

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/01 Summer 2023 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 1 series overview

H173/01 assesses AS Philosophy of Religion. There are three questions, of which candidates answer two. There are no compulsory questions. All questions are marked out of 30. Equal weight is given to A01 (knowledge and understanding) and A02 (analysis and evaluation). There are no separate marks for the quality of written communication, but rather this is assessed as part of the A02 level descriptors.

It is very important that candidates read the questions carefully and focus on responding to the question set rather than relaying information on the general topic. Candidates do well on this paper by applying their knowledge of philosophical theory and accurately applying scholarly views, academic approaches and relevant sources of wisdom and authority. More successful candidates will include a conclusion that directly answers the question set and gives a justification for their response based on the arguments presented in their essay.

Candidates who performed well on this paper demonstrated excellent knowledge of Hume's criticisms of the arguments from observation, Plato's theory of the Form of the Good contrasted to Aristotle's Prime Mover and a discussion on whether individual religious experiences are never to be understood as a union with a higher power. The more successful candidates presented and evaluated the arguments for and against the question using accurate knowledge and a variety of relevant scholars. The conclusion summarised their argument and gave a justification for their judgement.

Candidates who did less well tended to be brief and lacked relevant detail. They often concentrated on general theory rather than the specific question that had been set. Some gave general argument from 'common sense' about the question but demonstrated very little to no use of scholarly knowledge or academic viewpoints.

Questions 1 and 2 were more popular with candidates than Question 3.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrated clear and detailed knowledge • addressed the specific question asked • made good use of scholarly and academic viewpoints • made accurate use of technical terms • gave successful and clear analysis and evaluation in relation to the question set • finished with a clear and well justified conclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrated little accurate knowledge • addressed the general topic rather than the specific question set • did not develop their responses using depth, breadth, and detail • made very little use of technical terms or subject vocabulary • attempted very little argument • did not offer a clear conclusion or judgement on the question asked.

Question 1*

In all your responses, you should:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religious and philosophical thought and teaching
- analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief (in a philosophical context), including their significance, influence and study.

1* 'Hume successfully demonstrates that arguments for the existence of God based on observation are weak.' Discuss. **[30]**

This was one of the most popular questions on the paper and the more successful candidates were able to focus their response on Hume's criticisms of the arguments from observation (cosmological and teleological) and the analysis and evaluation of Hume's arguments. The more successful candidates focused on Hume's rejection of the arguments from analogy, the difficulty in drawing any conclusion about the nature of a creator or designer, the problem of evil, a rejection of infinite regression and the fallacy of composition. The more successful candidates were then able to analyse and evaluate whether Hume's arguments were successful using relevant scholars, such as Bertrand Russell.

However, there were a number of less successful candidates who focused their response on explaining the arguments from observation and had very little in the way of an explanation of Hume's arguments. Where a candidate had little explanation of Hume's arguments it then made it difficult for them to successfully analyse and evaluate Hume's criticisms to access higher levels on the mark scheme. A minority of candidates struggled to explain the concept of infinite regress and how it related to the cosmological argument and Hume's criticisms.

Exemplar 1

'Hume successfully demonstrates that arguments for the existence of God based on observation are weak'

David Hume was an empiricist who criticised arguments based on observation such as Aquinas' Cosmological and teleological arguments along with Paley's watch argument. ~~While~~ David Hume does have some valid criticisms regarding the arguments above which I will proceed to elaborate on. Overall, there are both strengths and weaknesses to his criticisms, but ultimately it seems he does successfully highlight weak points in the arguments ~~of~~ ~~God~~ ~~of~~ above in regards to proving the existence of God.

~~Firstly~~ Firstly, Hume criticises Aquinas' first way of motion in the (Cosmological arguments) which states that because everything is in a constant change of motion, which is put into motion by something else, there must be an unmoved mover which cannot ~~be~~ be moved who is outside of the chain of motion as he is the one who started it. Aquinas² came to this conclusion as he did not believe there could be an infinite regress of ~~of~~ movers, thus he ~~makes the leap of assuming~~ suggests this unmoved mover is God. Hume debates

This by highlighting his fallacy of composition, even if there was a creator or designer of the universe, it is a leap in logic on behalf of Aquinas to assume it is the God of Classical Theism. Moreover, ~~he~~ ~~just~~ he states that just because we can observe motion within the world, does not mean the whole universe is or has to be in motion. This same concept can apply to Aquinas' second and third way of his cosmological argument which are: there must be an uncaused cause as everything in this world is ~~rather~~ the result of an event that precedes it, e.g. we are the ~~of~~ result of the cause of our parents meeting and having intercourse, like in his first way, Aquinas ~~still~~ suggests that since there cannot be an infinite regress of the chain of cause and effect, there must be an uncaused cause who was not caused by anything else and caused everything - God. He criticises this by ~~questioning~~ saying Aquinas assumes a relationship between cause and effect, something's may just be random or may not ~~really~~ be the effect of a cause. However, he criticises Aquinas' third way of necessity and contingency ~~tho' it's~~ everything in the

world exists which means that at one point it did not exist, ~~and~~ and relied upon something or someone else to bring it into existence. For example, we relied on our parents to bring us into existence, he says that because ~~there~~ everything is the world is reliant on something else to exist, there must be a necessary being who created everything and is not reliant upon anything else for its existence, again, for Aquinas, this is God. He argues that ~~just~~ if God does not need an explanation for how ~~he~~ he came to be, the universe doesn't ~~either~~ either and could itself be its own explanation for existence. In addition, he gives me the example of 20 particles, ~~if~~ if we can explain ~~the~~ and understand each particle individually, we do not need to explain them as a whole. This sentiment is supported by Bertrand Russell who says that just because every man has a mother, does not mean human race as a whole has a mother, this why it can be easily argued that the ~~success~~ highlights the weakness of arguments on observation in regards to proving the existence of God. He highlights the inconsistencies in Aquinas' argument, proving him wrong with his own logic.

However, Paley's watch analogy is also criticised. Paley gives the example of a complex and intricate watch which consists of all its legs and mechanisms. For the purpose of telling the time, he suggests that just here the watch indicates a watch maker, the world indicates a world maker or designer. Paley's watch argument is criticised in a number of ways. ~~of the way~~, for example, Hume begins the question of if there is an intelligent designer behind the world or universe, why is it so full of obvious flaws, or things that do not seem to have any purpose e.g. ripples on lakes? However, Paley replied to this by saying even if parts of a watch ~~do not work properly~~ are broken or do not work properly, does not take away from the fact that there will be a designer behind it. However, it can be argued that a designer or creator who is susceptible to such big mistakes or flaws in his creation is not worth worshipping. Paley's watch analogy can also be criticised under the fallacy of composition as he too assumes that ~~this~~ this designer is the God of classical theism. Thus, Hume yet again highlights

the flaws of arguments ~~of observation~~ based on observation to prove God, as he successfully undermines the conclusions that are led to e.g. the idea that this designer or uncaused cause (if he were real) does not ~~lead~~ ~~need to be God of classical~~ ~~the~~ point to the goal of classical theism, and does not necessarily need to be an intelligent being but could instead just be a concatenation of matter which put everything else in motion.

~~The~~ However, some may argue that Hume's criticisms do not make the argument less convincing as we can clearly observe that non-intelligent beings seem to act towards a purpose e.g. sniffer dogs grow towards the sun, as described in Aquinas' teleological argument, which does indeed suggest a designer, however, Hume's point that the designer does not need to be the God of classical theism is still a valid critique.

In conclusion, there are both strengths and weaknesses to Hume's criticism of arguments based on observation to prove the existence of God, he does seem to be successful in discrediting it despite

Not necessarily proving it wrong e.g. after
 the chain of events and a causal effect
 effect can go forward infinitely, why
 can't it not go forward backwards. However
 the existence of infinity does seem to exist,
 e.g. ~~the~~ π in maths.

Exemplar 1 is an example of a candidate fully comprehending the demands of Question 1. The essay was awarded full marks.

Question 2*

2* 'Plato's Form of the Good is more convincing than Aristotle's Prime Mover.' Discuss.

[30]

This was the most popular question on the paper and candidates displayed good knowledge of both Plato's and Aristotle's theories, which helped them to meet the demands of the question. The more successful candidates were able to focus on explaining Plato's Form of the Good as being at the top of the hierarchy of the Forms and utilised the analogy of the cave to further explore this concept. The successful candidates also gave an excellent explanation of Aristotle's Prime Mover as the ultimate explanation for change in the world. The successful candidates clearly compared and contrasted the Form of the Good with the Prime Mover, discussing for example whether it is more reasonable to base a theory on empiricism or rationalism. The more successful candidates then came to a well-reasoned and justified conclusion focused on whether Plato's Form of the Good was more successful than Aristotle's Prime Mover.

Less successful candidates focused their response on explaining Plato's theory of the Forms and Aristotle's four causes rather than focusing their response on the question set. Therefore, these responses were more about the general topic and did less well. These candidates also tended to make an analysis based on the general topic rather than the Form of the Good and the Prime Mover.

Exemplar 2

'Plato's form of good is more convincing than Aristotle's prime mover'

Plato and Aristotle both proposed different theories regarding the ultimate source of justice and power in the universe. For Plato, this is his highest form of good, whereas for Aristotle, this is his idea of the prime mover. ~~This essay~~ ~~which~~ ~~both~~ ~~theories~~ have aspects that are convincing or useful in explaining reality. This essay will be arguing in the direction that Plato's form of good is more convincing, despite some flaws or weaknesses, whilst also acknowledging the strengths of Aristotle's prime mover.

Firstly, ~~we~~ we must discuss Plato's hierarchy of the forms. Contrary to popular understanding, Plato placed a large emphasis on

abstract forms such as beauty and justice, with the form of good being at the top, Plato's reasoning for this is that ~~that~~ nothing ~~is~~ positive such as beauty or justice can ~~exist without~~ ~~be described~~ exist without also being described as 'good'. Thus Plato states that everything ~~participates~~ participates in the form of good in some way or another, just like how beauty and justice are both very different, but both still perceived as good ~~and~~; which explains why we can recognise positive attributes such as goodness in ~~things~~ different things, e.g. a sunset and a flower are different but are still both perceived as beautiful or good, thus Plato's idea of the form of good can be applied to the world around us and help us understand reality. However, some may criticise this and say that his idea of the form of good is flawed as the idea of ~~the~~ goodness can be argued to be subjective as everyone has different perceptions and ~~ideas~~ ideas of ~~what~~ 'good', however, Plato replies to this and states that these different perceptions are due to us being ~~not~~ deceived by our senses, which cause us to make an incorrectly reasoned judgement, which he explains in

his analogy of ~~the~~ the cave, thus ~~his~~
his form of good is still convincing.

The idea of the form of Good can also be observed in Plato's allegory of the cave in which prisoners (representing the average person) were chained to a wall and could only see shadows (representing world of ~~appearances~~ appearances) reflected by the fire which was reflecting the true reality of what was going on behind the cave (world of forms). One of the prisoners is forced through the fire and sees the real ~~world~~ world illuminated by the form of Good, represented by the blazing sun, which initially was hard to adjust to. This goes in line with the idea that it is harder to participate in goodness, ~~but once you do~~ than it is to be a bad person, but once you do you can never go back, yet another reason why Plato's form of Good is more convincing as it can accurately be applied to the human experience and we can observe the concept of Good in our everyday lives, which arguably cannot be said the same for Aristotle's prime mover, which Aristotle ~~describes~~ ~~to~~ understands ~~to~~ ~~met~~ ~~to~~ this

prime mover does not even have an awareness of anything other than itself which means it does not participate in anything. However, one ~~way~~ way in which the prime mover is convincing is that it is in fact true that natural things seem to act towards an end or purpose, e.g. an acorn acts towards the end of becoming a tree. Aristotle explains this by saying the prime mover is the ultimate end or final cause and is purely actuality. He uses this idea to explain ~~the~~ the idea of nous which is changing from potentiality to actuality, he says that this is because we are all ~~drawn~~ drawn to the prime mover, however, many religious believers may not find this argument convincing as they can be ~~that~~ that a creator purposefully and intentionally designed the ~~the~~ world and cares about ~~the~~ its creation, unlike the prime mover who is aware ~~of~~ of nothing but itself.

On the other hand, Plato's idea of the form of good may be more convincing to religious believers as good is perceived to be the ~~the~~ ultimate source of goodness, much like Plato's

form of Good, Moreover, there is
 the ~~at~~ Christian belief of the Holy
 Spirit which ~~says~~ understands Good
 to be present in everything or words
 just like the form of Good participates
 in everything.

In conclusion, whilst there are some
 weaknesses in Plato's form of Good, it
 seems to be more convincing and helpful
 in the way it understands reality.

Exemplar 2 is an example of a script that received full marks. The candidate fully comprehended the demands of the question.

Question 3*

- 3* 'Individual religious experiences are **never** to be understood as union with a greater power.'
Discuss.

[30]

This was the least popular question on the paper. The more successful candidates were able to explain the concept of a mystical experience as an example of an individual religious experience and were able to draw on the scholarly views of William James, Otto and/or Happold. The more successful candidates were then able to consider whether conversion could be considered as evidence of a union with a greater power. Many candidates made good use of the academic views of thinkers such as Freud, Persinger and Dawkins to illustrate the argument that 'individual religious experiences are never to be understood as union with a greater power'. Many candidates were able to use ideas such as wish fulfilment and illusion in their analysis.

What went well - candidates were able to apply James' characteristics of a religious experience to an example, like Teresa of Avila.

Less successful candidates gave a general view of individual religious experience and did not include scholarly views. Some candidates were able to include an example of a religious experience in their explanation, which helped them to access more marks. Less successful candidates generally did not attempt to make arguments and instead views tended to be asserted with very little justification.

Misconception



Some candidates looked at corporate religious experiences, which are group experiences not individual experiences, and this did not help them to successfully answer the question.

More successful candidates were able to compare corporate religious experiences with an individual religious experience and examine whether they were more compelling as evidence because of the number of people present and not being reliant on the testimony of one person.

Exemplar 3

Individual religious experiences provide answers to what is usually an incomprehensible necessary and transcendent figure of God that points it to be more than a hallucination. Though there are arguments of possible physiological or psychological elements at play to trigger this perception of the experience as union with a greater power, the evidence upholding the idea of a union greatly outweighs this. This essay will argue individual religious experiences as unions with a greater power through the illustrative examples of Guru Nanak and Saul.

*

The religious, individual experience of Guru Nanak is illuminated to be that of a union with a greater power by William James' PINT criteria. In examining the experience, it must be regarded that Guru Nanak had sought the will or knowledge of God prior in multiple ways, with this being (rightfully) the most convincing of experiences. The experience fits all four criteria. First, it is passive in nature with Guru Nanak having no control of the situation in which God called for him to come into the water and stay to talk to him for days. Secondly, it is ineffable in nature, with Guru Nanak not being able to describe the nature of both the situation nor God in its entirety. Though, he was able to give insight

of a monotheistic omnibenevolent God, he could not summarise the full extent of a transcendent being. Thirdly, it is poetic in nature for the fact Guru Nanak was able to found the a religion with his knowledge of bestowed to him by Wahguru in the river for those 3 days. Finally, it is transient with the fact that Nanak's founded religion ^{of Hinduism} ~~of Hinduism~~ has transcended his death and continues to be a living religion which determines many people's lives. With this, it is only logical with such overwhelming evidence to point to ~~However, critics~~ an experience of that with a higher power.

However, Freud would argue of a psychological aspect within Guru Nanak's religious experience. He would argue for the purpose of wish fulfilment, which posits the idea of man needing a figure in which to be able to stomach the struggles of the world and our own characters that we desire in our wish for a 'father' to govern our lives and show that there is more to life than what we know. As Guru Nanak had sought this fulfilment for a long time, Freud would argue that eventually, this manifested to a hyperbolic experience with God that is down to the power of the mind. The idea of the mind is illustrated by Dawkins' wind argument, where he recounts thinking he heard the wind speak something to him but going outside

and finding no person for the "words" he heard, angriest "if he had been more 'impressionable', he wonders what the mind would've told him. This impressionability and with judgement is argued for Nanak as not a true union, but a mind running wild.

Though a psychological explanation for Guru Nanak's experience does make a strong point, there is a more compelling point to be found in the idea of cultivation of religious experience by Schleiermacher. Rather than argue Nanak's active seeking of religion hinders the possibility of truly being a union with a higher power, it is more logical to understand religion as a "task for the infinite" that Nanak had the opportunity of directly acquiring that many do not. If this was simply down to wishing for a father figure or impressionability, more would should've had this union to validate it. Yet the personal nature of Nanak's experience points not to falsehood, but a product of cultivation of experience that was met with rare, genuine response.

(LOA for first point: Individual ~~open~~ religious experiences are right to be assessed as genuine union with a greater power with the strength of James' PINT criteria to validate rare experiences (such as

Guru Nanak) methodically.

Individual experiences are rightfully asserted by James in his PINT criteria to answer questions of a higher union that scientific explanation falls short in conquering, as illustrated by the example of Saul.

Exemplar 3 is an example of an excellent response from a candidate to Question 3. The candidate fully met the demands of the question achieving Level 5 for both A01 and A02.

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