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Introduction

These exemplar answers have been chosen from the summer 2018 examination series.

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Please always refer to the specification http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242913-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-religious-studies-h573.pdf for full details of the assessment for this qualification. These exemplar answers should also be read in conjunction with the sample assessment materials and the June 2018 Examiners' report or Report to Centres available from Interchange https://interchange.ocr.org.uk/Home.mvc/BSex.

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It is important to note that approaches to question setting and marking will remain consistent. At the same time OCR reviews all its qualifications annually and may make small adjustments to improve the performance of its assessments. We will let you know of any substantive changes.
Question 2

2* To what extent does Hume successfully argue that observation does not prove the existence of God?

Exemplar 1

AO1 Level 6, 16 marks   AO2 Level 6, 24 marks
Total 40 marks

2 Arguments from observation for the existence of God include the teleological and cosmological. Respectively, these follow the premise that purpose and design and cause, evident throughout the world and universe prove the existence of God.

The teleological argument stems from the fifth of Aquinas’ five ways in his Summa Theologiae. This argues that everything in the universe has a purpose and achieves its end through its design. All God is what. This comes from God. Aquinas uses the analogy of the archer to evoke this, just as an archer guides an arrow towards target, God guides everything to their end.

William Paley expanded upon this. His analogy of the watch postulates that within nature there is such evident design that it must be if we were to stumble upon a watch we would assume a watch maker, likewise the complexity, regularity and order within the universe lead us to assume a creator. Paley says this is God.

David Hume’s first criticism of observation comes from this. He argues for the relativity of the analogy. In choosing a machine as his object for comparison, Paley has already detoured
Exemplar Candidate Work

A Level Religious Studies
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He out came he wants. Machines have makers
and so when this idea is projected onto the world,
inevitably Paley would conclude the world too
has a maker, there considers a cabbage. This too
shows complex design in its intricate, yet one
would not presume that there exists a cabbage
maker. To there, the whole world, in fact resembles
more of a vegetable than a machine, due to
the world's organic nature. It is clear
to see here where there is coming from.

Analogical from people like Paley are very do
seen a very assumptive, and so one can
argue there is successful arguing against
observation as proving the existence of God.

A common theme of the cosmological and teleology
argument is the conclusion of God. Further,
both seen very presumptive in their conclusion of
God. In the teleological argument there
postulates the argument from effect to
cause. We have some knowledge of this
world, but are incorrect in concluding that
from the idea of this finite, imperfect world
that an infinite, perfect God is responsible.

There uses the analogy of some scales. With
one pan lifted so we cannot see what is in it,
we cannot, make assumption based on the pan we
see. Likewise, we cannot assume the
Christian God is responsible. There suggest that
The world could be the discarded effort of
an infant deity or the work of a committee of
God; we simply cannot know.

Stet texting. The cosmological argument, assumed
that as everything in the universe has
a cause, the universe itself must too.
There says that this is a fallacy of
Paragraph 1
The opening highlights the context for the question briefly. This shows clear understanding.

Paragraph 2
A neat summary of Aquinas’ teleological argument presented here. The question is on the extent to which Hume argues that observation disproves the existence of God so mountains of Aquinas is not required. It is accurate.

Paragraph 3
Again, another neat summary to let out the AO1 rope to develop Hume’s criticisms and further argument. Brief but accurate again.

Paragraph 4
The paragraph doesn’t mess about. It is straight into the aptness of analogy and the inappropriate use of mechanical analogies when discussing organic things. The ubiquitous cabbage makes an appearance here (not actually what Hume says as he was more interested in the circulation of sap in trees) which shows excellent understanding. There is a neat analysis of Paley’s work at the end of the paragraph. Notice how in control the response is of the material at this point.

Paragraph 5
The argument continues here with the correct identification of the logical leap to a Judeo-Christian God without warrant. Even though their wording is a little clumsy here (‘the argument from effect to cause’) it is clear they understand Hume’s point that we cannot infer more about a cause than is known by the effect. There is even the scales example. At this point we are left in little doubt...
Examiner commentary continued

of the candidate's understanding of Hume. It is rich and varied and "fully comprehends the demands of, and focuses on, the question throughout" (Level 6 AO1 descriptor).

The paragraph continues with the breadth style approach as they move from point to point within Hume's work in the same area (e.g. rude essay of an infant deity, committee of God). This could have been further expressed but the candidate wants to move on. The work of Hume is so rich that they can do this with little worry. They could have stayed on the teleological argument material in a depth-based approach and still got full marks as there is an "excellent selection of relevant material which is skilfully used" (Level 6 AO1 descriptor).

Paragraph 6

At this point, the candidate jumps straight to the heart of the issue of the cosmological argument with the fallacy of composition. It is well expressed and subsequently supported with Russell. The AO2 in this paragraph is "confident and insightful critical analysis and detailed evaluation of the issue" (Level 6 AO2 descriptor) it does not move away from the argument but keeps circling the central point skilfully.

Hume's point that if we are ascribing some mysterious eternal substance to God we could equally do this for the material universe is covered well.

This is a neat essay that is a pleasure to read. The candidate clearly knows Hume and understands the significance of the arguments presented. This was the final essay the candidate wrote in the two hour examination. It is brief, but its brevity does not detract from its skilful and subtle argument or its excellent focus on Hume.

Exemplar 2

| Exemplar 2 AO1 Level 4, 10 marks | AO2 Level 4, 14 marks | Total 24 marks |

2. To what extent does Hume successfully argue that observation does not prove the existence of God.

A posteriori arguments (arguments from observation) for God's existence have been put forward in two main ways: the teleological and ontological argument. First observe the world and then conclude that God must exist. The empirical philosopher David Hume critiqued these arguments and concluded that they do not prove God's existence. I believe that Hume's critiques are successful in proving that God must not logically exist, but not successful in challenging belief based on faith using a posteriori arguments.

St. Thomas Aquinas put forward five ways (or arguments) to know God in his book, 'Summa Theologica' (the sum of all theology). In his fifth way, Aquinas argues that since everything is moving from actuality (what it actually is) to potentiality (what it could become) in such a regular way, and since most of these things are inanimate and not intelligent, there must be something guiding everything to its purpose.
or helas. This being is God. For Aquinas, God acts like an archer guiding an arrow to its target guiding things to the 17th-century philosopher, David Hume. 

William Paley argued that the

The 17th century philosopher, David Hume, argued that teleological arguments, such as Aquinas’ fifth way, made several assumptions, which undermines their validity. Hume argued that teleological arguments (and cosmological arguments) commit the fallacy of composition, which states that just because the parts have a quality, it does not mean the whole has the same quality. In rejection to Aquinas’ teleological arguments, just because the things in the universe appear to have a purpose, it does not mean the universe, or everything in the universe has a purpose. This assumption undermines Aquinas’ need for God.

Hume also criticizes the second assumption that the being in Aquinas’ argument (or the first cause in the cosmological argument) has to be God. In Aquinas’ time, God’s existence was a fact in the western world, and so it was assumed that the Prime Mover (being in the fifth way) was God. Hume argues that it is equally valid to assume that there was a panet of gods, guiding their objects to their purposes, and keeping their rules. This assumption is unfounded. However, Hume seems to miss the point here. Since it was assumed that God exists, those arguments from observation, especially from Aquinas, is meant to deepen our understanding of God, not necessarily meant to deductively prove God’s existence.

Hume also fails to grasp the importance of faith in these a posteriori arguments. The existential philosopher and theologian, Soren Kierkegaard calls it a leap of faith to go from the premises, i.e., the observations, e.g., that everything is moving towards its purpose, to the conclusion that
God exist, as this metaphysical gap is rightly pointed out by Hume, is a gap in our logic as well. The 20th century philosopher Paul Mitchell argues that arguments from observations of the world (e.g., that everything acts for a purpose and a cause) provide a acausatric case for God’s existence. Instead of a deductive argument, where the conclusion must be true, they should be considered an inductive arguments, where the conclusion is most likely to be true. Therefore, Hume’s criticisms are not successful as they fail to take into account faith.

In conclusion, Hume’s criticisms of a posteriori arguments are fully successful in proving that it is logically possible to say that there must be a God due to observation. However, for a Christian, these arguments are meant to deepen faith and understanding of God and are reliant on faith. Hume is therefore only successful to the extent of reason, but not in criticizing faith in the arguments.

Examiner commentary

Paragraph 1

The response outlines the battleground for the essay with an attempt to provide a thesis from the outset. It could have been developed with reasons why rather than been left as assertion at this stage.

Paragraph 2

Paragraph 2 shows some confusion of ideas with Aquinas’ first way and fifth way but settles on the notion that inanimate objects cannot act without an intelligence guiding it to its purpose. The analogy of the archer is accurate. In this case, we would use positive awarding to ignore the inaccuracies and credit the material which is correct.

Paragraph 3

There is a useful discussion of the fallacy of composition. It is a little clunky as the challenge is probably a best fit for the cosmological argument, but it is not a big stretch as Aquinas (but more probably Paley) would view the world itself as having a purpose. We are digging for the candidate here. They are not entirely in control of the material due to some conflation in their mind. The assessment is “mostly accurate and appropriate use of technical terms and subject vocabulary” (Level 4 AO2 descriptor) because of this.

Paragraph 4

There is an awful lot of confusion present in this paragraph. Ideas are conflated and are poorly expressed at times. Again, you are working hard for the candidate to follow their line of argument. The more they write the more it appears they do not fully understand. There is confusion with the Prime Mover and the fifth way along with some confusion over the ‘panel of gods’. Hume’s point is more to do with the aptness of analogy (we only have experience of creation in this universe and this is done by a team of builders normally) rather than the logical jump to a divine creator.

The final assertions in this paragraph seem to cement misunderstanding. The argument is asserted and not fully justified (hinting at Level 3 for AO2). Hume is entitled to challenge Aquinas’ original assumption that God exists. Hume does anything other than miss the point.
Examiner commentary continued

Paragraph 5

The real strengths of this essay are present in this paragraph. It is an unusual approach to challenging Hume, but it is coherent. The essence appears to be that Hume has cut out the importance of faith and that Hume's starting point is unfair. It goes on to develop this idea with the work of Mitchell suggesting that our faith is based on an accumulation of experience of the evidence instead of deduction. Again, the terms used here are not as sharp as they could be (“mostly accurate and appropriate use of technical terms and subject vocabulary” (Level 4 AO1 descriptor). We are still working to dig out the material for the candidate, but it is a useful approach and should be credited accordingly.

Paragraph 6

The conclusion is weak due to the confusion of Hume's ideas at points. Hume has not been well developed in the essay and so the candidate’s claims that Hume's work is logically flawed is unsubstantiated.

The candidate has a go at the question with some success in places, however they do not understand Hume or his arguments well enough to push into Level 5. The levels of response guide us to Level 4 in both AOs. The assertion in AO2 leads to the mid/bottom part of the band.
Question 4

4* ‘Corporate religious experiences are less reliable than individual religious experiences.’ Discuss.

[40]

Exemplar 1

AO1 Level 6, 15 marks   AO2 Level 6, 24 marks
Total 39 marks

Corporate religious experiences, defined as an experience felt by two or more people, can be said to be less reliable than individual experiences as they are more prone to mass hysteria. William James argued in his criteria for a legitimate religious experience that ‘passivity and transience’, a life-long change, were necessary in a corporate religious experience. However, it seems that neither individual or corporate can accurately be said to have had a genuine experience of God, and so individual cannot be said to be more reliable than corporate. Corporate experiences can be argued to be less reliable than individual ones as they are more prone to mass hysteria. This idea can clearly be seen in famous corporate experiences, such as the Toronto Blessings, where people speak in garbled words, make animal noises and roll on the floor. Richard Swinburne argued in his principles of credulity and testimony that “what one perceives to be is probably so,” meaning that people should be believed if they claim they have had an experience. However, in corporate situations, it is undeniable that people will be influenced by ideas of conformity. This has been proven in experiments...
Such as people standing in the wrong direction in line, or standing up at the command of a bell, just because other people are. It can therefore be said that in corporate experience, our influence and desire to conform will weaken the idea that people have a genuine experience. Sartorius's ideas seem better applied to individual experiences, where people are more likely to be free from outside influence. Therefore, it can be argued that corporate religious experiences are less reliable than individual ones, as they are more likely to be prone to outside pressure.

However, the idea that individual experiences are really free from influence seems dubious. Again, Sartorius argues that Bertrand Russell pointed out that "if you fast, you see smaller; and if you drink, you see God." This raises the legitimate problem that people could be under the influence of drugs when they claim to 'see God.' This would place doubt on the accuracy of testimony of individual experiences. However, this can be successfully argued against, when considering again that the only experiences deemed worthy are, as Williams James, argued "passive". Sartorius pointed out we would only trust an individual experience if it were we could say for certain that that person would have no other reason to experience it. Drink and drugs would clearly discount this, so it appears individual experience - authentic one - seem still preferable to corporate. However, still, this does not regard psychological factor. R. M. Hare pointed out that people...
all have 'blips', unfalsifiable truths, which influence how they see the world. This is clearly shown in the example of Holland's train, where a mother says it is an act of God that her boy was not run over by the train when in fact the driver just had a heart attack. This example clearly highlights how if people want to believe something, they will. Therefore, it cannot be said with full certainty that corporate religious experience is more not influenced by psychological factors, in the same way corporate is. It is therefore not any more reliable.

Finally, corporate religious experiences can be argued to be less reliable than individual ones because the necessary change to a person is less easy to notice. William James argued that an experience needed to have "a curious sense of authority for after time". This seems valid as if people are willing to take on life-changing beliefs, then that does imply that they are have had a genuine experience. This is much easier to track in individual experiences, such as Teresa of Avila with her "brilliant change... evident to all men" than corporate ones. For example, the Virgin Mary at K tse a Yimangorge could be doubted more, as it is harder to see a noticeable change in the children, therefore making the motivations behind claiming such an experience questionable. The fact it is rejected by the Roman Catholic Church further supports this. However, once again, the idea the "change" in an individual experience makes it more
Examiner commentary

Paragraph 1

The candidate sets out their stall showing their understanding of religious experiences and corporate experiences. They outline their argument from the start, which is a useful way of writing. They make good use of a litmus test through James (even though he was referring to mystical experiences rather than general experiences). There is clear evidence of understanding and critical engagement with the material presented in the opening.

Paragraph 2

The idea that corporate experiences are prone to mass hysteria is continued through the example of the Toronto blessing with some development of the experience present. Swinburne’s definition is not fully expressed here but it is more than simply “if people say they experienced it they experienced it”. The claim that mass hysteria might be linked to conformity is explored in a useful way showing further critical engagement and understanding of corporate religious experiences. This is evidenced with further good indication showing that people are driven to conform. It is well developed and explored critically. A reference is made back to Swinburne with the point that his definitions are best applied in individual experiences. Notice that the candidate has still not fully developed Swinburne’s ideas, but it does not detract from the quality of the overall argument.

Paragraph 3

The argument continues to support the original thesis found in paragraph 1 by attacking individual experiences with Russell’s point on fasting and drinking. The challenge tries to strike at the heart of personal testimony (a point which could have been explored in more detail with Swinburne’s principles of credulity and testimony). There is a useful discussion on the nature of authentic experiences and a counter-reason provided for the drink and drugs challenge (it is interesting that the candidate did not opt to use James’ own approach to this criticism but again it does not detract from the answer).
Examiner commentary continued

The candidate shifts to the psychological challenges to individual religious experiences; psychic realities provide unfalsifiable truths for individuals. This line of argument continues with Holland's train track example. The material isn't used to define the contingency definition of miracles but is used well to express the power of individual beliefs and the need to ascribe some meaning to events. The assessment stands up well, we cannot state with full certainty that individual experiences are not plagued with psychological factors.

Paragraph 4

The next attack begins with developing a thread discussed earlier in the essay, which identifies change in the individual as the defining characteristic of authenticity. The claim is that corporate experiences are more difficult to track the change whereas the example of Teresa of Avila is used to illustrate this for individual experiences. It is not the strongest point of the essay but it is more than fit for purpose. The argument has been well developed now over the four paragraphs.

A further example of corporate religious experience is provided in Medjugorje, which is well developed by the candidate. This is still pursued down the same line of argument. The candidate finally challenges this approach stating that seeing a change in someone does not guarantee the veracity of the experience. This is echoed in the evidence provided by Russell at the bottom of page 10. The candidate is in control of the material here and shows excellent knowledge and understanding of the issues raised.

Paragraph 5

The conclusion is what this candidate has been arguing from the outset and is not surprising. This has been reached by a methodical approach that has consistently voiced this thesis. The nod to the problem of other people's minds shows us that the candidate could have written more on the topic had they had the time.

Overall, this is an excellent piece. It arrived at the SSU with full marks but was taken down in the AO1 band by one mark mainly due to the lack of development of Swinburne and some inaccuracies in the James material. There are several marks available in each band and they should be used accordingly.

Exemplar 2

Religious experiences are difficult to measure/test. The nature of the experience is accountable for how reliable it is in revealing the existence of God. Corporate experiences would seem more reliable due to the fact that more people can testify about the nature of the experience. However, individual religious experiences can be transient (may last a short amount of time but have long lasting effects). As James argues, there is a way of testing the effects of an experience - observing the effect it has had on the individual's morality. Each religious experience

AO1 Level 4, 10 marks  AO2 Level 4, 16 marks
Total 26 marks
is unique to the person experiencing it, and should be perceived as "reliable unless given any reason to believe otherwise."

William James described religious-experiencers as being 'transcendent', 'ineffable', 'neore', and 'passive' - all qualities which can be observed in the person following the experience. The lack of ability to describe an experience could potentially limit the reliability of individual experiences as opposed to corporate experiences due to the fact that more people can try to convey the effect it has had. However, one transcendent nature of conversion experiences, for example, that of St Paul on the road to Damascus had a notable effect on his character and moral judgement following the experience. Furthermore, Nick Clegg's experience also clearly altered his personality and moral compass, suggesting the seriousness of conversion experiences and highlighting why we should believe the individual testimony with regards to what happened, unless given sufficient reason to believe otherwise.

Swinburne's principle of credulity and testimony illustrate that we should always treat religious-experiencers the same as any other experience, unless, for example, the individual has been known to take hallucinogenic drugs or have a mental disorder such as schizophrenia, which might have induced an...
Experience. Furthermore, the case of the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’ illustrates the notion as to perhaps why we should treat ‘experiences’ with caution—he claimed to have been told by God to murder people; yet it is clear that his condition (mentally) meant that his experience could not be treated as ‘religious’. James would argue that the transcendence was incredible as his morality was unchanged, facts to have been a religious experience.

Corporate experiences such as the cases of鲁能joo and the Toronto Blessings could be potentially seen as more plausible aside the only thing one judges be testimony—as multiple people could testify the same thing happening. However, is it unreliable? Perhaps the Toronto occurrence was merely a result of mass-hysteria or over-active imaginations? Perhaps it was a case of a few people experiencing it, testifying to others and then others continuing to the same testimony, so as not to feel isolated from the community? Each experience is unique and should be treated with respect, as Furnbume states, unless given reason to believe otherwise—both individual and corporate experiences are unique in different ways, so are both reliable if they have had a long-lasting effect on people’s lives.
Frederich Schuermacher argues that religious experience is at the heart of religion and should be treated seriously – union would suggest any experience is reliable depending on the context. St Bernadette was a peasant girl who claimed to have religious visions – experiences. Perhaps she did truly believe them and they were truly ‘true’ – inspiring as Rudolph Otto described them. However, from a skeptical point of analysis it could be argued that Freuereich’s exploration of experiences has some credulity her.

“What man needs, man makes God.”

This implies that God is merely a projection of our inner desires, and a result of wishful thinking in a vast, uncertain world that an aimless, benevolent God cares for us. Freud was largely influenced by Freuereich, arguing experiences such as these are a mere reflection of what we want to happen. Bernadette was poor and impoverished and more significantly socialised into a devout Catholic background. In this sense, is it any wonder she claimed to have seen visions of the virgin Mary, when her socialisation process had from birth been enquired in religious rituals and practices such as going to church. Despite being educated, she was still exposed to images, icons and stained-glass windows which would have essentially had an impact on her perspective of the world.
Examiner commentary

Paragraph 1

The topic is outlined with a central juxtaposition of ideas giving support for both. It is not clear what the argument is at this stage but the quality of understanding of AO1 is already beginning to come through.

Paragraph 2

The candidate defines religious experience using James’ classifications of mystical experience (not entirely accurate but a useful tool in general). It is a necessary condition that mystical experience is a religious experience but it is not a necessary condition that all religious experiences are mystical in nature. That said, the definitions are tight and evidenced with a variety of examples to support.

The candidate can identify the importance of testimony for the discussion of religious experiences. Swinburne’s definition is correct and fully expressed to include the reasons why testimony may be rejected. The Yorkshire ripper example shows the candidate is engaging critically with the material.

There is a slight concern at this stage that the response is losing sight of the question and trundling off into general topic.

Paragraph 3

This brings the essay back to the question at hand with the examples of Medjugorje and the Toronto Blessings, but they are not fully expressed. The emphasis in this case is on whether multiple testimonies are better than one in the evidence stakes. This is a valid approach and is clear and successful “good selection of relevant material, used appropriately on the whole” (AO1 Level 4 descriptor) “generally successful analysis and evaluation” (AO2 Level 4 descriptor).
Paragraph 4

The knowledge of the material continues in this paragraph with the inclusion of Schleiermacher. It shows the importance of experiences and their context for how seriously we treat them. The use of Otto to describe St Bernadette’s experience shows a lack of understanding on one level. This had begun to cement the belief that the candidate doesn’t truly understand the distinctions between the varieties of religious experiences. Otto’s work is on numinous experience, which shares little in common with mystical experiences. However, the material is still competent rather than excellent.

The critical screws continue to turn as the question of psychological projection with God as ‘man writ large’ is used well. This is further applied to the example of Bernadette already given and some strong analysis follows, indicating a hint at auto-suggestion or hyper-suggestibility found in the socialisation processes.

Paragraph 5

The conclusion doesn’t add anything new to the argument and simply restates the points made. There is a little assertion present at the end too.

This is an example of a good essay. It has plenty of material to support a Level 4 mark at both AOs. The material is largely well developed but suffers from straying from the question at times and so doesn’t fulfil the top bullet point of AO1 in Level 5. It does meet the other bullet points convincingly for Level 4 in AO1. The argument is asserted with some justification in places but mostly fits all the Level 4 AO2 descriptors.
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