

## Theme 1 Arguments for the existence of God

### 1A Inductive arguments: Cosmological

#### Now test yourself, page 7

- 1 What does empirical mean?

Sensory data from the physical world.

- 2 Why does an argument need to be valid?

For a philosophical argument to be successful, the conclusion must logically follow from the preceding premises without any gaps in reasoning during the premises or unexplained new information in the conclusion.

- 3 Give an example of an inductive argument.

**Example answer:**

A symptom of a cold is sneezing.

I sneezed.

Therefore, I have a cold.

#### Now test yourself, page 8

- 1 What example could you give to show what Aquinas meant by motion?

The process of a liquid (water) freezing to become a solid (ice).

- 2 How is the Second Way different from the First Way?

The First Way concerns motion – how things acquire properties.

The Second Way concerns cause and effect – how things begin to exist.

- 3 Define the words contingent and necessary.

Contingent: Dependent upon something else for its existence. Can begin and cease to exist.

Necessary: Not reliant on anything else for its existence. Cannot not exist. Cannot start or cease to exist.

#### Apply your knowledge, page 9

How valid or sound are the arguments from Aquinas and Lane Craig? Consider the following:

- 1 Is Aquinas correct that there is no such thing as infinite regress?

It is logically appealing to think that there is a start. The Big Bang Theory supports the idea of a start, but the steady-state theory suggests that the universe is infinite. Some scholars prefer the idea of infinite regress since they argue there is no reason to

suppose that it is impossible. Unless we can demonstrate the impossibility of infinite regress, the argument may not be sound.

- 2 If there can be no actual infinite, what problems does this cause God?

God is required to be infinite for the argument to work. If He is not then God has a start, which makes Him another contingent item that requires a cause. Yet the argument also requires actual infinities to be impossible. This suggests that the Kalam argument may not be valid.

- 3 Could the universe have been formed from pre-existent matter?

If the universe was formed from pre-existent matter, this suggests a continuation of cause and effect that needs to be accounted for. While this is inconvenient, it is not logically impossible for us to do this. The argument may not be sound if it is dependent upon the idea that the universe was created ex nihilo, unless we can prove rationally or empirically that it must have been created from nothing.

## 1B Inductive arguments: Teleological

### Now test yourself, page 10

- 1 What does *qua* mean?

(Latin) As.

- 2 To what did Aquinas compare the universe?

An archer and arrow.

- 3 What evidence does Aquinas give for a designer?

The orbit of planets in a regular manner; the universe obeys natural laws.

### Now test yourself, page 12

- 1 Name four features of the world that are used as evidence for design.

Complexity; order; fitting together of parts; purpose.

- 2 What human-made item does Paley compare to features within the world?

A watch.

- 3 What were Paley's two types of argument?

Design *qua* purpose and design *qua* regularity.

## Apply your knowledge, page 13

How valid or sound are the arguments from Aquinas, Paley and Tennant? Consider the following:

- 1 Can something ordered happen by accident?

Order could come from chaos through random variation and natural selection. If something works in the environment in which it exists, then it can continue to function. This means that random generation of features can appear ordered and planned. Therefore, the premise of the teleological argument that order must be generated by intelligence is not sound.

- 2 Are there any ways that the natural world is not like a human-made machine?

The natural world can self-replicate and repair itself. This is not a feature of machines, so it is an unsound analogy.

- 3 Is Tennant correct that our appreciation of beauty is superfluous to survival?

Some scientists argue that appreciation of beauty is advantageous to survival or that it is a by-product of the development of human intelligence. For instance, it may be evidence of an urge for learning that is left over from childhood or it may be a necessary part of the development of cognitive function. If any of this is true, the argument may be unsound.

## 1C Challenges to inductive arguments

### Now test yourself, page 15

- 1 What example does Hume give to illustrate the illusion of cause and effect?

If we assume that fire warms and water refreshes, it is only because it costs us too much pain to think otherwise.

- 2 What is the fallacy of composition?

The false premise that what is true of the parts is true of the whole.

- 3 If God didn't start the universe, what other options does Hume suggest?

The universe is uncaused and infinite, or that it is its own cause.

### Now test yourself, page 16

- 4 Why is it better to compare the universe with something other than a machine?

The universe shares features with a carrot, such as generation, growth and vegetation.

- 5 What do theists claim God is like?

God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipresent, eternal, morally perfect and He is only one.

- 6 Why does Hume suggest the designer would have to be absent, malevolent or an apprentice?

To compare the design from humanity with features of design in the universe is anthropomorphism. If we follow through with this analogy, we can see how problematic it is to make the designer, God, in our own image.

### Apply your knowledge, page 17

Do these scientific explanations give adequate alternatives to a first cause or designer God? Consider the following:

- 1 What caused the Big Bang?

Stephen Hawking pointed out that to ask what happened before the Big Bang is a nonsense question since there was no 'before'. Many find this answer unsatisfactory, however, because we are still left with the question of why there was suddenly something when previously there had been nothing.

- 2 Can an infinite point (singularity) change or begin to grow?

In the Kalam version of the cosmological argument, set theory suggests that it is not possible to add to or subtract from an actual infinite. This suggests that there may be a logical inconsistency in the idea of an infinite point being anything other than fixed.

- 3 Where did the single-celled organisms originate from?

There are numerous suggestions for possible answers to this question, but the reality is that no one knows the answer to how living organisms developed from non-living organisms. This is sometimes used by religious creationists as evidence that there must be an intelligent designer to begin the process of evolution.

- 4 Who designed the Weasel Program?

Richard Dawkins. This suggests a flaw in Dawkins' reasoning in his challenge to the teleological argument, because a designer is necessary for cumulative selection to be put into motion.

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 20

- 1 Outline the cosmological argument for the existence of God with reference to Aquinas' first three Ways. **(AS only)**
- The first three of Aquinas' Five Ways are a posteriori, meaning that they draw upon empirical evidence to formulate their conclusion.
  - They are also inductive, meaning that the premises lead to a conclusion that is one possibility among several.
  - Aquinas' First Way concerns motion. By motion, Aquinas means the process of change from one state (actuality) to another state (potentiality).

- In Aquinas' example, the actuality of wood is to be cold, but its potentiality is to become hot. To achieve its potentiality, it is moved by something else that is actually hot. Fire moves the wood toward its potentiality, which becomes its actuality once it is burning. This is the process of motion.
- The First Way argues that we can observe that some things in the world are in motion. A thing in motion must be moved by something else. The chain of movement cannot go back in time infinitely (infinite regress). Therefore, there must be a first mover, unmoved by anything else (a prime mover or unmoved mover).
- Aquinas' Second Way is similar but more concerned with cause and effect. This is different because it concerns how things come into existence rather than how they acquire different properties.
- His Second Way argues that everything that exists has an efficient cause because nothing can cause itself. There is no such thing as infinite regress, therefore there must be an uncaused first causer.
- At this stage, the prime mover/causer need not be the God of classical theism. The argument proves logically only that there must be an initial uncaused causer or unmoved mover.
- Aquinas' Third Way has a priori elements because it talks about the nature of existence and relies less on empirical knowledge.
- The Third Way states that there are contingent items. If everything were contingent, then nothing would exist at all, as contingent things need a cause. Infinite regress of contingent items is impossible, therefore not all things are contingent. There must be a necessary being to start off the chain of contingency, and that necessary being is God.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## 2 Compare Paley's and Tennant's teleological arguments for the existence of God.

Paley	Tennant
Both scholars present an a posteriori argument for the existence of God, based upon physical evidence within the world that they both claim points to the existence of an intelligent designer.	
Both versions of this argument are inductive in that they lead to a logical conclusion that is one of several possibilities.	
<p>Paley presents an analogical argument by using his analogy of the watch.</p> <p>This analogy says that if you stumbled across a stone on a heath, it would seem reasonable to suggest that this stone has just been there forever. However, imagine instead that you stumbled upon a pocket watch. It would not be reasonable to suggest that this watch has just been there forever. Instead, it must have come from a designer who planned to place the parts together, in that particular order, for the reason of time-telling. Paley did not</p>	<p>Tennant presents an argument that is based upon knowledge of evolutionary theory. It is known as his anthropic argument.</p> <p>This argument states that the universe was designed for the purpose of bringing about intelligent human life. The method by which intelligent life came to be here was no accident or chance occurrence. The processes of the beginning of the existence of matter and of evolution are all evidence of the method by which a designer worked to bring human life into existence. Since the</p>

Paley	Tennant
recognise evolutionary theory as he wrote before Darwin published <i>On the Origin of Species</i> .	universe and everything in it is regular and ordered rather than random and chaotic, it is reasonable to suggest it is the result of intelligence.
<p>Paley compares the watch with the human eye:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both possess order since the watch measures regular units of time and the eye interprets light.</li> <li>Both display complexity since they have multiple components with different functions.</li> <li>Both have these parts fitting together, for their own purpose of sight and of telling the time.</li> </ul>	<p>Tennant provides three points of supporting evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The universe can be understood rationally.</li> <li>The world contains all we need for survival (gravity at the right force, electrons at the right charge, etc.).</li> <li>Evolution via natural selection led to the existence of beings capable of rationality and survival.</li> </ul>
Both arguments are design <i>qua</i> purpose because they relate to the apparent purpose that is evident in the world or in features within the world.	
Paley also argues design <i>qua</i> regularity by comparing evidence from Newtonian laws of motion and gravity. By looking at the solar system and the obedience of the planets to natural laws he concludes that the universe, with its orderly, complex parts, must have had this order imposed upon it by an intelligent being. This is intelligent being is God.	The existence of a) beauty in the universe and b) our appreciation of beauty and our own desire to create it, Tennant argues, is evidence that there must be a designer. Tennant argues that there was no evolutionary advantage for humanity to be able to create poetry or appreciate a sunset. The process of natural selection and survival of the fittest would have no need of such an appreciation because it is superfluous, therefore it must have been designed.
Both scholars attempt to make use of the scientific knowledge they had available at the time of writing. Paley refers to Newtonian laws, while Tennant refers to evolutionary theory.	

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### 3 Examine the Kalam argument for the existence of God.

- The cosmological argument for the existence of God is a philosophical 'proof' for the existence of God.
- The cosmological argument is an inductive proof for God's existence. This means that it offers a conclusion that is one of several possibilities.
- It is also an a posteriori proof. This means that it arrives at its conclusions after having evaluated empirical data. The cosmological argument relies upon the empirical data of the cosmos and the phenomena within it to come to its conclusions.
- The Kalam argument is Aristotelian but was developed by Islamic scholars from around the ninth century CE. *Kalam* is an Arabic word that means 'argue' or 'discuss'. The argument comes in two stages and attempts to prove that the first cause must be a personal God.

- William Lane Craig is a modern Christian scholar who has recently developed the Kalam argument.
- Lane Craig makes use of set theory, which identifies the logical problems with the concept of an infinite set of items. To add to or subtract from an infinite set would mean it isn't infinite. In addition, half an infinite set is equal to the whole, so it cannot be subdivided. So, actual infinities are illogical and thus impossible.
- Consecutively adding items to a set with the potential to carry on forever is called successive addition. A set formed through successive addition is known as a potential infinite. A potential infinite is not actually infinite.
- Lane Craig's first argument states:
  - An actual infinite universe cannot consist of a series of consecutive events; this is not infinite.
  - An actual infinite universe would never reach the present moment because the preceding events would be infinite.
  - The present moment does exist because of a series of consecutive events.
  - The universe is not infinite, so it must be finite.
  - Finite things begin, and everything that begins is caused to do so (nothing can cause itself).
  - The universe was caused to exist.
- Secondly Lane Craig argues:
  - The universe was caused to exist.
  - It was caused either deliberately or by mindless laws of nature.
  - The laws of nature cannot have caused the universe as they belong to it and didn't exist before it began.
  - The universe must have been caused deliberately.
  - Deliberate action requires a personal being with a will.
  - If the universe was created from nothing, then the beginning of the universe was the beginning of time.
  - Therefore, a personal being exists outside of the universe and time as the first cause of it all.
- Here we have a being that has many of the qualities of the theistic God – this being must be transcendent, the cause of the universe, powerful, sentient and intelligent.

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4 Explain the anthropic and aesthetic arguments from F.R. Tennant.

- The teleological argument or design argument for the existence of God is based upon the root of the Greek word *telos*, meaning 'end' or 'purpose'.
- The argument contains a posteriori reasoning, as it is based upon empirical evidence. It is also inductive, as it brings us to a conclusion that is one possibility among many.
- F.R. Tennant advocates theistic evolution in his work, *Philosophical Theology*, and advocates a harmony between science and religion.
- The advent of evolutionary theory does not necessarily mean that the design argument is no longer useful. Tennant aims to show that the argument is compatible with the theory of evolution, and he developed two principles to demonstrate this.



- Tennant's anthropic principle argues that the universe was designed for the purpose of bringing about intelligent human life. The method by which intelligent life came to be here was no accident or chance occurrence. The process of the beginning of the existence of matter and the process of evolution are evidence of the method by which a designer worked to bring human life into existence.
- Since the universe and everything in it is regular and ordered rather than random and chaotic, it is reasonable to suggest it is the result of intelligence. Tennant provides three points of supporting evidence:
  - The universe can be understood rationally.
  - The world contains all we need for survival (gravity at the right force, electrons at the right charge, etc.).
  - Evolution via natural selection led to the existence of beings capable of rationality and survival.
- In addition, Tennant offers an aesthetic principle. The existence of a) beauty in the universe and b) our appreciation of beauty and our own desire to create it, he argues, is evidence that there must be a designer.
- Tennant argues that there was no evolutionary advantage for humanity to be able to create poetry or appreciate a sunset. The process of natural selection and survival of the fittest would have no need of such an appreciation because it is superfluous, therefore it must have been designed.
- Natural selection benefits from a bird's beautiful plumage because it means it attracts a mate, but it has no need for a landscape to be attractive. The fact that we appreciate such things must be because a loving God put them there for our enjoyment.

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- 5 Examine the challenges to inductive arguments with reference to David Hume.
- David Hume critiques the cosmological and teleological arguments in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779).
  - Hume challenges the idea that every effect has a cause, saying that this is an assumption not a fact. When two events happen consecutively, we habitually interpret some as causes and others as effects. Hume argues that this connection may be erroneous. We use our imagination to connect the two events, but this is insufficient to make the claim that one causes the other. He says that, 'If we believe that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pain to think otherwise.'
  - Hume also challenges the claim that the universe must have a cause. Just because there are causes within the universe, does not mean that the universe itself was caused. To assume this is the fallacy of composition. This means that it is a failure of reasoning to perceive a quality in parts of the universe and apply that to the whole.
  - Hume argues that the universe may be infinite and didn't have a beginning at all. An infinite item does not require a cause. If we apply Occam's razor, that out of multiple possibilities the simplest explanation is most likely to be correct, then the simplest explanation is that the universe is uncaused and infinite, or that it was its own cause.
  - Hume suggests if the universe was caused by God or a designer, there is no requirement for this to be the God of classical theism. A first cause is not necessarily going to be benevolent, personal and intelligent.



- He argues that there is no evidence that God exists. Since we were not there, we cannot know if the universe began or was caused. There is insufficient evidence, so it is not possible to talk meaningfully about God creating universes since we have no experience of it.
- Hume's challenges to the teleological argument are mostly against the analogy that is made to state the argument. Hume felt that comparing the universe with a machine was no better than comparing it with a carrot! The universe shares features with a carrot, such as generation, growth and vegetation. Hume adds that the universe is unique, so there is nothing with which we can justifiably compare it.
- Hume argues that a cause must be proportional to its effect. For instance, a small pebble tossed in a puddle would not cause a tidal wave. Thus, the designer can only have characteristics in proportion to the world that has been designed. This leads Hume to make several comic assertions:
  - If the world is designed, then it is imperfect. The existence of evil and suffering suggest that far from being omnibenevolent, any designer would have to be malevolent to have built it right in.
  - An apprentice watchmaker who makes mistakes while learning may abandon their early attempts at watch-making as they improve. Similarly, this world may be the work of an apprentice god that has since rejected this world as inferior and moved on to make better worlds.
  - A house needs more than one designer to bring it into being. There are usually many tradespeople involved in the process, so why would this world be any different? There could be many gods involved, not just one.
  - A watch designer is unlikely to stay admiring and adjusting his work for the rest of his life. He would be more likely to move on to make new watches elsewhere. He may even die. A designer of the world need not be around to worship and intervene.
  - To compare the design from humanity with features of design in the universe is anthropomorphism. If we follow through with this analogy, we can see how problematic it is to make the designer, God, in our own image.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## **Sample AO2 questions, page 20**

- 1 Evaluate the view that the teleological argument for the existence of God is not persuasive in the twenty-first century.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### **Introduction:**

- Persuasive = Convincing, can bring about a change of mind.
- The twenty-first century = today's modern world.

### **Paragraph One:**

- Twenty-first-century humans require empirical evidence to support truth claims. The teleological argument provides empirical evidence from the natural world of order, complexity, fitting together of parts and purpose.

- However, modern scientific methodology requires conclusions to be verifiable or testable. God is an untestable hypothesis.
- Having said this, some are drawn to explanations that give meaning or purpose to life. The teleological argument offers the possibility of there being a purpose to our lives, thus making it persuasive for some people.

#### **Paragraph Two:**

- During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries there has been a resurgence of the teleological argument through the intelligent design movement. This new-found popularity demonstrates how persuasive it is in the modern world.
- The intelligent design movement and the anthropic principle attempt rational support for those with faith, so at the very least those with existing faith in the twenty-first century can find their faith scientifically acceptable.
- However, the intelligent design movement is ridiculed by much of the modern world as pseudoscience and thus is not persuasive to anyone who accepts modern science.

#### **Paragraph Three:**

- God is an unnecessary explanation since evolution does not require it. Random variation and natural selection can account for human development and for apparent design without the need for a designer. Therefore, this argument is not persuasive in the modern, scientific world.
- However, experience of purpose, order, fitting together of parts and complexity are universal throughout time. All humans can observe these features and can see clearly the similarities with intelligently designed items. This suggests that there is no reason why twenty-first-century people should find this argument unappealing.
- Yet, some perceive chaos and lack of purpose in the world, while others see it differently. It is a matter of perspective rather than objective truth. We all interpret the evidence in front of us according to our blik.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Religious people and atheists interpret data according to their pre-existent faith perspective. For some this argument is persuasive, for others it is not. It depends how we interpret the data in front of us.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

- 2 'The Big Bang is more convincing as an explanation for the existence of the universe than the cosmological argument.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

#### **Introduction:**

- Convincing = Persuasive, can bring about a change of mind.

#### **Paragraph One:**

- Empirical evidence is always more persuasive because we can all perceive it ourselves. This means that it can be supported by the witness of many people as well

as being witnessed personally. All this makes the scientific evidence for the Big Bang more persuasive than the cosmological argument.

- However, philosophy helps us consider a range of possible interpretations for evidence. The cosmological argument also draws upon empirical evidence, yet it understands that evidence as pointing towards God.
- Ultimately, which you find more persuasive depends on your outlook in life. If you are already religious, then you will be more likely to interpret the evidence as pointing towards God.

#### **Paragraph Two:**

- Some might argue that science offers us a complex solution that raises more questions than it solves. For example, we still cannot satisfactorily answer the question of what caused the Big Bang.
- Scientific method is to move from evidence to conclusions. This approach is unbiased. In contrast, the cosmological argument begins with the conclusion and looks for evidence to support its view. This is an unconvincing method as people can manipulate evidence to make it match their agenda.
- Alternatively, science answers how the universe came to be through the Big Bang, while philosophy tries to solve why we are here – to worship God. Maybe both approaches have merit if they are understood in this way.

#### **Paragraph Three:**

- Many religious philosophers argue that the universe is too vast and amazing to have occurred simply by accident. The cosmological argument recognises this.
- However, others like Dawkins and other atheist scholars argue that science adds to our appreciation of awe and wonder at the world rather than reducing it to cause and effect.
- Maybe there is no reason why both explanations cannot be accepted together. Both recognise the awesome nature of the universe and both try to understand it.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Ultimately, science is supported by the repeated experiences of millions of people throughout the ages. It can be tested and is open to adjustment in a way that religious explanations are not. Therefore, the Big Bang offers a much more persuasive explanation for the universe than the cosmological argument.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

## Theme 1 Arguments for the existence of God

### 1D Deductive arguments: Origins of the ontological argument

#### Now test yourself, page 22

- 1 What makes an argument valid?

The conclusion logically follows from the preceding premises without any gaps in reasoning during the premises or any unexplained new information in the conclusion.

- 2 What kind of proof is rational proof?

Proof that does not require any empirical evidence to support it.

- 3 What is ontology?

Study that is 'concerned with being' or existence.

#### Now test yourself, page 22

- 1 Why is Psalm 14 significant to this argument?

St Anselm's ontological argument starts with a reference to Psalm 14, 'The fool in his heart says there is no God'. Anselm was suggesting that to deny the existence of God goes against reason, and so his ontological argument attempts to show that belief in God is the only rational option.

- 2 List the four premises and conclusion of Anselm's first form of the argument in the correct order.

Anselm has two forms of his argument. The first form is best summarised like this:

- 1 God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
- 2 God exists *in intellectu*.
- 3 If God existed only *in intellectu*, we could imagine something greater that exists both *in re* and *in intellectu*.
- 4 That being would be greater than God.
- C Therefore, God must exist *in re*.

- 3 Which part of the argument is *reductio ad absurdum* and why?

Premises 3 and 4:

- 3 If God existed only *in intellectu*, we could imagine something greater that exists both *in re* and *in intellectu*.
- 4 That being would be greater than God.

Anselm shows the ridiculous logical conclusion that would be necessary if God only existed in our minds. Clearly God cannot exist in the mind alone, otherwise He would not be that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

## Apply your knowledge, page 23

Consider the following:

- 1 Is reason a kind of proof? Why or why not?

Yes – Nothing can be true if it is logically contradictory.

No – The only acceptable kind of proof is that which can be checked by the senses and can be agreed (verified) by other people.

- 2 Does Anselm's argument appear to be valid and sound? Give a reason for your answer.

Yes – There is nothing in the conclusion that is not present in the premises. All the premises are logically acceptable.

No – Anselm's definition of God may be wrong. There is no proof to say that it is accurate.

In addition, it is not possible to define something into existence.

- 3 Can you think of any other circumstance when it would be acceptable to reject a conclusion that is supported by indisputable premises?

No – If premises are indisputable, then the conclusion is the only one possible.

Maybe – Premises can be accurate and yet be insufficient to support a conclusion. However, this means that we are disputing the premises or that we are challenging the validity of the argument.

## 1E Deductive arguments: Developments of the ontological argument

### Now test yourself, page 25

- 1 What is a predicate?

A property that something can possess or lack.

- 2 Why must God have a predicate of perfect existence?

Because if God is a supremely perfect being with all perfections and if existence is a predicate, then God must possess perfect existence as one of His predicates.

- 3 Why is it a paradox to say God does not exist?

It is a logical contradiction to accept the definition of God and yet deny that He exists.

## Apply your knowledge, page 26

Do Descartes and Malcolm offer sound arguments for God's existence? Consider the following:

- 1 Are any of our ideas innate?

Yes – Along with the idea or concept of God, we possess a sense of right and wrong that is innate as it occurs across all cultures regardless of circumstance.

No – We are taught all our ideas through our upbringing and experiences. This means that there is no innate idea of God that we can have a clear and distinct perception of.

- 2 Is existence a quality you can have or lack?

Yes – An item does change between being an idea and existing in the mind. One can spend Kant's coins if they exist, but not if they do not. So, Descartes' argument is sound.

No – One cannot possess a quality or lack it without first existing. Anselm and Descartes make a category mistake in placing 'existence' in the category or group of words that describe qualities. Instead it belongs in a different category of words that describe being. Descartes does not offer a sound argument as he makes this mistake.

- 3 Is God in any way logically absurd or paradoxical?

Yes – The traditional qualities of the theistic God are that He is both immanent and transcendent. He is both omnibenevolent and omnipotent, and yet evil exists. This means that Malcolm is unsound.

No – All that is being claimed is that there is a maximally excellent being. There is nothing paradoxical about this so Malcolm has a sound argument.

## Now test yourself, page 26

- 1 What are the three modes of existence?

- Necessity – Cannot not exist.
- Possibility – Could logically exist or not exist.
- Impossibility – Cannot logically exist.

- 2 Why isn't God simply possible?

If He does not exist, He cannot begin to exist.

To begin to exist requires a cause or chance, and this is a limitation inconsistent with God.

- 3 Why would Malcolm have liked Anselm's second form better?

It does not treat existence as a predicate.

## 1F Challenges to the ontological argument

### Now test yourself, page 28

- 1 Why did Gaunilo entitle his essay 'On Behalf of the Fool'?  
The title is a nod to Anselm's reference to Psalm 14.
- 2 Why is Anselm's first form of the ontological argument invalid?  
It is attempting to define something into existence.
- 3 Retell the analogy of the island.
  - 1 I can conceive of a perfect island, than which no greater island can be conceived.
  - 2 This island exists *in intellectu*.
  - 3 If it existed *in intellectu* alone, I could conceive of an island that is greater that exists both *in re* and *in intellectu*.
  - 4 This island would be greater than my island.

C Therefore, the perfect island must exist *in re*.

### Apply your knowledge, page 29

Do Gaunilo and Kant give successful challenges to the ontological argument? Consider the following:

- 1 Is it reasonable to compare an island, a triangle or coins to God?  
No – Islands, triangles and coins are contingent, but God is necessary. This means that the analogies given by Gaunilo and Kant are unsuccessful.  
Yes – The analogies show that the lines of reasoning do not produce a logical conclusion.
- 2 Do the coins gain anything by existing in reality?  
Yes – You can spend the coins that exist in reality, but not the ones that exist only in the mind.  
No – The qualities that the coins possess in the mind are no different if the coins exist in reality. Everything about the two sets is identical.
- 3 Would Gaunilo's and Kant's challenges convince a believer to reject their faith?  
Yes – Anyone who is prepared to submit their beliefs to analysis would be persuaded to reject a faith that was based upon the ontological argument because the challenges demonstrate why it cannot be trusted.  
No – People do not accept faith in God because reason tells them that they should. They usually have faith in God for other reasons first and then use reason to try and defend it.



## Now test yourself, page 29

- 1 Explain why Kant can reject the triangle analogy.

It is logical that the definition of a triangle means we must logically accept it has three angles. But if we reject the definition *and* the three angles together, there is no contradiction. Similarly, if we reject the definition of God, we need not logically accept His existence.

- 2 Retell the example of the gold coins.

Imagine 100 gold coins; picture their features, their markings, size, shape and weight. These are predicates. If you hold 100 coins in your hand, their predicates do not change.

- 3 Give two reasons why existence cannot be considered a predicate.

- A predicate tells you about the coins. But, to say that the coins exist adds nothing to the concept.
- It makes no sense to say that an item lacks the predicate of existence. That item would need to exist first to be able to lack the predicate, which is logically impossible.

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 32

- 1 Outline Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God. **(AS only)**

- The ontological argument for the existence of God is a deductive (a set of premises lead to an indisputable conclusion), a priori (prior to empirical evidence) proof. Ontology literally means 'concerned with being' and does not require any empirical evidence to substantiate its claims.
- St Anselm's Proslogion contains his ontological argument, which starts with a reference to Psalm 14 – 'The fool in his heart says there is no God'.
- Anselm was suggesting that to deny the existence of God goes against reason, and so his ontological argument attempts to show that belief in God is the only rational option.
- Anselm has two forms of his argument. The first form states:
  - 1 God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
  - 2 God exists *in intellectu*.
  - 3 If God existed only *in intellectu*, we could imagine something greater that exists both *in re* and *in intellectu*.
  - 4 That being would be greater than God.C Therefore, God must exist *in re*.
- Anselm defines God. This is necessary, even for the atheist, so that (s)he can reject His existence. Anselm describes no other qualities of God, he is merely saying that whatever 'God' is, He is so great that it is impossible to think of anything greater.

- Anselm states the obvious. Clearly God exists in our minds because we have just defined Him. Even the atheist cannot deny that God exists as a concept in her/his mind.
- Anselm uses a philosophical technique called *reductio ad absurdum*. He shows the ridiculous logical conclusion that would be necessary if God existed only in our minds. Clearly God cannot exist in the mind alone, otherwise He would not be that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
- This demonstrates inescapably that since God clearly exists in our minds but can't be restricted to our minds only, He must also exist in reality.
- Anselm's second form of his argument was written in direct response to criticisms raised by Gaunilo of Marmoutiers. This form refines his argument further. It is best summarised like this:
  - 1 God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
  - 2 It is greater to be a necessary being than a contingent being.
  - 3 If God were a contingent being then we could imagine something greater that was a necessary being.
  - 4 This being would be greater than God.C Therefore, God exists as a necessary being.
- Anselm begins his argument in the same way as his first form, with a definition of God. We must remember that the definition on its own is required for a denial of God's existence.
- Anselm demonstrates that within this definition is a requirement for God to be a being that has superior qualities to anything else that exists. Everything else that exists is temporal, but we can conceive of something that is not. We have defined God already and so we know that by definition He must be greater than temporal beings.
- Resorting to *reductio ad absurdum*, Anselm shows the absurdity of God being temporary.
- God exists is a tautology; this means that it is like saying 'an existing God exists'! The statement is an analytic existential proposition; this means that it is a statement about existence that requires no empirical evidence to support its truth.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

- 2 Examine the a priori features of the ontological argument from Anselm.
  - The ontological argument is a priori in nature. What this means is that there is no resort to empirical evidence. The argument is formed prior to or before any physical evidence is provided.
  - St Anselm's Proslogion contains his ontological argument, which has a priori features.
  - Anselm has two forms of his argument. The first form is best summarised like this:
    - 1 God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
    - 2 God exists *in intellectu*.
    - 3 If God existed only *in intellectu*, we could imagine something greater that exists both *in re* and *in intellectu*.

4 That being would be greater than God.

C Therefore, God must exist *in re*.

- In the first premise Anselm defines God. This is necessary, even for the atheist, so that (s)he can reject His existence. It would be ridiculous to dismiss something you don't have a clear understanding of. This definition is *a priori*. It is arrived at through reason, that if there is a God, He must by definition be subject to nothing greater. There is no empirical data to support this definition.
- In the second premise Anselm states the obvious. Clearly God exists in our minds because we have just defined Him. Even the atheist cannot deny that God exists as a concept in her/his mind.
- Anselm uses a philosophical technique called *reductio ad absurdum*. He shows the ridiculous logical conclusion that would be necessary if God existed only in our minds. Clearly God cannot exist in the mind alone, otherwise He would not be that than which nothing greater can be conceived. This does not depend upon any empirical evidence for support, it is demonstrated through reason alone.
- So, Anselm demonstrates inescapably that since God clearly exists in our minds but can't be restricted to our minds only, He must also exist in reality. Without resort to empirical evidence, Anselm has demonstrated that God's existence is rationally proven to be true.
- Anselm's second form of his argument was written in direct response to criticisms raised by Gaunilo of Marmoutiers. This form refines his argument further. It is best summarised like this:

1 God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

2 It is greater to be a necessary being than a contingent being.

3 If God were a contingent being then we could imagine something greater that was a necessary being.

4 This being would be greater than God.

C Therefore, God exists as a necessary being.

- In his first premise, Anselm begins his argument in the same way as his first form, with a definition of God. We must remember that the definition on its own is required for a denial of God's existence. This is *a priori*, since there is no empirical evidence to support it and it is arrived at through reasoning.
- In his second premise Anselm demonstrates that within this definition is a requirement for God to be a being that has superior qualities to anything else that exists. Everything else that exists is temporal, but we can conceive of something that is not. We have defined God already and so we know that by definition He must be greater than temporal beings. While we cannot perceive God to demonstrate this, logically it follows that something that is superior would not be subject to change or decay.
- Resorting to *reductio ad absurdum* to show the absurdity of God being temporary, Anselm shows rationally that it is ridiculous for us to conclude that God is contingent.
- Anselm leads us rationally to the conclusion that God must exist. God exists is a tautology; this means that it is like saying 'an existing God exists'! The statement is an

analytic existential proposition; this means that it is a statement about existence that requires no empirical evidence to support its truth.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

3 Explain the challenges to the ontological argument from Gaunilo and Kant.

- Gaunilo's response to Anselm exists in his essay entitled 'On Behalf of the Fool'. This title is a nod to Anselm's reference to Psalm 14, which claims, 'The fool in his heart says there is no God'.
- Anselm had been trying to argue that from our definition of God, it is irrational to argue that God does not exist.
- Gaunilo argues that to move from a definition of God to claiming God as a reality is an invalid argument. It is essentially attempting to define something into existence. There is a mistake in logic to move from a definition to a claim of existence. Gaunilo took an empiricist stance in this challenge of the argument, saying that it is not possible to use reason alone to demonstrate the reality of something. For something to be proven to exist requires empirical data.
- Gaunilo parodied Anselm's argument to demonstrate his point. It is best summarised thus:
  - 1 I can conceive of a perfect island, than which no greater island can be conceived.
  - 2 This island exists *in intellectu*.
  - 3 If it existed *in intellectu* alone, I could conceive of an island that is greater that exists both *in re* and *in intellectu*.
  - 4 This island would be greater than my island.C Therefore, the perfect island must exist *in re*.
- Kant's most clear objection is that existence is not a predicate. This challenge can be subdivided into three main points, the first of which is specifically aimed at Descartes.
- Kant rejects Descartes' triangle analogy. He says that while it is logical that the definition of a triangle means we must logically accept that it has three angles, what if we reject the definition *and* the three angles together? Similarly, if I reject the definition of God, I need not logically accept His existence.
- Kant claims that existence is not a predicate. He gives the analogy of 100 gold coins. We can picture their features: their markings, size, shape and weight. These are predicates. If you hold 100 coins in your hand, their predicates do not change. A predicate tells you about the coins. But, to say that the coins exist adds nothing to the concept.
- Kant also claims that to consider existence as a predicate is a paradox. A predicate is a quality that an object can possess or lack. But it makes no sense to say that an item lacks the predicate of existence. That item would need to exist first to be able to lack the predicate, which is logically impossible.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

4 Compare **two** different versions of the ontological argument for the existence of God.

Malcolm	Descartes
Both arguments are a priori, which means that they use logic prior to empirical evidence and are arguments that rely on pure reason.	
Both arguments are deductive in style, moving from a set of premises to a conclusion that, if the argument is sound, is indisputable.	
Uses modal logic and rejects Anselm's first form of the ontological argument for using existence as a predicate.	Has two forms of his argument that use existence as a predicate that God can possess.
<p>Modal logic is mathematical, formal logic that states existence must be qualified (shown <i>how</i> it is true) exclusively in terms of one mode. There are three modes of existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Necessity – Cannot not exist.</li> <li>• Possibility – Could logically exist or not exist.</li> <li>• Impossibility – Cannot logically exist.</li> </ul> <p>So, in terms of the statement 'God exists', a modal will tell you that 'God necessarily exists'.</p>	<p>The first form of Descartes' argument can be summarised in this way:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 I exist – Descartes said: 'Cogito ergo sum' (I think therefore I am).</li> <li>2 I have an idea in my mind of a perfect being – This idea is innate rather than taught.</li> <li>3 As an imperfect being myself, I could not have come up with the idea of a perfect being.</li> <li>4 The concept of a perfect being must have originated from a perfect being.</li> <li>5 A perfect being must exist to be perfect – Existence is a predicate of perfection.</li> </ol> <p>C A perfect being exists.</p>
<p>Malcolm's argument can be summarised in this way:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived – Anselm's definition.</li> <li>2 If He does not exist, He cannot begin to exist.</li> <li>3 To begin to exist requires a cause or chance, and this is a limitation inconsistent with God – This shows that God is not merely possible or contingent.</li> <li>4 Either God is impossible or He is necessary.</li> <li>5 He is not impossible – The only way He could be impossible is if He were logically absurd or paradoxical.</li> </ol> <p>C God exists necessarily.</p>	<p>The second part of Descartes' argument can be summarised in this way:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 The innate idea of God is of a supremely perfect being – I can perceive the idea of God clearly and distinctly with my mind, so He must possess the predicates I perceive.</li> <li>2 A supremely perfect being has all perfections.</li> <li>3 Existence is a predicate of a supremely perfect being – God must possess supreme perfection of necessary existence.</li> </ol> <p>C Therefore, God exists.</p>
Both scholars conclude through reason alone that God exists necessarily.	

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

5 Examine Immanuel Kant's objections to the ontological argument for the existence of God.

- The ontological argument for the existence of God is a deductive, a priori proof. Ontology literally means 'concerned with being' and does not require any empirical evidence to substantiate its claims.
- Immanuel Kant clearly objects to the ontological argument, particularly challenging Rene Descartes.
- Descartes argues that God possesses the predicate of perfect existence, which belongs rationally to God in the same way that a triangle possesses the quality of having three angles that add up to 180°.
- Kant agrees that it is logical that the definition of a triangle means we must logically accept that it has three angles. But he claims that we may reject both the definition *and* the three angles together. Similarly, if I reject the definition of God as a supreme being that possesses all perfections, I need not logically accept His existence.
- Kant went on to argue that existence is not a predicate. Descartes had claimed that God could possess existence in the same way that a coin possesses qualities such as shape, size and weight.
- Kant counterargues that we should imagine 100 gold coins. We should picture their features: their markings, size, shape and weight. These are predicates. If you hold 100 coins in your hand, their predicates do not change. A predicate tells you about the coins. But, to say that the coins exist adds nothing to the concept.
- In the same way, to say that God exists tells us nothing about Him. Therefore, existence cannot be a predicate that He can possess.
- Building upon this point, Kant argues that it makes no sense to say an item lacks the predicate of existence. That item would need to exist first to be able to lack the predicate, which is logically impossible. Thus, God cannot possess the quality of existence because such an idea is paradoxical.
- Kant's challenges to existence as a predicate also apply to St Anselm's first form of the ontological argument, since he also treats existence as a predicate that God can possess.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**Sample AO2 questions, page 32**

- 1 Evaluate the view that a priori arguments are more persuasive than a posteriori arguments.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

**Introduction:**

- Persuasive = Convincing, can cause a person to change their opinion.

### Paragraph One:

- A priori arguments are rational. Just like a mathematical formula, it makes no sense to dismiss what reason shows to be logically true, and so a priori arguments are convincing.
- However, Hume points out that the argument for God's existence only shows that it is logical for God to exist, but this is not enough to prove that He does exist in reality. For this to be proven, a posteriori evidence is needed.
- Yet, if reason shows that God could exist logically, it means that He is not impossible, so a priori arguments are at least partially convincing.

### Paragraph Two:

- A priori arguments for God's existence are meaningless because they cannot tell us exactly what exists. A posteriori evidence is needed to confirm the nature of the thing that is being claimed, for example evidence of order demonstrates an intelligent designer.
- However, the definition of God does entail certain characteristics, such as moral virtue and power. These can be understood a priori through the definition alone.
- But a priori arguments do show logically that something exists. God's character is a different issue to be dealt with in other arguments.

### Paragraph Three:

- Even Bertrand Russell was convinced by the ontological argument when he first heard it. He recognised that the argument was sound, where he had otherwise refuted a posteriori arguments.
- However, as Russell and others have recognised, it is word play, an exercise in semantics, and not a proof of the reality of a being. A posteriori evidence is needed to demonstrate the reality of a thing in the empirical world.
- In addition, as Kant, Aquinas, Russell and many others have demonstrated, existence is not a predicate. Therefore the a priori arguments remain unconvincing.

### Conclusion:

- Ultimately, the purpose of the ontological, a priori arguments for the existence of God were to support existing faith and show that it isn't irrational to believe in God. As a means of doing this, the arguments are persuasive. However, a posteriori arguments can do exactly the same and so neither one is more convincing than the other.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

- 2 'The challenges to the ontological argument are very effective.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### Introduction:

- Effective = Successful in producing a desired result. In this case they succeed in challenging the ontological argument by showing it to be invalid or unsound.



### **Paragraph One:**

- Gaunilo's argument was easily dismissed by Anselm and his second form of the argument, and so was ineffective as a challenge.
- However, Gaunilo's point was valid even if his analogy was weak. A definition is not enough to prove the existence of something.
- Gaunilo clearly shows that a definition does not prove reality. Defining a unicorn or Santa does not make them real, and so his challenges are very effective.

### **Paragraph Two:**

- It is not unreasonable to reject the definition of God as Kant does. Only theists would be happy to accept it and so the challenge from Kant is effective in challenging the ontological argument as unsound.
- However, in reference to Kant and Descartes' analogy, it is illogical to dismiss the triangle. We know clearly and distinctly what a triangle is, and we must do so in order to attempt to dismiss it. By rejecting the definition, we are highlighting this paradox and so the challenge is unconvincing.
- In addition, triangles and God are not comparable: triangles are contingent while God is necessary, so different rules apply to Him. However, since both Kant and Descartes made use of this analogy, it benefits no one.

### **Paragraph Three:**

- In support of the ontological argument, neither Kant nor Gaunilo prevent modern scholars from using modal logic to demonstrate God's existence, so the challenges have not succeeded.
- However, Brian Davies argues that even modal logic from scholars such as Malcolm misuses language by using 'is' in two different ways. Firstly it uses 'is' to define ('God *is* that than which nothing greater can be conceived'), and secondly it uses 'is' to confirm existence (God *is*). This fools people into accepting the validity of an argument that is actually invalid.
- Yet, the modal form does not make the error of treating existence as a predicate. This suggests that there are some merits to the argument and so the challenges are not entirely successful.

### **Conclusion:**

- People are atheists or Christians for reasons other than logic. Therefore, the challenges will never be entirely successful at refuting the ontological argument to the extent that it can be thrown out by believers. It is not reason that convinces a person to have faith, but reason can support and confirm a faith that is already present. Therefore, the challenges are not very effective.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

## Theme 2 Challenges to religious belief

### 2A The problem of evil and suffering

#### Now test yourself, page 34

- 1 Give two examples of natural evil.  
**Example answers:** tsunamis, brain tumours.
- 2 Give two examples of moral evil.  
**Example answers:** rape, child abuse.
- 3 Give two qualities of the God of classical theism.  
**Example answers:** omnipotence, omnibenevolence.

#### Now test yourself, page 35

- 1 What is the Riddle of Epicurus?  
Either God wants to abolish evil, but cannot; or He can, but does not want to. If He wants to, but cannot, He is impotent. If He can, but does not want to, He is malevolent. If God can abolish evil, and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world?
- 2 What is the inconsistent triad?  
There are three things that the theist tries to hold in balance when (s)he makes a theistic claim to God's existence. These are that God is both omnibenevolent and omnipotent and that evil exists. Logically these three things cannot simultaneously be true.
- 3 Why would other qualities of God add to the problem?
  - One – We cannot blame any other God for evil.
  - Creator ex nihilo – God made everything from nothing, so God made all that exists. This must include evil.
  - Omniscient – God knows everything so is not ignorant of our suffering.
  - Personal – God is not an impersonal force, He has understanding of what we experience.
  - Morally perfect – God knows the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, and desires good or right actions.
  - Omnipresent – God is everywhere, not distant from us, so He is close enough to act.

## Apply your knowledge, page 36

Does the problem of evil provide a complete proof against the existence of a loving and powerful God? Consider the following:

- 1 Can a good person ever deliberately cause someone to suffer?

A surgeon might cause suffering in their patient when they operate upon them to cure an illness.

A mother might cause mild suffering to their child when they discipline moderately in order to teach, for example confiscating a toy, telling them off, using the 'naughty step'.

- 2 Can anything ever be gained through a process of suffering?

In the examples above, the sick patient might gain better health and the child might learn appropriate behaviour.

Alternatively, a good parent can surely teach a lesson without causing pain or suffering to a child. If they understand then they will not suffer. A surgeon could use appropriate pain relief to remove suffering when they work to cure the illness.

- 3 If you have answered yes to either question, would your reasons be sufficient to allow children to die?

The gains from suffering cannot be achieved by allowing the death of the patient in the example above.

Alternatively, the death of the patient might allow the surgeon to learn how to treat future patients more effectively, so some greater good might be achieved.

## 2B Religious responses to the problem of evil (i)

### Apply your knowledge, page 40

Do you think Augustine offers an effective theodicy? Consider the following:

- 1 Is it logically possible for God to make a world in which humans are free but never sin?

No – The only way in which we can be free is if we have a real choice, which means that we can make errors in judgement. If we were incapable of error, we would be incapable of sin.

Yes – To be free there should always be the possibility of choosing good, so just as there is the chance that we may sin, there should always be the chance that we can choose the good.

- 2 Dawkins says that memes (units of culture, like songs or religions) can be passed from person to person like genes. Could sin be a meme?

No – Sin is an error in judgement where we aim for the wrong goal in our actions. It is not a disease; this would suggest it is independent of human will.

Yes – We inherit ideas from our culture and upbringing, so our tendency to sin could be the same. Augustine does not speak of memes of course, but he does suggest that we somehow inherit our sin from Adam and this suggests a similar idea. (However, Dawkins would dismiss the concept of sin as he is an atheist.)

3 Is evil simply a lack of goodness?

Yes – Augustine's example is very clear and is a good analogy for evil as a lack of perfection in the world.

No – Evil is more about our interpretation of events in the light of the effect they have on humans. We think of things as evil only if they make us feel bad. From a different perspective, such events may not be evil at all.

**Now test yourself, page 40**

1 How does God retain His power and goodness?

He chooses who will be given the grace to exercise the freedom to have faith in Him.

2 To what does Augustine attribute the existence of evil?

To original sin by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

3 Why does God allow evil to remain?

God allows it to remain because it is a just punishment, and because it adds to the aesthetic pattern of the universe.

4 What does *privatio boni* mean?

An absence of good.

5 What is meant by the term *felix culpa*?

A happy mistake. Reference to the sin of Adam leading to redemption by Christ.

6 Why doesn't God save everyone?

He doesn't have to. All deserve to be punished; this is justice for our sinfulness. However, because He is merciful, God saves the few who decide to choose Him. No one deserves to be saved, but some are because God is loving.

## 2C Religious responses to the problem of evil (ii)

**Apply your knowledge, page 43**

Do Irenaeus and Hick make sense as a theodicy? Consider the following:

1 What is the purpose of this life if there is a purgatory where we continue development?

There is no point – The theodicy would make sense only if this life finished when our souls were complete.

Alternatively, this life is just one stage in the process of soul-making – It is reasonable for there to be more than one part to the process of making a soul.

2 Is it logical that an all-powerful God could make our souls without allowing suffering?

Swinburne and Hick point out that for us to make free choices we do actually have to make real choices with real consequences. If we didn't suffer, we could never really

choose to do something wrong, which means that we could never freely choose good either.

Yet, an all-powerful God, by definition, should be able to do anything at all, even that which seems impossible to us.

3 Is free will worth the pain of allowing suffering?

Yes – Life is devoid of meaning if we are just puppets or automatons. Our actions would be pointless, and good and bad, right and wrong would lose all meaning.

No – As Dostoevsky says, all the knowledge of good and evil in the world is not worth one child's tears. To say that suffering is 'worth it' is an 'armchair' argument, i.e. it is the kind of argument offered by someone who never has to experience the full magnitude of what it means to suffer as a human.

### Now test yourself, page 44

1 Which scripture verse was important to Irenaeus' theodicy?

'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness' (Genesis 1:26).

2 What does Hick mean when he describes the world as a vale of soul-making?

This world is a vale of soul-making (a valley, or place, where souls are made) because suffering helps to build us to become more like God.

3 Give three examples of second-order goods.

- Charity – Only necessary because some people lack the resources they need.
- Altruism – Only necessary because some people's circumstances prevent them from acting for themselves.
- Compassion – Only necessary because some people or creatures experience terrible suffering or difficult circumstances that make it difficult for them to function according to societal or moral expectations.

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 47

1 Outline the problem of evil with reference to Epicurus and Mackie. **(AS only)**

- The problem of evil is offered as a challenge to religious belief because it appears to contradict the character of God according to monotheism. It is usually only considered a problem for Christians, Muslims and Jews because of their claims for God's nature.
- The logical problem of evil demonstrates that the co-existence of evil and the God of classical theism is a logical impossibility.
- Epicurus is perhaps one of the most ancient people to formally state the problem of evil and suffering. His statement of it is often called the Epicurean Paradox or the Riddle of Epicurus.

- Epicurus pointed out the paradox that we are presented with if God is both loving and powerful and yet evil remains. Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or He can, but does not want to. If He wants to, but cannot, He is impotent. If He can, but does not want to, He is malevolent. If God can abolish evil, and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world?
- In more recent years, this problem has been restated by J.L Mackie. Mackie calls this the inconsistent triad. There are three things that the theist tries to hold in balance when (s)he makes a theistic claim to God's existence, and logically they cannot all be true.
- God is considered by theists to be both omnibenevolent and omnipotent, and evil is believed to exist. At any time only two of these propositions can be held to be true:
  - God can be both loving and powerful if there is no evil. But this would be against all physical evidence to the contrary.
  - God can be loving and there is evil, meaning He is impotent and can do nothing for us.
  - He can be powerful and there is evil, meaning He is malevolent and enjoys our suffering.
- All three propositions cannot be true at once.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**2 Examine the problem of evil with reference to Rowe and Paul.**

- The problem of evil is offered as a challenge to religious belief because it appears to contradict the character of God according to monotheism. It is usually only considered a problem for Christians, Muslims and Jews because of their claims for God's nature.
- Rowe and Paul present the evidential problem of evil. This is an argument that the empirical evidence of the existence of evil and suffering means it is improbable that God exists.
- Rowe's argument states that an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God would want to and be able to remove intense suffering where He could do so without causing greater harm or preventing greater good in the process. Since God does not do anything to prevent this intense suffering, He cannot exist.
- Rowe gives an example to support this argument: In a distant forest, lightning strikes a dead tree, causing a forest fire. A fawn becomes trapped in the fire and is horribly burned. It lies suffering with its injuries for days before it dies, with no one aware or able to do anything to help it.
- Rowe claimed that in this tragedy, the fawn's suffering does not benefit any being. No one freely caused this evil. No one could have performed a good act to help and no one has learned anything from it as there were no witnesses. This unnecessary, avoidable event should have been prevented if God was both good and powerful.
- Gregory S. Paul's evidential problem of evil estimates that:
  - at least 100 billion humans have been born throughout history (starting roughly 50,000 years ago, when *Homo sapiens* first appeared)
  - the historical death rate of children was over 50 per cent

- the deaths of these 50 billion children were mostly due to diseases
- additionally, 300 billion humans may have died prenatally and never reached birth – the prenatal death rate being historically about three-quarters.
- Paul calls this horrifying number of child deaths the 'Holocaust of the Children'. He considers it impossible for a theist to construct a rational account of God's nature when there is this magnitude of death of innocent, helpless beings. It is not credible for a God that is both loving and morally perfect to fail to prevent such horror.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**3 Explain how Irenaean type theodicies attempt to solve the problem of evil.**

- Theodicy literally means 'justification of God'. A true theodicy will accept that evil is real but will maintain how God can logically still be both good and loving in the face of such suffering. Any solution that denies one of these things is not a true theodicy.
- Irenaeus' theodicy maintains that evil and suffering in the world is created by God for a legitimate reason. Irenaeus makes God responsible for evil but shows that He is justified in creating it and allowing it to remain.
- Irenaeus sees the purpose of the world as a place for making souls:
  - We were created imperfect with the potential for perfection.
  - Genuine human perfection is developed through free choice.
  - We are placed on Earth, where we suffer and struggle.
  - Suffering allows us to develop into perfection, as God intends, through our free choices.
  - God is like a craftsman that moulds and makes His creation beautiful.
- Hick has developed this theodicy further in more recent years and agrees that if the Earth was a place for making happy lives, then it would be a poor creation. This world is a vale of soul-making because suffering helps to build us to become more like God. As a result, Hick called this a soul-making theodicy.
- Irenaeus took his inspiration from an interpretation of scripture – 'Let us make kind in our image, in our likeness' (Genesis 1:26).
- When God created humans, He made us in His image, so with some capacity like Him. This would include morality, intelligence and free will. However, we are not yet like Him and we must grow into the likeness of God. Hick agrees that humans did not fall from perfection, they were created imperfect. So, God has responsibility for our capacity for evil.
- God stays at an epistemic distance so that we can freely choose to develop into His likeness.
- God allows natural evil in the world because it provides the opportunity for spiritual growth:
  - It would be easy to be good in a perfect world.
  - If resources were plentiful, and if disasters didn't happen, there would be no opportunity for growth.
  - When evil occurs, we have the chance to demonstrate virtues like charity, altruism and compassion.
  - These virtues are second-order goods that rely on the existence of evil to flourish.



- The counterfactual hypothesis shows that the world in its current state gives us the impetus to improve.
- A world with no famine would contain no charity.
- In a perfect world, we would have no reason to try.
- Irenaeus and Hick argue that our salvation lies in our choices on Earth. It has less to do with Christ's work on the cross and more to do with whether our faith and works have developed us during our lifetime.
- We are not eternally damned if we do not achieve moral perfection in this lifetime (many of us do not), because we continue to develop in purgatory.
- The innocent who suffer are rewarded in heaven. The person who causes harm must wait until they gain perfection to reach heaven. But all can achieve it in their own time.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

- 4 Compare the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus as a religious response to the problem of evil.

Augustine	Irenaeus
God cannot be responsible for evil as He is morally perfect.	God is responsible for evil but is justified in allowing it to remain.
Evil is a privation of good ( <i>privatio boni</i> ).	Evil is for the purpose of making our souls.
God created Adam and Eve to be perfect with free will. They committed original sin, which contaminated all of humanity as we were seminally present in Adam.	We did not fall from perfection but were created imperfect with the potential for perfection.
It is our fault that evil came into the world and so God is justified in allowing it to remain as a fair punishment.	The counterfactual hypothesis shows that the world in its current state gives us the impetus to improve. This is the only world where soul-making could occur.
God is just, so He requires punishment for our evil deeds. He gave Christ (God incarnate) to die for humanity as a just punishment for the sins of some.	We do not need Christ's death to atone for our sins and we can save ourselves by becoming perfect.
God is merciful and so offers the opportunity for salvation through Christ to those who freely choose Him.	God is loving and so salvation is possible for everyone. Some do not achieve it in this life and require more time in purgatory.
It is a divine mystery to us who will be saved and who will be damned.	God stays at an epistemic distance so that we can freely choose to develop into His likeness.
We can freely decide to choose God, but require assistance from His grace to fulfil our good choice and reject sin.	When evil occurs, we have the chance to demonstrate virtues like charity, altruism and compassion. These are second-order goods.
This 'soul-deciding' theodicy means that the individual decides to choose God, then God provides the grace for them to do this.	This 'soul-making' theodicy means that God provides this environment for the purpose of moulding and creating our souls.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

### **Sample AO2 questions, page 47**

- 1 Evaluate the view that Augustinian type theodicies fail as a defence of the theistic God.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

#### **Introduction:**

- Fail = Does not succeed at all in defending the theistic God.

#### **Paragraph One:**

- The theodicy includes Christ's salvation on the cross, which is fundamental to Christian teaching. This gives credence to the theodicy as God's power and love are upheld.
- However, since salvation is wholly based upon Christ's salvation of those who choose him, human actions are irrelevant and incapable of saving us. So, there is no real difference in merit between the saved and the damned. It makes judgement seem arbitrary and meaningless.
- Yet, theologically it seems to balance Christ's work with free will. So, while it makes God partially responsible for allowing evil, the theodicy succeeds in placing the blame on human shoulders and the acclaim for salvation with God.

#### **Paragraph Two:**

- Augustine's theodicy keeps in mind all the theistic qualities of God without dismissing evil, which is in keeping with the nature of a true theodicy.
- However, F.D.E. Schleiermacher has demonstrated that it fails on scientific, moral and logical grounds. Seminal presence is biologically inaccurate; a loving God should not save some yet abandon others, and a perfect creation surely cannot go wrong.
- So, while theologically it is in line with scripture, there are too many errors so the theodicy fails.

#### **Paragraph Three:**

- Augustine's theodicy is too concerned with avoiding heresy to be a coherent answer to the problem of evil. There is too much contradiction between our free will and God's predestination of us.
- However, this theodicy does not diminish God's power over humanity even while it admits that we have freely sinned against Him and must freely choose Him.
- In addition, the theodicy avoided heresy to the extent that it is accepted by the Roman Catholic Church and Augustine is revered as a saint, so it must be considered a success.

#### **Conclusion:**

- While the definition of evil is reasonable and logical as a privation of good, God has still allowed us to suffer from it. Regardless of the nature of evil, God must be

considered responsible for the extent and gravity of our experience even if original sin is what brought it about. Therefore, the theodicy cannot wholly succeed.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

- 2 'The classical form of the problem of evil is not really a problem.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

**Introduction:**

- Problem = In this instance this means it offers a challenge that is enough to make God's existence illogical.

**Paragraph One:**

- The classical form of the problem of evil demonstrates the illogical nature of a believer's faith in an omnipotent and loving God, so it certainly should be considered a problem.
- However, God is not subject to reason in the same way as corporeal creatures. It is not unreasonable to expect God to transcend such problems as He is greater than our limited reasoning capacity can understand.
- In addition, those who have faith in God will continue to do so regardless of this philosophical problem, so the problem of evil is not really a problem at all.

**Paragraph Two:**

- The theodicies defend God's nature and so they demonstrate that it is rational to believe God has these qualities. The problem of evil is dealt with successfully and does not continue to be troublesome.
- However, no theodicy has adequately and coherently answered the paradox. There are so many problems with Augustine's and Irenaeus' solutions that neither can be considered as an answer to the problem.
- The paradox is clearly stated in the classical problem of evil, but theodicies show that there are many possible solutions. It is a problem, but not an insurmountable one.

**Paragraph Three:**

- The problem of evil has been stated and restated by many philosophers since the ancient Greeks. Even today, it is considered a significant argument against God's existence.
- Yet, the 'problem' shows a simplistic understanding of the nature of God and evil. The problem exists only if we understand God in terms of human goodness and power – but God is incorporeal and transcendent.
- The problem is observed by many, so it is a problem. But our free will and responsibility are also observable to all and we cannot transfer all the blame to God.

**Conclusion:**

- Despite all the support from theologians past and present, the classical problem of evil has further support from the evidential problem that shows God to be improbable. This means that the problem of evil is certainly a significant problem.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

## Theme 2 Challenges to religious belief

### 2D Religious belief as a product of the human mind: Freud

#### Now test yourself, page 49

- 1 What is meant by the id?

Unconscious urges and desires of our psyche that are innate and natural but not always pleasant.

- 2 Why did Freud think religion is a neurosis?

Both have similar features as products of the human mind. They:

- are ritualistic, repetitive and symbolic
- are reassuring/calming
- induce guilt and anxiety when missed.

- 3 What is the role of the primal horde in Freud's understanding of religion?

The primal horde was the original human ancestral group that experienced the trauma of killing the father to gain access to the females. This trauma was repressed and therefore became a mental illness that was passed on to subsequent generations.

#### Now test yourself, page 51

- 1 Why did Hans feel guilty according to Freud?

Freud concluded that Hans' guilt feelings for desiring his mother led to his fear of the horse, which symbolised his fear that his father would punish him by castration.

- 2 What did the dreams/phobias of Hans and Pankejeff indicate to Freud?

Freud concluded that Hans' fear of the horse symbolised his guilt feelings and fear that his father would punish him by castration for desiring his mother. The horse represented the father with his moustache, glasses and larger penis.

Freud concluded that Pankejeff had associated his parents with animals having sex. His desire was to be copulated with by his father but he feared what would happen if he did. The repressed trauma resulted in the fear of wolves and God.

- 3 How is Lamarck's interpretation of evolution important?

Freud supported his Oedipus complex with evolutionary theory, on which he based his primal horde hypothesis. He used naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's understanding of evolution to include the inheritance of acquired characteristics, not only genetic ones.

## Apply your knowledge, page 52

Can religious belief really be reduced to a mental illness? Consider the following:

- 1 What similarities can you find between religious ritual and neurotic ritual?
  - Both contain ritualistic washing and cleanliness rituals.
  - Both are repetitive in nature and there is an insistence that rituals should be done correctly, e.g. Holy Communion, Eucharist and OCD.
  - Both contain promises of relief from fears if rituals are performed correctly.
  - The Oedipus complex and the Eucharist both contain reference to the slaying of the father.
  - Both include a sense of guilt.
- 2 Do you remember the fallacy of composition? How might that be relevant here?

The fallacy of composition says that what is true of the parts is true of the whole, but this is false because it need not be the case. Freud could be said to commit the fallacy of composition by claiming that because some of his patients suffered from the Oedipus complex, all people suffer from the Oedipus complex.
- 3 Can you think of any reason why we might be predisposed to reject Freud without considering his ideas fully?

The thought of children having sexual desires for their parents is unpleasant and something we want to deny. (This may be because our superego is trained to reject such notions!) We may wish to discredit the whole theory because it is based upon this idea that we find distasteful and socially unacceptable.

## 2E Religious belief as a product of the human mind: Jung

### Now test yourself, page 54

- 1 Explain the three parts of the human mind/psyche.
  - Consciousness – The part of the mind that we are aware of and adjust in response to the outside world (also called the ego).
  - Personal unconscious – Unique to the individual and acquired through a person's lifetime. Where lost memories, repressed experiences and desires reside.
  - The collective unconscious – The oldest part of the mind, an ancestral heritage. Impersonal, universal and identical in all humans. It generates primordial images and is the source of all religion.
- 2 Give three examples of archetypal images and explain their meaning.

**Example answers:**

  - Persona represents a false social identity. It is often represented by a mask, armour, being naked in public or wearing the wrong clothing.

- Shadow represents irrational or animalistic nature. It could be represented by Mr Hyde, Satan, Dorian Gray or Professor Quirrell who masks Voldemort under his turban.
- Anima represents the feminine aspects of a male. It could be represented by Eve, the Virgin Mary, a ship, a cave or a goddess.

3 Why can we call God an archetype?

- Our images of God are generated by the collective unconscious.
- The disposition to do this is innate.
- The actual images we have of God vary according to our experiences in the world.
- The God archetype's nature is expressed through symbolism.
- Symbolic language is therefore necessary to talk about God and religion.

**Now test yourself, page 55**

1 Give three pieces of evidence that Jung could put forward to support his idea that religious faith is a positive construct of the human mind.

- Jung observed first-hand the problems suffered by those who took a materialist outlook and struggled with the disillusionment that followed.
- Regular collective worship helps to offer meaning to life as it offers freedom from fear of death.
- Social cohesion is found in societies that include regular collective worship.

**Apply your knowledge, page 56**

Is there really reason to suspect that God is just another archetype? Consider the following:

1 Religious believers report experiences such as miracles that suggest God is an external being.

This could be evidence of an externally existing God, or it could be engagement with the archetypes, which Jung suggests is necessary for wholeness. Miracles often have limited empirical evidence to support them, so they themselves may be archetypal in origin.

2 Other believers claim religious experiences in which they gain knowledge or certainty.

Again, this could be evidence of an externally existing God, or it could be an archetypal experience that is useful for individuation. It is important that people believe in them for their own mental well-being.

3 Is it impossible for God to exist objectively if Jung is correct?

Jung's ideas do not make it impossible for God to exist. Jung might be right *and* God might exist. However, Jung's ideas do make God less likely as an objectively existent being. It is maybe a question that should not be explored too deeply if we wish to individuate successfully and live healthy lives!



## 2F Issues relating to the rejection of religion: Atheism

### Now test yourself, page 57

- 1 Why is Socrates presented as an atheist by some writers?  
Socrates challenges the authority and consistency of the attributes of the Greek gods.
- 2 What does *atheos* mean?  
(Greek) Without God.
- 3 Give two reasons why atheism is different from agnosticism.
  - Atheists reject belief in any God(s), whereas agnostics do not know if there is a God(s).
  - An atheist rejects any burden of proof since they make no positive claims, while an agnostic may claim it is impossible to know if God exists (strong agnosticism).

### Now test yourself, page 59

- 1 What is distinctive about New Atheism?  
New Atheists are distinct because they don't just lack belief in God or reject belief in particular types of gods, they actively oppose any belief in God.
- 2 Give two reasons why religion can be accused of being non-thinking.
  - The notion that blind faith is virtuous encourages people to accept propositions without thought or reason.
  - Religion teaches people to be satisfied with not understanding the world.
- 3 Give two examples of how religion prevents or slows scientific progress.
  - Religion in some parts of America controls the teaching of scientific knowledge in schools on issues like evolution and climate change.
  - Religious belief controls medical treatment of the terminally ill and pregnant women.

### Apply your knowledge, page 60

Does New Atheism provide a satisfactory argument against religious belief? Consider the following:

- 1 Do the New Atheists use any non-rational methods in their arguments?  
No – Having taken a scientific stance, they are consistent in applying it to all aspects of life in an unbiased way. That is the point of their argument.  
Yes – They tend towards an ad hominem approach (attacking the person rather than their argument), which is illegitimate. It does not follow that just because they discover an individual who is unappealing to them, that all their philosophy is necessarily false. To dismiss all religious people as infantile and unthinking does not successfully analyse their rationale.

2 Is it fair to say that all religious people show signs of mental illness?

Yes – If we view religion itself as a mental illness in the same way that Freud did. In this case, by definition all religious people would be mentally ill.

No – There are certainly many examples of religious people who are mentally ill, but this is true of people in all walks of life. There are also plentiful examples of religious people who otherwise demonstrate the ability to be fully functioning members of society, capable of analysing data in a rational and coherent way.

3 Is it coherent to be both religious and a scientist?

No – As Dawkins would argue, it is impossible, and anyone who claims to be both is lying about one of them. He gives the examples of Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein, who he says are ‘sexed-up’ atheists, using the term God in order to be socially appealing but meaning something very different with the term.

Yes – There are many examples of vastly intelligent people such as Polkinghorne, Collins, McGrath and so on, who are multidisciplinary and capable of holding both scientific and religious propositions. They can view religion and science as doing different kinds of work and answering different kinds of questions.

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 63

1 Compare Freud’s and Jung’s explanations of religious belief.

Freud	Jung
Religion is a construct of the human mind rather than something based in an objective reality.	
<p>There are three parts to the psyche:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Id</b> – Unconscious urges and desires that are innate and natural but not always pleasant.</li> <li>• <b>Superego</b> – Unconscious controls taught to us by society that have become ingrained.</li> <li>• <b>Ego</b> – Mostly conscious part of our mind that tries to mediate between the id and the superego.</li> </ul>	<p>There are three parts to the psyche:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consciousness</b> – The part of the mind that we are aware of and adjust in response to the outside world (also called the ego).</li> <li>• <b>Personal unconscious</b> – Unique to the individual and acquired through a person’s lifetime. Where lost memories, repressed experiences and desires reside.</li> <li>• <b>Collective unconscious</b> – The oldest part of the mind, an ancestral heritage. Impersonal, universal and identical in all humans. It generates primordial images and is the source of all religion.</li> </ul>
Freud compared religion to neurosis, suggesting that both are similar products of the human mind.	Religion is not a product of mental illness; it instead performs the role of balancing the mind and is key to successful individuation.
Neurosis is mental illness causing symptoms of chronic stress. Like neurosis,	Individuation is a process by which a person integrates and balances the

Freud	Jung
religion is ritualistic, repetitive and induces negative feelings.	conscious and unconscious parts of their mind.
Freud called religion a universal obsessional neurosis or collective neurosis, suffered by all humans as they try to repress the most basic longings from their id when they conflict with the superego's controls.	Our collective unconscious, and therefore the predisposition to generate archetypal images, is universal. All humans need to individuate and balance these images, and mental illness comes when this is not successful.
Religion originates from a universal Oedipus complex that exists in all males, who have a sexual desire for their mother and hatred/admiration for their father that derives from the id.	Religion is archetypal in origin. It contains images produced by the structures of our mind. All people generate the same kinds of images, e.g. the persona and the shadow.
For example, the Wolf Man case study shows that having witnessed his parents having sex when he was a child, the patient developed phobias and obsessive religious tendencies as a result of repressing his desires and trauma.	For example, Miss Miller the schizophrenic had a dream of a moth desiring light. Jung compared this with the human desire for God; this is repeated in religious tradition, which compares God to light.
As an illness, religion needs to be treated and cured.	Religion needs to be embraced and people need to engage fully with it for mental well-being.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## 2 Examine Freud's view that religion is a neurosis.

- Freud challenged religious belief by claiming it is produced by our minds rather than derived from a reality external to us. This means that God need not exist.
- Freud claimed there were three parts to the human psyche (structure of the mind):
  - Id – Unconscious urges and desires that are innate and natural but not always pleasant.
  - Superego – Unconscious controls taught to us by society that have become ingrained.
  - Ego – Mostly conscious part of our mind that tries to mediate between the id and the superego.
- The id's desires may conflict with the controls from our superego. Neurosis arises when this conflict is repressed. A neurosis is a mental illness causing symptoms of chronic stress. Freud compared religion to other neuroses, suggesting that both are similar products of the human mind.
- Religion, like any other neurosis, is ritualistic and repetitive. For example, in a church service the liturgy is repeated in the same way every service. The Eucharist has specific rituals and wording that must be performed correctly. The same is true for those with obsessive-compulsive behaviour.
- For a religious participant, the performance of the ritual is reassuring if it is performed correctly, but induces guilt if not. The same can be said of other neurotic people, who

find themselves repeating behaviours over and over again if they cannot get the ritual right.

- In each case the ritual is symbolic. In the case of religion, it is a spiritual symbolism; in the case of other mental illness, it is symbolic of the psychological struggle.
- Freud called religion a universal obsessional neurosis or collective neurosis, suffered by all humans as they try to repress the most basic longings from their id when they conflict with the superego's controls.
- For Freud, the Oedipus complex is the neurosis at the root of all religious belief and behaviour. In Greek mythology, Oedipus unwittingly murdered his father and married his mother.
- In the case of people in the real world, a breastfeeding boy desires his mother and is jealous of his father, yet also admires him. The superego prevents his feelings being fulfilled, so they are repressed. This causes guilt and conflict in the unconscious mind. If unresolved, this conflict emerges as neurosis.
- Religion is an immature solution that humans should grow out as they resolve the conflict with a reasoned solution. Religion is therefore a neurosis that requires treatment and a cure.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**3 Explain Jung's understanding of religion as necessary for personal growth.**

- Carl Jung's understanding of religious belief is a challenge to its objective truth because it claims that religious belief is produced by our minds rather than derived from a reality external to us. This means that an objectively existent God may not exist.
- However, Jung was much more positive about the role and function of religion than Freud, claiming that it was necessary for personal growth.
- Jung replaced Freud's conclusions with the following observations:
  - Religion is a natural and beneficial process.
  - It performs the function of harmonising the psyche.
  - Removing religion would cause psychological problems.
  - Religious images are a projection of the self.
  - They enrich human life and are important.
- Jung observed that those of his patients who were over 35 years old often suffered from a loss of religion. Jung concluded that modern people lack the wholeness that they seek because they no longer believe in myths.
- Jung argues that the first stage of a person's life involves finding a place in the world and forming friendships, family and work. However, from middle age onwards, when faced with declining opportunities and health, the person must find a new purpose in life and come to terms with their own personality.
- Individuation is a process by which a person integrates and balances the conscious and unconscious parts of their mind. It is achieved through accepting the contents of the collective unconscious into the conscious mind. It is the failure to do this that causes mental illness.

- Religion is not a product of mental illness; it instead performs the role of balancing the mind and is key to successful individuation.
- Jung claimed there is a part of our mind called the collective unconscious. This is the oldest part of the mind, an ancestral heritage that is impersonal, universal and identical in all humans. It generates primordial images and is the source of all religion.
- Jung called the contents of the collective unconscious archetypes:
  - Archetypes are structures/blueprints or image generators within the mind.
  - They generate image types in response to our experiences.
  - They help us make sense of our place in the world.
- It is necessary for us to produce these images so that we can successfully individuate and thus achieve mental balance. God is one of these kinds of images.
- Those who reject religion are less likely to individuate successfully and more likely to experience neurosis because of psychological tension. Jung concludes that religion is psychologically valuable.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**4 Examine the challenges to religion from New Atheism.**

- Atheism is defined as:
  - the absence of belief in deities (no belief is held), or
  - the rejection of belief in deities (any belief is rejected), or
  - the belief that there are no deities (a contrary belief is held).
- New Atheists or antitheists argue that religion should be eradicated from our society. New Atheists are distinct from atheism as it was in the past. New Atheists don't just lack belief in God, they actively oppose any belief in God.
- The New Atheist movement arose in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Dawkins claims that prior to 9/11 he saw religion as harmless nonsense, but now he sees it as very dangerous nonsense. He especially challenges belief in the existence of God and the afterlife, on the basis that life here on Earth will be treated less reverentially if there is more after this one is finished.
- New Atheists argue that religion is non-thinking:
  - Dawkins and Harris agree that the God hypothesis should be subject to scientific scrutiny like any other hypothesis, yet it is not. It is often given special protection against such scrutiny.
  - Dawkins calls intelligent design and creationism 'pseudoscience'. This is because such movements pose as being scientific but are not consistent with our current understanding of scientific methodology.
  - The notion that blind faith is virtuous encourages people to accept propositions without thought or reason and actively dissuades people from using their reason.
  - Scripture has no data outside itself to support its accuracy and yet religious people rely upon it for truth.
  - Religion teaches people to be satisfied with not understanding the world and just trusting God. There is no evidence to prove His existence.
  - Dawkins contends that religious faith in a personal God is a delusion or a persistent false belief in something against strong contradictory evidence.

- New Atheists also argue that religion is an infantile world view:
  - Dawkins sees it as childish to assume someone else has responsibility for giving our lives meaning and purpose.
  - He sees education and consciousness-raising as one of the primary tools in the opposition of religious dogma to help people emerge as adults without the need for God.
  - Religious belief is reductionist, reducing the universe to a small, limited thing, instead of the vast, expansive, wondrous thing that science perceives it to be.
  - The religious approach makes God like a large and unpleasant human that we should fear rather than revere.
- New Atheists argue that religion impedes scientific progress:
  - Hitchens claims religion works hard to resist what it views as a challenge to faith from scientific research.
  - For example, religion in some parts of America controls the teaching of scientific knowledge in schools on issues like evolution and climate change.
  - Religion also controls medicine, for example prevention of HIV through contraception, what medical research can and cannot be done, treatment of the terminally ill, treatment of pregnant women, faith healers' hostility to medicine.
  - To resist science is against reason, yet religion prevents science moving on and improving life for all.
  - Dawkins accuses religion of subverting science through the teaching of religion in schools, which is indoctrination and religious abuse.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**5 Explain how religion has responded to the challenges of New Atheism.**

- Religious believers respond to the challenges of New Atheism in a variety of ways, some sympathetic to a modern world view and others less so. In each case the aim is to logically, morally and spiritually defend the faith from these challenges.
- New Atheists present the argument that science and religion are incompatible. Religious believers respond by presenting believers from the scientific community. For example:
  - John Polkinghorne, theoretical physicist and theologian:
    - Takes a critical realist approach to religion and considers physics to be only part of what it takes to understand the universe.
    - Claims that there is scientific evidence for God's existence since the universe is intelligible and the laws of nature are perfectly adapted to produce intelligent human life; the latter point is known as anthropic fine-tuning.
  - Alister McGrath, molecular biophysicist and theologian, and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, chartered psychologist and Anglican priest:
    - Argue that Dawkins wrongly characterises religion and science as being at war, with science as the only possible authority.
    - Argue that religion and science are partially overlapping magisteria (POMA), meaning that there are areas in which the two authorities of science and religion can benefit each other.

- New Atheism and the scientific theories that are championed by atheists are often seen as a threat to religion and scriptural authority. One possible response is to reject the whole of science and the secular world to return to the fundamental values of faith. For example:
- Ken Ham, co-founder of the organisation Answers in Genesis, the Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter creationist theme park:
  - Emphasises the absolute authority of scripture over modern secular science, so the Old Testament is literally true.
  - As a young earth creationist, he claims the universe is 6000, not 13.7 billion, years old, so he rejects the Big Bang and evolution.
- Religious and scientific education:
  - Today there is a continuing battle in the USA to be allowed to Teach the Controversy, meaning that fair and equal time should be given in science lessons to alternatives to evolutionary theory, such as creationism or intelligent design.
  - Intelligent design is proposed as an alternative scientific approach. It teaches that some features of the universe are best explained by an intelligent cause not an undirected one.
- Apologetics is the religious discipline of defending or proving the truth of religious doctrines through systematic argumentation and discourse. New Atheism has given rise to public debates with apologists on radio, television and social media. For example:
- Robert Barron, Roman Catholic priest and apologist with a significant presence on social media:
  - Trivial atheism, not religion, is the opiate of the masses. It masks our desire for God and dulls our sensitivity to our deepest longings.
  - Atheism is the fantasy, where it says 'Wouldn't it be nice if we could do what we want and there would be no consequence?'
- William Lane Craig, American Christian apologist, philosopher and theologian who has publicly debated with several of the 'Four Horsemen' (Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett):
  - Claims that religious faith must be spread through appeal to reason and logic or atheism will triumph.
  - Without God, morality and evil do not exist, the world becomes a nonsense, evil goes unpunished and life has no purpose.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

### **Sample AO2 questions, page 63**

- 1 Evaluate the claim that Jung's approach to religion has no basis in empirical fact.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

#### **Introduction:**

- Empirical fact = That which can be perceived with the senses and is open to verification or falsification and repetition.



### **Paragraph One:**

- Jung's approach to religion has no basis in empirical fact because his method of analysis included evidence from dreams and private experiences. These can never be used as evidence as they are not open to verification.
- However, the only way that we have ever 'know' anything is through personal experience. When we interpret sensory information, this is a private experience and cannot be shared publicly.
- Jung's approach is based in empirical fact as much as any other scientific approach. All approaches are subjective to some extent, but Jung has a methodology that is repeatable and was successful with many of his patients.

### **Paragraph Two:**

- There is no evidence for Jung's concept of the structures of the mind, most significantly for the collective unconscious, which suggests his theory has no basis in empirical fact.
- However, extensive research by Jung and others into myths and symbols across cultures confirms that there are consistently recurring themes.
- The lack of conclusive evidence means that the theory can never be universalised in the way that Jung attempted, so, while it may have some factual basis, it cannot be applied to all people.

### **Paragraph Three:**

- Empirical evidence is what helps us separate fact from fiction. It is very difficult to tell in Jung's theory the extent to which his archetypes are fact or fiction. There are a great many images that are generated, and they are all open to interpretation.
- In addition, one would expect empirical facts to be falsifiable, and yet Jung does not seem to allow any evidence to count against him since every image produced is, to him, archetypal.
- However, the psychological discipline of dream interpretation and analysis is scientific. There is a methodology in place and the mind is based within the physical brain, which suggests that to some extent Jung's approach must be based on empirical fact.

### **Conclusion:**

- Jung's' approach gives an empirical explanation for the existence of religion as a construct of the mind. While this might be appealing to a sympathetic atheist, it is not a theory that can be supported with conclusive sensory evidence that can be falsified and as such it has no basis in empirical fact.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

- 2 'Religious belief is infantile.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### **Introduction:**

- Infantile = Childish, immature, something not expected of an adult and something that one will grow out of when one develops more fully.

### **Paragraph One:**

- There is much evidence presented by Dawkins and the other New Atheists to support this claim. For instance, religious beliefs are not based on reason and tend to be unthinking, open to sometimes outlandish suggestions.
- However, this argument is an ad hominem one that attacks the person rather than the content of the claim and as such is not only insulting but illegitimate philosophically.
- One would expect an infantile idea would have features of childishness about it, and in this case religious belief does. In scripture Jesus appeals to people to come to him as little children do, trusting, unquestioning and worshipful, in which case the view is reasonable.

### **Paragraph Two:**

- It is unreasonable to tar all religious believers with the same brush. While there are some who would take a blind faith (fideistic) approach to religion, this is not true for all. The work of theology is all about questioning, understanding and reasoning, and this is far from infantile.
- However, Freud had previously made a similar claim against religion when he saw the development of the species and the individual as being parallel. In this case he saw religion as a kind of early stage of societal development that we would grow out of and eventually into reason.
- This kind of universalising of all humans is not legitimate as it commits the fallacy of composition by assuming that what is true of a part is also true of the whole. Just because a few sick people showed childish tendencies with their religious belief, does not mean this is true of all religious people.

### **Paragraph Three:**

- The New Atheist assertion that religion is infantile is a reasonable one, in the sense that religion is resistant to education, science and reason. Hitchens provided arguments for this when he pointed out how it prevents scientific progress.
- In addition, in the more fundamentalist responses to atheism we see a resistance to evidence regarding the age of the Earth, its shape and the origin of humanity. Again, this is based on an unthinking trust in scripture rather than a reasoned approach.
- However, there are many who would use reason to support their beliefs, and the scientific community includes many religious believers who analyse their beliefs rather than dismissing science as contrary to scripture.

### **Conclusion:**

- Ultimately, there are many religious believers who can be accused of being infantile when they reduce their God to a frightening petulant child or to a father that will sort out all our self-inflicted problems. However, for many, God is not like this and analysis of the character and reality of God and religion is a sophisticated process, not an infantile one.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

## Theme 3 Religious experience

### 3A The nature of religious experience

#### Now test yourself, page 65

- 1 Give three ways in which a religious experience is different from an ordinary experience.
  - A religious experience is not universal to all humans.
  - A religious experience is not verifiable.
  - A religious experience is not an experience of empirical events or items.
- 2 What does it mean to ask about the nature or features of religious experience?

There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. You must show that you understand what these experiences are like.
- 3 Define the three features of visions.
  - An apparently external event occurs.
  - The event cannot be sensed by others.
  - It brings knowledge and understanding that cannot be gained in any other way.

#### Now test yourself, page 66

- 1 Explain three ways that people may experience conversion.
  - From unbelief to belief
  - From one religion to another
  - A strengthening of faith
- 2 What are the differences between a sudden and a gradual conversion?

Sudden conversions tend to be:

  - at a specific moment in time
  - unconscious
  - involuntary
  - unexpected or spontaneous.

Gradual conversions:

  - cannot be pinpointed in time
  - tend to involve conscious effort
  - tend to be voluntary
  - tend to take time.

- 3 List Miller's five features of mystical experiences.
  - Transcendent – Above and beyond the material world.
  - Ineffable – Not explicable in ordinary language.
  - Noetic – Provide knowledge unobtainable by any other source.
  - Ecstatic – Bring an emotional state of rapture or euphoria.
  - Unitive – A sense of oneness with the divine.

### **Apply your knowledge, page 67**

How useful are the different explanations of the nature of religious experience? Consider the following:

- 1 Do the explanations ever seem self-contradictory?

Yes – If conversion can be both sudden and gradual, both communal and individual, then it is difficult to see what such an experience is. Definitions seem to include both everything and nothing in their explanation of religious experience.

No – The experiences are diverse and so explanations need to include diversity so that they do not exclude an experience that is religious but doesn't exactly fit limited criteria.

- 2 Do we have a better understanding of what mystical experience is like?

Yes – The examples that are given help to add clarity to explanations.

No – They are ineffable and so resort to religious or symbolic language to explain something, which no one can understand unless they have had the experience themselves.

- 3 Can we analyse an experience that cannot be verified?

Yes – James considers such experiences from a psychological perspective and cites other scholars who have done the same.

No – We can never be certain that such an experience is genuine or that its features have not been misinterpreted or mistaken.

## **3B Mystical experience**

### **Now test yourself, page 68**

- 1 What is the basic nature of a mystical experience?

It is a feeling of unity with the divine and an ecstatic feeling that causes a person to lose their sense of self.

- 2 What four characteristics did James observe to be common within mystical experiences?

- Passive – When it occurs, the mystic feels grasped by its power.
- Ineffable – The mystic struggles to articulate the experience.

- Noetic – Knowledge is gained without use of reason or ordinary experience.
  - Transient – Experiences are temporary, yet the effects last.
- 3 What does it mean to describe James as a pragmatist regarding religious experiences?  
He claimed that a proposition that works positively in a person's life is true.

### Apply your knowledge, page 70

Read the mystical experience from Teresa of Avila. Highlight or note down the features of her experiences that correspond to James' four characteristics and then repeat for Otto's numinous experiences.

James:

- Passive – 'Christ appeared before me'
- Ineffable – 'I saw him with the eyes of my soul'
- Noetic – 'more clearly than could ever have seen him with the eyes of the body'
- Transient – 'although it was more than twenty-six years ago, I seem to see his present even now'

Otto:

- *Mysterium* – 'giving me to understand that there was something about this that displeased him'
- *Tremendum* – 'I was greatly ... disturbed'
- *Fascinans* – 'I was greatly astonished'

Consider the following:

- 1 Do you feel James has helped you understand more about what a mystical experience is like?

Yes – Each feature is clearly defined, and may be present in a wide range of different experiences, all of which can be called mystical because they have these features.

No – They do not really tell us what these kinds of experiences are like, because we cannot understand what is claimed to be known or sensed as a result of the experiences.

- 2 Is the definition of numinous clear for someone wishing to know more about religious experience?

Yes – We can clearly understand the ambivalence that is present in numinous experiences and comprehend such confusion.

No – Just because we are both repelled by and interested in something, doesn't make it divine in origin. We might say the same about some reality shows on TV!

- 3 Do the definitions appear consistent with each other or do they conflict?

They are not paradoxical, yet they hold nothing in common.

### Now test yourself, page 70

- 1 What did Otto mean by the word numinous?  
Supernatural or divine power.
- 2 What are the three significant elements to *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*?
  - *Mysterium* – A mystery, 'wholly other'. Something beyond human boundaries.
  - *Tremendum* – Awe, fear or dread caused by being in God's presence.
  - *Fascinans* – Pull or attraction of experience. Being unable to drag oneself away.
- 3 Why is the numinous described as *sui generis*?  
It is of its own kind, unique, in a category of its own, unlike any other kind of experience.

## 3C Challenges to the objectivity and authenticity of religious experience

### Apply your knowledge, page 73

How reasonable are the different challenges to religious experience? Consider the following:

- 1 Are any of the alternative explanations unreasonably complex?  
Yes – Such challenges are suggested because some people will grasp at any other explanation so that they don't have to believe it was God.  
No – All the other explanations are consistent with empirical world experience that can be experienced by everyone.
- 2 Are any of the challenges unreasonably *ad hominem*?  
Yes – Not all religious believers are liars or drug-addled. In fact, their ethical system would prevent this from being the case.  
No – Such experiences are not claimed by all religious people. Those who do claim them are often those who are in most need of help in their lives, hence their need for a religious experience in the first place.
- 3 Do the challenges make it impossible for religious experiences to be genuine?  
Yes – These challenges cover such a wide range of alternative possibilities, there can be no hope of experiencing God.  
No – God is still a possible cause, even if the other explanations seem more likely.

### Now test yourself, page 73

Place the following statements into the correct category of challenge from Franks Davis:

- 1 You were fasting for too long. – Subject
- 2 You are lying. – Subject

- 3 This is an old-fashioned explanation before we understood science. – [Description](#)
- 4 'God's grace' is a meaningless explanation. – [Description](#)
- 5 The rainbow was caused by weather conditions and light, not God. – [Object](#)
- 6 But science tells us that this is impossible. – [Object](#)

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 76

- 1 Outline the different types of religious experience. **(AS only)**

#### **Visions:**

- The recipient may believe they have seen or heard someone or something that no one else can see or hear and that gives them insight into some other kind of truth or reality.
  - Sensory visions – Where an apparently external event occurs.
  - Intellectual visions – Seen with the mind rather than the eye.
  - Dream visions – Occur while sleeping or in a meditative state.

#### **Conversion:**

- Where a person changes from one standpoint to another. It is usually life-changing, although not necessarily permanent. A conversion may be:
  - from unbelief to belief
  - from one religion to another
  - a strengthening of faith.
- William James notes three stages to 'sick soul' conversion:
  - 1 A divided self characterised by depression and anxiety.
  - 2 A desire for change.
  - 3 Self-surrender, where clarity and contentment are found.

#### **Mystical experience:**

- Ed Miller summarises the features thus:
  - 1 Transcendent – Above and beyond the material world.
  - 2 Ineffable – Not explicable in ordinary language.
  - 3 Noetic – Provides knowledge unobtainable by any other source.
  - 4 Ecstatic – Brings an emotional state of rapture or euphoria.
  - 5 Unitive – A sense of oneness with the divine.
- It involves a non-rational experience of something beyond the empirical world. It includes a temporary removal of the sense of self or ego so that the person feels no separation between themselves and the divine.

#### **Prayer:**

- Is about communication with the divine, which is why it is a religious experience.
  - Thanksgiving
  - Worship



- Petition
- Repentance
- A significant type of prayer that is worthy of study as a religious experience is the contemplative prayer championed by St Teresa of Avila. St Teresa gave the effect of prayer in her Garden Analogy:
  - Teresa compared the soul to a garden that can be watered in four ways. The garden, once watered, becomes rich and vibrant. This is the effect that prayer has upon the soul.
  - Watering the garden with a bucket lowered into a well is hard work, much like the early stages of contemplative prayer.
  - By the end of the process, like rainfall, no effort is required to water the garden. Once prayer is established, God takes over and union with Him is complete.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

- 2 Compare Otto's numinous experience with the characteristics of mystical experience from James.

James	Otto
Studied religious experience as a psychological phenomenon.	Rejected a purely rational approach to religious experience.
Pragmatic in his approach to mystical experiences.	Rejected previous schematisation of language and produced his own schema – the numinous – to describe mystical experience.
Made no comment on his own view on the objective truth of such experiences.	Was interested in comparative religion, but valued Christianity as the most sophisticated form of religion.
Interested mostly in union with God and loss of ego as described in mysticism.	Interested in creature-consciousness and the awareness of our humility in the presence of the divine.
Described features of mystical experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive – The mystic feels grasped by power, a positive sensation whereby they relinquish power to the divine.</li> <li>• Ineffable – The mystic struggles to express the experience in ordinary language, instead resorting to specialised religious language that seems meaningless to one who has not shared a similar experience.</li> <li>• Noetic – Illuminations are full of authority but are a kind of intuitive knowledge, leaving the recipient with a sense of certainty.</li> <li>• Transient – Experiences are temporary yet leave lasting effects.</li> </ul>	Referred to mystical experience as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mysterium</i> – A mystery, 'wholly other'. Something beyond human boundaries.</li> <li>• <i>Tremendum</i> – Awe, fear or dread caused by being in God's presence.</li> <li>• <i>Fascinans</i> – Pull or attraction of experience. Being unable to drag oneself away.</li> </ul>

James	Otto
There are degrees of mystical experience, ranging from déjà vu to full mystical consciousness.	We have a predisposition to mysticism – everyone has the capability for it, but not everyone is receptive to it.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

3 Examine the challenges to religious experience from Caroline Franks Davis.

- In *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*, Franks Davis identifies three types of challenge to religious experience.

**Description-related challenges:**

- These ask how reliable the account of religious experience is.
- They challenge the way in which the event is explained.
- They may suggest that the account is logically inconsistent or incoherent, for example if I said I had seen a square circle, I could be challenged for making an illogical claim.
- A description-related challenge might point out the claim conflicts with our knowledge of the world, for example if I claimed I had just seen a dodo, this would conflict with what I know (that the dodo is extinct).
- They might also claim that there is a conflict between my claim and my actions. If I claimed there was a cobra in my bedroom, but I did nothing to remove it or acted in a calm manner, someone might not believe me.
- It might be that the subject has used the wrong words because they haven't understood them properly. So if I said I had a headache but pointed to my stomach, then this would be evidence that the description is flawed.
- Ambiguous terms might be used, for example the word 'pavement' is unclear to someone using American English.
- It might be that someone makes claims that could have been known about before the experience, causing me to doubt the descriptions. If someone gave a description of Christ that was consistent with scripture, it might be that I can claim that they knew it prior to the experience.

**Subject-related claims:**

- These ask how reliable the person is who makes the claims.
- They might say that the subject's perception is unreliable, for instance (s)he might be colour blind.
- The subject might not have the right training to recognise what they saw, for instance if I had never heard music I may not be able to claim something is out of tune.
- Different accounts might conflict, such as claiming that we were pushed, jumped or fell.
- There might be something about the subject that prevents them from perceiving accurately, such as hallucinating while on drugs.

**Object-related challenges:**

- These question how reliable the event is.
- They ask the question 'What actually happened?'
- An object-related challenge might argue that the object was not present as described. So, if someone claimed to see the Abominable Snowman, we would argue that it wasn't there at all.
- Alternatively, the challenge might say that the object was present but was not causally related. So, if I claim an angel appears every night, someone might point out that the pattern of shadows created in the room makes it look like an angel when it is not.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**4 Explain the nature of religious experience.**

- Religious experiences are different from ordinary experiences because they:
  - are not universal to all humans
  - are not verifiable
  - are not experiences of empirical events or items
  - are subjective
  - are interpretive
  - provide knowledge of other realities or the divine
  - are life-changing
  - are difficult to describe in ordinary language.
- Types of religious experience include visions, conversion, mystical experience and prayer.

**Visions:**

- The recipient may believe they have seen or heard someone or something that no one else can see or hear and that gives them insight into some other kind of truth or reality.
- Sensory visions: Where an apparently external event occurs, e.g. St Bernadette's vision of Mary at Lourdes.
- Intellectual visions: Seen with the mind rather than the eye, e.g. St Ignatius of Loyola experienced his eyes being opened to understanding without seeing any physical vision.
- Dream visions: Occur while sleeping or in a meditative state, e.g. Jacob's vision of a ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:10–22).
- As in the examples above, visions give the recipient images that offer insight into a spiritual truth or ideal.

**Conversion:**

- Where a person changes from one standpoint to another.
- Usually life-changing, although not necessarily permanent.
- A conversion may be:
  - from unbelief to belief

- from one religion to another
- a strengthening of faith.
- William James notes three stages to 'sick soul' conversion:
  - 1 A divided self characterised by depression and anxiety.
  - 2 A desire for change.
  - 3 Self-surrender, where clarity and contentment are found.
- This kind of religious experience gives the recipient a certainty and clarity that previously they lacked.

### **Mystical experience:**

- Ed Miller summarises the features thus:
  - 1 Transcendent – Above and beyond the material world.
  - 2 Ineffable – Not explicable in ordinary language.
  - 3 Noetic – Provides knowledge unobtainable by any other source.
  - 4 Ecstatic – Brings an emotional state of rapture or euphoria.
  - 5 Unitive – A sense of oneness with the divine.
- It involves a non-rational experience of something beyond the empirical world. It includes a temporary removal of the sense of self or ego so that the person feels no separation between themselves and the divine.

### **Prayer:**

- Is about communication with the divine, which is why it is a religious experience:
  - Thanksgiving
  - Worship
  - Petition
  - Repentance
- A significant type of prayer that is worthy of study as a religious experience is the contemplative prayer championed by St Teresa of Avila. St Teresa gave the effect of prayer in her Garden Analogy:
  - Teresa compared the soul to a garden that can be watered in four ways. The garden, once watered, becomes rich and vibrant. This is the effect that prayer has upon the soul.
  - Watering the garden with a bucket lowered into a well is hard work, much like the early stages of contemplative prayer.
  - By the end of the process, like rainfall, no effort is required to water the garden. Once prayer is established, God takes over and union with Him is complete.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## **Sample AO2 questions, page 76**

- 1 Evaluate the view that individual experiences are valid even if they cannot be verified.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### **Introduction:**

- Valid = Having a sound basis in logic or fact, reasonable or cogent.

### Paragraph One:

- All types of religious experience are life-changing for the individual recipient, whether individual or communal, therefore they should be considered valid.
- However, one might argue that conversion as an individual experience is the most valid because we can see the evidence for its authenticity borne out in the change in the individual's life.
- Yet, religious experiences are so diverse and indistinct in nature that they cannot be trusted to convey fact.

### Paragraph Two:

- Mystical experiences from individuals often communicate completely contradictory ideas. Any ideas that are paradoxical in this way cannot be considered valid.
- However, individual experiences are described using emotive language that demonstrates an individual's engagement with the divine. This cannot be assessed in the same way as rational statements.
- Yet, mysticism is first-hand experience of the divine and so is reasonable and convincing.

### Paragraph Three:

- Individual experiences cannot be verified or falsified and thus cannot be assessed for validity. This makes them meaningless and not valid.
- Communal experiences have more chance of validity since they can be corroborated by other witnesses even if they cannot be replicated.
- Yet, nothing makes one experience better than another. They are equally untrustworthy because they can never be seen to be supported by science or by reason.

### Conclusion:

- All religious experiences are said to communicate something beyond the material world, whether individual or communal. Nothing meaningful can be said in worldly language that could ever do justice to such a topic, so individual experiences will always appear invalid, even if they reflect some other reality.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

- 2 'Otto's definition of the numinous is inadequate.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### Introduction:

- Adequate = Satisfactory or acceptable in quality.

### Paragraph One:

- Otto has inspired writers such as C.S. Lewis to exemplify him in their books, therefore to those who have had such experiences, his definition seems adequate.
- However, Otto merely reworks James' finding and adds nothing new to the analysis, which suggests that his definition is only adequate if James' is.

- Yet, the concept of the numinous expresses the ambiguous relationship of humanity with the divine in a way that James did not fully explore with his empiricist method.

#### **Paragraph Two:**

- Otto's definition gets to grips with the fundamental sense of experiencing the divine. He focuses more on the sensation or feelings rather than reason. This is more than adequate as it captures a sense of what mysticism really is.
- However, Otto interprets religious experience according to his prior framework of belief. This means that everything he says about mysticism is in line with Christian theology, rather than a discovery of the range of mystical experience. This makes it inadequate.
- In addition, Otto's description of the experience of a believer does not account for an objective source for mysticism. It focuses solely on the person rather than the divine and so is inadequate.

#### **Paragraph Three:**

- Otto is too vague to be understandable by those who have no first-hand experience. He states in *The Idea of the Holy* that if the reader has never had a religious experience, they should just stop reading as his remarks will be meaningless!
- However, Otto is consistent with biblical experiences of God that are fearful as well as ecstatic. This suggests that for the Christian, his definitions should be adequate and trustworthy.
- Indeed, Otto is more effective than James in demonstrating the unique nature of the source, since James' focus on secular, rational methodology removes the true spirit of what a religious experience is.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Otto reflects that we can relate more to a recipient's feelings about such an event than to reason or natural theology. His methodology is likely to be more attractive to the believer than to the atheist or secularist, and so the adequacy of his definition might depend upon whether the reader has sympathy with such experiences to begin with.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

## Theme 3 Religious experience

### 3D The influence of religious experience on religious practice and faith

#### Now test yourself, page 78

- 1 Name the seven features of religion from Smart.
  - Mythical or narrative – The stories or scriptural accounts
  - Experiential or emotional – The feelings associated with involvement
  - Ritual – The order of ceremony, the words that are said and actions that are performed
  - Material – The things, objects and places that are involved
  - Institutional or social – Community membership and participation
  - Legal or ethical – The laws, rules and codes that govern behaviour
  - Doctrinal or philosophical – Systematic teachings and belief systems
- 2 Give two examples of religious founders who had religious experiences.

#### Example answers:

- Christ (Christianity) – At Jesus' baptism, he saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and heard God's voice declare him His son.
  - Muhammad (Islam) – Muhammad received a visitation from Jibril in a mountaintop cave and was given the words of the Qur'an.
- 3 How would Paul's conversion experience demonstrate God's forgiveness? (See Acts 9.)

Saul, persecutor of Christians, had a vision of Christ and consequently obeyed God's commands. Ananias prayed for Saul's healing in Jesus' name and Saul's sight was restored. The suggestion is that Saul (subsequently Paul) was remorseful for his actions (shown through his obedience to God's commands) and God forgave (shown through His healing action).

#### Now test yourself, page 79

- 4 How might the religious experience of a key figure help motivate people to obey moral or religious laws?
  - It enables people to feel part of the community.
  - The divine source gives people the impetus to react.
  - The example of others makes some feel that the same is possible for them.
  - It acts as evidence of the reality of the divine for those who need it.



- 5 Suggest two examples of behaviours that mark a religious experience and help social unity.

**Example answers:**

- Collective prayer
- Pilgrimage to a shrine or site of religious experience.

### **Apply your knowledge, page 80**

Can an experience that cannot be verified or checked for accuracy ever really be considered valuable? Consider the following:

- 1 How can we judge whether or not the fruits of someone's experience are valuable?

- By whether they actively enable social cohesion rather than disorder.
- By whether they enable a fulfilling life for themselves and/or others.
- By whether they bring about a positive change in a person's lifestyle.

- 2 If there is no God, does the religious experience retain any value?

Yes – If there are positive effects for the person and/or those around them, then we can take a pragmatic approach like James and say that if it works, it is real.

No – Ultimately the person is deluded and basing their life on a lie. A more enriching life is that of honest living in the real world.

## **3E The definitions of miracles**

### **Now test yourself, page 81**

- 1 According to Aquinas, why can't a miracle be contrary to a law of nature?

Because nature is created by and according to God's will.

- 2 How did Hume define miracles?

'A transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.'

- 3 Why did Hume need to define miracles if he was going to deny their existence?

Hume defines miracles so that we are clear about what he considers impossible.

### **Now test yourself, page 83**

- 1 What kinds of events does Holland's definition allow to be called miracles?

Coincidences.

2 What example did Holland give of a miracle?

A boy whose ride-along car was caught on a rail in the path of an on-coming train. The train stopped because of the coincidence of the driver passing out due to a medical issue and the brakes being applied automatically.

3 How does Swinburne define a miracle?

'A violation of a law of nature by a god, that is, a very powerful rational being who is not a material object (viz., is invisible and intangible).'

### Apply your knowledge, page 84

Are any of the definitions of miracles adequate? Consider the following:

1 If a law of nature cannot be broken, does this mean there can be no God?

Yes – If there is an omnipotent being, that being should, by definition, be able to break the laws of nature.

No – Laws put in place by an omnipotent God can be unbreakable since they are in accordance with His all-powerful will.

2 Does belief in miracles require belief in a deity?

No – In practice there are many people who are happy to believe in or make claims of miracles, yet who do not commit to a belief in any God or gods.

Yes – A miracle, like any event, requires a cause. If the event breaks the laws of nature, then it requires a cause outside of nature to bring it about.

3 Is it acceptable for a miracle to be declared just because a person has an emotional reaction to a surprising event?

Yes – The word miracle need not simply be restricted to breaking the laws of nature. There is no purpose in a miracle that does not have some kind of effect, emotionally and/or spiritually, upon the recipient(s).

No – People can have emotional reactions to any event. There must be something that marks a miracle out as special or significant to make it a true miracle. If it does not break a law of nature, there is nothing that makes it different from an ordinary event.

### 3F A comparative study of two key scholars from within and outside the Christian tradition and their contrasting views on the possibility of miracles

#### Apply your knowledge, page 87

Is there ever any good reason why we should doubt the testimony of a person who claims that a miracle has occurred? Consider the following:

- 1 Are all religious people inherently more or less trustworthy than non-religious people?

No – Religious people are just as trustworthy/untrustworthy as any other group of humans.

Yes – Simply the fact that they believe in something as unsupported as God is reason enough to doubt the truth or value of their other claims.

- 2 Is it more or less likely that a person who is religious will be poorly educated?

More likely – A well-educated person is less likely to believe in God as they will understand science correctly and be able to use reason reliably enough to see superstition for what it is.

Much the same likelihood as any other group of humans – You get religious people in any walk of life, including within science and academia, and many religious leaders are required to be well-educated to take up their position in the clergy.

- 3 What reason will always be present that should make us more likely to doubt a person who claims that a miracle has occurred?

The fact that they claim a miracle has occurred is a good reason to doubt them. This is because we know from experience that miracles do not happen. By definition they are very unlikely and therefore we are likely to doubt even the most trustworthy person if this is what they claim.

#### Now test yourself, page 87

- 1 Why does Hume doubt the testimony of people who claim to have experienced a miracle?

- It is always more likely that the person is lying or mistaken than that a miracle has happened.
- There are never enough witnesses who:
  - possess enough good sense
  - possess education and learning
  - are trustworthy not to mislead us
  - have a good enough reputation
  - have enough to lose if discovered lying.
- People are likely to be attention-seeking.
- Claimants are unreliable and lack common sense.

- A religious person may be lying to convert people.
- Those who claim miracles are ignorant and uneducated.

2 Why does Swinburne suggest we should trust such testimonies?

We should apply the principle of testimony – If someone says that an event has happened then it probably has, unless we have reason to doubt their claims. Otherwise we end up in a sceptical bog, where we cannot trust anything that anyone says.

3 What does it mean to proportion your belief to the evidence?

The strength of your belief should be in direct proportion to the evidence that supports it. There is more evidence that laws of nature are absolute and unchanging than there is that they can be broken. Therefore, we should be more believing of the power of natural laws, and less believing of miracles.

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 90

1 Compare the definitions of miracle from Swinburne, Hume, Holland and Aquinas.

Name	Definition	Comparative comments
<b>Aquinas</b>	'Things that are at times divinely accomplished, apart from the generally established order in things, are customarily called miracles.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to Hume and Swinburne.</li> <li>• Broadens the definition to include three ways that God might act within nature:                         <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Something Nature cannot do alone.</li> <li>2 Something Nature can do but not in that order.</li> <li>3 Something Nature can do, but doesn't.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Does not allow that a law of nature can be broken.</li> </ul>
<b>Hume</b>	'A transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to Aquinas and Swinburne.</li> <li>• Quite limited since it only addresses the breaking of laws of nature.</li> <li>• Nothing less than this can be called a miracle.</li> <li>• Would not include coincidence or events that could be explained by natural laws.</li> </ul>
<b>Swinburne</b>	'A violation of a law of nature by a god, that is, a very powerful rational being who is not a material object (viz., is invisible and intangible).'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to Aquinas and Hume.</li> <li>• Adds that there should be a purpose to such an event since God is not arbitrary.</li> <li>• A broken law of nature is a non-repeatable counter-instance.</li> <li>• It is acceptable to assume God is the cause if no other cause can be witnessed and there is other evidence to suggest it is a positive answer to prayer.</li> </ul>

Name	Definition	Comparative comments
<b>Holland</b>	An event that in certain circumstances has a human significance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctly different from the other definitions.</li> <li>• Considers definitions that deal only with the breaking of laws as too restrictive.</li> <li>• Includes coincidences.</li> <li>• Accepts that there is an emotional element to claims.</li> <li>• Accepts contingency miracles as distinct from violation miracles.</li> <li>• Allows for the example of the child and the train.</li> </ul>

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

2 Examine the value of religious experience for a religious community.

- The value of religious experience for a religious community may be in the affirmation of a belief system.
- Religious experience is the source of religious teaching. World faiths often have a key figure(s) whose experience of the divine is the basis for doctrine and ethical instruction. For example, at Jesus' baptism, he saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and heard God's voice declare him His son. Siddhartha Gautama's meditation under the Bodhi tree brought illumination after his fight against temptation from Mara.
- According to Max Weber, religious communities are built upon the teaching of a charismatic figure. The figure's claim of experience of the divine appeals to our ideal interests that are not currently being met.
- Alternatively, rather than the events being the basis of the teaching, the events may confirm pre-existent teaching. If a community believes that God is loving, a religious experience may confirm this belief. For example, the Apostles taught that God forgives, and St Paul's conversion and repentance supports this claim.
- Religious experience may promote a faith value system.
- Religious figures who have had or have religious experiences are often used by religious people as good examples to aspire to. For example, the temptation of Christ during his time in the desert (Luke 4:1–14) is emulated through fasting or self-discipline, especially during Lent.
- Emil Durkheim recognised that belief in God or the divine worked as a social motivator for moral behaviour. Religious encounters with the divine using symbol and ritual help motivate us to regulate our behaviour even if there is no divine source.
- Religious experiences may strengthen the cohesion of a religious community. Durkheim claimed religion strengthens society by bringing people together and enabling them to cooperate.
- The corporate religious experience of prayer, renewal of faith or even experiences like the Toronto Blessing serve to offer a focus for collective worship. For example, the Qur'an revealed to Muhammad is celebrated during Ramadan through fasting and iftar.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

3 Explain how Swinburne has challenged Hume's critique of miracles.

- Swinburne defines miracles in a similar way to Hume, as 'A violation of a law of nature by a god, that is, a very powerful rational being who is not a material object (viz., is invisible and intangible).'
- Yet rather than critiquing miracles like Hume, he writes in defence of miracles. Swinburne challenges Hume's claim that there is not enough evidence for miracles.
- Swinburne claims that there are four kinds of evidence:
  - Private memories
  - The testimony of others
  - Physical evidence
  - Our understanding of natural laws
- All these count as evidence and we must gather as much of it as possible. If there is more evidence for the event than against it, it is likely that it happened.
- He challenges Hume's scepticism by pointing out that if we are sceptical about the accounts of miracle then we must be sceptical about historical and scientific claims since they rely on the same forms of evidence.
- Swinburne applies the principle of credulity – if an event seems to have happened, then it probably has unless there is reason to suggest otherwise. He goes on to challenge Hume's standards as unreasonably high:
  - What is a sufficient number of witnesses to substantiate a claim?
  - What is sufficient education?
  - Not all religious people are liars.
- For Swinburne, different kinds of evidence have different weights:
  - Our own evidence is better than someone else's.
  - The evidence of someone reliable is better than that of someone unreliable.
  - A large number of witnesses is better than a small number.
- He accuses Hume of being bigoted by disregarding all religious testimony. If we are sceptical of people's claims of miracle, then we should be sceptical about all their other personal experiences for the same reason.
- So, to avoid a sceptical bog, we should apply the principle of testimony – if someone says that an event has happened then it probably has, unless we have reason to doubt their claims.
- Hume claims that religious miracles are contradictory, but Swinburne points out that while they could be, they never are. For example:
  - A Roman Catholic priest praying for a miracle to demonstrate transubstantiation.
  - A Protestant priest praying for a miracle to demonstrate that transubstantiation is idolatrous.
- These would be contradictory, but no such miracle has ever occurred.
- True miracles from any source simply show the power of God or His benevolence.

- There are no logical difficulties in supposing that there could be strong historical evidence for the occurrence of miracles.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

4 Compare the views of Hume and Swinburne on the possibility of miracles.

Hume	Swinburne
Defined miracle as 'A transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.'	Defined miracle as 'A violation of a law of nature by a god, that is, a very powerful rational being who is not a material object (viz., is invisible and intangible).'
<p>Hume argues that a wise person proportions their belief to the evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent experience constitutes full proof.</li> <li>• Variable experience requires weighing probability.</li> <li>• Miracles are variable experiences because they contradict the consistent experience of the laws of nature.</li> <li>• No testimony is strong enough given how much evidence there is that it wouldn't happen.</li> <li>• Miracles are not impossible, but they are highly improbable.</li> <li>• It is always more likely that the person is lying or mistaken than that a miracle happened.</li> </ul>	<p>There are four kinds of evidence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Private memories</li> <li>2 The testimony of others</li> <li>3 Physical evidence</li> <li>4 Our understanding of natural laws</li> </ol> <p>All these count as evidence and we must gather as much of it as possible. If there is more evidence for the event than against it, it is likely that it happened.</p> <p>If we are sceptical about miracles, we must be sceptical about all historical and scientific claims for the same reason.</p> <p>The principle of credulity says that if an event seems to have happened, then it probably has unless there is reason to suggest otherwise.</p>
<p>There are never enough witnesses who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possess enough good sense</li> <li>• possess education and learning</li> <li>• are trustworthy not to mislead us</li> <li>• have a good enough reputation</li> <li>• have enough to lose if discovered lying.</li> </ul> <p>The event never takes place in a public enough place or known part of the world for us to believe its truth.</p>	<p>Hume's standards are unreasonably high:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a sufficient number of witnesses?</li> <li>• What is sufficient education?</li> <li>• Not all religious people are liars.</li> </ul> <p>Different kinds of evidence have different weights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our own is better than someone else's.</li> <li>• The evidence of someone reliable is better than that of someone unreliable.</li> <li>• A large number of witnesses is better than a small number.</li> </ul> <p>Hume is being bigoted by disregarding all religious testimony.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are prone to wish for miracles.</li> <li>• This desperate wish sees an end to common sense and reliability.</li> <li>• A religious person may lie to convert more people.</li> </ul>	<p>If we are sceptical of people's claims of miracles, then we should be sceptical about all other personal experiences for the same reason.</p> <p>We should apply the principle of testimony – if someone says that an event has</p>



Hume	Swinburne
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They exaggerate for admiration and attention.</li> <li>• Those who claim miracles are ignorant and uneducated.</li> </ul>	<p>happened then it probably has, unless we have reason to doubt their claims.</p>
<p>Accounts of miracles from different faiths cancel each other out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each claim of miracle is made to establish the truth of their religion.</li> <li>• All have the same possibility of being right or wrong.</li> <li>• All have the same force with which to overthrow each other.</li> <li>• All contradict each other; therefore, they are all wrong.</li> </ul>	<p>Religious miracles could be, but never are, contradictory. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Roman Catholic priest praying for a miracle to demonstrate transubstantiation.</li> <li>• A Protestant priest praying for a miracle to demonstrate that transubstantiation is idolatrous.</li> </ul> <p>These would be contradictory, but no such miracle has ever occurred.</p> <p>True miracles from any source simply show the power of God or His benevolence.</p>
<p>Hume concludes that there is always more evidence that there was no miracle than that there was one.</p>	<p>Swinburne concludes that there are no logical difficulties in supposing that there could be strong historical evidence for the occurrence of miracles.</p>

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

5 Examine why religious believers might accept that miracles occur.

- Not all religious believers accept that miracles occur. Of the religious people who do accept miracles, there are several reasons why.
- They may accept evidence from scriptures that are often believed to be divinely inspired. Where religious scriptures include accounts of miracle, they tell us that the divine is involved in the world and interested in it.
- For example, in Exodus 14, the Israelites escaped from Egypt but could not cross the Red Sea. At God's command, Moses parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross. The pursuing Egyptian army were drowned when Moses returned the sea to its usual depth. Scripture suggests that God took an interest in the challenges faced by His chosen people and transcended nature's laws.
- Believers may accept traditional teaching. Traditionally, the nature of the divine is often personal, powerful and benevolent. Events may be interpreted in the light of these divine characteristics.
- The Apostle's Creed, recited in Christian church services, is a summary and confirmation of the basic beliefs that are accepted and taught by the Church. It states:  
 'I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord  
 Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
 Born of the Virgin Mary...

...He descended to the dead  
On the third day he rose again'

- This creed has two miracles central to its declaration of faith:
  - 1 That Jesus was born from a virgin.
  - 2 That he was raised from the dead.
- Tradition says that God altered the function of natural laws to bring about His will. He is personal, powerful and loving.
- Modern-day accounts of miracles reinforce for believers the tradition that God has these kinds of qualities. He is interested in the world, can affect it and loves His creation enough to occasionally do so.
- For example, in 2008 Sister Bernadette Moriau attended a blessing for the sick at Lourdes. Moriau was fully disabled, having undergone four unsuccessful operations for a 40-year-long back problem that prevented her from walking. She felt a surge of warmth, heard a voice tell her to remove her braces, and walked away from her wheelchair. This event was officially recognised as a miracle by the Roman Catholic Church in 2018 after no scientific explanation was found.
- For the people involved, this is a confirmation of Christ's continued activity in the world and his overwhelming power to heal.
- Personal claims of miracle are another reason why believers may accept miracles. Once a person has experienced this kind of event, it is less important that a law of nature has been broken and more important that God has heard their cry for help or reached out to them in the world.
- For example, in the 1980s, Jennifer Rees Larcombe was struck down by encephalitis and came close to death. Confined to a wheelchair for eight years, she visited a church conference, was prayed for by a stranger and regained the ability to walk.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

- 6 Explain the influence of religious experience upon religious practice and faith.
- Religious experience can influence religious communities and individuals.
  - Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religion show that in defining what a religion is, experience is central.
  - Religious experience may influence faith by being the source of religious teaching.
  - World faiths often have a key figure or figures whose experience of the divine is the basis for doctrine and ethical instruction. For example, in Sikhism, Guru Nanak vanished into a river for three days and met God; God then commanded him to teach others of His true nature.
  - Alternatively, the experience of key religious figures may confirm what is already taught about the nature of the divine. For example, the apostles taught that God is immanent and their collective experience of the tongues of fire at Pentecost confirmed this.
  - Religious experiences may promote a community faith value system.
  - Examples of religious figures who have had or have religious experiences are often used by religious people as a motivation or a good example to aspire to. The

conversion of St Augustine of Hippo, who became a leading authority in establishing early Church doctrine, is a good example of a virtuous ideal.

- Religious encounters with the divine using symbol and ritual help motivate us to regulate our behaviour.
- Religious experience may strengthen the cohesion of a religious community. Durkheim claims religion strengthens society by bringing people together and enabling them to cooperate. For example, the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad and this is marked at Ramadan as a community through fasting and the iftar.
- Alternatively, there is value for the individual.
- It can be faith-restoring, producing Buber's I-Thou relationship with God through personal interaction and emotional engagement with the other, or Price's belief 'in' through an emotional commitment or attitude toward God.
- Religious experience can strengthen faith in the face of opposition. Believers are often met with suspicion, mockery or even outright condemnation. This has led some to make sacrifices for their faith. For example, the disciples at Pentecost were ridiculed as drunkards (Acts 2:13).
- These believers are strengthened by prayer and devotion and feel a certainty that accompanies the noetic element of mystical experience as described by James.
- Religious experience can lead to a renewal of commitment to religious ideals and doctrines.
- Many religious groups include initiation ceremonies or rituals that symbolise dying to the old way of life and the beginning of the new, or purification. For example, Baptist, Pentecostal and Anglican Christianity have a believer's baptism, while Muslims perform wudu before they pray.
- Evangelist Billy Graham held rallies or 'crusades' encouraging inquirers to come to the front for prayer and counselling. Hundreds and thousands of devotees would come forward as a way of renewing or marking a commitment to their faith.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## Sample AO2 questions, page 90

- 1 Evaluate the view that religious experiences are unimportant for religious belief and practice.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### Introduction:

- Unimportant = Do not have any impact or are not needed.

### Paragraph One:

- Experience is one of Smart's seven dimensions of religion. It cannot be separated from religion and so is extremely important.
- Having said this, while it is one of the dimensions of religion, it is not the only one and so it may not be the most important.

- In addition, many of the seven dimensions can be applied to secular groups and societies too, suggesting that the most vital part of religion is really the social part rather than the experiential.

**Paragraph Two:**

- Religious experience keeps a religious community together through experience of rituals and teachings, thus making experience a central part of what religion is.
- Yet, experiences can include simply going to church in the same way that one goes to the shop. This is an experience, albeit not supernatural. Therefore, we must ask what is meant by religious experience in the first place.
- Any experience is necessary to help structure a community, but experiences are not the focus. The focus is doctrinal, ethical or social rather than experiential.

**Paragraph Three:**

- Religious experience is the thing that inspires people to follow and remain with their faith. It is that which demonstrates an objective reality beyond this world and gives reason for the existence of the faith.
- However, people need community and friendship rather than abstract experiences. It is this that keeps the community together, not the quick fix of wonder and amazement that is over in a flash.
- It would seem that religious experiences are interesting myths that give structure to religion but nothing more, and so are largely unimportant.

**Conclusion:**

- Despite arguments to the contrary, it must not be forgotten that religious experience is the source of religion. The experiences of founders such as Christ or Siddhartha Gautama are the bedrock of religion and the basis for doctrine and ritual. Therefore they are vital to the existence of religion, even if they are not essential for individual believers.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that has been supported with evidence.**

- 2 'There is no adequate definition of miracle.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

**Introduction:**

- Adequate = Good enough or satisfactory.

**Paragraph One:**

- Aquinas' definition is broad enough to include a range of ways that God can affect the world, and so his definitions of miracle are at least adequate, if not comprehensive.
- Yet, every scholarly definition means that some claim of miracle is not included. Vardy's example of the church choir that were all separately delayed for practice, thus missing a boiler exploding in the hall, is more than just coincidence, but is not included under Aquinas' definition.

- All adequate definitions should have the breaking of natural laws somewhere in the criteria, to make the events clearly out of the ordinary. So long as this is included, the definition can be seen as adequate.

**Paragraph Two:**

- Hume's definition is clear and simple and does not allow for any vague uncertainty, thus making it adequate.
- However, Hume is too rigid in his definition, not allowing for the character of God as benevolent, personal and merciful.
- In addition, it is hard to see much acknowledgement of the purpose of such events in Hume's definition. This, as Swinburne points out, is vital in any consideration of miracle.

**Paragraph Three:**

- Holland's definition accounts for people's perception of God working within the universe, which is surely most important when considering an event as miraculous.
- Yet, if a definition is too broad it loses the unique character of a miracle, and Holland's definition seems to do this in his acknowledgement of mere coincidences as miracle.
- However, as Holland points out, to say it is unnecessary to call such events miracle is to say that it is unnecessary to fall in love when people may remain friends. It is to dismiss the emotional response to an event, which is central to miracle claims.

**Conclusion:**

- Ultimately, there is no adequate definition of miracle. An interventionist God that acts to turn water to wine, yet not to save a dying child, is problematic. Yet a God that cannot act at all is equally difficult. Maybe we should take a different approach altogether, as does Maurice Wiles, and say that everything is miracle in that there is any kind of existence at all.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that has been supported with evidence**

## Theme 4 Religious language

### 4A Inherent problems of religious language

#### Now test yourself, page 92

- 1 Why is it a problem for religious language if we describe God as infinite?

Infinity is an abstract quality. This means that it has no relation to what we can experience in the empirical world. Therefore, it is hard to know what it really means.

- 2 How does the problem of evil show that religious pronouncements are unintelligible?

It highlights the apparently contradictory or paradoxical claims of religious language. The problem of evil is a paradox, since theists claim God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent and yet acknowledge that we suffer.

- 3 Why do sacred texts add to this problem?

We cannot believe scriptural claims as fact in the same way as we might believe an ordinary claim about the world, so the meaning is very unclear.

The religious language found in scripture relates to metaphysical concepts or ideas that do not relate to the empirical world.

#### Apply your knowledge, page 93

Do these problems make religious language meaningless? Consider the following:

- 1 Is non-religious language ever subjective?

Yes – It can be whenever it talks of feelings, ideas or attitudes. Any talk of ethics, emotions, poetry, art or music can be subjective. Some would argue that if it is non-cognitive then it is meaningless.

No – Even attitudes and feelings can be tested to some extent. I can tell if someone is happy by their facial expression or their behaviour. The sentence 'I feel happy' is therefore meaningful. But there is nothing that I can ever do to test religious language for truth.

- 2 Do non-religious statements ever use abstract terminology?

No – All non-religious language relates in some way to the empirical world.

Yes – The whole branch of philosophy known as metaphysics deals with abstract concepts such as time, being, space and knowledge. These are not necessarily religious ideas although religious people also consider them.

- 3 Is it ever possible to understand what is meant when someone describes their feelings?

No – We can only know our own feelings because those are the only ones we can experience. Others might use the same terminology, but we cannot know that they feel the same way.

Yes – As human beings our physical make-up and brain chemistry means that there must be some similarity in our instincts and sensations. I know what kind of feeling I

have when I smile, so I can transfer that idea and apply it to others whom I witness smiling.

### Now test yourself, page 93

- 1 Why could the word grace be more difficult for a non-believer to comprehend?  
The word grace is religion-specific terminology that does not relate to the physical world but has more basis in faith or religious experience, which non-believers do not share in.
- 2 If religious terminology is subjective not objective, how does this add to the problem?  
It cannot be known to be true or false (it is non-cognitive).
- 3 If religious language is non-cognitive, why can't we test it for truth or falsity?  
Because it expresses attitudes or interpretations, not facts within the empirical world.

## 4B Religious language as cognitive (traditional religious view) but meaningless (Logical Positivist view)

### Apply your knowledge, page 97

Do the principles of verification and falsification prove that religious language is meaningless? Consider the following:

- 1 Is there any evidence that can count toward the Verification Principle?  
No – The whole Verification Principle is meaningless. Nothing can count as evidence that the only meaningful statements are tautologies or have physical evidence to prove them.  
Yes – Synthetic and analytic statements can universally be agreed upon and this counts as evidence to support the Verification Principle.
- 2 Is any language still meaningless if we apply weak verification or verification in principle?  
No – The problem here is that Ayer's modification makes all language meaningful and doesn't help us find a criterion of meaning at all.  
Yes – Some religious language is still meaningless. For example, we still do not know what it means to talk of God's grace or other religion-specific terminology. In these cases, we do not know what we would check for in principle or what evidence could possibly count toward it.
- 3 Why is the Parable of the Toys in the Cupboard meaningful if it cannot be falsified?  
It is not meaningful if there is nothing we can do to falsify it. In addition, this is not intended as a factual claim anyway and so it is meaningless.  
We can still falsify each separate component of the statement by Swinburne. We can check what is meant by toys, movement and not looking. Therefore, when we put them together, they can still mean something.



## Now test yourself, page 98

- 1 What kinds of language are meaningful according to the Vienna Circle?

Analytic (language concerning rational statements such as tautologies) and synthetic (language concerning material items that can be checked and tested).

- 2 What modifications did Ayer make to the Verification Principle?

- Verification in practice – It is practically possible to check the truth or falsity of the statement.
- Verification in principle – We know in theory what is required to check, but it is impractical.
- Strong verification – A statement is conclusively empirically verified.
- Weak verification – Some empirical evidence counts towards a statement, making it probable.

- 3 What does it mean to say that the Verification Principle is unverifiable?

The Verification Principle itself is not an analytic statement and cannot be checked against empirical evidence. According to its own criteria, this makes it a meaningless statement.

- 4 What kinds of problem statements are made meaningless by the Verification Principle?

Historical statements cannot be verified, and universal scientific statements cannot be verified. This considerably narrows the list of meaningful statements.

- 5 What is the meaning of the Parable of the Celestial City?

The road symbolises human life and the travellers are a believer and an atheist. Neither can be sure of the existence of the celestial city (heaven or the afterlife) but they must journey through their lives anyway. We will discover whether there is an afterlife once we reach the end of life.

## 4C Religious language as non-cognitive and analogical

### Now test yourself, page 100

- 1 What is an analogy?

A comparison made between two things that are not identical but that share similarities.

- 2 How can we compare God to things within the world?

God is the efficient cause of everything in the universe. A cause must possess the characteristics that it brings about, so anything from the world that we compare to God must share a similarity with Him.

- 3 What is the difference between an analogy of attribution and an analogy of proportion?

- Analogy of attribution – God is compared with things of the world because God is the cause of those things.

- Analogy of proportion – The comparison is scaled according to the greatness of the being that is being compared to.

### Now test yourself, page 101

- 1 Why does religious language need to be odd?

It is expressing a moment of wonder.

- 2 What does Ramsey's swimmer example show us?

It shows us the model of causes that we are all familiar with (where the action of a swimmer diving is caused by a range of physical things). When we add the qualifier ('first') we know that the way we should understand cause is slightly different from all the other physical causes. The swimmer's movement can be caused physically by a chain of causes, but the 'first' cause is a decision to dive – it is similar, yet different in character, from the other kinds of causes.

- 3 What does the courtroom example intend to illustrate?

Religious language adds meaning to words that are used. A qualifier allows this enlightenment to take place, in that a word adds illumination and understanding where previously there was none. The 'odd word' in the story adds clarity to the judge and defendant in the same way.

### Apply your knowledge, page 102

Does the concept of analogy make religious language meaningful? Consider the following:

- 1 Can we know any facts about God if we use analogy to speak of Him?

Yes – All analogy can give us truth, just not the whole truth.

No – Analogy must be interpreted and there is no way of knowing if we are interpreting it correctly.

- 2 Is all religious language analogical? How can we know?

Yes – Aquinas felt that any talk of God must be analogical because we cannot talk literally about His characteristics, having only limited language to do it with.

No – Some religious language at least attempts to make literal assertions about God or about His actions. For example, Christians are expected to believe that Christ literally died and then was resurrected, otherwise there is no purpose to the religion.

- 3 How do you think religious believers might react to being told religious language is analogical?

Positively – Scripture makes more sense if it is viewed as analogy. Instead of having to believe in paradoxical statements, they can be viewed as non-literal and so may be acceptable. It makes more sense in the modern age.

Negatively – It reduces religious claims to 'Just So Stories' (stories that must be repeated verbatim but are fiction that may contain a hidden moral). Religious claims are more important than this.

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 106

1 Explain the Verification Principle with reference to A.J. Ayer.

- Logical Positivism emerged in the 1920s with a group of philosophers called the Vienna Circle. They aimed to establish a common criterion of meaning for language.
- They divided language into analytic and synthetic statements. For the Vienna Circle, these were the only kinds of language that can have meaning.
- Analytic statements are derived from reason, such as mathematical statements or tautologies. For example,  $2 + 2 = 4$  or 'The ice is frozen' are both meaningful, yet they do not really tell us anything as they are self-evident.
- Synthetic statements are derived from observation of the material world. They tell us about the world. For example, 'My hat is green' is a synthetic statement and can be checked (verified) by you having a look at my hat. So synthetic statements are meaningful.
- The Vienna Circle thus established the Verification Principle. Any statement that cannot be verified through observation or reason is meaningless and not open to philosophical analysis.
- This means that all religious propositions are meaningless because there is no way of verifying them with empirical evidence.
- A.J. Ayer also took a Logical Positivist position. He observed difficulties with the classifications from the Vienna Circle, as they make some historical and scientific statements meaningless. To remedy this, Ayer added further categories to the Verification Principle.
- Ayer's verification in practice means that it is practically possible to check the truth or falsity of a statement, and therefore it can be meaningful. This means that my statement 'My hat is green' is meaningful, but the statement 'God is loving' is not. The statement 'All birds have two legs' is also not meaningful because I cannot practically go and find every bird that has ever existed to check if the statement is true.
- Ayer aimed to deal with this through his verification in principle. Provided we know in theory what is required to check, the statement is meaningful. This means that while in the bird example it is impractical to check every bird, I know what I would do in theory. This still makes religious statements meaningless, however, because I cannot know how to check that God is loving.
- In addition, Ayer distinguished between strong verification and weak verification. If a statement is conclusively verified empirically (that is, we can check and have an indisputable conclusion regarding the truth of the statement), then it is meaningful according to strong verification.
- If there is some empirical evidence for a statement, making it probable, then this is weak verification. Ayer also allows this as meaningful. Historical statements or universal ones can now be meaningful because there is some evidence available to

support the claim, but religious statements still have no empirical evidence to support them, so they are meaningless.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

2 Examine how religious language is challenged by inherent problems.

- One of the inherent problems of religious language is that it is too limited to be able to talk accurately about the nature of God.
- God is said to have numerous qualities, such as being omnibenevolent, omnipotent, infinite and timeless. When God's nature is described, an abstract quality is being defined. This means it has no relation to what we can experience in the empirical world, and therefore it is hard to know its real meaning.
- For example, God is:
  - Infinite – We are finite beings and the world we are part of is also finite, so we cannot really understand what is meant by infinite since we cannot experience it ourselves.
  - Timeless – Everything we experience happens in time, so we have no way of knowing what it means to exist outside of time.
- Another inherent challenge to religious language concerns scriptures and religious teachings.
- Scripture or religious teachings often seem to make contradictory or paradoxical claims. The problem of evil is a paradox, since theists claim God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent and yet acknowledge that we suffer. There are also other apparently contradictory claims. For example, 'Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live' (John 11:25) – death is defined as the end of life, so how can there be life after death?
- We cannot believe these pronouncements as fact in the same way as we might believe an ordinary claim about the world, so some might try and suggest that they are metaphorical or inspirational claims. If this is the case, then the meaning is very unclear.
- The religious language found in scripture and teaching relates to metaphysical concepts or ideas. If we start discussing whether God exists, if there is a life after death, or souls or spirits, then we are talking of metaphysical things and it becomes very difficult to understand what is meant or intended since they do not relate to the empirical world.
- A further challenge is that religious language is not a common shared base and experience. The language we use is of the material world and experience of this is common to all. It describes sense experiences and attempts to make sense of them. Religion, however, uses specific terminology that does not relate to the physical world but has its basis in faith or religious experience.
- There is no common basis for the language we use and religious terminology. For example:
  - Grace – An uncreated substance given to us by God.
  - Holiness – Divinity or sanctity.

- These are ideas that do not translate to anything outside of a religious context and so a religious believer may not be able to communicate anything about their religion to a non-believer.
- Finally, the solution that some have to the problems above is to attempt a non-cognitive approach to understanding religious language. Non-cognitive language does not express objective propositions, it expresses attitudes or interpretations.
- If religious language is used cognitively, it is impossible to test assertions that are made by using empirical evidence and so some would argue it cannot be meaningful.
- If religious language is testable, then it could be possible to prove the statements to be false. This is a problem because of course religious people would argue that their statements are true as revealed by God.
- However, if religious language is used non-cognitively, then it is difficult to understand the subjective attitude that is being expressed because it cannot be shared with others and cannot be said to make any factual claims.
- Believers would refute the idea that their claims have no basis in fact.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

### 3 Compare the approaches of verification and falsification.

Verification	Falsification
Verification Principle – A proposition can be considered meaningful only if there is a method by which it can be tested for truth.	Falsification Principle – A proposition can be considered meaningful only if there is a method by which it can be tested for falsity.
Vienna Circle, A.J. Ayer	Karl Popper, Anthony Flew
<p>The Vienna Circle established three categories of language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytic (meaningful) – Rational, mathematical, tautologies, e.g. <math>2 + 2 = 4</math> or 'The ice is frozen'</li> <li>• Synthetic (meaningful) – Can be checked against empirical evidence, e.g. 'My hat is green'</li> <li>• Meaningless – Every other kind of language, e.g. 'God is good'.</li> </ul>	<p>Language is meaningful if there is a method available with which to demonstrate its falsity. For example, for 'All swans are white' it is not necessary to find all the swans, it is only necessary to find one that is not white.</p>
<p>Ayer added different types of verification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong verification – We can check the evidence and be certain of the claim.</li> <li>• Weak verification – There is some evidence that can make a statement probable.</li> <li>• Verification in principle – I know what I could do to check, but do not actually do it.</li> </ul>	<p>Flew gave the parable of the gardener to show the problems with religious language:</p> <p>Two explorers arrive at a garden in the jungle. One claims there is a gardener who looks after it, the other says there is not. They lie in wait and set tests and traps to catch the gardener, to no avail. One explorer continues to claim there is a</p>

Verification	Falsification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verification in practice – I do actually check the evidence.</li> </ul> <p>He theorised that religious language remained meaningless if these principles were applied.</p>	<p>gardener, but he is invisible, intangible and impervious to pain.</p> <p>There is no way to falsify the explorer's claims because he will allow no evidence to count against him.</p>
<p>Ayer's modifications mean that a wider range of language is meaningful, but religious language is still meaningless because there is no test available to check for God or similar claims.</p>	<p>Religious people keep redefining religious terms to prevent them being falsified, so religious language is meaningless because it cannot be falsified.</p>
<p>He also denied that we could know in principle what we could do to check claims about God since such claims refer to metaphysical qualities that have no reality in this world.</p>	<p>By the time religious terms have been constantly redefined, there is no difference between their God and no god at all: 'God dies the death of a thousand qualifications.'</p>

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

- 4 Explain the analogical approach to religious language from **both** Aquinas **and** Ramsey.
- One solution to the problems of religious language is that it is analogical. This criterion of meaning claims that statements about God are not to be understood literally, but are comparing God, a transcendent, eternal, incorporeal being, with things/beings within the world.
  - Aquinas taught that when we use the names of God, there are two ways to understand language:
    - Univocal – Language that can be understood in only one way. It cannot be interpreted differently.
    - Equivocal – Language that has many possible meanings, all of which are equally valid.
  - Neither of these is suitable for God-talk. Human language about the empirical world is all we have, and so it cannot mean the same thing when we use it to talk of God. Yet, it is needed to convey accurate truth and knowledge about Him, so it needs to be clear and understandable.
  - Aquinas argues that a third possibility – analogical language – is a middle way between these two. We can know what is meant by religious propositions, not because we can know God directly, but because we can make analogies between the world and God.
  - As our efficient cause, God is the uncaused causer of everything in the universe. A cause must possess the characteristics that it brings about. So, 'God is good' is meaningful because we can see goodness in the world caused by God. Goodness is not identical to God, it is just a comparison. We can talk about God accurately, but not comprehensively.

- There are two different ways in which we might make comparisons between God and ourselves:
  - Analogy of attribution – God is compared with things of the world because God is the cause of those things. For example, 'It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens' (Jeremiah 10:12). Power, wisdom and understanding can all be applied to God because He caused them within us, and we can see this in the world.
  - Analogy of proportion – The comparison is scaled according to the greatness of the being that is being compared to. For example, 'Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good' (Psalm 135:3). We understand goodness in the world, and we can scale it up in our minds to understand the greater good of God.
- Ian Ramsey claimed that it is necessary that religious language is 'odd' as it is expressing a moment of wonder. Two elements are required to enable meaningful talk about God:
  - Models – This is a word with which we are all familiar and can be used to enable us to recognise features of an unfamiliar situation, e.g. 'God is good'. Good is the model with which we are familiar, but it is not enough to understand God's nature if we use it by itself.
  - Qualifiers – This word is added to adapt the model and provide disclosure. It qualifies the model and then develops it in a useful direction, e.g. 'God is infinitely good'. Infinitely is the qualifier that explains the way in which we should understand the model.
- Other characteristics of God function in the same way. God is infinitely wise, creator ex nihilo, eternal purpose. When the qualifier is added it provides disclosure, the 'light dawns', the 'penny drops', the moment 'comes alive' and there is depth to our understanding. This disclosure is inexpressible insight into the divine that evokes a sense of wonder and commitment.
- Ramsey tells the following story: Mr Justice Brown arrives in court dressed in a wig, with scarlet and ermine robes, designed to depersonalise him. The defendant is a long-lost friend from college, and they do not recognise each other until an odd word is dropped into the conversation such as 'Sammy', and the court is electrified as the penny drops, the ice breaks and understanding dawns that there is depth and a personal element to their situation.
- A model must be qualified before it is useful currency about God because it must be sufficiently odd to enable possible disclosure of God.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

- 5 Examine the challenges to falsification from Hare, Mitchell and Swinburne.
- In Flew's principle of falsification, he claims that religious believers do not allow any evidence to count against their claims. Like the explorer in his adaptation of Wisdom's Parable of the Invisible Gardener, religious believers constantly qualify and requalify their claims about God so that they cannot be proven false.
  - Hare challenges Flew's claim by pointing out that everyone views the evidence before them from a different blik. A blik is a belief that underpins a world view. A little like



tinted glasses, everyone views the world through a different tint. In the university debate, Hare told the Parable of the Paranoid Student:

- A paranoid student is convinced that all his teachers (dons) wish to kill him. His friends introduce him to the most pleasant dons they can find, and afterwards ask the student, 'Surely you don't believe they want to kill you now?' But the student replies, 'They are just pretending, they are plotting against me the whole time!'
- The friends and the lunatic differ because they have different blik. They interpret the evidence in front of them differently and thus no matter how much evidence is presented, they will understand what they see in different ways.
- For example, a religious believer and an atheist may see the same empirical items in the world. The atheist will interpret an eye, for example, through their blik as an amazing result of evolutionary processes that have come about through chance and adaptation to environment. A believer will witness the same evidence and see it through their blik as evidence of intelligent design for a purpose.
- In the university debate, Mitchell argues that religious people do allow evidence to count against their claims, but they are already committed to a faith position for other reasons. To illustrate his point, he tells the story of the partisan and the stranger:
- In wartime, a partisan meets a stranger who claims to command the resistance movement and convinces the partisan to trust him. Subsequently, the partisan sees the stranger helping both sides. His friends think he is crazy and point out the stranger handing patriots over to the police. The partisan agrees that this is damning evidence but continues to help him because he trusts him based upon their initial conversation.
- Mitchell points out that religious believers initially have faith in God, so when faced with issues such as the problem of evil, they continue to trust God, even though the evidence is problematic.
- Swinburne offers another challenge. He points out that even if religious claims cannot be falsified, this does not make them meaningless. Some statements may be meaningful even if they cannot be falsified. For example, imagine toys that come out of the cupboard and move around when we are not watching. We all understand what this means even though there is nothing that we can do to prove this statement false.
- Since there is nothing that we can do to empirically prove the existence of God, it is an unfalsifiable claim. Regardless of whether such claims are true or false, they are meaningful because we understand what such a statement is claiming.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## Sample AO2 questions, page 106

- 1 'Falsification is completely successful in showing religious language to be meaningless.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### Introduction:

- Completely successful = Has fully achieved its desired aim, which in this case is to show religious language to be meaningless.

### **Paragraph One:**

- Falsification is completely successful because it applies a consistent set of criteria to all language in a scientific way. The result is that religious language is meaningless when measured against these criteria.
- However, if falsification is to be truly consistent, it fails at its own test and is not a falsifiable principle. This means that it is unsuccessful because according to its own criteria it is now meaningless.
- In addition, Hare's bliks demonstrate that the ability to falsify a statement is rather dependent upon the blik of the people involved. This means that what is falsifiable to me, may not seem falsifiable to you. Our interpretation of evidence is entirely dependent upon our blik and thus falsification is unsuccessful in showing religious language to be meaningless.

### **Paragraph Two:**

- The difficulty with a principle like falsification is that not all language can be tested against the same criterion because it has varying functions. Some language is about stating propositions, but other language can be to tell jokes, issue instructions or express an emotion. Falsification is unsuccessful because none of these three functions is falsifiable, but they are meaningful in different ways.
- However, language must have a logical sense behind it for philosophy to be possible. If there is no logical consistency then it is difficult to see how anything can be meaningful at all, so falsification is effective and therefore successful.
- In addition, falsification shows how we should treat all language according to the same criterion of meaning so that there is a fair and consistent approach to language. If religious language is deemed meaningless, this is only after the same, fair criterion of meaning is applied to all language. Therefore, it is successful.

### **Paragraph Three:**

- Logic dictates that when we make a truth claim it should be testable in the real world. Religious claims about God and His nature are intended to be propositions and so must be treated as such. Therefore, since religious language fails the test, falsification is successful in showing that it is meaningless.
- In addition, falsification highlights an assumption we make that people understand the meaning of religious terms. When we consider the qualities claimed about God according to falsification, we can see that there is no difference between this God and no god at all.
- However, falsification limits meaningful language to labelling items in the present moment. Any other kind of language – past, future, universal or with an alternative function – is rendered meaningless. This cannot be the way that Flew functioned in his daily life and personal relationships! Therefore, falsification fails.

### **Conclusion:**

- In conclusion, to dismiss some language as meaningless limits the depth of human expression. In the same way as George Orwell highlighted in *1984*, we eliminate the richness and diversity of language if we apply these criteria. So, while falsification

might be successful in making religious language meaningless, it should not – because to be human requires more than statements of bare fact.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

- 2 Evaluate the view that the religious concept of analogy fails to make religious language meaningful.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

**Introduction:**

- Fails = To not succeed. This means that the concept of analogy does not work, is inconsistent or inaccurate.

**Paragraph One:**

- The concept of analogy succeeds because it answers many of the inherent problems of religious language. It accepts that the language used is limited and, by treating it as a comparison, allows it to be accurate if not comprehensive enough to completely describe God.
- However, analogy is a non-cognitive approach. It is difficult to see how we can know if the analogical claims about God are accurate. This limits the success of the theory.
- In addition, to try and describe God using analogical language inevitably leads to interpretation taking place. Even if the language used is accurate, there is nothing to ensure our interpretation is also accurate. Therefore, analogical language fails.

**Paragraph Two:**

- God is quite unlike us, but since God is our efficient cause there are marks of comparison between us. Therefore, analogy succeeds in describing the divine in empirical language.
- But Stanisław Lem points out that something so different from us can never effectively be described in our language. There is too much that works as a barrier to understanding. For example, if something can 'exist' without reference to time or matter, what does it mean to 'exist' at all?
- However, the limitation in expression does not limit reality. While analogy may not be sufficient to describe the divine, it may go some way to enabling us to talk about it, so it does not fail completely.

**Paragraph Three:**

- Analogy is used all the time in areas of language outside of religion. It is familiar, it is understandable and therefore it is a criterion that can be applied and understood by both religious and non-religious people.
- However, it is possible to invent a series of rules to apply to anything. This does not make these rules accurate in reflecting truth.
- The issue of meaning is not in itself about the actual truth or falsity of a claim. The statement 'All elephants are pink' is meaningful, even though it is not true. All that is required of Aquinas and Ramsey is the creation of a system to understand religious language, and they have done this successfully.

**Conclusion:**

- Analogy has some merits to understanding religious language, in that it is systematic and therefore successful. However, like any other language, religious language has many functions. Within scriptures we see factual claims, songs, commands, laws and poetry. Not all this is analogical in nature and so analogy fails to account for religious language.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

## Theme 4 Religious language

### 4D Religious language as non-cognitive and symbolic

#### Now test yourself, page 107

- 1 What four functions did Randall think that religious language served?
  - Motivation – Symbols arouse emotions and stir people into action. They summon the feelings of those who share the experience and give power to the symbol itself to motivate and inspire people.
  - Social – They stimulate people to cooperate and bind communities together. The ideas used in worship give people a shared identity and provide a common vision of shared values. This becomes the core of religious identity.
  - Communication – They communicate aspects of an experience that are otherwise inexpressible. They evoke feelings and transfer power to the symbol itself. These are not the symbols of science that provide factual knowledge about the world. These instead are non-cognitive and emotional.
  - Clarify and disclose – They reveal human insight of the divine in the same way that art or poetry reveals understanding of our place in the world. Symbols are not verifiable, but they clarify our understanding. It is only through symbols that the human can approach the divine and live a religious life.
- 2 Why is religious language a little like art or poetry according to Randall?

Religious language, like art or poetry, provides insight about the meaning of life and our purpose within it, rather than facts about the physical world.
- 3 What is meant by the coherence theory of truth?

The philosophical position that the truth of a proposition is in relation to its consistency with other propositions.

#### Now test yourself, page 108

- 1 Where does Logical Positivism fail according to Tillich?

It treats all words only as signs.
- 2 Suggest three ways in which symbols are different from signs according to Tillich.
  - Symbols cannot be replaced with another word or object, but signs can.
  - Symbols become inextricably linked with the thing they point to, whereas signs are arbitrary.
  - Symbols are poetic, liturgical and have power.
- 3 What would make a symbol die?

If a symbol ceases to reveal other dimensions of reality within a society, then it dies.

## Apply your knowledge, page 109

Do Tillich and Randall help to resolve any of the problems of religious language? Consider the following:

- 1 If religious language is non-cognitive, what is it really communicating?

It is difficult to say unless you are part of the religious community that is using the symbolic language. Tillich uses the example of a piece of art, which suggests you need to already have faith in order to understand the meaning within such language. Therefore, that there is no shared basis of experience is still a significant problem.

- 2 Can you ever know anything that cannot be verified or falsified?

No – You can only be said to know something that has empirical evidence conclusively demonstrating its truth.

Yes – There is more than one way of gaining knowledge. Rationalism suggests that you can gain knowledge by using reason alone. Maybe we can also gain knowledge through revelation. Any language of reason or of revelation should therefore be valid.

- 3 Can artwork, poetry or music communicate any kind of truth?

No – It is all beautiful and expressive, but it cannot be understood as something to be analysed for insight or reality.

Yes – People regularly achieve insight through creation of such works, or through experiencing such works by others. It is not cognitive truth, but it is a kind of insight and understanding of the human experience.

## 4E Religious language as non-cognitive and mythical

### Now test yourself, page 112

- 1 How can myths be meaningful if they are non-cognitive?

- Myths speak about what it means to be human in a confusing, dangerous or mysterious world.
- They relate to the empirical world by considering the significance behind worldly experiences.
- They convey human understanding of God's nature, purpose and relationship with the world.
- They provide insights into the society or culture to which they belong.
- They deal with the kinds of recurring problems that humans face, for example why we are here, the purpose of evil and the need to be cared for.
- They speak to people about their destiny.

- 2 Suggest three symbols and their meanings that reoccur in creation mythology.

- Water – Mystery; chaos; unpredictability; lack of control; purifying; life-sustaining; destructive; terrifying; can flood the Earth or swallow a boat, yet God can control it

- Land – Order; stability; control
- Light – Knowledge; understanding; power; truth; perception; life

3 What is a solar hero?

A person of divine or semi-divine origin associated with the power of the sun.

### Apply your knowledge, page 114

Does the concept of myth make religious language meaningful? Consider the following:

1 Can we know any facts about God if we use myth to speak about Him?

No – Facts are empirical things. God is not empirical and mythological language does not claim to convey empirical data.

Yes – A fact isn't restricted to empirical data and labelling objects. Myths speak to people through time about the concerns and values that human beings share. They show us that our concerns and values are important and are not unique.

2 How can we tell the difference between mythological and literal elements of a story?

No – It is impossible to turn back time and understand the intentions of the writer. It is likely that scriptural authors with a lack of modern scientific knowledge would have believed some of these 'myths' to be true.

Yes – By considering which elements are consistent with modern science and which are opposed. Anything that is opposed to modern science can be understood mythologically.

3 How do you think religious believers might react to being told religious language is mythological?

Some would be perfectly happy with this – It is how believers have been treating this language for centuries. Even scholars like Augustine and Aquinas recognised that there were times when scripture contrasted with our experience of the world and realised that it was a sign that we should look for the spiritual meaning of the text.

Others, those who favour a literal interpretation, would object – A more modern approach by some believers is to accept all of scripture as literally true because otherwise it calls into question the moral commands given by God. If some is mythological, all could be mythological, and this is intolerable.

## 4F Religious language as a language game

### Now test yourself, page 115

1 List three different ways in which language is used.

**Example answers:**

- To exclaim
- To tell a story
- To make a joke



- 2 Why did Wittgenstein think that Logical Positivism was limited?

Logical Positivism fails to capture the complexity of language. It treats all language as though it is for the same purpose: identifying facts.

- 3 Why is religious language immune from the challenges of Logical Positivism?

You must be immersed in the form of life that corresponds to the game in order to understand its rules. It is not legitimate to challenge the rules of one game by using the rules of another.

### Now test yourself, page 116

- 1 What is the coherence theory of truth?

The coherence theory of truth claims that something can be considered true if it sits coherently with other specified propositions.

- 2 What does Wittgenstein mean when he says we should 'look and see'?

Wittgenstein argues that we must 'look and see' the use of the language, rather than what picture is being created in our minds by each word. Thus, when someone says 'Help!' we do not search for an item that corresponds to the word, we understand that a command is being given. If we hear someone say 'What is that called?', we 'look and see' a request for information rather than a statement of cognitive fact.

- 3 What does it mean to be immersed in a form of life?

To be participating in it and part of it. If you are playing a game of rugby, you would have to be on the field, running, tackling and handling the ball, not just watching from the sidelines. In a language game you must be using the language yourself, listening and speaking it to be truly immersed in it.

### Apply your knowledge, page 117

Does the concept of language games make religious language meaningful? Consider the following:

- 1 Is it ever possible to challenge a claim made about God?

Yes – If you are immersed in the game and someone within your game makes a claim that you think is inaccurate, then you are at liberty to challenge the claim. What you cannot do is challenge a claim made according to a game that you are not playing.

No – If you are immersed in the same game as others, then you are going to be making the same kinds of claims. It is impossible to be immersed in a game and then challenge its rules. By necessity, to be part of the game you have accepted the rules and thus you can never challenge a claim. In addition, no one from outside a game can challenge a claim made within it.

- 2 How do you think a religious believer would feel about religious language being compared to a game?

Some would strenuously object – They might consider the comparison to a game to be a trivialisation of religious language and a failure to recognise that factual claims are sometimes being made. To claim God exists is not a game, it is a proposition that is thought to be factual.

Others would find it acceptable – Religious believers are doing something different when they talk about God existing than the scientist is when they describe the properties of a carbon atom. To consider it according to the analogy of a game allows for the different functions of language to be equally valid.

3 Could someone immerse themselves in both a Logical Positivist and a religious game?

No – If you are completely immersed in the religious form of life, there would be no way that you could find it acceptable to participate in a game that runs in direct contradiction to the religious one.

Yes – Some people see religion as valuable and useful, yet do not agree that it is factually true. There is no reason why someone who immerses themselves in Logical Positivism in the classroom couldn't play a faith game on a religious day of rest. Logical Positivists must use everyday language when outside of the university if they wish to maintain relationships and have a quality of life. The game of Logical Positivism is played in the philosophy classroom environment, but has no place elsewhere.

## Specimen exam questions

### Sample AO1 questions, page 120

1 Compare the work of Randall and Tillich on religious language as symbolic.

Randall	Tillich
Non-cognitivist criteria of meaning:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes statements that cannot be checked according to empirical evidence.</li> <li>Does not state propositions.</li> <li>Contains interpretive content.</li> </ul>	
Symbols are different from signs.	
<p>A sign:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>represents or stands for another thing</li> <li>produces the same response from people as the thing it stands for.</li> </ul> <p>A symbol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>represents itself</li> <li>provokes a unique response in those who see or use it.</li> </ul>	<p>A sign:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>points beyond itself at something else</li> <li>is arbitrary and can be replaced</li> <li>needs no relationship with the thing that it points towards.</li> </ul> <p>A symbol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>points beyond itself at something else</li> <li>cannot be replaced with another word or object</li> <li>becomes inextricably linked with the thing it points towards.</li> </ul>
Randall held a coherence theory of truth – that the truth of a proposition is in relation to its consistency with other propositions.	Symbols express our 'ultimate concern', which is the holy or numinous.

Randall	Tillich
<p>Focused on the function of religious language. Four functions of symbols:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation – Symbols arouse emotions and stir people into action.</li> <li>• Social – They stimulate people to cooperate and bind communities together.</li> <li>• Communication – They communicate aspects of an experience that are otherwise inexpressible.</li> <li>• Clarify and disclose – They reveal human insight of the divine in the same way that art or poetry reveals understanding of our place in the world.</li> </ul>	<p>Six characteristics of symbols:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point beyond themselves to something else – With religious symbols, this thing is the Holy.</li> <li>• Participate in that to which they point – The symbol becomes part of the meaning.</li> <li>• Open up levels of reality that are otherwise hidden – Literal language is limited.</li> <li>• Unlock dimensions of our soul that correspond to these levels of reality – This provides inspiration and a deeper understanding of faith.</li> <li>• Cannot be manufactured – Symbols emanate from the collective unconscious and are accepted only if they meet the needs of the inner situation of the group.</li> <li>• Symbols can die – If a symbol ceases to function within a society, then it dies.</li> </ul>

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## 2 Examine religious language as non-cognitive and mythological.

- Myths are non-cognitive because they do not convey facts about the empirical world. However, they can be said to be a rich source of spiritual or moral truth.
- Myths:
  - Speak about what it means to be human in a confusing, dangerous or mysterious world.
  - Relate to the empirical world by considering the significance behind worldly experiences.
  - Convey human understanding of God's nature, purpose and relationship with the world.
  - Provide insights into the society or culture to which they belong.
  - Deal with the recurring problems that humans face, for example why we are here, the purpose of evil and the need to be cared for.
  - Speak to people about their destiny.
- To understand a religious myth, we must consider the writer's *Sitz im Leben*. We can best understand the meaning behind the imagery and symbols in the story if we know a bit more about the society in which the author was writing and what their object or ultimate concern might be.
- Myths occur across religions and cultures and contain common themes because there are issues that are common to human experience. Unraveling the complex meaning contained within these myths requires multiple disciplines such as theology, anthropology and psychology.

- For example, creation myths speak of a primordial time that lacks historical records. While these stories were never intended to be cognitive, they are nonetheless meaningful. They contain common themes:
  - Water – Represents chaos, life-sustaining, terrifying, can flood the Earth or swallow a boat, yet God can control it.
  - Land – Represents order, stability and control.
  - Light – Stands for knowledge, truth and life.
- Myth deals with our fears and ultimate concerns: What will it be like to die? What will become of me? What will happen if someone pushes the nuclear button? What if the ice caps all melt and the world is flooded? We have different ultimate concerns in today's world, but myths address the need for understanding.
- According to Jung, these myths are archetypal in origin and we produce them because they are part of a universal psychological need for mental well-being.
- In each myth, there is an element of fear, lack of control and mystery. Although modern society now has more scientific knowledge, humanity still demonstrates a need for myths that speak to our fear of apocalyptic tragedy.
- These myths bring insight that does not challenge science but speaks to us spiritually or emotionally so that we can understand our own place in the universe and be inspired to react positively to it.
- Alister MacIntyre proposes that instead of analysing myths as true or false, we should question if they are living or dead. This means that the myth either contains purpose and relevance regarding how people live, or it does not.
- For example, does it:
  - help to bind communities together?
  - shape human behaviour in the form of ethics?
  - provide a sense of purpose to individuals in their lives?
  - inspire social action?
- Myths declare our place in society, our relationship with God and the purpose of our lives. They then affect our behaviour.
- They can be non-cognitive and yet still have meaning. They provide the function of ordering our experiences, informing us about ourselves, expressing hope and providing patterns for human action in both real life and ritual.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

**3 Explain Wittgenstein's concept of religious language as a language game.**

- Wittgenstein argues in *Philosophical Investigations* that the meaning of a word exists in its function in the language. Wittgenstein gives the analogy of a full tool box; the function of words is as wide and as varied as the function of the tools. They all serve to do different things.
- There are many ways in which language is used and Wittgenstein gives an extensive list of functions, including:
  - To describe an object
  - To exclaim

- To tell a joke
- To ask, thank, greet, curse, pray...
- Each different function of language is a different language game.
- One language game is that of labelling items. This is a primitive language game, whereby a child might learn the correspondence between an item and a word. Another more complex game is when someone understands that there is an action expected in response to the word, for example to go and collect that item.
- Logical Positivism fails to capture the complexity of language in that it treats all language as though it is for the same purpose, identifying facts.
- Logical Positivism and religious language are different language games. For example, define the word 'game'. Does it involve winning or losing? If the answer is yes, then this would mean that a child bouncing their ball against a wall is not playing a game. Is it about skill? If the answer is yes, then a group of children playing 'ring a ring o' roses' are not playing a game.
- The use of language is part of an activity or form of life, which sets out how the language is going to be used. Forms of life are contingent upon culture and context. The rugby player's form of life is that of movement on a rugby pitch, and their understanding of a 'game' will be different from that of the chess player, whose form of life is indoors and static at a table. All humans are immersed in different forms of life. If you are immersed in a form of life, you will understand its rules of the game.
- There are similarities between games, but not all games share the same features. Language games show a family resemblance or *Familienähnlichkeit*. There are similarities in the language games that are played, but they are not identical. There is nothing that all games have in common, but there is relationship between them all that overlaps and criss-crosses and is impossible to pin down and define in one way.
- It is possible to learn other language games and to participate in more than one. It is not possible for there to be such a thing as a private language; it is a community activity. Therefore, not just anything is meaningful, it is necessary that the rules of the game are understood by others.
- Language games are non-cognitive. Therefore, meaning comes from the context of the language, not from identifying checkable truths about the world. The meaning of a language game is not always clear to people who are not participating in the game, so people must be immersed in the form of life for the language to be meaningful.
- Wittgenstein argues that we must 'look and see' the use of the language, rather than what picture is being created in our minds by each word. Thus, when someone says 'Help!' we do not search for an item that corresponds to the word, we understand that a command is being given.
- Religious language is coherent in the context of the religious form of life. The coherence theory of truth claims that something can be considered true if it sits coherently with other specified propositions. Such expressions are not meaningful under correspondence theory; we must ensure that we know which game is being played before we assess a statement for meaning. It is not legitimate to challenge the rules of one game by using the rules of another.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

4 Explain the challenges to mythical language.

- Some myths seem to communicate contrasting ideas about the meaning and purpose of life. How can we know which myth contains truth and which contains falsity? For example:
  - Genesis 1 – Humans were created deliberately and directly through divine will and are superior to all other species.
  - The Ainu creation myth from Japan – Humanity evolved from a polar bear god. The world was created by accident from pre-existent mud by a confused wagtail.
- In addition, as people's *Sitz im Leben* changes, the meaning attributed to myths changes. Some myths die out in terms of importance and new ones appear. If a myth is no longer true, then the basis of religion is questionable. For example, is the miraculous catch of fish about:
  - a call by Christ to his disciples to minister to evangelise about their faith?
  - the importance of faith even when things get difficult?
  - Jesus' humanity as he needed to hunt, cook and eat just like the rest of us, so he understands the human struggle?
- If a myth dies out because it has lost value, then it no longer speaks to the ultimate concerns of the listener.
- In addition, mythology places the divine in the empirical world, so it can be misleading and a barrier to faith. Mythological stories are fantastical and can be rejected by the modern mind searching for truth. Rudolf Bultmann was concerned with demythologising religious myths and removing or recategorising misleading parts. For example:
  - Genesis 1 – God is seen walking in the garden with Adam and Eve.
  - Acts 1 – Christ is later seen or described as physically rising to heaven.
- Removing the myths from scripture risks removing the message that is being conveyed, but it is unclear which parts must be set aside and which parts should remain. Myths are both scientifically and theologically useless in the modern world.
- Finally, while we might argue that there is no need to understand myths in a literal sense, even the meaning they convey is in direct conflict with a scientific understanding of the world. For example, in Genesis 1 God creates instantaneously and deliberately. The myth may be telling us about God's creative power, but it directly conflicts with evolutionary theory that tells us humans came about through chance and adaptation to environment.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

5 Examine how the views of Randall and Tillich can be used to help understand religious teachings.

- Randall and Tillich both understand religious language as non-cognitivist, meaning that it makes statements that cannot be checked according to empirical evidence, that it does not state propositions and that it contains interpretive content.
- Both develop the concept of symbol as an explanation of religious language, and therefore religious teachings can be understood as symbolic.

- Tillich agrees that there are two elements to our image of God:
  - Literal – Non-symbolic as the ultimate ground of being. This means that some claims are made literally, i.e. that God is. But this can then be understood using symbolic language.
  - Symbolic – Qualities or actions ascribed to God. These teachings cannot be applied literally as they are simply human qualities, perfected. God as the source of all being, not as a being.
- They recognise the wide variety of ways that language can be used instead of limiting it to labelling objects in the world.
- Both point out that symbols are different from signs and Tillich rejects Logical Positivism for treating all language as though it were a sign, simply labelling objects in the present moment.
- Randall states that a symbol provokes a unique response in those who use it, and according to Tillich it becomes inextricably linked with the thing it points towards.
- Randall was interested in the function of symbolic language as used in religious teaching and developed his four functions of symbols:
  - Motivation – Symbols arouse emotions and stir people into action.
  - Social – They stimulate people to cooperate and bind communities together.
  - Communication – They communicate aspects of an experience that are otherwise inexpressible.
  - Clarify and disclose – They reveal human insight of the divine in the same way that art or poetry reveals understanding of our place in the world.
- Symbols help people to understand the context of religious teaching rather than dismissing such claims as contrary to scientific knowledge.
- Randall adheres to the coherence theory of truth, so provided religious teachings are consistent or coherent within the religious context and according to other pronouncements, they can be said to be true.
- The human experience is deeper than can be expressed through scientific language. Poetry, art and music all offer insights into the feelings and priorities of other people and religious teaching does this on a spiritual level.
- Tillich identifies six characteristics of symbols to demonstrate this deeper element of human expression of religious teachings:
  - Point beyond themselves to something else – The symbol elicits emotional engagement and becomes inextricably linked with the thing it points toward.
  - Participate in that to which they point – The symbolic word becomes part of the meaning.
  - Open up levels of reality that are otherwise hidden – Literal language is limited and cannot express understanding of this nature.
  - Unlock dimensions of our soul that correspond to these levels of reality – They provide inspiration and a deeper understanding of faith.
  - Cannot be manufactured – A symbol cannot be invented intentionally nor arbitrarily replaced.
  - Symbols can die – If a symbol ceases to function within a society, then it dies.



- The fact that Tillich's symbols can evolve and die out offers an explanation of religious language that is more coherent with sociological studies of religion.
- While there is no clear way of translating symbols reliably, symbol theory does give a criterion of meaning to religious language to some extent so that even the non-believer can hope to understand the function of such language.
- The human experience is deeper than can be expressed through scientific language. Poetry, art and music offer insights into the feelings and priorities of other people and religious language does this on a spiritual level.

**This is not a checklist. Any valid alternatives may be credited.**

## Sample AO2 questions, page 120

- 1 Evaluate the view that the problems of religious language cannot be resolved by non-cognitive solutions.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### Introduction:

- Resolved = Repaired, fixed, a solution has been found.

### Paragraph One:

- Non-cognitive solutions do resolve the problems of religious language as they recognise that language is more complex than just identifying items in the present.
- However, there is no way of rejecting spurious claims if non-cognitive language is accepted, meaning an additional problem is that we cannot analyse religious claims for falsity.
- It seems that while non-cognitive language is an attractive solution because it might be acceptable in daily life, it is unanalysable in philosophy and thus does not resolve the problems.

### Paragraph Two:

- Non-cognitive claims are abstract and therefore unsuitable for philosophical analysis. This means that the inherent problems are not solved.
- However, non-cognitive solutions do broaden the range of human expression to allow for function to be considered. This is an improvement upon the limited options afforded by the Logical Positivists.
- It seems that more can be said using non-cognitivist solutions but little can be known, and so while the language can be meaningful, it is hard to know what use this is to philosophy.

### Paragraph Three:

- God-talk can be rich, emotional and relate to individual experience. Non-cognitive solutions recognise and celebrate this. They reflect the experience of the language users.

- However, with such solutions a religious believer is now incapable of making cognitive claims about God. This is unsatisfactory to many, who might say that 'God exists' is a factual claim.
- It seems that religious terms might feel meaningful to an individual, but they can't be universalised so that each person means the same thing when they use the language. This makes the solutions ineffective.

### **Conclusion:**

- Non-cognitive solutions are philosophically useless and do not resolve the problems of religious language. This is because while they appear to allow religious language to be meaningful, they offer no insight into objective truths and as such it is impossible to pin down the purpose of such language.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**

- 2 'Language games make all language meaningful.' Evaluate this view.

**There are so many acceptable ways to answer this question. The suggestion below is an acceptable method but not the only one.**

### **Introduction:**

- Meaningful = That someone can understand the intention behind the words, *not* that they are necessarily true.

### **Paragraph One:**

- Language games does make all language meaningful because there is no way of challenging the rules of a game that you are not immersed in.
- However, there is nothing to stop someone from within a form of life questioning the rules that are being applied. Someone who asks 'Is there life after death?' could be immersed in the religious form of life but challenging whether such a claim is cognitive.
- In addition, there are religious scholars who do just this. Within the religious form of life, some people consider claims about life after death to be literal, while others consider them to be regarding this life.

### **Paragraph Two:**

- Wittgenstein is very clear that he rejects private language, so language games limits meaningful language to that used within groups of people who are participating in the same game.
- However, this does not narrow the range of meaningfulness very much. Private language is going to be meaningless, but it is not open to philosophical analysis because it is private.
- Yet, what matters is not whether we can dismiss some language as meaningless. What matters is that when language is used between people, it is possible for it to contain meaning. Language games ensures that there is a criterion of meaning for language and so if it makes all language meaningful then this is a good thing.

### **Paragraph Three:**

- Wittgenstein's language games theory does make all language used between more than one person meaningful, but only to those within the same form of life.

- But this makes it impossible for someone outside the game to understand it. So, language games theory makes all language meaningless to someone at some point.
- In addition, while all language is potentially meaningful, it is difficult to see how any interfaith dialogue can take place, or how anyone can have a discussion about God from differing perspectives. This means that there is no way that all language is meaningful because it should be understandable and analysable by all.

**Conclusion:**

- Language games theory is attractive because it recognises the multi-functionality of language. However, it fails to make all language meaningful, because it does not allow philosophical analysis to take place between those from different forms of life.

**Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a conclusion about the question that is supported with evidence.**