

Examiners' Report
June 2018

GCE Religious Studies 8RS0 01

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Introduction

This year saw some very strong responses across the questions but there were also some general issues worth addressing here.

The easiest way for candidates to improve is to remember to answer the question, not a question they would prefer or feel more knowledgeable about. Some candidates may have misread the question but simple tips such as underlining or circling key words should help them engage with what exactly is being asked.

Another issue that can be improved is timing. It is important to stick to the advertised timings as far as possible; these can be found on the Edexcel web-site and are recommended to ensure candidates are able to demonstrate their range of knowledge and powers of analysis across the full breadth of the paper. Many candidates appear to have struggled with their timing this year. Responses to Q1 (8 marks) were often long, taking the full page available, whilst responses to Q4(b), the final (20 mark) question, were often stilted and possibly cut short.

The trigger words for each question should remind candidates of the weighting of AO1 and AO2 marks and successful candidates apply this to their answers.

Question 1

This required an exploration of the problem, however many candidates presented solutions to the problem thus were not addressing the question. It is vital to write an answer to the question on the paper, not simply present knowledge of something related to the topic. Centres should urge caution here; it is very important that candidates read the question carefully and answer the set question.

This requires only AO1 material. Candidates who launched into an assessment of ideas were penalising themselves by not presenting strictly AO1 material.

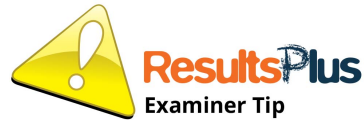
The best answers explained the logical, the evidential (although this was less prevalent) and the moral problems – using scholars' names to identify their answers. There were many insightful responses referring to the works of Epicurus, Mackie, Hume, Hick and Swinburne. Many candidates were able to confidently and accurately use terminology such as 'omnibenevolent' and 'omniscient', and explained how the presence of suffering therefore causes difficulties for belief in God. Some of the weaker answers were confused about the philosophical vocabulary and relied on a simple explanation of some examples of suffering in the world.

1 Explore key features of the problem of suffering.

The John Leslie Mackie thought up the inconsistent triad which is an extension of the logical problem of evil. Mackie says that there are three possibilities. God is benevolent, God is omnipotent and God evil exists. The third point is undeniable due to both the evidential and diverse problems of evil. That means a God is either omnipotent or benevolent, but God cannot be both. This undermines the traditional attributes attributed to a traditional theistic God. There is also the philosophical problem of evil. The idea that believes except conflicting claims about God. This is advocated by David Hume who states that people think God is benevolent and omnipotent even when evil exists. If God was benevolent then surely God would use his omnipotence to remove suffering from the world so therefore God is not omnipotent. Or if God is omnipotent God is not benevolent because God does not remove suffering. Hume's ideas are an extension of the ideas put forward by Greek philosopher Epicurus.



This response was awarded full marks. Despite being a little repetitive at times it is clear on the issue of the attributes of God, and there is good reference to the evidential problem of evil as well.



Be direct and explain key terms.

SECTION A

— omnibenevolent
— omnibenevolent
— omnipotent

Answer ALL questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

1 Explore key features of the problem of suffering.

The problem of suffering is part of problem of evil as a whole. ~~It is concerned~~ It is concerned over the ~~tempor~~ existence of God if there is this much suffering across the world.

There are several types of suffering. An example could be diseases and illnesses. People who suffer from illnesses such as cancer or clown syndrome have not been caused from humans. As well as people born and have disabilities such as clown syndrome, no human explanations of how it occurred to this world. Most ailments

new paragraph would be the theists key-terms to argue against existence of god. They would argue that if there was a god, there could be two explanations for the problem of suffering. Either god cannot stop the suffering to happen, which means he is not all omnipotent (all-powerful). Or he just wants to see humans as well as animals suffer and not do anything about it, which means he is not all-benevolent (all-loving).



This answer just reached into Level 3 at 6 marks. It has a full but basic style and presents material on the types of evil and the attributes of God but it is less secure and developed than the previous example.



Don't forget to develop or unpack your ideas as well in the time available.

Question 2

There were many candidates who were unaware of the term 'Kalam' despite it being clearly on the Specification. This issue arose last year with the Process solution to the problem of evil and indicates candidates are disadvantaged if centres do not cover the whole Specification or candidates select topics to focus on in their own revision rather than covering all of the material. Some left their scripts entirely blank, others ignored the unknown term and wrote an essay about the cosmological argument generally, focusing on Aquinas et al with different degrees of success.

The best answers were aware that AO2 constituted 2/3 of the marks for this question, and they made sure to keep evaluating and to provide a conclusion – and a good conclusion will choose one side of the argument and state why it is stronger (not just that they think it's better).

The best answers also picked out the distinctive features of the Kalam argument; some candidates wrote enthusiastically about al-Kindi, al-Ghazali and William Lane Craig; they discussed the question of infinite regress, the compatibility with modern science and the benefits of an a posteriori argument. Candidates were able to balance these strengths with criticisms in order to 'assess' fully. They discussed the criticisms of thinkers such as Hume, Kant and Dawkins to evaluate the Kalam and there were some very fine connections made to the Russell and Copleston radio debate. Some of the weaker responses included very confused connections to key terms such as 'deductive'; others relied on arguing that the Kalam version of the cosmological argument is strong 'because it predates Aquinas' with no real analysis of why this would make it effective. Weaker answers fixated on one aspect and had little detail or assessment.

There are two exemplars for this question, both in the top level.

w/c, vs, G, n-p, n e

2 Assess the strengths of the Kalam version of the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God.

The Kalam version of the Cosmological Argument was made by Al-Matindi and Al-Gazali and is based upon the idea that everything that comes into being must have a cause which is not dependent upon anything else and must be non-physical, which points towards the existence of God.

The first strength of this argument is that it makes logical sense due to the fact that there is no such thing as infinite regression and that everything on earth must have had a start or beginning. But nothing in this world has the power to create itself as we are all contingent beings who must begin and end, therefore it makes logical sense that we must have a non-physical independent cause that started the universe as there cannot be an infinite chain of contingent beings otherwise humans would have never existed.

The second strength of the argument is that it is supported by William Craig who claims that the very proof of the argument is that ~~present~~ this very moment exists and time cannot be infinite and therefore must have a starting point. This would lead to the same conclusion of the Kalam argument as the only explanation for the beginning of time can lie within a necessary being which is God.

However, there are limitations to the strengths of the Kalam argument as the Kalam version does not actually provide any further evidence for the actual existence of a God, who is to say that a non-physical being is even a God and not a force that hasn't yet been ~~discovered~~ discovered by science or the result of multiple Gods.

Overall, the strengths of the Kalam version of the cosmological argument outweigh its lack of evidence simply in the fact that it is logically impossible for there to not be a cause to every being and the universe, as the probability of humans developing by chance are so slim that they may as well not exist.



This response earned the full marks available; it has an obvious structure and a pleasing level of detail. There is good and clear 'assessment' evident here.



Structuring your answer helps focus on the question.

2 Assess the strengths of the Kalam version of the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God.

The Kalam argument was conducted by Al-Ghazali, who claimed that infinite regression is impossible and therefore there must have been a time when the universe did not exist. Thus, as 'something cannot come from nothing', God must exist in order to create the universe.

One strength of this argument resides in the logical understanding of cause and effect mechanisms, as we can clearly see evidence that nothing can cause itself e.g wood cannot set itself on fire. Therefore, God must logically exist as the universe could not have created itself.

Another strength is the fact that infinite regression is clearly impossible. William Lane Craig agrees that you mathematically cannot have an infinite process of events, meaning the universe ~~did not~~ has not simply existed forever. There must have been a ~~begin~~ began moment in which the universe was created, and as something cannot come from nothing, there must have been God.

Furthermore, another strength in Kalam is that the creator of the universe must have been a divine being external to the universe, which we define as God. This is because creation could not have been caused by natural laws, as these were created after the universe began. Therefore, God (who exists outside of space and time) must exist as nothing else could have started the universe.



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Examiner Comments

This answer is a little brief; however the material is relevant and an answer on why it is strong is presented. It was awarded 7 marks, just into Level 3. It could be improved by developing the amount of 'Assess' material or offering the other side of the argument.



AO2 can best be achieved by offering a judgement about the issue and this can be done by considering and assessing the other side of the argument as well.

Question 3

There were a number of scripts where the candidates seemed unfamiliar with the term 'analogy'. Additionally, some candidates demonstrated weak exam technique and wrote an account of the Design Argument generally, rather than focusing on the key words 'strength' and 'analogy'.

However, the majority of scripts focused on William Paley's watch analogy and tailored their material appropriately. Aquinas' analogy also featured and was often used successfully. Candidates referred to Russell, Swinburne, Dawkins, Darwin, Hume and Mill in their assessment of the strength of analogy by pointing out its various weaknesses. Problems associated with the analogies were discussed such as anthropomorphism and the possibility of multiple gods and particularly good use was made of Hume's criticism of analogy and the notion of like effects have like causes. The scripts that achieved fewer marks tended to devote too much time to a vague description of the parts of a watch, or stating that the analogy of the watch makes the argument more reliable 'because it makes sense'.

The word 'Assess' should remind the candidate that 2/3 of the marks are AO2 and therefore they need to assess, weigh-up, and evaluate the argument – usually by providing alternative viewpoints and giving a conclusion. The candidates who did this systematically tended to reach the higher marks.

3 Assess the strength of the argument from analogy in the Design Argument for the existence of God. ^{William Paley} ^{Thomas Aquinas} ^{Aristotle} ^{Swishome} ²⁰⁰⁵

William Paley makes an Design Argument for design from analogy. Paley's argument basically compares the world to a watch and similarly to how the watch has a ~~watch~~ watchmaker (designer) the world has a creator (designer). The argument from analogy has been supported and criticised by multiple philosophers however due to its strength it has remained one of the most common design Arguments.

The argument from analogy as stated by William Paley is a strong argument not only because it explains the origin of the universe but it also shows ~~how~~ the ~~universe~~ shows why the universe is the way it is with its regularities of co-presence. Paley ^{shows} ~~explains~~ that our world is capable of holding life because it has been designed.

Although, however much the intricate nature of the world points to a designer, David Hume notes that we have no experience in world making and therefore cannot make claims of the universe being designed. Hume says that if the universe resembled a house, which it does not, the claim that the universe was designed would be more plausible as we have experience in house making/Building.

Furthermore ~~As the contrary~~ Hume brings his own analogy and says the universe is more likely to resemble a plant because like the universe the plant is growing, without

a particular cause or purpose.

Thomas Aquinas adds his own analogy to the

On the contrary, scientists come to conclusions about certain theories without having any experience in them similarly to how a male doctor can conclude that ^{labour}pregnancy is painful without ever experiencing it. One only needs to see the manner in which labour occurs to see its pain, similarly one only has to look at the regularities within the world to understand that it was a designer.

However, by ~~using~~^{comparing} our world to a watch Kant argues that we can show that God did not create the world ex nihilo. Similarly to how watchmakers use pre-existent materials their must've been pre-existent materials. To conclude the design Argument isn't strong because it anthropomorphosises

(Total for Question 3 = 9 marks)

the characteristics of God.

TOTAL FOR SECTION A = 26 MARKS



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Examiner Comments

This answer packs a large amount in. It is tightly organised and covers a lot of ground but it is focused on analogy and the strengths and weaknesses of this issue. It uses and explains key terms and it is impressive in the time available in its focus and range and clearly earns full marks here.



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Examiner Tip

Structure, focus and terminology really enhance an answer.

3 Assess the strength of the argument from analogy in the Design Argument for the existence of God.

Hume - Cannot compare with machine - Paley

The Design/Teleological argument ~~suggests that~~, as put forward by Aquinas as his 5th way of proving God's existence, suggests that everything has such a ~~per~~ perfect purpose that it had to have been designed. This designer is considered to be God. The argument is an argument of analogy, using analogies to explain or prove its points.

One such analogy, put forward by Paley, is the watch analogy. He suggests that if one finds a rock in a field, it appears to belong and be fulfilling its purpose. However, if one were to find a watch, one would assume that it was unnatural and had to have been created due to its intricacy. Darwin also used an analogy similar to this, claiming that all he need do to prove the existence of God would be to look at his thumb/thumbprint. Again, due to the intricate detail in something so small, it suggests there was a designer working meticulously to add such detail to the world. This argument for the Design argument is considered one of the strongest by many scholars.

However, David Hume did not agree with Paley's analogy that seemed to so simply explain/prove God's existence. He countered his analogy with the idea that the earth could not simply be reverenced down and compared to a machine with a specific purpose. The purpose of the universe itself is still ~~is~~ called into question. It was also argued that using analogy in a posteriori argument such as

This one may lessen its credibility. If empirical evidence is such a large component, it would stand to reason that empirical evidence should be ~~taken~~ ~~more~~ used here in place of analogy to ~~pro~~ back up this argument.



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Examiner Comments

This response was awarded 6 marks, the top of Level 2. There are some errors here; it is a good attempt but it gets stuck on evidence and it could improve by offering more objections.



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Examiner Tip

Aim for balance in your assessment (strengths and weaknesses perhaps) but offer a clear verdict as well.

Question 4

There were a substantial number of scripts with part a) left blank, indicating again that candidates are not prepared for or familiar with the material on the Specification. Centres need to address this if candidates are not to be disadvantaged in the exam room.

Most candidates tackled part a) well and although there was no requirement to talk specifically about Swinburne's principles of testimony and credulity, the majority of candidates chose to take this approach. Most of the responses reflected the AO1 requirement of the question and gave informative summaries, some wove in James and Otto and applied this to themes of credulity and testimony or the burden of proof which was well done.

In part b) some candidates had clearly run out of time and should be reminded of the recommended time for each question available on the Edexcel web-site which they can practise adhering to in order to enable the best chance of reward for their knowledge and application in the exam room.

It is part of the challenge to structure material well in this longer essay question, to focus on the demands of the question and not waste words in narrative; these skills can be practised of course. Responses that achieved fewer marks usually had less AO2, and typically described the experiences of individuals who had been subject to a religious experience such as St Paul, Muhammad or Nicky Cruz with little attention to the 'persuasiveness' issue in the question.

Higher achieving scripts were focused and analytical about their use of experiences as an argument for the existence of God. It was pleasing to see ongoing analysis in some scripts; they tend to read better and ensure the candidate is meeting the demands of the question throughout rather than with a tacked-on conclusion after presentation of narrative.

Some of the best responses took a range of views (James, Otto, Swinburne being very popular) and used alternative explanations from the likes of Dawkins, Persinger and Freud to critique Religious Experience. There was also very good AO2 consideration of other challenges to the persuasiveness of the argument including the vicious circle and conflicting claims issues. This was well balanced with the nature of religious experience itself (ineffable, transcendent) adding to the persuasiveness of the argument. Many candidates incorporated Swinburne's principles of credulity and testimony into Q4(b) which was perfectly acceptable when applied to the question, although some scripts merely repeated the same information from Q4(a) without adding any AO2 content and thus it did not add much to their answer. Some good use was made of the cumulative argument although this is often confused with the weight of testimony. The best answers had clear structures and good conclusions which tied their views into the 'persuasiveness' or otherwise of religious experience as a basis for an argument for the existence of God.

- 4 (a) Explore the key ideas of testimony and credulity associated with the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience.

(8)

The ~~argument of~~ principle of testimony suggests that we should trust ~~an~~ someone's telling of their ~~own~~ religious experience if we have no reason to believe otherwise. This means that if one were to explain ~~these~~ their religious experience suggesting the God does exist, and we have no other reason to not believe them, then we could suggest that God does in fact exist. However, due to the private nature of religious experiences such as an ineffable private experience, it is often difficult to have a strong sense of belief of what the person has said to have experienced.

The principle of credulity is the idea that we should trust our own experiences of the divine, if we do not have any other reason to believe otherwise. As these are personal experiences, it is not hard to take what we ~~be~~ have a personal knowledge of (our own experience) to be the truth. Therefore, they can help towards ~~improving~~ ^{confirming} the idea of the existence of God.

(b) Analyse the persuasiveness of the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience.

(20)

Religious experiences take many forms such as visions, mystical experiences or conversions. Due to the often private nature of these experiences it is difficult to believe many religious experiences and their suggestion that God in fact exists.

A. J. Ayer ~~put~~^{put} forward the verification principle which suggests that we have no a posteriori knowledge which enables us to verify that what our experience was, was in fact related to God in any way. This therefore suggests that religious experiences are not persuasive enough to support the argument for the existence of God. However, John Hick responds to Ayer's claim stating that there is in fact a way of verifying the existence of God. Hick puts forward eschatological verification which suggests that we will know of God's existence once we die, linking to the Christian view of the afterlife. This implies that religious experiences of the divinity can be verified, only after we die. Brian Davies also responds to Ayer explaining that just because we have not proven the existence of God, through religious experiences, it does not mean that God does not exist. For example, we do not currently have proof of alien lifeforms existing but this does not mean they do not exist. Therefore, these claims support the idea that religious experiences can help provide proof supporting the argument for the existence of God. However, claims made by Hick are weak as they imply that there is in fact an afterlife which leads to another debated issue, and so it can be said that Ayer's point stands thus suggesting religious experiences are not persuasive.

evidence for supporting the existence of God.

If we take into account our own personal religious experiences, we may suggest that God does exist as we have no reason to doubt ourselves. However, it ~~has~~ has come to light that many religious experiences are in fact self-induced. For example, in the Gospel of Luke it explains that Jesus only saw the devil after 40 days and 40 ~~nights~~ nights of starvation in the desert. This suggests that preparation has been taken place in order to reach a state of mind to have such a divine experience. Bertrand Russell argues that "there is no difference between a man who eats too little and sees God and a man who drinks too much and sees snakes", suggesting that there is an active role on behalf of the person who experiences the divine in order to have the experience questioning its validity. Furthermore V.S. Ramachandran a psychologist explains that temporal lobe ~~epilepsy~~ epilepsy produces the same feelings as one would a religious experience during a seizure. This therefore highlights that religious experiences are not valid as preparation is often needed to reach that state of mind, reducing its validity as a genuine experience. However, some argue that just because preparation is needed, it does not mean that the experience is not valid. This supports the idea that the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience is strong due to the genuine nature of the experiences. Furthermore Hick argues that some religious experiences occur without any self-induced activities. This therefore weakens the criticism of the persuasiveness of religious experiences. However, the scientific

Credibility of the works of V.S. Rana Chandra strengthen the argument on the basis of biological influences and so implies that religious experiences do not help in the persuasiveness of the argument supporting God's existence.

Furthermore, the idea of seeing/meeting God is highly debated as something that should not occur. This is as God is nothing similar to anything of our world and so we would not know what God is like. Even a theist, Aquinas, supports this idea claiming that we need to have direct experience of God, a posteriori knowledge, to make the claim that we witnessed God. Furthermore, some argue that as God is omnipresent he cannot be at one place at one time. This therefore, reduces the plausibility of ~~experiences~~ experiencing God ~~to~~ actually taking place. However, Otto suggests that we can know that it is an experience of God through a numinous experience. This type of religious experience entails that God gives us the knowledge that it is in fact him that we are experiencing during the experience and so we can know what God is. This shows support for the idea that religious experiences can be persuasive in proving the existence of God. However, this belief that Otto puts forward is highly debated and to empiricists may in fact be false as no experience of God is truly backed by a posteriori knowledge weakening the argument. Therefore, the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience is weak and so is not persuasive enough.

Overall, the idea that religious experiences do help provide support for the existence of God is weak as there are many reasons why religious experiences are not authentic experiences of the divine.



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Examiner Comments

For part a) of this response it was quite clear on credulity and had a good focus; it was awarded 6 marks for this section as it would benefit from further development to reach higher into Level 3.

For part b) we can see a good structure and depth in the response, there is lots of AO2 material throughout and the candidate has used the material selected appropriately to focus on the demands of the question. This answer presents careful consideration and a good line of argument. It was awarded full marks for part b), 20.

Overall it scored 26/28.



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Examiner Tip

Unpack the range of material needed in the first part as well.

- 4 (a) Explore the key ideas of testimony and credulity associated with the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience.

(8)

The first key idea is that of ^{Credulity} testimony proposed by Richard Swinburne when focuses on the credibility of the experience. In this he argues that 'one ought to believe that things are as they seem' meaning ~~of~~ an example would be that of Bernadette who is said to have seen the Virgin Mary. Swinburne argued that we should believe this unless there is sufficient reasoning to doubt the credibility of the person.

The second is the principle of testimony which argues that we should believe in what a person tells us unless we believe them to be a 'charlatan', or if there is sufficient reason to believe that their statement is false for example they are a known liar, or they are under the influence of narcotics or alcohol. When considering the witness of God it can be argued that it proves it as if one were to say they felt the presence of God and there is no reason or evidence to doubt them it means that it was a true experience with God proving his existence.

(b) Analyse the persuasiveness of the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience.

(20)

The persuasiveness can first be found through Swinburn's two Principles, testimony and credulity one which states that we ought to believe that things are as they seem and we should believe the testimony of a person, both state that unless there is sufficient reasoning to doubt it e.g. the person took narcotics or alcohol or they are a 'charlatan' we should not deny their religious experience, thus proving the existence of God. However Monism William James states that religious experiences are at the core of every religion and there are four main aspects of a religious experience which show the existence of God. The first being that it is passive meaning that the person feels the presence of a greater being examples being that of St. Teresa of Avila and her experience. Second it is ineffable meaning that the experience cannot be explained in human terminology, it is also noetic as it provides you with previously unknown information as was found with Bernadette's experience with Mary as she an uneducated child referred to her as 'the immaculate conception'; lastly it is transient so while the experience is short the effects are long term e.g. Paul becoming Paul and founding the Church. However this point is argued against by people such as Carol Wruck Davis who state that they are not reliable enough.

and breaks it down to three aspects. Subject related, meaning the person who had the experience could be lying or have been under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Moreover if the experience cannot be properly explained that makes it very unreliable and how can a person know whether or not it is a higher being they are encountering and how do they know it is a religious experience. It is also argued that religious experiences human beings release certain chemicals and endorphins from the brain whenever they experience a religious experience; there is also the issue of the most different religious experiences from different religions they would all see various beings according to their religions so how can one determine the veracity of each. To conclude the argument is not very persuasive.



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Examiner Comments

Part a) of this answer is wide ranging and shows good knowledge and understanding. It was awarded 7 marks.

In part b) the candidate presents a range of knowledge with some deconstruction of ideas but it could be more clearly argued. It is near the top of Level 3 for this section and was awarded 14 marks.

Overall this answer scored 21/28.



Candidates should make sure that they know what they are going to argue and then demonstrate their view, with clear evidence and reasons, to address the question fully in the longer essay and have a slightly longer conclusion.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- balance the time you spend on each question carefully
- focus on the wording of the question and only use material that is relevant
- ensure you 'Assess' as needed in question 2 and in question 3 and offer reasons for your views and a verdict as appropriate
- use scholarship where you can to develop an answer and demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding
- very importantly, keep your handwriting clear and legible

Grade Boundaries

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