

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit C (RSS03) *Philosophy of Religion*

June 2009 Examination Candidate Exemplar Work:

- Candidate A



2009 (June) Unit C *Philosophy of Religion*

Example of Candidate's Work from the Examination

Candidate A

- 1 (a) Explain Aquinas' cosmological argument.

(30 marks)

AO1

Candidate Response

1.a	<p>Aquinas proposes the cosmological argument in the first three of his five ways. The first way is that of motion. An object is either in a state of actuality or potentiality, the two cannot be at the same time and spontaneously move itself. There is a reason for this movement, this reason itself must also be in a state of actuality as well. Aquinas goes on to suggest that this chain of motion cannot go ad infinitum and that it must be inaugurated at some point. The Kalam tradition also supports this notion that infinities are impossible in reality. There has to be an unmoved mover and here Aquinas states that this is God through deductive proof.</p> <p>Aquinas' second way is known as the 'Aetiological Argument' as it deals with cause & effect. It is based upon the same principle as the first way. Aquinas states that an event is never at potency & act at the same time, there must be something causing the event to happen. Subsequently another event which was in act was ^{must have} been a reason for the previous event. Again Aquinas goes on to say that these chain of antecedent events cannot go back ad infinitum & they must be inaugurated at some point, due to the fact or notion that infinities cannot exist in reality. Aquinas proposes that the chain of events is caused & constantly caused by a <i>per se</i> actus, a being here Aquinas believes it is God.</p> <p>Aquinas' see third way is the 'Contingency Argument'. He states that everything we see in the universe is contingent. Aquinas then subsequently says that it is therefore</p>
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'necessary' to apply this characteristic of contingency to the universe as a whole. Aquinas here is trying to say that the universe has a beginning & will have an end. Aquinas comes back to his notion of infinity & says that if the universe did not have a beginning it means it would have been around for infinity. If this was the case ~~the universe~~ there would be a time when there was nothing due to the contingency in the universe. If there was nothing regardless of God or no God there would be nothing now, however empirical data from our senses tells us there is something, this further suggests that the universe could not have been around forever. Aquinas says that ~~if~~ because the universe ~~is~~ was

inaugurated at some point in time there must be a necessary being in existence before the universe began. Aquinas goes on to say that contingency in the universe means you can deduce the existence of a necessary being, here Aquinas ~~to~~ says it is God.

Commentary

AO1 (30 marks)

This is an example of a response that avoids starting the answer with a repetition of the question set. The first few sentences are always difficult for candidates but this answer addresses the question directly. No time is wasted and the candidate gets straight into the relevant material.

The explanation of the First Way is given using the relevant terms (e.g. potentiality, actuality). The logical form of the argument is given with reference to rejection of infinite regression. The conclusion of the unmoved mover is identified as "God".

The answer is set out in clear paragraphs that identify a new point. Again, in explaining the Second Way the form of the argument is set out with rejection of infinite regression and the conclusion that there must be "God".

The Third Way addresses the contingent/necessity argument.

The material is well presented in that it is focussed and concise. The candidate clearly has good knowledge and understanding.

The candidate was awarded a level 6 (26 marks). The reason that it was not awarded full marks was the lack of examples, especially in explaining the First Way and Aquinas' understanding of "motion". The idea of contingency and necessary being also lacked explanation.

Level 6 (26 marks)

- (b) Assess how far Aquinas' cosmological argument shows that it is reasonable to believe in God.

(15 marks)

AO2

Candidate Response

1b)	Aquinas' cosmological argument has its strengths & its weaknesses. Aquinas uses empirical data to make a
A	metaphysical conclusion. Hume criticises this point.
F	as follows. Hume says that there ^{are} reasons why you cannot use empirical data to make a fact certain conclusion of the existence of God. Our senses rely on empirical data & so does the basis of Aquinas' argument, more to the point is that our senses often deceive us & more than too often we accept that these things we see actually happen. Aquinas asks us to be careful about using our senses & empirical data to make conclusions however, to many that disregarding what generally seems right is not at all reasonable. * a christian would argue that & to the christian makes a good point here & suggests its not reasonable to throw away our rationality because a philosopher asks you to.
A	Another criticism of Aquinas use of empirical data to make metaphysical conclusions is that it is unjustifiable. Swinburne says that you can only look for an answer for something by looking at something which isn't contingent. However there is no empirical data of to use which falls into this category & the harder one looks the harder it is to find evidence. This is means that it is unjustifiable to look for an answer of
F	or reason of the universe from within itself. In response to this a christian may argue that there is so many things which must lead to God however they, eg emotions, hears, sunsets etc, however this doesn't justify the reason to look for evidence or empirical data to prove the existence of God.
A	Another criticism of Aquinas argument is that God is playing the role of "God of the Gaps" & that is just as likely that the Universe caused itself not God & christians cannot really deny this claim. At most they ^{most people} can say is that Aquinas' CA makes it prob more probable that God exists, however isn't sufficient reason for the existence of God.

Commentary

AO2 (15 marks)

The candidate focuses on the problem of using empirical evidence to conclude that God exists. However, the weakness/strength of the argument was not always expressed clearly. Some attempt was made at analysis/comment and there was recognition of more than one point of view. There was also an attempt at some reflection of the criticisms, which provided evidence of a process of reasoning.

The main weakness of the answer was that it had limited discussion about "reasonableness". The aspect of "how far" was also brief in its conclusion.

As a result, the answer was awarded a level 5.

Level 5 (10 marks)

2 (a) Examine the variety of forms of religious experience.

(30 marks)

AO1

Candidate Response

2-a) There are several forms of religious experience & they can happen & take place anywhere & anyway. There are three main types of religious experience, these are mysticism, visions & immersion. Mysticism has four main characteristics about it & these are ineffability which is that it defies definition, secondly mystics talk about the inadequacy of language, thirdly they speak of the unspeakable & suggest the best way to God is through silence. Mysticism can also have a ecstatic quality, this is where the mystic comes face to face with divinity or the closest they will get in the mortal world. Secondly & lastly the divine leads the mystic to an insight of the truth of reality unlike the truth experienced in the mundane world.

Another characteristic of mysticism is that of transiency which just means that there will be a short religious experience in which time seems to stop & they feel immortal. After this the experience will immediately be recognized, however it can only be recollected imperfectly.

The last characteristic of mysticism is that of passivity; The mystic feels that his or her own will is in abeyance & there is nothing that the mystic can do to stop the divine doing it. The mystic may feel things & behave normally, but the mystic may also feel things and act in a strange mystical way.

1/1 A second type of religious experience are visions, for example Joseph had many visions in the Bible of plagues, locusts & other nasty things to come & this itself is an example of religious experience through visions. 1

1 Lastly another type of religious experience could be that of conversion. They may be sudden or gradual. An example of sudden conversion could be that of St. Paul on the Road to Damascus where his belief was suddenly changed to Christianity. An example of gradual conversion is that of Leo Tolstoy. He was an established writer, had a name for himself, wealth, a beautiful wife & a wonderful family to match. However throughout his later years he spent more & more of his time contemplating suicide & how to commit. He had been very close on several ~~occasions~~ occasions however he had felt the presence of something external preventing him from committing suicide. Eventually he concluded that it was God, afterwards he was a stern believer & just found out that it was the vanity of the upper class was too much for him & that he could not take it. 15 21

Commentary

AO1 (30 marks)

The focus of this question was on the variety of forms, both across forms and within forms. There are three categories of religious experience listed in the Specification, but other categories were credited since no particular category was named in the question.

This candidate focussed on the three listed in the Specification (vision, conversion and mysticism). They clearly had an understanding of the material but drifted into just listing the four main characteristics of mysticism given by William James. There were no examples to illustrate the variety and no reference to varieties within mysticism such as monistic and theistic.

The review of visions was very brief and the examples not explained or linked to the features of visions. The material on conversions did have illustrations of gradual and sudden but was limited to just those features.

It was **not** a fairly thorough treatment within the time available (level 6). However, there were some examples given to illustrate the forms and some attempt was made to discuss the three main types of religious experience. Key ideas and facts were included. Hence, it was awarded a level 5 (21 marks).

Level 5 (21 marks)

- 2 (b) 'Only those who have had a religious experience can fully understand what a religious experience is.' Assess this claim.

(15 marks)

AO2

Candidate Response

2b	The claim "Only those who have had a religious experience can fully understand what a religious experience is" is a topical issue that is frequently being discussed by members of the Clergy and members of theist and other theist religions.
f	In agreement with this claim many would argue that we have come to know the common characteristics of religious experiences and that these are that they are ineffable. Many would argue that it seems logically completely out of the question that if the person who has experienced experienced his religious experience cannot even understand or describe it, how could somebody who has never experienced or even thought think about being able to understand what they have experienced.
2b	Moreover many would argue that religious experiences are subjective. This would mean that each religious experience means something different to every single person, each religious experience may have a completely different effect on the way one runs their day to day life. This again seems simply beyond words that a person out of the question that a religious person if a religious experience means something different to everyone how can one person understand the next's own experience.
f	Furthermore many religious believers are sceptic towards understanding somebody's religious experience as they don't feel that it's fair. How can they all be equal in God's eyes yet God chooses certain people to experience him they would ask.

This means that as many philosophers would argue ~~it means~~ a religious experience means nothing to those outside of a religious community and if the religious community is not willing to try understand how can anyone understand.

However here are some arguments that suggest that we can understand a religious experience without experiencing it ourselves. ?

Many would argue that we have come to know many common characteristics not just that they are ineffable. & these common characteristics have let such people as Spinoza and William James

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Diary

2b categorize religious experience, therefore we can get some understanding about how a religious experience is for certain people.

Not only this but many people follow in the footsteps and idolize those that have had a religious experience for example Muslims

A follow the Sunnah a lifestyle of the prophet Muhammad who had a religious experience.

This shows how even though perhaps one can not fully understand the religious experience itself, one can understand the profound effect it has had upon people, surely bringing us closer to what it is like to have a religious experience

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To conclude although we have come to know many common characteristics of religious experience we have also come to know the main one which is ineffability. It therefore seems incredibly hard for someone who has not had a religious experience to understand what one is.

Commentary

AO2 (15 marks)

This evaluation question is taken from the Specification directly and so should be very accessible to candidates. This candidate demonstrates the problem of getting into the answer and so wastes a paragraph by virtually writing out the question.

The second paragraph has a clear argument supporting the claim that only those who have had an experience can fully understand what a religious experience is.

The next paragraph focuses on the subjective nature of the experience and gives further support to the claim. The candidate then gives a confusing argument which needed further explanation to make the point clearer.

Thus far, the candidate has just listed arguments in support. There has been no real reflection on those arguments. Now the candidate starts to list arguments against the proposition. There is some analysis with the comment about not fully understanding the experience itself but can understand the effect it has on people.

The conclusion follows with an attempt to justify a weighting on one side rather than the other. Certainly there is evidence of a reasoning process and some attempt at a final evaluation, drawing the answer to a conclusion. However it is limited. Hence it was awarded a lower level 6.

Level 6 (12 marks)