

# **Religious Studies**

Advanced GCE

Unit **G581**: Philosophy of Religion

## **Mark Scheme for June 2011**

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**1 Critically assess the claim that religious language is meaningless. [35]****AO1**

Candidates may begin with an account of the work of the Logical Positivists, possibly even giving an account of the forming of the Vienna Circle and the writings which led these philosophers to come together. Some may mention Wittgenstein's Tractatus but they should be aware that he was not himself a member of the Circle.

This may lead to an exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of the Verification Principle, with some demonstration of the self-refuting nature of the principle itself. Some may use examples from religious language of the kinds of statements which the Vienna circle were accusing of meaninglessness such as; 'God is all-loving, all powerful, your God is a jealous God.'

Some candidates may take their arguments towards an explanation of the later writings of Wittgenstein and introduce the ideas of language games; and his claim that language gets its meaning from the context in which it is used or the rules of the game you are playing at any given time.

Others may explore the approach taken by the Vienna Circle to analytic and synthetic statements, explaining the need for synthetic statements to be verifiable by empirical evidence if they were to be considered meaningful. In this context some may address the issue of strong and weak verification.

**AO2**

In their evaluation candidates may assess the underlying assumption of Logical Positivism that it is only scientific propositions which can accurately describe the reality of our world. Arguably not religious language but also poetry and music contribute a great deal to our understanding of reality. Who would say that a Shakespearean sonnet tells us nothing about the world?

Others may assess the extent to which Wittgenstein helped to make all kinds of language meaningful again by his introduction of language games. They may discuss the extent to which he only allowed for communication within the game and the implications for attempts to communicate with people playing a game with different rules.

Others may have read philosophers such as Vincent Brummer or D Z Phillips, using their work to assess the extent to which treating religious sentences as if they are failed scientific ones is to commit an error of understanding.

**2 Evaluate the claim that the soul is distinct from the body. [35]****AO1**

Candidates may begin with an explanation of Greek philosophical attitudes to this issue, moving from the Platonic idea that the soul is indeed distinct from the body, and will eventually return to the realm of the Forms, to the Aristotelian idea that while there is indeed a distinction, one cannot survive without the other.

Some candidates may, alternatively, begin with an explanation of the Cartesian understanding of the distinction between the soul and the body and the problems associated with this kind of dualism, exploring, for example, the issue of how a soul which is separate can interact with or control a physical body; or they may look at Ryle's accusation that Descartes makes a category error.

Candidates may also explain alternative views of groups such as Christians who would hold that the body and soul are one to the extent that their creed proclaims belief in the resurrection of the body. This may lead some to explain the views of John Hick and his thought experiment which attempts a philosophical justification of this opinion. Others may describe the views of St Thomas Aquinas who tries to reconcile Catholic Church's philosophical views in this area with those of Aristotle.

Some may explain the views of writers such as Peter Atkins or Richard Dawkins who postulate that there is no soul in the sense that religious people would claim there is. Others may explain what Dawkins means by soul 1 and soul 2.

## **AO2**

Candidates are likely to assess a number of the possible views outlined above, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of these positions. They may for example evaluate the extent to which Ryle is correct to say that Descartes is making a category error or question the possibility of conceiving of bodily resurrection.

Others may assess the view that the soul is no more than a human fantasy brought about by fear of death and that what some consider to be a soul is just chemical and electrical processes in the brain.

It is important that the candidates focus on the issue of body/soul distinction and not get distracted into a pre-prepared response on life after death. While some issues overlap, they need to address the specific question in their answers.

### **3 Critically assess the problems for believers who say that God is omniscient. [35]**

#### **AO1**

Candidates may begin their responses with an explanation of the human limitations which are inherent in a relationship with an omniscient God. They may, for example, question the concept of human freedom as how can we be said to be truly free if God knows in advance what we are going to do?

They may explain Swinburne and others' view that we should try to describe God as being a God who knows everything which can possibly be known but maintain that this does not include knowledge of the future. They would argue that if we start from a position of human freedom, then we cannot believe in a God who knows everything without sacrificing our freedom.

Other candidates may use this question to discuss the implications for the God of classical theism that if he knows everything and does nothing to stop evil, is he a God worthy of worship? They are likely, if they take this route, to discuss the problem of evil; however, it is important that the responses are not limited to the simply a discussion of the problem of evil.

**AO2**

Candidates are free to assess the issues involved in this belief from any of a number of angles; they could for example start with a linguistic analysis of the word 'omniscience', evaluating the limitations of human language when it comes to trying to describe the ineffable.

Others may assess the question of whether or not it is philosophically coherent to try to describe something so far beyond our experience that we cannot know what knowledge might mean in this context. We may be in a similar situation as that of a seeing person trying to describe the colour red to a person born blind.

Those who have discussed the problem of evil in their AO1 may evaluate the extent to which this way of describing God is helpful or unhelpful when trying to assess the classic triad, possibly asking whether if philosophers accept omniscience they are heading for a denial of omnipotence or omnibenevolence.

**4 'Visions are not caused by God but can be explained by science.' Discuss. [35]****AO1**

Candidates will probably see this statement as one of the many ways of questioning the validity of religious experience. Some may start by explaining the nature of some of these experiences; Bernadette Soubirous' vision at Lourdes or the children at Fatima. Some may use the Old Testament examples such as angels (messengers) or Jacob's ladder. Some may explore examples from other traditions such as Gibril appearing to Mohammed (pbuh) or alternatively Mother Kali in the Hindu tradition.

Candidates may discuss whether these 'visions' are the same as 'seeing' in our daily life or are the recipients using ordinary language to describe something beyond ordinary usage. Teresa of Avila, for example, in her Autobiography said:

'...saw Christ at my side – or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for neither with the eyes of the body or of the soul did I see anything.' (Taken from Taylor, which many candidates will have read.)

Other candidates may approach this from a more scientific side, looking at the hallucinatory effects of certain drugs. Some may be aware for example that alcoholic delirium tremens is caused by vitamin B deficiency which some scholars believe also to have been a side effect of many ascetics' diets.

**AO2**

Candidates may apply knowledge from other areas of religious language to assess both sides of this debate.

They may for example apply Swinburne's principle of credulity, suggesting that unless we have evidence to the contrary we should accept individuals' belief in their visions as veridical.

Others may assess the personal nature of visions and critically explore whether they can be of value to anyone apart from the person alleging they have received a vision.

Some may look for scientific evidence based around chemical reactions in the brain, as per the question, which may also lead to a discussion of the effects of the 'psyche' on the 'soma'.

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