

Examiners' Report  
June 2013

GCE Religious Studies 6RS04 1A

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## Introduction

1. It was fundamentally important to examine the passage itself. All the level descriptors in the indicative mark scheme for AO1 begin with reference to the passage. There are a variety of ways this may be done. Some candidates presented a detailed exposition of the passage. This has much to commend it, including those who used this technique to explore the context of the wider source. One possible drawback was that this could become a simple comprehension exercise. This can be overcome by placing the passage in a context and showing an understanding of a detailed analysis of the more important terms and ideas. Another popular method was to present an overview of the whole source from which the passage was derived in order to examine the key points from within the passage. This method was useful in enabling candidates to show their understanding of the ethos of the passage. However, a potential weakness was that such an overview may be completed without sufficient focus on the passage itself.
2. Similarly, it was essential to answer the full demands of the AO2 part of the question:
  - do you agree with the idea(s) expressed
  - justify your point of view
  - discuss its implications for understanding religion
  - discuss its implications for understanding human experience.
  - It was important that these demands were addressed in an explicit manner rather than implicitly.
3. This unit is the synoptic part of the GCE RS course. In that respect candidates are expected to link their answers to related parts of their studies. Sometimes this may be achieved by relating work to one or more of the other sources in the anthology and also by drawing on material from any of the other three units. This enabled some candidates to compare and contrast a variety of possible responses.

## **Question 1**

### **AO1 features of good quality**

Candidates:

- presented well-informed answers focused on the passage. Those candidates who referred to the source as a whole or to related ideas managed their answers in such a way as to demonstrate their understanding of the passage. There was effective use of scholarship.
- structured their answers in a coherent manner, with evidence of analytical thought across the answer.
- were clear about the synoptic features of this unit relating their answers to other sources and related material in other units.

### **AO2 features of good quality**

Candidates:

- displayed effective use of argument
- referred to scholarly opinion
- displayed a thoughtful evaluation of alternative views
- were explicit in their material on implications for understanding of religion and human experience
- constructed well-justified arguments leading to a coherent conclusion.

### **AO1 features that require improvement**

Candidates:

- tended to present a basic examination of some ideas but the answers were not well-focused on the passage. Some treated the passage like a simple comprehension exercise.
- sometimes had a problem with unsatisfactory allocation of time, related to the two parts of the question. For example, some candidates spent too much time on part (b) in spite of the mark allocation. There were a few candidates who combined (a) and (b) but with those who did there was a tendency to have insufficient material given the range of demands in AO2.
- presented a generic account of the whole source from the anthology or a general account of related teachings at the expense of a focus on the selected passage.

### **AO2 features that require improvement**

Candidates:

- presented basic points of view with limited use of argument.
- displayed limited explicit focus on implications.

## Observations from the scripts

There were some exceptional scripts. Successful candidates analysed the Ayer passage in a systematic manner drawing on a range of scholarship. The best answers were precise and their use of technical language was crystal clear. Many made intelligent use of logical positivism and its variations including informed analysis of analytic and synthetic propositions. Some crafted good work on religious experience although a few spent an undue amount of time on the intricacies of this topic. The passage prompted candidates to examine relevant features of the design argument in terms of the verification principle. Others, given Ayer's reference to the view that the existence of God cannot be 'demonstratively proved', quite correctly examined the *a priori* features of the ontological argument. Certainly, most candidates knew how to capitalise on the other two anthologies and relate them closely to Ayer.

Candidates emphasised the influence of empiricist thinking on Ayer including the relevant ideas of Hume. Candidates were also aware of the influence of the 'early' Wittgenstein on Ayer's thinking with some good accounts the 'picture theory of meaning'. This contextualisation meant that Ayer's views were analysed at a higher level. Some candidates thought that the whole of Ayer's 'Language, Truth and Logic' was focused primarily on religious language when in fact this part is found towards the end of his sixth chapter, following his critique of ethics.

Good AO2 answers were rooted in academic debates with extensive use of scholarship. Typically, scholars included Dawkins, Flew, James, Swinburne and Wittgenstein. Most of the evidence from these scripts was that candidates disagreed with Ayer, although some ably supported his position. Some considered reasons and evidence to support their own stance followed by criticisms against their own initial position. An interesting subtle approach was to consider the astringent benefits brought by Ayer to religious language but also to see its problems. Some preferred to concentrate on the sociological implications, others on the philosophical and others located Ayer's contributions in Westerphal's scheme on the shift from philosophical theology to the philosophy of religion. There were interesting debates about the implications from Ayer's analysis of religious language to the linguistic claims of agnostics and atheists. A few drew attention to ignosticism which could be a fruitful way of highlighting some distinctive features of Ayer.

Less successful candidates lacked focus on the passage itself, with partial answers in part (b). In AO2 these relied on knowledge from AO1 but were unable to develop this into a cohesive argument. Material on implications was minimal and these failed to arrive at a justified conclusion.

The following examples represent good quality work.

a) In this article, A. J. Ayer argues that all talk of God is meaningless - All talk of God, even from an atheistic or agnostic perspective is nonsensical because it deals with the non-empirical. Ayer believes the debate about God's existence should not even be entered into. God's existence is, he claims, 'not even probable'. The ultimate basis for these claims is Ayer's verification principle (VP) which argues that a statement is meaningful only if it is either analytic (true by definition) or synthetic (truth or falsity can be ascertained through empirical testing). Ayer was in agreement with the logical positivists; metaphysical & unscientific claims must be rejected.

This passage is the opening passage of Ayer's article 'God talk is evidently nonsense', therefore it lays out the direction in which the rest of the article will go.

In this passage, Ayer begins by claiming that most people, including philosophers, agree that ~~both any non-animistic~~ the existence of any 'non-animistic' God cannot be proved. This means that ~~non-animistic~~ God is the God of sophisticated religions, one

that is metaphysical and transcendent, as opposed to an animistic god, which is defined by the natural world. When Ayer makes this point he most probably is referring to the criticisms that Kant & Hume made to the ontological (OA), teleological (TA) and cosmological (CA) arguments. This is a point Westphal picks up on his article, as he noted that Kant & Hume were largely responsible for the prevalent belief that we cannot talk or should not talk about God & therefore focus on religion.

The ~~other~~ O.A uses the definition of god to argue, a priori, that God exists, and is heavily associated with Anselm, but also Descartes, Malcolm & Plantinga. Kant criticised the OA but thought that by doing this he also undermined the T.A & C.A, as ultimately they depend on the ~~idea~~ definition the O.A gives to God. Kant argued that the O.A was flawed in that it treated existence as a predicate. Kant argued that predicates tell us something about the being or object they are describing. Existence, however,

tells us nothing about the nature of God, only that the concept of God has been actualised. Kant used an analogy with a triangle to explain how there is no contradiction in

denying the existence of God along with His attributes. Kant agreed that it would be contradictory to argue that a triangle does exist, but that it doesn't have three angles, but 'there is no contradiction in denying the existence of the triangle along with its three angles.'

Hume criticised both the CA & T.A. The CA argues that everything in the universe has a cause, therefore the universe must have a cause. An infinite regression of causes is impossible, therefore there must be a first, un-caused cause, which is God. Hume, <sup>made many points of critique but</sup> mainly focused on criticising the use of causation in the argument; ~~for~~ for example a key criticism he made was 'the fallacy of composition' - one cannot argue that ~~the universe~~ from individual chains of causation within the universe to a cause of the universe as a whole.

Hume also criticised the T.A. The T.A observes several features within nature which appear to have been designed. This observation leads to the conclusion that there must be a designer, <sup>of the universe</sup>, which is God. ~~He~~ Paley uses an analogy with a watch to explain the argument. Hume again makes many critical points but these focus around the central theme of a weak analogy. For example, ~~just~~ as



watches can have many designers or a bad designer, perhaps there are many gods, or perhaps God is immoral. They've come & I think support Ayer on the point that the existence of God cannot be demonstratively proved.'

Ayer then goes on to explain how the existence of God is 'not even probable'. He says that if it was, statements about God's <sup>existence</sup> would be 'empirical hypotheses'. By this he means that the statement that God exists would be a proposition which would mark out how we could verify the statement using observation. & when Ayer is making this point, he is referring to his verification principle (VP) which I explained earlier on in my essay. The fact that God statements about God are neither analytic or

synthetic means that God's they are ultimately meaningless. As Ayer said, 'the notion of a being whose essential attributes are non-empirical is not an intelligible notion at all.'

Aquinas would disagree with Ayer's V-P ~~because~~ because he believed we can talk about God, albeit in a limited way, through analogy. Aquinas' theory of analogy was born out of a rejection of both univocal & equivocal language to talk about God. Univocal language is when language means the same thing in 2 or more <sup>no example black cat & black chair.</sup>

Context: Aquinas believed the problem with using univocal language to talk about God is that it anthropomorphises God, as God is so different to the empirical world which our language was formulated to talk about. Equivocal language is when language is used to mean different things in different contexts, for example river bank & money bank. The problem with using equivocal language is that when we talk about God it means something different, so it becomes unintelligible. As Aquinas said, 'It follows that from creatures nothing could be known or demonstrated about God at all.'

So Aquinas developed analogy to talk about God. An analogy is a linguistic tool used to talk about something unknown by comparing it to something known. In this case the 'unknown' is God. Analogy is a figurative way of talking about God (i.e. non-literal) which Aquinas believed ~~to~~ avoided the problems of univocal language & equivocal language because it neither says God is or isn't like the world.

Aquinas formulated two types of analogy: attribution & proportional. Analogy of attribution draws on the idea that all qualities are ~~at~~ from God, so they can

is attributed to him. Aquinas used an analogy using a bull to help explain this. You can check the health of a bull by checking its urine. However the health of the bull is more fully & completely within the bull itself. In the same way, God has those qualities (such as love & wisdom) first & most completely, & we have them to a limited extent.

Analogy of proportion draws claims that God possesses qualities more fully, whereas we exhibit pale reflections of these, we exhibit them to a lesser proportion. Therefore Aquinas disagrees with Ayer on this point as he believes we can in fact talk about God in a meaningful way.

Ayer then goes on to talk about how some people argue that 'a certain sort of regularity in nature' is a good enough evidence for belief in God. People who argue this may also just argue that some people have argued this is the case as the observation of nature <sup>& that it appears as we been created</sup> can create in them a religious feeling or experience. Indirect religious experiences can have this effect - looking at nature can give an overwhelming sense that God exist. Caroline Francis Davis also includes this type of experience in her categorisation of religious experiences. She refers to <sup>religious</sup> experiences

causes by 'observation' of 'the natural world as 'awareness experiences'.

Ayer then goes on to argue against ~~this~~ the view that 'regularity in nature' is evidence enough for the existence of God. He argues that it is only meaningful if believers claim that 'God' refers merely to those regularities & observations of nature. He notes, however, that no theist means to assert this when he asserts the existence of God from these observations. Instead, they mean to assert the existence of a metaphysical, transcendent God.

b) Ayer's ideas in this passage are persuasive and attractive as they promote a scientific rigour to language, meaning language becomes clear & free from ambiguity. However, Wittgenstein in his later philosophy would agree that Ayer is acting as if there is only one (scientific) language game - science. Therefore he is flawed, as there are many different language games, such as the religious language game, which are governed by their own rules & whereby statements are true in so far as they fit in with the grammar of that language game (coherence theory of truth.) Nonetheless, Ayer's ideas would appeal to mystics such as ~~Kurosawa~~ ~~and~~ Zen Buddhists who argue that God can't be spoken of. However, ultimately Ayer's ideas are unconvincing

as they are built upon the VP which is self-referencing: it cannot pass its own test for meaningfulness as it is neither analytic or synthetic.

If Ayer is correct, there are a number of key implications for religion. Firstly, if the VP is correct, and God can't be proven to exist & cannot be talked about, there may well be a role in atheism.

People are much less likely to hold religious beliefs if they can't even talk about God. This is a positive ~~feature~~ implication in the sense that it ~~may~~ <sup>will</sup> end religious conflict. It will end religious conflict as no one will be religious, so there is nothing for people from different religions to disagree about.

Another key implication Ayer's ideas would have on religion is that religion ~~may be seen~~ <sup>will</sup> people who hold religious beliefs in light of Ayer's ideas could be seen as having a psychological problem. This is due to the fact that God has been proved to be a meaningless concept, so it would be illogical to hold on to religious belief. This is a negative implication as it could breed hostility towards people who remain religious.

<sup>would</sup> Another key implication Ayer's ideas <sup>have</sup> on religion is that religious texts

would be undermined. Religious texts are full of ~~now means~~ talk about God which has been shown to be meaningless & non-sensical. Therefore they have no authority - people will not try and learn about or gain advice about life & morality from a book which is full of nonsense. This is a positive implication, because the religious texts, such as the Bible, have some suspect teachings within them. Dawkins, for example, made this point and picked out examples from the Bible such as Abraham being commanded to sacrifice Isaac by God, & Noah & the flood.

There are also some key implications for human experience of Ayer is correct. Firstly, religious ethical systems, such as divine command ethics and natural moral law are ~~severely~~ undermined as they refer to the teachings in the religious texts & ideas about the nature of God to inform morality, & these ideas are now non-sensical. Plato would argue that this realisation was positive as he argued that religion and morality can not be linked in any way satisfying to our understanding with his Euthyphro Dilemma, where he asks 'is God good because he commands 'X', or is 'X' good because God commands it?' Following on <sup>from</sup> the previous implication, Ayer's V.P. makes ethical cognitivism

nonsensical, because moral facts can not pass the V.P., they are neither synthetic or analytic. Therefore, Ayer's theory of ethical language, emotivism, is likely to become the dominant ethical way of thinking. Emotivism is a non-cognitive theory of ethical language, which states that there are no moral facts. Instead, ethical language is merely expressive of personal preferences, but also 'calculated to arouse emotion & stimulate action' (C.L. Stevenson).

This is a negative implication because, as Vardy notes, all talk of ethics' just becomes... so much hot air & nothing else! Also, the idea that there are no moral facts goes against most people's' ideas about ethics.

Another implication for human experience if Ayer is correct is that the basic belief in life after death is undermined to a large extent. Therefore less people care highly to believe in life after death. Life after death is often built upon a ~~theistic~~ system of thought, where God exists to create & look over the afterlife. As God is a meaningless

concept, less people are therefore likely to believe in life after death. Bostrensky would agree that this is a negative implication of Ayer for human experience, as he said that

'Without God anything is permissible.'  
He believed that people need the idea of God watching over them & judgement to make them behave morally. Ayer largely takes this away with his ideas, which is likely to lead to moral chaos.

Ultimately, I agree with Ayer on the point that religious language does not refer to objective truth, however I disagree that this makes it meaningless. Religious language & systems of thought are meaningful in different ways, for example because of the effect they have on the life of the believer. This ~~idea~~ is a 'blit' according to R. M. Hare & ~~state~~ is an unverifiable & unrefutable belief which is deemed meaningful because of the effect it has on the life of the believer.



### ResultsPlus Examiner Comments

This is an example of an answer achieving full marks. It is typical of work at this standard in terms of its use of scholarship and an effective management of a range of ideas.



### ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

In AO2 the candidate follows through in an explicit manner the structure of the various demands of AO2.



1a) This is an extract from an essay by A. J. Ayer, whom opens his essay with his famous quote, "God is evidentially meaningless". This quote makes the proposition, not only is not provable, but his existence is not even probable as he is a metaphysical and spiritual being beyond human knowledge and understanding. Ayer's verification principle and his ideas spread into thought in the 1920's / 1930's in a group of philosophers known as the Vienna circle, otherwise known as the logical positivists.

The logical positivists were concerned with how people used such <sup>moral</sup> statements and to what extent there was truth in these statements. The logical positivists applied the logic of science of maths and science to language, and they believed that like knowledge, language had to be based on experience. Science was therefore of primary aim to the logical positivists and they believed that philosophy should become the "handmaiden of science". They postulate that if language was not based around the logic of science and maths, then this language they referred to as bears nothing.

more than a 'meaningless proposition.' They were strongly against metaphysical philosophy and idealism and they claimed that religious language had no purpose. These ideas came into being largely inspired by philosophers such as Kant and Hume. Largely focussing on Kant's argument, that since God is in the noumenal realm, we cannot experience him as we do at the opposite end of the spectrum, the phenomenal realm.

A. J. Ayer was largely inspired by the logical positivists' ideas. His ideas of the verification principle in his book 'Language, Truth and Logic' have a very strong position on religious language. His verification principle states, that the only language which is meaningful is language that is either analytical, synthetic or mathematical. In other words, analytical statements are 'true by definition' for example, a circle is round is an analytic statement. Synthetic statements are identified by using our 5 senses whether to prove it exists. A. J. Ayer proposes this quote, "any statement which cannot be conclusively verified cannot be verified at all, it is simply devoid of meaning". Ayer therefore makes the

postulate that metaphysical and spiritual language and in fact beings are devoid of meaning, as there is nothing verifiable about such beings or statements.

In this particular passage A.J. Ayer quotes how any attributes which use the word 'God' are not intelligible, this can also be quoted by his famously known quote, "an attribute whose essential attribute is non-empirical, is not a sensible attribute at all." Ayer claims that the word 'God' does not make him any more probable, and giving him this name does not give him any more meaning. In this particular passage therefore Ayer is making the proposition, that since God is a metaphysical being, there is nothing empirical about this claim, therefore he makes ~~God talk~~ complete the assumption that God talk is evidentially meaningless, as we cannot combine analytical or synthetic statements to such metaphysical and spiritual reality, he is making the whole discussion about God, one of very little point and in fact such debates about 'God' become nonsensical, as this is demonstrated in the passage where he clearly states, God

can not be 'demonstratively proved'.

In his passage he claims, 'there can be no way of proving that the existence of God, such as the God of Christianity, is even probable', here he is further making the statement that ~~God~~ even though God can not be proved true or false his existence is not even probable. This part of ~~the~~ his essay can be strongly linked with a famous quote by A. J. Ayer who claims, "God is a metaphysical being, and if God is a metaphysical being, his existence can not even be probable" Ayer therefore is making the argument This can be identified with a part of his passage which postulates, "for if the existence of God were probable, then the proposition that he existed would be an empirical hypothesis", this statement makes the assumption that such terms such as 'God' can not even be a probability, as such terms do not even require a testable and empirical hypothesis, as is quoted in the passage.

Furthermore A. J. Ayer is quoted in this passage, the design argument cannot prove that God exists, the only thing that can be proved about such design in the world,

is that there is 'regularity in nature', as quoted in this particular passage. After this passage Ayer makes the conclusion that ~~at that~~ moral statements used by mystics are of no use to the philosopher, but are only of use to the psychologist.

However A.J. Ayer's strict stance on religious language and religious experience is criticised harshly and it is an wide philosophical debate amongst many. For example in this particular passage Ayer quotes how God is not even a probable being, as he does not require an empirical hypothesis of analysis; however this can be criticised harshly by John Hick. John Hick's psychological verification goes against the flaw of the verification principle. John Hick makes the proposition, although God does not require of a testable or empirical hypothesis in this life, at the end of times, God will be verifiable. Furthermore A. J. Ayer's verification principle makes the statement that ~~only~~ the only language which is of any meaning at all, is either analytic, synthetic or mathematic, however the verification principle itself cannot be

verifiable which leaves Ayer's argument deeply flawed. Furthermore Ayer makes the statement that if God did exist he would have an empirical hypothesis, however R.M. Hare is against such statements. R.M. Hare uses his concept of a 'blik' although such words such as 'good' are not empirically verifiable, does not make them meaningless, as they are meaningful to those who make such statements. This can be supported by Teresa of Avila "where she claimed, "it is wholly impossible to doubt that I have been in God and God in me"; this statement proves in addition and against the verification principle on the grounds that for something to exist it does not essentially have to be empirical.

Furthermore on the grounds that the design only shows regularity in nature, Richard Swinburne argues against such claims in his principle of credulity and testimony. He states that we should trust people when they claim to have had a religious experience unless there is evidence to the contrary, it was also suggested by William Alston. We should <sup>therefore</sup> not make such statements that ~~are~~ "God is evidently nonsense" we should believe people if people do tell the truth.

b) A.J. Ayer's verification principle leaves a huge dent in religious language and religious experience. If we decide to follow the verification principle there will be huge implications that lie in the field of religion. For instance Ayer ~~was~~ makes his famous quote "God is evidentially meaningless". This completely sums up his position on religion. Religion has no place in society if you decide to follow the verification principle, as he states in his passage "God is not even probable". This can be further supported by Richard Dawkins who believes that religion is a great 'crap out' it is a virus of the mind and leads to irrational thinking and sectarianism, supported by his famous quote, "science flies you to the moon religion flies you into buildings". Therefore religious statements have no place in such a society where the verification principle is strictly abided to. As supported firmly by R.A. Sharpe whom suggests, religion leads to a lack of morality. We should make our own and completely get rid of religion. Therefore since God cannot be 'demonstratively proved' religion is of no use ~~as~~ as religious statements.

are simply based on feelings and as such do not come under the <sup>logic of</sup> empirical evidence of science and maths.

However, can religion be discarded completely? Many argue against Ayer's strong position on faith as they claim that society does need religion. This can be clarified by John Polkinghorne who states that society needs both religion and science, they are both of importance. Lord Harewood further suggests that the decline in religious faith has led to a decline in morality. Just because religion is based on moral statements does not mean it should be regarded as completely meaningless as argued strongly by Ayer.

Religious folk such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, William Wilberforce demonstrate the idea that we should keep religion as it leads to promising results such as peace.

The verification principle has a huge amount of affect on human experience and can be regarded as negative by many.

For example if we do take on the stance of A. J. Ayer by claiming language is only meaningful if it produces objective fact, use cognitive factual language and



needs to be empirically verifiable then language that has non-cognitive use is of no meaning. The verification principle swipes out human emotions, symbolic language, poetry and love, all of which can be argued have the greatest impact on ourselves and to such things have huge impact on our lives. Therefore some argue that taking on this harsh stance of Ayer, emotions are of no use <sup>and therefore</sup>, it cuts out a huge part of what it means to be human. This can be demonstrated by Bryan Magee's famous quote, "The people began to realise that this glittering new scalpel was in one operation after the other, killing off each patient one by one." The verification principle had damaging consequences for human experiences, and the biggest implication for human experience lies in the field of morality.

If we therefore decide to take on Ayer's stance of the verification principle, all moral statements and non-cognitive language is of no use to us, as it cannot be empirically verifiable, therefore ~~evidentially~~ ~~at all~~ evidentially meaningless. Ayer's emotivism theory, 'Boo, Hurray' states

that ethical statements are just based on feelings and do not come under the category of truth or falsehood. He wipes out ethical language as meaningless as he postulates that they are simply a 'primitive noise'. Ethical statements just express what is true for the speaker & not for anyone else.

However various philosophers go against Ayer's verification principle and they believe that ethical statements should not be completely abolished. As suggested by MacIntyre, virtue ethics is important, as we are moving towards an end or purpose and emotivism has left society to lose its moral compass, MacIntyre is therefore supporting ethical language on the grounds that it is very important for morality. This suggestion by MacIntyre is supported by C. L. Stevenson, who unlike Ayer gives meaning to ethical statements. C. L. Stevenson suggests that ethical statements are not merely based on 'feelings' as suggested by Ayer, but they have a persuasive element to them, which use words that acquire emotive meanings. Stevenson supports the idea that we cannot get rid of ethical language. Furthermore other philosophers have harshly criticised

emotivism and Ayers verification principle, Peter Vardy makes the statement that our moral statements cannot be reduced to hot air and nothing else therefore we cannot regard them as meaningless, as postulated by James Rachels, ethical statements are more than an 'ouch' when you stub your toe.

To conclude therefore in Ayers verification principle and his opening paragraph which states, "God is evidentially meaningless" is not a good guideline for moral living. This can be addressed by the previous paragraphs which show how the verification principle has such a damaging effect on the implications for religion, human experience and morality. We must step aside from Ayers debate and look at other philosophers who postulate different ideas. For example it just because moral statements do not produce objective moral fact does not mean they should be discredited as 'meaningless propositions'. We should consider the stance of Kierkegaard on the grounds that the personal leap of faith is what matters, and although we make statements which are of subjective quality. Subjectivity is just as

important as objectivity. Therefore on the grounds  
~~of Kierkegaard~~ therefore we should take on  
Kierkegaard's proposition and focus specifically  
on the debate from Elizabeth Anscombe, that  
we should move away from focusing ~~deontological~~  
deontological and absolutist rules and we should  
~~put~~ morality and society should put the focus  
back on ~~the~~ the human beings themselves.  
Trying to better our character and be virtuous people is  
far more important as it does not abolish ethical  
statements ~~or~~ and emotions which lie at the  
heart of morality and are of ultimate importance  
to each individual.



### ResultsPlus Examiner Comments

This is an example of an answer gaining full marks. On the first page there is evidence of a clear understanding of key terms and ideas. This style is followed through in the rest of the answer. This is a paper in the philosophy of religion and the candidate's approach is philosophical throughout. For example the candidate probes philosophical concepts and debates a range of views and interpretations.



### ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

The candidate has a reasonable balance of material across both parts (a) and (b). Across both parts there is a very good use of scholarship. For example the conclusion incorporates pertinent ideas from Kierkegaard

Ayer ~~comes from an~~ Empiricist background and whom as an empiricist comes from an empiricist background and maintains that for any claim to be meaningful it needs to be ~~or~~ empirically ~~verified~~ verified. Ayer maintains that only an empirical claim can be empirically verified. In this article Ayer maintains that any utterance of God is meaningless / nonsense and he transcends the human understanding and there is no way of ~~to~~ ~~den~~ empirically demonstrating the existence of God as he is not an empirical being, he is metaphysical (beyond the physical)

In this specific passage which is at the beginning of the article, Ayer states that <sup>not only does</sup> everyone <sup>agree</sup> ~~agrees~~ that the existence of God cannot be demonstratively proved but more than that, that the existence of God is not even probable! 'there can be no way of proving that the existence of a God, such as the God of Christianity, is even probable' He ~~states~~ understands that you cannot even begin to even think about the existence of a God. 'For if the existence of such a God were probable, the the proposition that he existed would be an empirical hypothesis' Ayer asserts that

If there was such a God, you could in some way test it or further investigate the existence of God, but we are unable to do that as God is not empirical. If God did exist, you could empirically test it or prove it. Because you cannot prove the existence of God it becomes nonsense.

Ayer ~~not~~ comprehends that you cannot talk of the metaphysical i.e. God. If God is a being whom transcends the human understanding, then you cannot utter of God in human terms. It has no literal significance. Ayer understands that unless a claim can be empirically verified it is meaningless/nonsense.

Therefore claims about God which mention the metaphysical are nonsense and meaningless. According to the verification principle they can not be verified and therefore have no meaning.

Ayer then goes on to examine claims which Atheists and Agnostics ~~make~~ make. He states that his claims are the same as those from an atheist or Agnostic. Both claims which an Atheist or Agnostic make are ~~so~~ nonsense, in fact they're

equally nonsense as a theist's claim. This is because Ayer maintains claims from an Atheist and Agnostic have God as the subject. They aren't even proper propositions. He maintains that by an Atheist stating 'There is no God' it becomes nonsense, as he's still contemplating and uttering of the metaphysical God. God is still the subject.

Similarly Ayer asserts that when an Agnostic states 'There is or 'There may or may not be a transcendent God' it is equally nonsense, because neither proposition is true or false. Again God is still the subject. As a result Ayer ~~still~~ maintains the notion that his claims aren't similar to an Atheist, agnostic or theist because their claims are equally nonsense and have God as the subject. However critics of Ayer may criticise Ayer and state his claims revolve around the existence of God, therefore wouldn't his claims become equally nonsense?

Consequently, Ayer suggests that the only time a religious claim can be meaningful is if God is referred to as an empirical object. This is demonstrated in

simple religions where God is seen as a natural object. For example if one wants to make the claim 'Jehovah is angry', from this you would deduce that God is thunder. Therefore the claim could be empirically verified making it meaningful.

However, in sophisticated religions such as monotheistic religions (Islam/Christianity/Judaism) God is depicted as super empirical (beyond the empirical) therefore no objective criteria can be applied to God. As a result God cannot be empirically verified as he is a super empirical being who transcends the human understanding. This makes ~~the~~ any claim from sophisticated religions nonsense, which links to Ayer's initial claim of 'God talk is evidently nonsense'. Ayer ~~also~~ then goes on to ~~the~~ propose that religions trick you into thinking that the term 'God' is a noun, when it isn't. It is not describing anything. God is not a genuine noun.

Ayer claims that he is not interested in religious feeling and what he cares about is religious language.



Ayer proposes that when religious people are challenged about God they often retreat to saying 'God is a mystery who transcends the human understanding'. Ayer has a fundamental problem with this.

If you ~~are stating~~ (a theist) are stating that God transcends the human understanding, surely that means you can't understand

God! God is unintelligible. If he is beyond your understanding and beyond this world, he is past your intelligence!

You cannot put human terms to something that transcends is metaphysical.

If you yourself are stating that God is a mystery and you can't understand him then surely what you when you try to explain God, ~~because~~ you must admit that it is nonsense. If you don't understand him, how can you speak of him? It's unintelligible and past your intelligence.

Ayer then goes on to making criticisms of 'mystical intuition'. He maintains that what a mystic proposes of God is also nonsense and meaningless. If a mystic did have the cognitive faculty of God then

surely they could express it. If a mystic knew or his intuition told him something of ~~God~~ about God then wouldn't he be able to express it? A mystic is unable to express or justify his propositions, as a result claims from a mystic are ~~equal~~ nonsense. Ayer then claims that when a mystic does go on to explain this intuition/encounter all they do is give us intimation of their own state of mind rather than intimation of the external world. Also philosophers such as P. Daman would state how can you check your intuition? You can not check your intuition against any set of facts! However Swinburne (Richard Swinburne) challenges this view of Ayer and that what the mystic states is nonsense. He does this using his principle of testimony and credulity. Swinburne maintains that if a person states they've had an experience then they probably have and you should believe that. 'If it seems to the subject that X is present, then X is probably present, what one perceives is usually what the case is' He maintains that

if someone claims to have had an experience then you should believe them.

In the concluding paragraphs, Ayer gets rid of the argument from religious experience. Theists have no way of empirically demonstrating the existence of God, therefore they try to justify his existence using metaphysical or mystical claims. However Ayer comprehends that this is nonsense! It has no literal significance. Ayer states that if someone was to make the claim that they see a yellow patch, they could show it/point to it using some sort of sensory perception. However if you were to make the claim I see God, you would not be able to empirically prove it. You can experience a yellow patch in a way that you can't experience God.

From this Ayer deduces the conclusion that all religious language is nonsense.

Ayer maintains that he maintains that Religion is fallacious and built on false premises. As well as this he ~~also~~ comprehends all religious claims

are nonsense.

All of the above have ~~derived~~ derived from Ayer's initial claim being 'All God-talk is evidently nonsense'.



## ResultsPlus

### Examiner Comments

This is an example of good quality part (a). This candidate used the details of the selected passage to develop key ideas from Ayer in the source as a whole. For example this answer demonstrates the implications for any sort of 'God-talk' including claims by agnostics and atheists. In addition there is pertinent material on religious experience arising from ideas within this passage.

30 marks for part (a)



## ResultsPlus

### Examiner Tip

If candidates are going to examine ideas from the source as a whole it is vital that this is rooted in an analysis of the selected passage.

a)

In this ~~essay~~ passage Ayer questions if the existence of God is even probable seen as there is no empirical proof and because of this that God-talk is non-sensical.

The philosophical context around this article is that if God is a transcendent being, he is beyond human knowledge and understanding, so how can we ~~use~~ describe him? Logical Positivists, a group of 1920's philosophers from the Vienna circle and Ayer would claim that because we cannot empirically prove God exists through sense experience that any statement or claim made about or regarding God is meaningless, this is known as the verification principle. However it could be argued that ~~we~~ God's existence can be seen and

conclusions drawn from looking at the world and people in it. For example, the Design Argument suggests that the "regularity in nature" gives evidence for purposeful design to maintain life on Earth e.g. The atmosphere stops harmful rays coming through and the fact that we have four seasons and patterns within nature is strong proof for design and therefore suggests a designer. Paley's watch analogy helps to explain this further.

Hume criticised the analogy as, although he acknowledged elements of design in the world, he pointed out that this does not mean the designer (if there is one at all) is the God of classical theism.

The world and people around us could also be used to help us understand and talk about God with meaning. Aquinas's analogy of proportion and attributes allows us to compare God to what we already know like love e.g. Jane's love is the same love as God's but as God is

a superior being his love is on a greater scale, he is omnibenevolence.

If we can talk about Jane's love with meaning merely we ~~can also talk about~~ ~~God's love~~ talk about God's love if also has meaning? Although this helps us to simplify God's nature so that we can understand it through what we already know it could be argued that God is transcendent, non-contingent being cannot be compared with earthly, contingent matters that we know because it is a natural fallacy to assume that they would be similar.

Ayer ~~was on to~~ believes that for something to be meaningful we must have deductive and empirical proof but further on in his article dismisses Anselm's ontological argument which is solely based on deductive, a priori evidence. Anselm's argument suggested that everyone, even atheists, had an understanding of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' and this perfect must therefore possess all perfections e.g. omniscience, omnipotence

but perhaps most importantly existence.

The argument was criticised on not everyone sharing the same deification of God and Kant and Russell criticised that existence is not a predicate. Ayer claimed that 'God is not an object of reason' and therefore cannot be proven a priori but he also dismissed a posteriori proof such as religious experience because we cannot describe it ~~or~~ through sense experience and therefore God-talk is not veridical and meaningless.

Anthony Flew used the falsification principle to render religious language as meaningless too. He was concerned with trying to prove something false and to have meaning something has to have counter-arguments against it. However he claims that Christians are unable to see any fault with God and religion e.g. 'The problem of evil and so religion dies; the death a thousand qualifications' and therefore it can have no meaning.

Philosophers such as Otto and



James would argue that just because we may not be able to describe something doesn't mean it is not meaningful. Otto describes God as a mystical that we may not be able to find the right words to describe and James furthers this with his idea of ineffability. An example of this would be giving birth. Many mothers will tell you that the experience cannot be ~~explained~~ described, it is like nothing else and that you cannot comprehend until you have experienced. No one would render childbirth meaningless because of this thought.

Can we not apply the same to God-talk? Because He is a transcendent being we may not have the words to describe him correctly but this does not mean the statement 'God-exists' is meaningless.

This can be linked to Wittgenstein's language games which suggests that we may not criticize another if we are not part of their 'game' because we do not understand their rules.

For example, cricket has its own language like 'in' and 'out' but I, not being a cricketer, will not understand the meaning behind this and have no basis to claim the use of these terms are wrong and have no meaning. The same applies to religious language e.g. transcendent, omni-benevolent, mystical all have meaning to players within that game and an atheist should not be allowed to criticise this language as it will have meaning to the individual and things like symbols and myths ~~are~~ can be interpreted differently, who's to say which interpretation is right? We can't, the individual must draw from it what is meaningful to them and it cannot be right or wrong when compared to another's view.

Ayer also claims that all statements, whether from a theist, atheist or agnostic, regarding God are nonsense as his existence can neither be 'demonstratively proved' or disproved

so neither viewpoint has any literal significance. However it could be argued that Ayer is being very hypocritical when saying we should not talk about God as he is talking about God in this article. Does this mean that his views are meaningless too and should be dismissed?



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

One of the features of 6RS04 is that this is the synoptic unit whereby candidates are encouraged to examine relevant themes from the other units. This candidate achieves this well in AO1. The candidate incorporates material on:

- design argument
- ontological argument
- range of views on religious language including Aquinas, Flew and Wittgenstein
- aspects of religious experience with Otto.

29 marks for part (a)

A.J. Ayer begins this passage by highlighting the fact that it is now considered as part of a general consensus that the existence of God is cannot be proved. The point Ayer is getting at is that he believes that it is not considered or agreed in the same way that 'God' is even 'probable'. Ayer agrees this, as he does in the other articles that given the attributes of God and the fact that many theologians agree with him that God is undefinable and is 'super-transcendent' so beyond this world that Ayer states that we'd be able to construct an empirical hypothesis in which we could try to deduce from it but Ayer states that this is in fact impossible. He goes on to say that 'the existence of a certain sort of regularity in nature constitutes sufficient evidence for the existence of God'. Ayer dismisses this idea, stating that the apparent regularity in nature, in fact does not indicate a transcendent being, not simply that there is regularity in nature and nothing more. Ayer would consider that 'certain types of phenomena' in 'certain sequences' does not point towards the conclusion that God exists. & further on the article, Ayer claims that since God is 'super-empirical' and beyond this world we cannot even begin to try to prove him and this is why Ayer claims that even the probability of God is impossible.

~~The~~ In fact Ayer is not only aiming at convincing us that God cannot exist because he is not probable, but he just wants to give that the idea of God is meaningless and like the title of the article indicates that 'God-talk' is ~~absolutely~~ senseless. From this we see that Ayer is away from religious language.

Ayer was part of a group of thinkers from the Vienna circle who were known as the logical positivists. The logical positivists created the verifiability criteria of meaning in which they aimed to verify ~~was~~ whether a statement could be true or not. If a statement could be verified then it was meaningful and people were talking about. If a statement, although, could not be verified empirically, using the senses, then it was rendered meaningless and so there would be no point talking about it. This criteria which allowed us a way to judge the meaningfulness of statements was a huge blow to most of religious language. As religious language did not fit into either analytic, synthetic or mathematical statement then it was considered meaningless. As we of course could not verify God or any statement relating to him this meant that

likely about was meaningless and as Aye put it, any talk about something beyond what we can see beyond science, was nonsense. ~~My~~ ~~Aye~~ ~~may~~ ~~have~~ ~~developed~~ ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~ideas~~ ~~of~~ ~~Hume~~. As Hume was a skeptic he questioned the purpose of religion. ~~As Hume~~ ~~once~~ ~~said~~ ~~that~~ "humans were governed by their desires and not by reason, they had religious ~~for~~ belief because it is what they desired not what their reason indicated". Aye would've ~~been~~ agreed with this, although taking a much harsher approach in that he deems religion as meaningless and therefore any talk about it as meaningless too.

Also part of the logical positivists ~~was~~ early Ludwig Wittgenstein, which influenced Aye would've agreed. In his 'Tractatus' Wittgenstein posited his 'picture theory' stating that only what we can imagine and picture in the real world, could be meaningful. So as we can not picture God in the world, then God would be meaningless. Despite this he later contradicted himself stating that he believed religion language could be understood but it just depended on the context. This is where he

talked about language games. Wittgenstein later said that ~~was~~ religious language could be meaningful to those who were part of a religious community ~~as~~ they understood what they were talking about. However not all communities would be able to. Wittgenstein said that 'one form of life can not judge another' in saying this he meant that no other community could judge another or just because someone such as Ayer would say religious language was meaningless ~~as~~ that was the ~~part~~ part of community he was part of i.e. the scientific community does not mean he could make judgements over the religious community, who would find significance in religious language in the same way he ~~was~~ said that the religious community could not judge the scientific community he asserted that religious language could be meaningful if put dependent on context.

Throughout the article Ayer also addresses the mystic and comments on religious and mystical experiences. Ayer said that whilst the mystic would agree that we could not deny whether they did experience God or gained knowledge or were in a 'cognitive state' because we didn't

ourselves experience, he did say that as Christians themselves define God as unintelligible and such religious experiences as the same, and as undepreciable then Ayer said that if the mystic did try to talk about or explain his experience he is 'bound to talk nonsense'.  
The the (Ayer) claimed that the mere fact that religious people agreed with him that God was transcendent, super-empirical and unintelligible worked against them as he believed that this made the word 'God' a 'metaphysical' word and so we could not verify him and so to utter the word 'God' is meaningless.

~~Inspired~~ Inspired by Ayer's ideas, R.N. More proposed his ideas about 'Blits'. More stated that when we talk of God and when we experience him we are perceiving God and experiencing him on a personal level. His idea of Blits worked in a similar way as looking at God through a personal lens.\*<sup>1</sup> He ~~was~~ claimed that our experiences of God were too personal and that they were ~~objective~~ subjective and so they couldn't be reliable or verified, in this way he agreed with Ayer.\*<sup>3</sup>



However, Swinburne believed that we could talk meaningfully about God, whether or not we could verify him. He used the analogy of the 'toys in the cupboard' to illustrate his idea. He said that there was no way we could falsify or verify that the toys in the cupboard weren't moving when we weren't looking, but it was still meaningful to talk about it, because we understood the concepts and the ideas of it and so therefore it was still meaningful to talk about, despite not being verifiable or falsifiable. In his way we see how Swinburne offers a strong counter argument to Ayer. \*2

\*2 He used the example of the paranoid lecturer to explain his ideas. He said that the lecturer perceived that all his students and colleagues were out to get him and to murder him and he perceived all their actions as a threat or an attempt to kill him, when they were not trying to kill him.

To conclude, Ayer proposes that not only is the possibility of God impossible but that the mere fact that we talk that talk about God

and of religious experience, is meaningless.  
Only Wittgenstein and not K.M. are agreed with  
Ayer that it is meaningless if it ~~can~~ <sup>is not</sup> verifiable,  
although later Wittgenstein and Quine have proposed  
counter-arguments to show how religious language  
can still be meaningful and therefore can K.M. still  
be used.

(b) To a certain extent I agree ~~that~~ with  
Ayer that religious language lacks verifiability  
and so in that sense it is effectively rendered  
meaningless. However I find that Ayer has quite  
amazingly formulated his argument to  
try and dispute that we cannot talk of God, which  
begins in the sarcastic title <sup>where he refers to</sup> ~~that~~ God-talk  
and reduces sentiment and arguments of God  
down to something unimportant. Secondly  
Ayer concludes rather sarcastically that  
religious experiences are interesting from a  
psychological point of view but suggests  
rather cruelly that those who claim to experience  
them would 'provide good material for the  
Psychoanalyst'. I agree with Ayer and he  
says that not only do arguments fail to prove  
God but also when he shows how the possibility  
of God is not probable either. It all seems to

accept Ayer's views we are faced with an array of implications which affect religion, society and humans on a personal level.

Ayer suggests that we not talk of God or that we not even utter the word 'God'. If we are to do this we are effectively getting rid of God altogether. This would ultimately lead to the abolishment of religion which in itself carries many implications. Much of our society was founded on the beliefs found in religion and in the Bible, such as the ten commandments. Kant's principle argument was that God was the moral author of morality and law. If we are to remove God from the picture then his essentials could eradicate our current moral system and people's personal morals too. Many people are moral because God asks of it, if we then tell people that God does not exist as he is meaningless then this could lead to people to abandon their morality as they see no point in being moral if not for God. Society would be impacted also as we are likely to

The bible to smear in cart. This we would have to do away with if we are to do away with God and religion. Nietzsche would agree with this and would be happy to embrace the abolishment of religion and all our morality that is based on religion. ~~This~~ This for Nietzsche would be a chance for humanity to finally drive for the 'will to power' and for us to be autonomous being developing an 'Übermensch' in which we do not follow a slave morality.

Another implication would be a ~~consequence~~ consequence of rejecting religious experience. Since ~~we~~ we cannot talk about it as if meaningless then we would question the point in a religious experience. If we accept the view that religious experiences in fact provide material for the psychoanalyst then we are suggesting that many millions of people ~~are~~ who have had a religious experience suffer from mental problems. A psychologist who would agree with this is Freud. He believed that religion was a 'childhood psychosis' and he believed that religious experiences are merely a repetition of our desires and our

~~with~~ with fulfillment. He would depict  
his experiences as symptoms of a mental  
illness or the ~~same~~ childish need for  
a false hope.

Aye also argued that as the word 'God'  
was meaningless that this would mean that  
apostolic and atheist claims were  
also meaningless too. An implication  
we could give is, is Aye suggesting  
a new type of atheism? ~~What~~ What  
exactly would Aye depict himself as?  
An implication of rejecting apostolic claims  
also has a huge impact towards the  
debate about religion and God.

Thinkers such as Dawkins who is most  
accurately described as an anti-theist  
would disagree with this. Dawkins  
believed in the importance of campaigning  
against the 'virus that is religion'  
but if we are to accept any 'bad talk'  
as meaningless this would include  
claims against God and religion.  
~~This in Dawkins view could be~~ Although  
if we were to abolish religion altogether  
Dawkins would not disagree with this.

To conclude the implications of accepting Ayer's views are that it could lead to the eventual eradication of religion as a whole and lead us to identify religious experiences as meaningless and not proof ~~of~~ or valid arguments for the existence or possibility of God. Furthermore the whole debate hinges on God would ~~be~~ vanish if we accept that 'God' is a meaningless word.

\*<sup>2</sup> Swinburne also agrees ~~that~~ for religious experiences as meaningful through his principles of credibility and of testimony. Swinburne agreed that we couldn't be too sceptical and that generally we wouldn't be able to trust people, especially when they claim to have a religious ~~of~~ experience. He stated that unless people had a reason or motive to lie, ~~we~~ or where under the influence of drugs then we should believe them and their testimony. Although this was rejected by those who claimed that 'people lie all the time and therefore can use the argument of white lies to

go against ourselves.

\*<sup>3</sup> Flew also similarly found religious language to be meaningless, argued from his falsification principle, which maintained the idea that if something could be falsified then we know it couldn't be true so therefore no meaning and not worth talking about. However if we couldn't falsify something then we still couldn't talk about it. This effectively reduces all religious language to have no meaning whatsoever. This was a view that was similar to Ayer's verifiability principle, in which that we should be able to prove or disprove something for it to have meaning.

\*<sup>4</sup> If we use the verifiability principle, then not only do we deem religious language to be meaningless but also anything else that can't be verified, this would include art or understandings of art and of music, all things that we talk about, quite objectively. By accepting that everything must be verified we accept the fact that we also cannot talk about art or about music as anything we

express cannot be verified, much like religion language. we also reject any claims or any moral statements as those are statements which cannot be verified either. The implications of this are that essentially Age is prescribly absolute freedom in terms of any moral action as we cannot bridge the gap between moral right and moral action. This could lead to ~~the~~ society in to chaos if we are to scrap all our morals and if we are to say that no objective morality exists.



**ResultsPlus**

**Examiner Comments**

This is an example of a script credited with the highest marks. There is much to commend this answer. The candidate brought these issues alive and analysed and debated them with verve and rigour.



## **Paper Summary**

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

- Develop an interest in a rigorous study of religion and relate it to the wider world. To succeed in this paper candidates must show evidence of a thorough study of the selected passage and fulfil the demands of A02.
- Treat the subject as an academic discipline. This paper requires specialist study, drawing on knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Adopt an enquiring and critical approach in order to reflect on all previous units studied.
- Develop own values and views in the light of learning. AO2 in particular enables candidates to engage in this creative process.

## **Grade Boundaries**

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>



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