instances of intense suffering an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good being could prevent whilst not losing a greater good or allowing an evil equally bad or worse
2. By definition, such a being would prevent intense suffering
3. Because evil exists, there does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

Rowe recognised sometimes intense suffering in humans and animals may be justified as necessary when it results in greater good BUT there remains intense suffering that cannot be justified or morally necessary.

His example is a forest fire in which a fawn (animal) is trapped and horribly burnt lying in agony for several days before death relieves its' suffering.  
Although we cannot prove intense suffering isn't necessary in humans as we don't always know if there is a greater good we are unaware of, Rowe argues we can have rational grounds for believing it is likely some intense suffering exists without a greater good.



**Gregory Paul**  
Still alive today  
Theologian

### Gregory Paul: Statistical Problem of Evil

Traditional theodicies focus on 'non-qualitative arguments', this means they are abstract and not based on empirical evidence unlike Paul's argument. Paul argues that the extent and indiscriminate nature of human suffering through natural evil is the basis for denying the God of Western Christianity.

1. Throughout history the statistical evidence for youth suffering and premature death is so high in relation to other suffering that they are 'maximised beyond expectation', what Paul terms "The Holocaust of Children".
2. Such 'arbitrary discrimination' is proof the classical Christian theodicies fail.
3. The denial of free will to newborns and premature beings in particular cannot be reconciled with the existence of the God of classical theism
4. Therefore God doesn't exist.

Although he focuses on the estimated 350 billion pregnancy failures, infant and juvenile mortalities lost in the third world throughout history, Paul goes on to demonstrate that 'youth suffering and death' is statistically devastating – he considers the statistics relating to disease, famine, malnutrition, earthquakes and floods.

"It is said that... the nature of creation reveals the nature of the creator" Paul

### Youtube "The Problem of Evil Crash Course Philosophy"



**The Problem of Evil: Crash Course Philosophy #13**  
CrashCourse 4M views • 3 years ago

After weeks of exploring the existence of nature of god, today Hank expl problems in theism, and possibly ...

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### Tasks

**Remember this is A-Level work, it is difficult and it is ok if you do not fully understand it at this point.**

1. Read this sheet carefully
2. Watch the video and make notes on key points
3. How would define the difference between moral and natural evil? Which do you think a Christian who believes in an all-loving and all-powerful God must explain? If your answer is both – why both?
4. Have a go at summarising what the problem of evil is into one brief statement
5. Read through William Rowe and Gregory Paul's contributions to the problem of evil. Which of the two arguments do you find most convincing and why?
6. Use the images below to see if you can come up with some counter arguments to the problem of evil? How would a Christian Respond to the Problem of Evil?

