

Examiners' Report  
June 2019

GCE Religious Studies 9RS0 01

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# Introduction

In the second sitting of this new specification there were some excellent and well-crafted responses. Candidates revealed thorough knowledge, good assessment and analysis and impressive awareness of the links to other papers in Q04. Again this year, at the highest level, candidates presented answers that drew on a range of detailed and carefully employed knowledge to deconstruct the issues and offer clear and sustained reasoning and judgement in relation to the question. This was achieved through reviewing and analysing the strengths and weaknesses of different views and forming clear judgements. There was a good range of subject specific terminology and a variety of scholarship used well in many responses.

There remain some issues of time management for candidates and centres to refine. In Q01 candidates should select material from the topic to address the question and not try to cover a 'whole topic' essay in the time, and space, provided. Many of the candidates who wrote more than the time and space allowed for ran out of time on other questions; this can improve with continued centre-based practice.

Candidates wrote well, on the whole, in questions that require the AO2 skills of 'Assess,' 'Analyse' and 'Evaluate' although some candidates simply outlined content rather than offering assessment or weighing up of differing positions, therefore they were unable to score very highly. Centres clearly work on this with candidates, but it is an area to continue to focus on and encourage to allow candidates to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.

There were some excellent responses to the anthology extract in Q03(a) although it did seem that many candidates struggled to identify the position of Mitchell despite it being evidenced in the passage and question, suggesting careful reading is important for candidates to remember in the exam room as is secure knowledge of the position of respective contributors to debates to avoid confusion. Candidates were able to 'Clarify' well for the most part although the tendency to 'translate' or repeat the passage is still evident for some candidates. The extract should be seen as an opportunity to expand upon ideas raised and set them in content of the wider topic, whilst not straying too far from the text itself. Candidates 'refer to the passage' most effectively when it is in short bursts rather than extended lengthy quotations which then end up only repeating the content.

The synoptic link element of Q04 was handled well by very many candidates although sadly it still did not appear in a significant proportion of answers which limits the levels of the mark scheme available to that candidate. This link was most effectively done when clearly signposted and then elaborated in a short paragraph or two on how the topics linked to each other. Some responses created this link throughout an essay with some considerable skill.

## Question 1

This question saw a variety of responses. Some candidates opted for a survey of the views of key thinkers from the cosmological arguments including Aquinas, Leibniz, the Kalam argument or William Lane Craig's version of it. Others selected a few ideas to outline in good detail such as causation, necessary being, or issues regarding infinite time. At the top level, candidates wrote quality essays that discussed arguments from motion, cause and effect and contingency; many of the top answers were succinct with absolute focus on the question and precise language.

Candidates who approached this question as if it were, or who had hoped for, a longer essay often spent too long on a lengthy introduction about the type of argument and evidence it provided without making this relevant to a key idea. They appeared to wish to present a much larger essay rather than carefully selecting a few ideas to outline in some detail, which would have been a more appropriate strategy.

Some responses included AO2 style comment which is not required in an 8 mark Explore question and thus prevented candidates including more relevant AO1 material.

### 1 Explore key ideas of Cosmological Arguments for the existence of God.

(8)

The cosmological argument is based on the first 3 of Aquinas's 5 ways, in particular the third. The argument from contingency relates to the idea of ~~cause~~ cause. A key idea of the cosmological argument is ~~that~~ that every action has a cause that led to that action. This however is not an infinite regression. This means that ~~every~~ ~~causes~~ something started the ~~chain~~ chain of causes.

This person is an unmoved mover. The unmoved mover is God. The cosmological argument argues that every cause can be traced back to God. God ultimately started the chain of ~~causes~~ causes. The cosmological argument says this proves God to be exist as there is no other explanation of who could ~~be~~ be the person who started the chain of causes.

Q6 The cosmological argument even fits with science's theory of the Big Bang Cosmology proves that God could have caused the big bang to occur.



This exemplar indicates a mid Level 2 response that was awarded 4 marks. It is rather thin and terms are conflated or confused. A narrow range of ideas are addressed such as infinite regress and the support of science but the knowledge is not secure or developed to reach any higher.



Define key terms carefully and precisely and develop each point clearly.

# 1 Explore key ideas of Cosmological Arguments for the existence of God.

(8)

Key ideas of the cosmological argument include that it is an a posteriori argument which ~~is~~ <sup>based</sup> on experience which uses inductive reasoning to ~~reach~~ <sup>perceive</sup> to follow conclusion. The cosmological argument ~~states~~ <sup>argues</sup> that ~~existence~~ <sup>knowledge</sup> of the universe as proof of the existence of God. Cosmo means universe, logy means knowledge. ~~The~~ It is known as the first cause which focuses ~~on~~ <sup>and</sup> on cause and effect. Infinite regress is rejected in this argument.

It was proposed in Aquinas's book of Summa Theologica, it include his first way uncaused causer, suggesting every effect has a first cause, infinite regress is rejected. There must be an uncaused causer which is seen to be God, furthermore the ~~end~~ <sup>way</sup> of the unmoved mover ~~is that~~ <sup>of the unmoved mover</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> everything in the world is in motion, He must be something which ~~is~~ <sup>causes</sup> motion of everything, there must be a first mover, ~~infinite regress~~ <sup>(unmoved mover)</sup> is rejected, the unmoved mover is therefore seen to be God. Finally in Aquinas's third way on contingency it suggest that there are contingent beings in the world, which demand a necessary being to exist, infinite regress is rejected, this necessary being is seen to be God. Furthermore, it ~~could be argued~~ <sup>Aquinas said that there</sup> that ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> a first cause, everything in the ~~world~~ <sup>universe</sup> ~~has~~ <sup>must</sup> have been caused this is seen to be God.

Furthermore, if everything has a cause what cause God, William Lane Craig ~~rediscovered~~ <sup>rediscovered</sup> the Kalām Argument by Al Ghazali and Al Ghazali which argued that God is eternal, he has no beginning and no end therefore he ~~is~~ <sup>has</sup> no cause. Finally Gopston agreed with Leibniz that there needs to be an external explanation. He said ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> everything is contingent, the ~~world~~ <sup>universe</sup> is full of contingent beings as everything in the ~~world~~ <sup>universe</sup> is full of contingent beings, there must be an ~~external~~ <sup>external</sup> explanation, a being that cannot not be, this is seen to be God.



This response was awarded full marks. It is not a perfect answer but it does enough to reach the full 8 marks. There is a wide range of knowledge, terminology is selected and used well and a broad range of key ideas and beliefs are addressed. This candidate has focused the selection of their material to the time and space provided.



Good range here, make sure points are explained clearly throughout.

## **Question 2**

There were many strong answers to this question that included material on Plato, Descartes, Aristotle, Kant, Ryle and Dawkins. For the most part there was good knowledge of the differences between monism and dualism. Candidates wrote well on immortality of the soul and on the ideas of reincarnation and considered the strengths and weaknesses of different versions of belief in the continued existence of a soul, maintaining a good focus on the question. There was confusion in some responses over the beliefs of Buddhism and many included extensive material on Hick's Replica theory that was not appropriate nor made relevant to the question. Weaker responses focused on the whole range of beliefs about life after death as a survey of sorts, rather than focusing on the view of the soul surviving death, with little assessment of the notion. Some candidates crafted their argument to suggest it was not strong as resurrection in some 'physical' form was more successful, but for the most part those candidates who moved away from discussion of the soul did not focus on the question sufficiently to access the higher levels of the mark scheme. There was good use of material on evidence for existence without a body, or in a new body, and assessment of this evidence in comparison to monist evidence of the nature of the soul and body in some responses. Other weaker responses resorted to narrative of an out of body experience with little assessment.



The view that the soul can survive after death fits with the concepts of dualism, in which the body and soul are separable, the body being the finite material that decays, the soul being the metaphysical and infinite that endures. Plato acts as an advocate for dualism with his belief that the soul can have a post-mortem existence, in a higher realm and world of eternal truths. To him birth is a joining of the soul and body, with the soul coming from this higher realm, and death is the disconnection of the two and the soul returning to knowledge. However, we cannot have knowledge of this higher realm of eternal truths on earth, therefore the concept is unverifiable, the whereabouts of this higher realm is also unknown weakening the view. Aristotle can be seen to oppose this view with his materialist view, that the body and soul are one and inseparable, at death the soul ceases to exist. To Aristotle humans are forms and matter, the form (soul) only exists when held in the body, almost ~~ensoul~~ referred to as an ensouled body.

Re-incarnation focus aims to reveal that a soul can exist after death. This Hindu concept discusses the soul passing on from generation to generation, through the judgement of Karma in the eventual hope to reach Brahman and achieve Moksha, the release from this constant transmigration of the soul. Hindu scholars argue this to be the case due to remembered past-lives, similar character traits as well as inexplicable geniuses of children. However, these arguments may be viewed as weak due to the fact memory of past-lives is rare, they may also be hoaxes or unconscious memories of stories told in the past. The concept of re-incarnation causes us to question how we can identify an individual without a body of exact continuity.

Hick attempts to solve this dilemma through his replica theory, a form of resurrection in which God would form an exact replica of us at death, continuing all our memories, characteristics and appearances into another realm. However, this idea can be seen as flawed due to the absence of knowledge of this realm. We can also question what state this replica to continue the soul would be in. Surely as our bodily death was caused by either an illness or damage the replica created would be

in exactly the same state if a complete form of  
ourselves.

Therefore we can see the difficulty of providing  
Near-death experiences are also often utilised to  
attempt to show a soul, separate from the body  
at death, with accounts of seeing tunnels of light,  
perfect landscapes, religious figures or friends. A  
possible foretaste of another realm. However these  
may be perceived as purely physical and  
chemical responses to trauma, either induced by  
drugs or oxygen deprivation.

Therefore we can see the difficulty of providing a  
entirely sound argument for the idea of continuity  
of the soul. Although the concept of a  
continuation of the self may comfort there is  
a lack of empirical evidence to support it fully  
with lack of verification until that point.



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Examiners Comments

This answer demonstrates a wide range of knowledge; it carefully uses terminology and deconstructs issues leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning. It is a pity that the Hick replica theory is presented in relation to a question about the soul as it prevents the candidate adding more relevant material but the remaining material qualifies this response for Level 3 and it was awarded 11 marks.



Make sure all the material you select is directly relevant to the question.

Dualism is ~~at~~ the idea that the body and soul are separate and when the body inevitably dies the soul can go on. This was first postulated by Plato and later by Descartes - stating 'cogito ergo sum' meaning 'I think therefore I am' showing he knows of his existence only through his mind - distinguishing the separation.

The idea has been contemplated with many of the world's main religions believing this with Buddhists believing in ~~reincarnation~~ ~~rebirth~~ reincarnation of the soul ~~and~~ and Christians believing in the soul being transported to a heaven, while the physical body is <sup>dead</sup> ~~John Hick created a theory known~~

However, there is no empirical proof of a soul but there is empirical evidence of brain activity ceasing after a short while once dead.

The idea dualism contrasts with the idea of monism - which is the belief that the body and soul are one, a Jewish belief.

This answers questions dualism can't such as in an afterlife what would the body look like? How old would you look, would you be physical? However, monism still has ambiguities such as would your body still have the wounds you died with? ~~\*~~

Near death experiences can also provide evidence of many people having a dualistic experience, such as the soul rising out of the body to begin an after life.

\* leaving us with too many questions for it to be logical for the soul to go on after death.



This response is Level 2; it was awarded 8 marks. It is focused with some useful terminology but it is a little short. It discusses a range of theories, some more accurately than others, and offers a consideration of some evidence with a simple chain of reasoning.



Avoid confusion between Hindu and Buddhist belief.

### **Question 3**

Q03(a) There was a wide range in the quality of responses to this question. The clarity in the top answers was exceptional. There was substantial evidence that indicated that this (fairly) new specification prepares candidates well for the study of philosophy at undergraduate level, and this was particularly evident in some of the answers for Q03(a). Many candidates dealt with this extract and question very successfully. The AO1 knowledge was well-marshalled and detailed. This led to a good unpacking of the extract and expansion on the points it raised in relation to meaning and falsification, and to faith despite acknowledging that evidence may count against the statement. However, many candidates showed they did not understand what an assertion was and there was a perception that Mitchell was agreeing with Hare. There was a good deal of confusion evident in some responses about the respective positions of Flew, Hare and Mitchell. Most candidates handled the material on bliks more successfully for the second part of their answer. There was a higher proportion of confused or very brief responses in this question or answers that simply presented developed versions of the parables of the 'Partisan and Stranger' and the 'Lunatic and the Dons' whilst not identifying any key ideas about assertions accurately.

Q03(b) Question 3 focused on the topic of Religious Language this year, with falsification and meaning a focus for part (a) and verification a focus for part (b). Candidates were therefore afforded the opportunity to write about more of the religious language topic whilst focusing in on this question. Many candidates had an excellent understanding of the Verification Principle. They were able to discuss the context of the Verification Principle, the implications of its use, strong and weak verification as well as challenges such as eschatological verification and the fact that it 'fails its own test'. Hick and Ward were used well in some answers. Some candidates took the opportunity to discuss attempts by other approaches to prove that religious language is meaningful in response to the challenges from the Verification Principle highlighting its weakness such as language games and the use of symbol. Some offered material on the Falsification Principle as an improved version of the Verification Principle to indicate the meaninglessness of religious language and applied this to the question. Some candidates perhaps misread the question or were not prepared for this part of the specification and limited their mark by only focusing on the Falsification Principle and repeating material from part (a) with no reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the Verification Principle at all.

**Read the following passage before answering the questions.**

The partisan of the parable does not allow anything to count decisively against the proposition 'The Stranger is on our side.' This is because he has committed himself to trust the Stranger. But he of course recognizes that the Stranger's ambiguous behaviour does count against what he believes about him. It is precisely this situation which constitutes the trial of his faith.

Hare's lunatic who has a *blik* about dons doesn't admit that anything counts against his *blik*. Nothing can count against *bliks*. Also the partisan has a reason for having in the first instance committed himself, viz. the character of the Stranger; whereas the lunatic has no reason for his *blik* about dons – because, of course, you can't have reasons for *bliks*. This means that I agree with Flew that theological utterances must be assertions. The partisan is making an assertion when he says, 'The Stranger is on our side.'

(Source: Extract adapted from 'The Philosophy of Religion' - Chapter I, 'Theology and Falsification: A Symposium', edited by Mitchell, B., Oxford University Press, 1977, Edexcel Anthology)

- 3 (a) Clarify Mitchell's ideas in this passage that religious claims are assertions because they do allow things to count against them.

You must refer to the passage in your response.

(10)

Mitchell here is replying to an article written by Anthony Flew who held that religious claims hold no meaning because they do not allow anything / any evidence to count against their beliefs. In other words, they are not falsifiable and Flew (who takes the idea of falsification from Karl Popper as an alternative to verification), uses the test of falsification as a means by which to work out what statements and claims should be considered meaningful. Mitchell replies to Flew. He agrees with the principle of falsification, but differs from Flew by arguing that religious claims do in fact allow things to count against them - theists do not simply seek



to continually qualify them in order to ~~show them~~ <sup>ensure</sup> that nothing will count against them. Mitchell gives his own parable about the 'stranger'. In this parable, the stranger represents God - from the perspective of the Narrator, the conduct of the stranger may at times appear 'ambiguous' (he is shown to be a soldier who sometimes appears to work for the enemy), yet he has faith in him. Mitchell says that 'it is such conduct which constitutes the trial of faith.' In other words, the theist basically admits that the evidence looks bad at face value (the stranger helping the enemy side here is akin to the existence of evil which some believe disproves the existence of God - eg. J.L. Mackie), yet his faith means that he still believes in the stranger. Mitchell therefore effectively ~~says~~ <sup>is</sup> - ~~of course the evidence against God looks bad, but I have faith in God.~~ religious statements are falsifiable - this is evident, people lose their faith. The question should instead be, how long until a theist loses their faith, this is the 'trial of faith' to which he makes reference.

Mitchell now refers to 'bliks', an idea coined by R.M. Hare who writes that ~~the~~ ~~long~~ religious claims made by theists are not falsifiable because they are not assertions (they do not, in other words, belong to what the late Wittgenstein would have referred to as a 'form of life' which concerns =>

meaning in relation to evidence and falsification). Instead, religious claims are expressions of unfalsifiable world views which he calls 'blik's'.

Mitchell disagrees with such a view - the parable of the lunatic by Hare gives the example of a paranoid student and his 'insane' blik that all dons want to kill him. <sup>the student</sup> He has, however, no good reason for his belief and allows no evidence (eg- friendly dons) to convince him that his view is wrong. The partisan in the parable of the stranger, however, allows for evidence. His belief in the stranger is inspired by a meeting (akin to a religious experience), and he admits (using evidence that the stranger is apparently, despite being on the side of the partisan, appearing to help the enemy), that the evidence against the stranger looks bad - yet the partisan (at least for now) retains his faith.

Flew later concedes to Mitchell that some religious claims must be falsifiable assertions - otherwise, he writes, we wouldn't have the 'intractable problem of evil' which arises from the fact that, as many/most theists admit, the existence of evil looks bad on the part of God. Mitchell therefore says that religious claims are assertions and that they are falsifiable - it is a question of how long a theist will maintain their faith in the face of contradictory evidence.

(b) Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the challenge to religious language from the verification debate.

(20)

### Verificationism

~~The verification debate~~, championed most notably by the logical positivists of the Vienna circle, is a means by which to assess whether <sup>it is meaningful</sup> ~~certain claims/beliefs~~ have to make certain claims / to hold certain beliefs in the face of empirical evidence. Whilst initially a very popular idea, it eventually became weakened to the point of abandonment as there are arguably a lot more stronger ways of assessing the meaningfulness of religious claims.

It must <sup>firstly</sup> be stated firstly that the principle of verificationism was adopted by the logical positivists of the Vienna circle to rule out any ~~to~~ religious and ethical claims. They were concerned only with statements which could be shown to be verifiably (using evidence) true. It aligns itself with the correspondence theory of truth in which claims are regarded as true if they correspond correctly to the world around us. Wittgenstein was initially very supportive of this attempt to cut religious talk out, writing in his work *Tractatus* that we shouldn't talk about that which we know nothing of (in other words, things that we can't experience and show to be verifiably true). However, this meant that the logical positivists could not make meaningful scientific hypotheses or even talk about the future.

and so it was decided to weaken the theory by splitting it into verifiable in 'practice' and in 'principle'. The verification 'in principle' allowed for things which could conceivably be verified to be spoken of as meaningful - this meant that in principle scientific hypotheses could be considered meaningful, ~~yet this was still an issue for historical statements (which can't be verified in principle)~~ This weakening, however, allowed for John Hick to argue that life after death (a religious claim), could be considered meaningful in principle as in principle, we could die and then experience (and verify) the afterlife - this was an idea known as 'eschatological verification'. This meant that the 'weak' logical positivists had failed in removing religious claims and language as 'meaningful'. Yet Hick's eschatological verification and the verificationists rely heavily on experience and the reliance on our senses. Some may ~~some may~~ argue that only analytic and tautological statements can be regarded as necessarily true (and therefore meaningful) as synthetic claims place trust in the senses, something which Descartes, for example, would be greatly sceptical of - he advocated for what has become known as 'Cartesian doubt', writing 'Cogito ergo sum' "I think therefore I am".

Yet a far more pressing (and some even consider fatal) objection to the verification principle is that it doesn't pass its own test. The claim; 'religious language / claims are only meaningful if they can be considered empirically verified' cannot be empirically verified. Whilst the early Wittgenstein would not have regarded this as a particularly pressing criticism, writing that the verification principle should be viewed as a 'tool', it inspired the rise of Karl Popper's falsification principle. Its falsification principle is arguably ~~more~~ superior to the verification principle given that it's less intransigent and encourages continual scientific progression as scientific claims should be viewed as falsifiable and consequently falsified where possible. Yet, whilst Anthony Flew argued that falsification could also cut out religious claims (as he believed theirs only qualified their beliefs in order that they not become falsified), others such as Midtall refuted such an argument. The verification principle was therefore (at least its 'strong' version which rejected 'in practice' and 'in principle' distinction), very successful in rejecting religious language as meaningful - if, like early Wittgenstein, we ~~do not~~ ~~take~~ view the principle only as a tool (thereby rejecting the issue that the verification in practice principle dissolves as its

own acid), then it is perfectly adept in dealing with religious claims.

Yet perhaps a much stronger argument would be that given the verification principle is self defeating, that religious language should be seen as meaningful under the coherence theory of truth.

The later Wittgenstein argued that religious claims and language should be seen as meaningful within a particular 'form of life' - in this case, religious claims within a church / group of theists would be considered meaningful as religious statements are meaningful to theists. This is a far less intransigent approach to religious language than the logical positivists argued for: furthermore, Wittgenstein's form of life allows for the logical positivists to make their own meaningful claims within their group, using their own rules / frame of reference.

~~It appears that there is no good reason~~ a conclusion, which the <sup>a practice</sup> verification <sup>a practice</sup> principle successfully rules out religious talk as being meaningless, there is no good reason to accept the principle itself, and when it is weakened it only allows for religious statements to become verifiable 'in principle' as shown by Hlick.



This answer was awarded top of Level 3 for part (a) and top of Level 5 for part (b) scoring a full 30 marks.

Part (a) illustrates a clear understanding of Mitchell's position and reasoning and uses terminology well. It is direct and focused and uses the text well.

Part (b) demonstrates a wide range of knowledge and specialist language. It deconstructs the issues leading to clear and coherent reasoning making use of a variety of points regarding the Verification Principle itself. It also applies information on other understandings of the meaningfulness or otherwise of religious language astutely.

- 3 (a) Clarify Mitchell's ideas in this passage that religious claims are assertions because they do allow things to count against them.

*You must refer to the passage in your response.*

(10)

Mitchell starts the passage summing up Flew's example of a man meeting a stranger who claims he is the leader of the resistance. This man makes the decision to trust the stranger. This parable links to the theists belief in God. The parable allows us to see that although the man's faith is tested, and he recognises there are some negatives about the stranger, his resolve remains strong, he "has committed himself to trust the stranger".



Then Mitchell goes on to discredit Hare's blicks, saying that because his parable is so narrow and doesn't allow for anything to "count against blicks", that it cannot be the logical way to view religious language.

Mitchell, ~~go~~ next, speaks of how committing yourself to a belief with "a reason" is much more sensible than making a religious claim for no reason. Seeing the reason in a claim allows for people to see the counter arguments too, which makes religious language more reasonable.

Finally, Mitchell sums up his view by acknowledging that Flew's view of that "theological utterances must be assertions" is the most sensible way to view religious claims.

(b) Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the challenge to religious language <sup>weak</sup> from the verification debate.

(20)

The verification debate claims religious language must be verified either analytically or synthetically, for it to have meaning.

A weakness of this debate is that, ~~we~~ using the verification principles, we cannot verify history. It isn't possible for us to be able to look around and verify historical facts, we have no sense evidence for them. This means that we cannot rely on verification to verify the meaning of facts, because we couldn't verify history we know has happened.

In response to this, verification was split into strong and weak forms. This strong form is simple facts, always verifiable, <sup>the</sup> weak form relies on being verified at some point in time. This does also allow for many things to become verifiable, however, so splitting the argument weakens its resolve and makes facts more flexible.

A strength of verification is its ease of understanding. It allows you to take any statement and verify it, which gives clear results and doesn't rely on previous knowledge or understanding. Being able to see immediately if the statement is analytical or synthetic allows it to be used clearly and with no confusion.

However, some scholars say that you can't verify non-cognitive language. Dealing with religious language means dealing with non-cognitive language, and it should be treated as such, not as fact. You cannot verify language that is unable to be proved by knowledge and has no way of being proved via sense experience, so the verification principle is weak in that it shouldn't be applied to religious language.

Similarly, the verification principle itself is unable to be verified by its own parameters. The inability to verify the verification principle is a weakness because it leaves room for the

principle to be discredited by its own rules. This seems intelligible so makes it verification less likely to be used to understand religious language.

A final strength of the verification principle is its clear parameters. Using weak verification allows religious language meaning because even though you can't prove it now, in the future it will be able to be verified. Take the afterlife, although it cannot be verified now, it will, in the future, be verifiable.

In conclusion, I believe although the verification principle has many flaws, it's still a strong principle in dealing with tricky religious language.



This response was awarded Level 3 for part (a) at 7 marks, and Level 4 for part (b) at 15 marks.

Part (a) uses the text and expands upon the key ideas of evidence and faith, it could be developed further but it covers a fair range of ideas.

Part (b) remains focused on the issues of verification identifying strengths and weaknesses thereof. It deconstructs religious issues and makes reasoned judgements considering a more appropriate understanding of the role of religious language. This response could also be developed further in terms of detail to reach the next level, but it is a clear and secure answer.



Explain the terms clearly when needed to show your understanding.

## **Question 4**

This was largely very well-answered reflecting the popularity of this topic. The strongest responses balanced their time carefully between explaining the problem of evil and utilising their knowledge of the various theodicies to provide and evaluate counter arguments. The writings of Augustine and Irenaeus dominated but Process Theodicy was also very popular. The essays which presented well were those which made continual reference to the question and which concurrently considered the strengths and reasons for support of these responses, or otherwise, in a tight assessment. Many good responses clearly signposted the link to the study of ethics or religion which is helpful. Some scripts made good reference to the religions that they studied showing a synoptic link; there were also some good links made with New Testament studies and ethics where notions of Jesus' suffering or Virtue Ethics were popular.

Weaker responses spent too long on the problem of suffering, sometimes many sides of the booklet with rather repetitive versions of the material (for example Epicurus, Hume and Mackie) and therefore did not have time to evaluate adequately the theodicies. Some just outlined the theodicy without any counter arguments producing almost exclusively AO1 material. Some candidates did not fulfil the requirements of the question and provide a link to another area of study which meant, even for otherwise strong responses, they were unable to access the top level. Other responses seemed a little confused, for example they wrote that the problem of evil linked to New Testament studies and then wrote about the book of Job, or the garden of Eden, and although many links to other religions were done well there was often confusion over Buddhist concepts.

4 Evaluate the view that the problem of suffering shows that ideas about the nature and existence of God are inconsistent. Irenaeus, Augustine.

In your response to this question, you must include how developments in Philosophy of Religion have been influenced by **one** of the following:

- Religion and Ethics
- New Testament Studies
- Study of Religion.

FWD  
(Swinburne).

David Griffin / A.N.  
Whitehead  
(process  
theodicy)

(30)

Within Christianity, God is said to be the perfect being, with qualities such as being omnipotent and omnibenevolent. However, scholars have questioned his nature due to the extent of suffering within the world, as if he was all powerful, the problem of suffering wouldn't exist. This essay will outline how, to a great extent, ideas about God's nature and existence are very inconsistent.

J.L. Mackie is one critic of God's nature and his existence. He derived the inconsistent triad, which is comprised of three parts; God is omnipotent, God is omnibenevolent, yet evil exists. Mackie explains that these cannot all be true at the same time, as if God was both all loving and all powerful, he would not allow evil to exist. This ~~can~~ causes problems as it shows that God may be neither all powerful or all loving, which completely degrades his nature.

Due to the ~~inconsistent~~ inconsistencies about God's nature, various

theodicies have been created, which try and justify how God exists even with the existence of evil.

~~The~~ St Augustine of Hippo came up with the Augustinian theodicy, which is based on the idea that evil came about due to human disobedience. He explains that God created a completely perfect universe and that he never intended for evil to come about as it wasn't a part of the divine plan. Evil came about when free beings turned their backs on God, which is most commonly associated with when Adam and Eve ~~an~~ disobeyed God, also referred to as the ~~origin~~ Original Sin. Therefore, only humans are to blame for the occurrence of evil, <sup>and</sup> ~~as~~ it is a divine judgement/punishment from God.

This theory is very weak in its nature as firstly, it seems to be a logical contradiction; how could a perfect world go so wrong? Schleiermacher stated that either the world was never created perfect, or God allowed it to come into the world. Also, why would perfect beings choose to be evil? If goodness was hard-wired into our nature, then it seems unlikely that we would choose to be evil. Therefore, this theodicy, whilst attempting to justify the problem of suffering, is weak in its



attempt as it seems incoherent and contradictory.

Another theodicy that aims to justify the problem of suffering is the Irenaean theodicy, which is associated with St Irenaeus. His ideas differ from Augustine in that he believed that God deliberately created an imperfect universe. This was because evil was a test to help humans develop qualities needed for perfection, such as kindness and courage. Irenaeus believed that eventually, all evil will be overcome and all humans will dwell together in heaven.

Whilst this attempt seems justified in that it says how evil can have a positive purpose, it is also greatly flawed. For example, it says that evil is necessary for moral growth, however sometimes it can morally ~~degrade~~ degrade, having the opposite effect. For example, it's very hard to see how a mother's daughter being brutally murdered can be positive and lead to moral development. Also, a further flaw is that if eventually all humans will dwell together in heaven, where is the motivation for developing good qualities. It is also very hard to justify ~~how~~ how the extent of evil could possibly have a positive outcome, as an all-loving God would not allow terminal illnesses like cancer, and he would

be powerful enough to stop natural disasters, so this brings his nature and existence into question.

The free will defence, most commonly associated with Richard Swinburne, explains how God gave humans free will with the possibility of evil, which some choose to exercise. He explains that if humans had no free will, we would be no more than robots as we would be programmed to always act good. Therefore, Swinburne says that God even has to allow for mass killings like genocide because if he intervenes, it takes away human freedom.

Whilst this theory is stronger than the previous two, it is also weak in that it assumes that everyone has equal free will, however this is not the case. Also, it only really addresses moral evil, which is human based, as opposed to natural evil.

In the New Testament, links can be seen with the problem of suffering. For example, Jesus is said to be called the suffering servant, in which he died on the cross to save our sins. However, some believe the suffering servant is the Land of Israel. Also, in the gospels, Jesus permits war to happen,

like when he tells his disciples 'sell your cloaks to buy a sword', and says 'Those who live by the sword will die by the sword' which shows how he allows suffering to some extent.

To conclude, although various attempts have been made to justify the existence of evil regardless of God's nature, each attempt is more unsuccessful as they all propose serious problems, and therefore inconsistencies.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This example is Level 4, awarded 28 marks. It has a tight, good structure and clear AO2 evaluation. The link with New Testament studies is clear and useful, although the essay does rather tail off after this. Nonetheless, this is a response that uses a wide range of knowledge; it constructs reasoned and coherent judgements which are supported by an appraisal of the evidence.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

A good clear answer, but try not to rush a conclusion.

SECTION C

problem of evil  
rock of atheism  
John Hick

ref in conclusion - make judgement  
physical weakness  
assume God exists

mental suffering  
moral wickedness

Write your answer in the space provided.

4  
previdential  
conclusion

Evaluate the view that the problem of suffering shows that ideas about the nature and existence of God are inconsistent.

In your response to this question, you must include how developments in Philosophy of Religion have been influenced by one of the following:

- Religion and Ethics
- New Testament Studies
- Study of Religion.

natural evil / moral evil  
Buddhism

evaluation of a/g 3. A.N. ~~philosophy~~  
 Angustinian  
 process  
 Free will  
 deprece  
 4 noble truths  
 dukkha - become enlightened to see it for what it is.  
 2 part of life what it is.  
 (30)

The problem of evil presents a barrier to belief in God for the atheist and faith in God for the theist. David Hume called the problem of evil the "rock of atheism", since how can the God of classical theism who is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing) and omnibenevolent (all loving) allow evil to happen? Hume would certainly support the view that the problem of suffering shows that ideas about the nature and existence of God are inconsistent, and concluded wisely that God does not exist.

J.L. Mackie was Hume's point of reference for concluding that due to the problem of evil, God does not exist. J.L. Mackie explored the inconsistencies of belief in the Abrahamic God's 3 attributes by presenting the inconsistent triad. This puts the 3 attr

tributes on the three points of a triangle, but one is always missing due to the presence of evil. God cannot ~~only~~ be omnipotent and omniscient but not omnibenevolent. This is in conflict with idea of an all loving God ("those who live in love live in God"). It also presents an issue of would you want to worship a God who willed evil despite the power to stop it. A Christian response may be that evil is a just punishment for the fall in Genesis. This then leaves God to only be omniscient and omnibenevolent but not omnipotent. Once again, is such a limited God worth worshipping? ~~and~~ If he knew evil would occur, should he have created the world at all? J.L Mackie demonstrates with the inconsistent triad that a solution is required to explain why God allows evil to occur and demonstrates the different views of God's attributes that are held in response by some.

Solutions to the problem of evil are put forward in theodicies. Theodicies are arguments that defend God's attributes in the face of evil. Moral evil (caused by immoral human action) is explainable by free will, by natural evil (the apparent malfunctioning of the natural world such as earthquakes) presents a trickier issue. This is because natural evil is beyond our control and the blame often falls to God, which

theodicies attempt to reconcile.

St Augustine ~~also~~ put forward his traditional theodicy ('Augustinian') which uses Genesis to explain the problem of evil. Augustine argued that God had created the world perfectly ("he saw what he had made and it was very good"). HE went on to say that evil is simply the privation of good, for example sickness is merely an absence of good health. Therefore, God did not create evil because he is omnibenevolent and evil is just a privation of good so does <sup>not</sup> preside as an entity itself. Augustine argued that evil, both moral and natural comes from the fall in Genesis. Original sin (disobeying God and eating from the tree of knowledge) meant God punished humanity since we were ~~the~~ "seminally present in the loins of Adam". Adam and Eve disturbed the natural order by acquiring knowledge, causing natural evil and created moral evil through their disobedience. Augustine concludes that this is a just God rightly punishing <sup>people</sup> and that God shows his omnibenevolence by sending his son Jesus to die for our sins and allow believers a chance at eternal bliss.

Augustine's theodicy has been highly criticised. Schleiermacher arguably presents a convincing case. He references the issue that Augustine said the fall created moral evil and thus disobedience, but how did the Angels and humans know how to disobey in the first place? The illogical nature of Augustine's point here is a valid criticism. Furthermore, Augustine's argument is biologically unsound, as not all humans are 'seminally present in the loins of Adam'.<sup>\*</sup> Augustine's theodicy also fails to stand up to evolution, which rejects the notion that the world was made perfectly. It is arguably quite clear then, that original sin as an explanation for the problem of evil is outdated and weak.

Irenaeus offers a different theodicy to Augustine, despite agreeing that moral evil is created through freedom and disobedience. Irenaeus's theodicy is often referred to as 'soulmaking' as it focuses on evil as a necessary experience to make us 'perfect' moral beings. Irenaeus argues that there were two (which explains natural evil).

<sup>\*</sup> This then asks the question, is it fair as humans must suffer evil? Is this really a 'just' God as Augustine claims?

stages to creation. The first was Genesis, where we were made in the 'image of God'. The second is a gradual development where we are working towards the 'likeness of God'. Irenaeus concludes that evil is present to provide conditions that test us and make us better people. His supporters call the world a 'soul-making vale'. Irenaeus argued that eventually, all of humanity would reach moral perfection in heaven, where many would continue to develop because our time on earth is not long enough.

Irenaeus likewise faced many criticisms just as Aquinas did. Primarily, that '~~just that~~ his view of the afterlife is theologically unsound as well as ~~and~~ his claim that we are working towards the 'likeness of God'. There is the precedential problem of evil, the sheer amount of evil seems unnecessary to test us. Irenaeus also seems to suggest that evil will make us better people because it forces us to choose between good and bad. ~~But~~ However, many 'evils' make people worse and angry and do not better themselves. Arguably, Irenaeus does succeed in maintaining God's 3 attributes but his argument is weak in the sense that it does



not explain the sheer amount of evil in the world.

A less popular theodicy to explain the problem of evil is 'process theodicy' put forward by A.N. Whitehead. Whitehead suggests that God is not omnipotent but remains omniscient and omnibenevolent. This bold claim limits God and is unsupported by most theists since God's omnipotence is central to the Abrahamic God's character. Nonetheless, Whitehead claims that God ~~is~~ did not create the universe since he is part of the uncreated process himself. This theodicy claims that we are all in an interconnected momentary process, where good moral action promotes harmony in the universe and bad moral action creates natural evil. Whitehead goes as far to say that since the world is God's body in a sense, he <sup>the</sup> feels pain of natural evil and is our "fellow ~~sufferer~~ sufferer who understands".

Process theodicy is criticised for compromising God's nature and ~~one~~ is even said to not be a theodicy since it does not defend all three

of God's attributes. However, process  
theodicy is reticent of the Indian traditions  
such as Buddhism. The idea of annica  
(change) is central to Buddhist teaching.  
and there is a belief that everything is  
interconnected. Certainly in the vedic  
hindu tradition, the concept of Brahman  
as original source and all things Brahman  
reflects the momentary process whiteman  
observes of the world.

Buddhist response to the problem of suffering  
does not include a God and they simply  
view suffering (dukkha) as a fact of life  
(dhamma). This means there are less  
inconsistencies about the nature of being,  
~~and change is not~~ the four noble truths  
provide a clear response to the issue of  
suffering. The four noble truths diagnose  
the human condition and see desire (tanha)  
as the root of all evil. The wish for things to  
be different stops us from attaining nirvana.  
Enlightenment provides the necessary tools  
to deal with the problem of evil ~~to~~ so it  
is the goal in Theravada Buddhism and  
also central to Mahayana, including the

## Bodhisattvas.

The clear response Buddhism provides to the problem of evil is not found in the theistic traditions. ~~such as Christianity~~ ~~as~~ The theodicies themselves demonstrate the variety of conclusion and justification reached when dealing with the problem of evil. Certainly, there are inconsistencies seen in descriptions in the nature and existence of God relating to the problem of suffering. All theodicies explored assume a belief in God and explain evil in these terms to justify his existence. However, to the atheist theodicies are inadequate forms of argument for God due to the assumption God exists at the beginning.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This essay is a fine example of a script that was awarded the full 30 marks. It includes a wide range of knowledge and specialist language and terminology is selected and used well throughout. It carefully makes coherent and reasoned judgements of the full range of elements of the question and regularly considers the question. It is focused throughout and provides convincing conclusions that are justified by the candidate. The link section is handled well and is related to the question carefully.

The problem of suffering is concerned with evil in the world and why there is evil. It begins with it <sup>looks</sup> at the belief of God being omnipotent (all powerful), omniscience (all knowing) and omnibenevolent (all loving) and concludes that it is impossible for God to be all these three and exist. It does this by looking at the evil and suffering in this world.

Mackie presents the idea of the inconsistent triad where he shows a triangle with each point having its own respective omni belief. He uses this to show how if you were to remove one it would no longer be complete and he removes them by arguing that a God who is all three must not allow evil to exist yet there is both natural and moral evil present so such God must either not be

omnipotent, omniscient or omnibenevolent. However by removing one in order to allow the explanation of evil you remove the idea of a theistic God and now have another "God".

To combat this <sup>Augustine</sup> ~~Augustine~~ presented the idea that all evil is a consequence for our sinful actions. He saw that God is a "loving father" and as loving fathers do they discipline with reason as such the reason behind evil would be that of a consequence for discipline. As a consequence it is their to help us understand the good and learn from it.

Irenaeus took a different approach, he stated that evil exists to help us grow morally and spiritually through our experience with it. His theodicy was called the soul making theodicy. This is because he argued that ~~the~~ evil exists to help shape and mold our soul into the best possible soul it can be and that because in one life it is not enough to ~~test~~ ~~it~~ learn all it has multiple lives. This does sound like a form of reincarnation however and was rejected by many church officials as a result.

Some view evil as non-existent but rather a privation of good, in the same way there is darkness when there is no light. There is evil. Evil is only a way to say there is no good currently there.

Many have tried to defend the theistic view of God by stating that God creates nothing but good and point to the Bible as sources for evidence. They also state that all evil is a result of human free will, similar to Augustine, evil is a consequence of misused free will. The problem of evil states God's nature to be of human comprehension despite many scholars agreeing that it is beyond human comprehension as God is transcendent as such the inconsistency we see is only because we are humans and cannot understand. ~~The~~

The question of what Evil is is difficult to answer, the idea that it was not created by God suggests that Evil came into existence through itself by its own means through ~~Ex~~ Ex nihilo (from nothing). If so is the concept of evil just as powerful as God in creation or equal if it can from ex nihilo.

One flaw of the problem of suffering is that it only views God as a Creator rather than personal and creator. It suggests God created the world and left it with humanity. However the Catholic Church teaches that God is as personal as creator, they use the Holy spirit to show this. As believing in the trinity doctrine God is the Father Son and Holy spirit. Through the Holy spirit, that is received in confirmation and Baptism, we receive gifts that affect our lives. The sacrifice of Jesus being crucified demonstrates how God is personal as through his love he gave up his own son to save humanity.

Overall the problem of suffering does show ideas of God's nature and existence being inconsistent through various demonstrations of clashing logic in a being that is omnibenevolent, omnipotent and omniscient. It does however cause more questions as for "What is evil" and gifts to define what it means exactly to be omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient. It also does not look at God as personal and Creator but only as creator. As such it does not fully analyse God's nature and reinforce to the point that calling it

inconsistent can be seen as wrong due to lack of understanding and evidence. Furthermore many more ideas about the nature and existence of God are being presented day by day to the point that it or this means that one idea or concept we have now may change sooner or later or maybe not at all.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This is a Level 4 script at 23 marks. It is a good solid response, covering a range of ideas - outlining the problem of suffering and a range of solutions. It has coherent chains of reasoning and appraises the evidence but this is an area that could be developed or 'sharpened up' to push it higher up the mark scheme. Reference to God as Creator and personal is present but more could be made of this potential link.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Make evaluative comments really clear.



## Paper Summary

Based on performance on this paper, candidates should:

- Select material carefully to answer the question set, notably for an 8 mark question, do not use everything you would do for a larger question, focus your work to the marks and space available.
- Remember to make your analytical comment clear, offer an assessment of or verdict on a position not simply present an alternative view eg 'however others argue' without judgement.
- Read the question carefully and refer to it at times to maintain focus in your answer.
- Ensure scholars are used with correct spellings and views attributed to them.
- For Q04 make your synoptic link clear. It is useful (although not the only way to achieve this) to indicate what topic you are linking to by naming it directly for example 'This links to the Ethics paper topic of Virtue Ethics where ... because...' Candidates do not need to be this explicit but it is one way to clearly signpost that the requirements for a Level 5 response have been attempted. Good synoptic links are usually more than a sentence or two in content and instead are a paragraph highlighting linked issues.

## Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>



