

Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

**Pearson Edexcel Level 3 GCE
Religious Studies (8RS0 01)**
Advanced Subsidiary Level

PAPER 1: Philosophy of Religion

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This paper elicited a wide range of responses, many of which demonstrated promising philosophical understanding and a genuine attempt to engage with the material. There is clear evidence that candidates are developing the necessary skills to meet the demands of the specification. However, there remain areas where performance could be improved through closer attention to question wording, assessment objectives, and exam technique.

Candidates should pay close attention to the key terms in the question and consider how these relate to the specific assessment objectives being targeted. In some cases, responses showed strong potential but did not fully meet the requirements of the question because the wrong AO had been addressed. For example, some candidates offered extended evaluative commentary on questions that were purely AO1, where no marks are available for such material. In contrast, questions that required AO2 were sometimes answered descriptively, without analysis or judgement, which limited the marks that could be awarded.

Time management is another area for development. The number of marks allocated, and the space provided in the answer booklet can serve as useful indicators of the level of detail expected. Some candidates dedicated too much time to shorter responses and then left longer evaluative questions unfinished. Strategic planning and awareness of mark weighting will help ensure that all parts of the paper are addressed appropriately.

Strong responses engaged directly with the demands of the question. Candidates aiming for higher levels should be alert to key discriminators such as 'best explanation' or 'convincing argument'. These terms signal the need for evaluation and a supported judgement, not just a presentation of material. Where responses became overly general or attempted to include everything a candidate knew on a topic, focus was lost and relevance weakened.

Tips for candidates:

- Always read the question carefully, identify the assessment objective before you begin writing.
- Don't waste time evaluating in AO1 only questions, no marks are awarded for this.
- In AO2 questions don't just describe strengths and weaknesses, engage analytically and make a clear judgement.
- Stay focused on the exact wording of the question to avoid drifting into unrelated content.

1) Explore key ideas about the principles of testimony and credulity (8)

While some candidates were able to provide comprehensive and clear accounts of Swinburne's principles, there was occasional confusion with William James' four marks of a religious experience.

Higher-scoring candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of the principles and made clear distinctions between them. The principle of testimony was generally well-covered, but the principle of credulity was sometimes oversimplified, with some candidates describing it merely as 'something being credible' rather than fully explaining its intended meaning.

Lower-scoring candidates tended to conflate the question with the general concept of testimony, leading to no connection with the principles.

2) Assess the view that the problem of evil and suffering cannot be solved (9)

Some candidates effectively focused on the demands of the question and analysed proposed solutions in detail. The topic provides a wealth of material to draw from, and it was encouraging to see candidates present a wide range of points. The highest-scoring candidates made clear connections between theodicies and how they attempt to solve the problem of evil.

Candidates are encouraged to remember the importance of AO2 marks in this question. Some candidates merely described the theodicies without offering a critical assessment of their potential to address the problem.

3) Assess the claim that the universe requires a cause and that God is the best explanation (9)

There were some excellent responses which demonstrated a broad and well-informed engagement with the question. Many candidates made effective use of Aquinas' Cosmological Arguments, with some also drawing on the Kalam and Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason. A number of responses were further strengthened by the

application of Humean critiques, such as the fallacy of composition or the Epicurean hypothesis, showing an ability to use these criticisms in a methodical manner.

Mid-range responses often showed potential but lacked either full development of reasoning or sufficient engagement with both parts of the question. Some candidates offered thoughtful material but did not address the key discriminator regarding whether God is the *best explanation*. A sharper focus on this precise question would have enabled these answers to access higher levels of the mark scheme.

Lower band responses often relied on partial or misdirected understanding, for example, confusing cosmological arguments with teleological ones. These responses tended to offer descriptive content rather than analysis or evaluation.

4 (a) Explore key features of the Design Argument (8)

This question was generally well approached, with many candidates demonstrating clear understanding of the relevant material. The structure of the question allowed for coverage of several key features, and the highest-scoring responses selected a few of these and explored them in depth, rather than offering a broader but more superficial overview.

Some candidates presented a range of relevant points but did not fully develop or explain them. This limited their access to higher marks, as the assessment rewards depth of knowledge.

Many responses showed a strong grasp of the nature of Design arguments, particularly a posteriori and inductive characteristics. This conceptual understanding was often well expressed and rooted in appropriate examples. However, some candidates moved into evaluative commentary, which is not credited in this AO1 focused question. Awareness of the assessment objective is key: knowing whether the question requires explanation or evaluation can make a significant difference to the final mark.

4 (b) Analyse the view that the Design Argument for the existence of God is unconvincing.

Some candidates demonstrated good time management and engaged fully with all aspects of the question, offering a clear evaluation of whether the Design Argument is convincing. Where time was poorly managed, responses sometimes ended abruptly, with conclusions left incomplete – this limited the opportunity to show higher-level reasoning and synthesis.

There was a tendency to conflate or mislabel logical fallacies. In particular Hume's *is/ought* distinction was misunderstood or incorrectly applied. It was paraphrased as, "if something is true of one thing, it doesn't mean it ought to be true of another", a description that more accurately reflects the *fallacy of composition*. While some candidates did manage to use Hume's critiques effectively, others need to be more precise in both identification and application.

To access the higher levels, candidates should move beyond listing strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation must be clearly related to the specific question and should aim to reach a judgment. Responses that simply catalogue points without making reasoned judgements cannot fully meet the demands of AO2.