



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies AS Level
Paper 1: Philosophy of Religion

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Introduction

There were some commendable responses with some excellent ones. Generally, candidates were successful.

Most candidates appear to be getting to grips with the trigger words and the best answers did 'assess' in the Assess questions (q's 2 and 3) weighing up the strength of, or reasons for, a position, and forming a conclusion – employing the AO2 skill as required by these questions.

Many candidates did an excellent job in the straightforward AO1 'Explore' questions and gave full, succinct responses. Some candidates were tempted to include strengths and weaknesses or analysis here, but this was not required; material was credited where relevant of course, but often this element of the response took time and content away from material that would have been more directly relevant. The key to success in these questions is writing material that is closely focused on the issue of the question only, without including any extra tangential material to detract from the time and task available. It is certainly not necessary to write extra material to reach the top levels in these questions.

Although Q4b was tackled well by many candidates there were some rather short responses – candidates should be mindful of the number of marks available for each section of the paper and try to plan their time accordingly. It is also prudent to take care not to repeat material from part a) in part b) and instead target material to the specific demands of each of the questions. The best responses in Q4b) tackled the issue of whether 'alternative explanations for religious experience undermine its strength as an argument for the existence of God' with good use of detailed argument, counter argument, clear and accurate use of scholarship and direct evaluation of the issue and a clear conclusion reached without repeating material from part a).

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

Question 1

This required an exploration of key ideas about the anthropic principle, however some candidates appeared to be unaware of the term 'anthropic principle' despite it being clearly on the Specification. Some candidates presented some general material about the Design Argument and therefore did not address the question as set. It is vital to write an answer to the question on the paper, not simply present knowledge of something related to the overall topic. It is very important that candidates read the question carefully and answer the set question. This requires only AO1 material. Candidates who launched into an assessment of ideas were penalising themselves by not presenting strictly AO1 material.

The better answers explained key ideas about the 'anthropic principle' such as the universe being ordered for human life; there are too many 'coincidences' in the laws of nature that provide for life; a designing God that has fine-tuned the universe for us to be able to exist etc. Good answers identified the relevant scholar F.R. Tennant and linked it to his 'aesthetic principle'.

Question 2

Most candidates tackled this question well and engaged effectively with 'the implications for understanding the nature of God' aspect. Most of the responses reflected the AO1 requirement of the question and gave informative summaries.

Responses that achieved fewer marks usually had less AO2, and typically described the 'Inconsistent Triad' with little attention to the 'assessing the implications' issue in the question. Higher achieving responses were focused on the scale of suffering being the most challenging for the nature of God with many objecting to the scale and gravity claiming it seriously challenges the nature of God as all loving and all powerful.

The best answers had clear structures and good conclusions which tied their views into the 'implications for understanding the nature of God'.

Question 3

This was largely very well-answered reflecting the popularity of this topic. The strongest responses balanced their time carefully between 'the impact of two key challenges'. The better responses were presented well and made continual reference to the question and developed material that explored the question of infinity and the revelation that at the quantum level things appear uncaused.

Weaker responses spent too long on describing 'Cosmological Arguments' and therefore did not have time to assess adequately the impact of any challenges.

Question 4a

This was well answered by most candidates who clearly were informed and able to identify in detail various types of religious experiences.

Some of the, admittedly, few weaker responses offered a brief 'list' of religious experiences without any meaningful detail.

Question 4b

This question saw a wide range of responses. There was very good use of scholarship in the best answers and many answers revealed candidates' detailed knowledge and included analysis of the ideas of scholars such as William James, Swinburne, Persinger and Freud etc.

Good responses focused on both the failures (hallucinations etc) and successes (conversions eg Nicky Cruz etc) of religious experiences, but not simply as a list of both. The strongest answers were not merely descriptive but analytical throughout. Students analysed each of the reasons, gave examples, counter arguments and made judgements. Weaker responses just gave a list of objections.