

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/01 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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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. 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. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 1 series overview

The Philosophy of Religion paper assesses AO1 knowledge and understanding (40% of the marks available) and AO2 analysis and evaluation (60% of marks).

The most successful essays tended to be those which:

- embed the evaluation throughout the essay rather than leaving it until a final paragraph
- focused directly on the question rather than issues raised by the topic
- often outlined what was going to be argued at the beginning and developed this through the essay
- carefully selected relevant material

The essays that gained less credit tended to

- write everything they knew from a section of the specification without tailoring it to the question being asked
- Evaluate by juxtaposition of different views, rather than develop reasons why one was stronger or weaker

Question 1

1* How successfully does the language games concept make sense of religious language? [40]

This question asked candidates to focus on and evaluate Wittgenstein's language games. Some took a broad approach by critically comparing language games with an alternative view on religious language while others produced an in depth, detailed evaluation of language games by analysing its strengths and weaknesses.

Most good responses showed understanding that language games allowed religious language to make sense in its own context and through its use, with varied examples. However, the highest levels were achieved by those who engaged in a critical dialogue with Wittgenstein. For example, many explored the 'rules of the game' not being applicable to different contexts but contrasted with views that tried to use the same criteria for all language, such as the scientific approaches of Ayer or Flew. This development often led to interesting discussion about Wittgenstein's form of life or 'lebensform', some bringing in Hare's bliks to illustrate its effect on believers. Analysis of whether language games were cognitive or non-cognitive was a popular way to develop analysis (see Exemplar 1), although those that weighed up the issues it raised rather than simply repeating the technical terms, were more likely to access the higher levels. Effective evaluations included whether language games allowed for inter-faith dialogue, was prone to fideism or exclusivity or whether it was possible to escape from language games.

Some responses in levels 1-3 indicated perhaps candidates were not expecting a question directly on Wittgenstein. It may be worth noting that questions can be asked on any thinker named in the specification. Lower levels were achieved for minimal descriptions of language games followed by everything else they could remember on religious language with a simple assertion that their preferred view was more successful than Wittgenstein. A few misunderstood the importance of a group agreeing on rules and claimed that any language was valid because it was meaningful to an individual.

Exemplar 1

My hypothesis is the the language games concept presented by Wittgenstein does not successfully make sense of religious language, as it treats religious language as non-cognitive statements, when people who make religious statements generally believe that they are making factual assertions.

Exemplar 1 illustrates how a line of reasoning is started in the introduction by setting out a strong criticism of language games. This was then followed throughout the essay and provided its structure. Exemplar 1 also shows a clear understanding of technical vocabulary by contrasting 'factual assertions' (cognitive) with non-cognitive approaches which do not make factual or truth claims. As noted above, discussion about non-cognitive or cognitive interpretations of Wittgenstein was used well by higher achieving responses.

Exemplar 2

Indeed, contrary to the aforementioned criticisms, I would argue that Wittgenstein cuts to the heart of Christianity, fully appreciating the sense of community and solidarity, recognising that religious language empowers those who use it. Therefore, it seems more convincing to argue that the language games concept is relatively successful in making sense of religious language.

Exemplar 2 shows an evaluation of previous criticisms (exclusivity, alienating non-believers) and reflects on a strength of language games. The candidate recognises the use and thus importance of religious language within its community of faith. Whilst this candidate has used a formulaic style, this helps them stay focused on the question and to weigh up the arguments as they write producing a very good (top level 5) answer. To achieve Level 6, the response could have developed analysis in more detail, for example, by using specific scholarly ideas or reflecting on potential issues raised by value being dependent on a closed community, such as fideism or extremism.

Question 2

- 2* Critically compare the logical and evidential aspects of the problem of evil as challenges to belief. [40]

This was a complex question with several strands that could be addressed. Excellent responses handled the critically compare aspect well but even the weakest responses could engage with a part of the question and so were able to gain some credit. Some lower achieving responses, appeared to be unprepared for a question on the logical and evidential aspects of the problem of evil, despite it being taken directly from the specification.

Most candidates understood the differences between the logical and evidential aspects of evil, at least implicitly but some lower level responses were unable to explain the evidential problem of evil. Those candidates that structured their essay to compare the two problems often achieved level 6, perhaps by weighing up how well each aspect was addressed by the solutions they selected. Most candidates chose to evaluate both problems using the theodicies from Augustine and Hick. However, those who simply rewrote large sections of the theodicies without applying them to the question, could not access higher levels. For example, those who discussed whether Augustine's *privatio boni* defeated the logical problem by removing 'evil' from the Inconsistent Triad, or whether Hick's vale of soul-making world could account for the sheer scale of evidential evil, were most successful. Another valid approach was to compare the 'a priori', deductive nature of the logical problem with the 'a posteriori', inductive nature of the evidential problem. Others explored alternative definitions for the attributes of God to discuss a solution to the logical problem of evil or used omniscience, for example, to challenge to free will.

Many and varied scholarly views were given, again those that engaged and tailored their discussions of these to the question were most successful. In particular, many candidates explored examples given by Dostoyevsky and Stephen Fry to assess the evidential problem of evil.

Responses in the lower levels often mentioned the Inconsistent Triad but did not explain how or why this could challenge God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence. A few of those who struggled to explain the logical and evidential aspects, incorrectly assumed the theodicies were the evidential problem of evil.

Exemplar 3

triad, ~~and~~ This suggests that it is not logically possible for evil to exist as ~~well~~ as the Christian ideal of an all loving, all powerful God, as either God cannot prevent suffering (so he is not omnipotent) or he does not want to (so he is ~~not~~ not omnibenevolent). Thus, the logical problem of evil does create a firm basis from which belief can be challenged.

A typical mistake was to give a simple description of the Inconsistent Triad without explaining how and why it challenged belief. In Exemplar 3, the candidate has demonstrated accurate and detailed understanding by succinctly drawing out the challenge of the logical problem of evil to belief in a traditional, theistic God.

Question 3

3* Analyse Aristotle's four causes.

[40]

This was a straightforward question focusing on the four causes. Analysis was seen either in depth by discussing each cause in turn or using a broader approach to evaluate Aristotle's empiricist based theory.

For good to excellent levels for AO1, candidates demonstrated knowledge of the four causes and were able to give clear examples of each cause, usually a chair, table or statue, although some interesting responses used their own examples. A few made relevant links to the soul being the form or formal cause of the body as part of their analysis.

Most responses in levels 5-6 discussed why Aristotle took an empirical approach through reliance on the senses and *a posteriori* knowledge, often in comparison to Plato's rational or *a priori* approach. This was most effective when assessing whether Aristotle was successful in explaining change or movement in the world, through actuality and potentiality. Many extended this to analyse the Prime Mover as the final cause, attracting all things towards their telos, by its own perfection and pure actuality.

Whether through the depth or breadth approach, most high level responses discussed Aristotle's final cause in detail. Several points on purpose were analysed often with examples, including whether everything has a purpose or multiple purposes, is purpose a human mental construct, and whether Aristotle is guilty of the fallacy of composition (assuming the world has a purpose just because objects within the world seem to have a purpose). Some considered whether humans do not have an innate purpose (Sartre) and others used evolutionary theory to challenge the idea of purpose. Good analysis was seen when candidates referred to the influence of Aristotle on Christian thought, through Aquinas' adaptation in his Five Ways, and on the scientific world.

Responses that achieved Level 3 or below, were unable to explain all four causes or give examples and most commonly misunderstood the formal cause, confusing it with a blueprint, design or telos (see Exemplar 5). Or tended to spend too long explaining Plato without using his ideas to analyse the four causes.

	<p>Misconception</p>	<p>A common misconception confused the views of Aristotle and Aquinas, particularly with efficient and final causes.</p> <p>The correct view is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aristotle understood the universe and matter to be eternal and have no beginning or end, unlike Aquinas who argued there must have been a starting point (unmoved mover or uncaused causer). 2. Aristotle's Prime Mover is the final (not efficient) cause of <i>motus</i> or change in the universe and everything is drawn towards its purpose and the pure actuality of the Prime Mover.
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Exemplar 4

Second cause ~ Aristotle introduces is the formal cause. The formal cause is what makes something the way it is. The shape of something. for example the shape of a rat is a small rodent, and the shape of a desk is a rectangle with four legs.

The efficient cause of something is how it got here. The efficient cause of the rat is its parents, and the efficient cause of the desk is the carpenter. Aquinas said that God is the efficient cause of the world in his 2nd way 'The uncaused causer', but

Exemplar 4 gives a detailed and accurate account of the formal and efficient causes. The formal cause could also be described as the shape or characteristics of an object that allow us to recognise what it is. Some responses did not achieve higher levels/marks because these two causes were misunderstood, or candidates named the causes without explanation or examples. This exemplar also correctly identifies that the efficient cause was later adapted by Aquinas in Way Two of his cosmological argument to suggest the existence of the Christian God as the uncaused causer.



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Aristotle's four causes are explained in his *Metaphysics* book V and *Physics* book II, widely available online.

Question 4

4* 'The world was created by chance, not by God's design.' Discuss.

[40]

Question 4 directed the candidates towards a broad discussion comparing the arguments from design and those which suggested the world was created by chance.

Selection from a wide range of material made for an interesting range of responses and some excellent critical discussions. Most correctly identified that 'design' was a reference to the teleological argument and assessed those from Aquinas, Paley (purpose or regularity) or Tennant. Hume's criticisms were often favoured, for example, the aptness of analogy, multiple gods or the weighted scales. However, those that were directly linked to the question of chance or design achieved the highest levels, rather than those that gave a generic discussion of the teleological argument. For example, Hume's Epicurean Thesis was used to discuss an alternative theory of chance. Although, it was more accurately explained using Hume's version of particles forming order than Emile Borel's infinite monkey theorem (c.1913).

Others chose discuss Dawkins' 'blind watchmaker' to counter the claim of purpose in nature, since he claimed evolution was a 'blind' process, with no foresight, only random and chance mutations. The aesthetic principle (Tennant), having no survival value, was successfully used as a counter-argument here. Many good responses supported their preference for chance using evidence from the Big Bang and evolutionary theory, such as red shift or species which have died out due to their inability to adapt to their environment. Whilst Kant's point about human experience imposing apparent order was used effectively by some. Others adopted Douglas Adams' example of the puddle thinking the hole had been specially created for it to develop a similar argument. Candidates familiar with Mill or Hume argued that the world seems disordered, linking to the problem of evil, and assessed if this was an indication of poor design or chance.

Some candidates described cosmological arguments, but credit was only gained if linked to the idea of a designer God initiating creation opposing chance. A few candidates incorrectly thought the ontological argument was an argument from design. Lower level responses used Paley's watch simplistically and needed to develop it further, for example relating it to purpose and design. Too many relied on a simple use of Ockham's razor which did not add to their argument.

	Misconception	A misconception confused the teleological and cosmological arguments e.g. Aquinas Way 1 about movement and change was incorrectly equated with his example of arrow and archer.
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Aquinas' Way 5 – example of arrow and archer

The example of the arrow and archer is from Aquinas' Way Five (teleological / design argument): the arrow is directed to the target by the archer, just as beings without intelligence in the world are directed towards their purpose by a thinking, intelligent being, which Aquinas calls God. Aquinas states, 'It is plain that they achieve their end by design and not by chance.'

Exemplar 5

designer has made it compared to the watch. So, if we look at humans from their complex biology such as the eye from its retina and pupil its complex interaction with light, Paley would state that a designer must be behind this, which is no other than God. Tennant would add with the anthropic principle that the world is made for man kind. God made the world and it is not by chance as we can tell that it is finely tuned. If we look at the sun's position, it is just right for our existence and life to exist on Earth. Paley also adds that even if the watch may not be perfect like the world, it still has enough evidence in its complex nature that there exists a designer that is God. This is a strong argument as it accepts the world to be imperfect yet still suggesting that there's sufficient evidence for God rather than a world by chance.

Exemplar 5 is an example of an argument that is developed and justified through the paragraph. The candidate has explained Paley's design argument of the watch but as in many high level responses, extends this to the eye. The anthropic principle as well as the 'goldilocks' thesis that the earth is 'just right' for human life to evolve effectively support the analysis. Elsewhere in the essay, the candidate discussed the issues of imperfect design and refers to this again here in the context of Paley.

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