

My Revision Notes: OCR A2 Religious Studies: Philosophy of Religion

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These are guidelines of what might be included but are by no means exhaustive or even the only way to answer the question.

Chapter 1

1 'The verification principle offers no real challenge to religious belief.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- You could explain the work of the logical positivists.
- You could then explore the strengths and weaknesses of the verification principle and the work of A.J. Ayer, as well as the Vienna Circle's approach.
- You could examine the issue of strong and weak verification. You could explain how all religious statements could be said to be meaningless as they cannot be verified.
- You could oppose this with Hick's Celestial City – God maybe verified at some time.

AO2

- Evaluate logical positivism's views on reality (of our world, and how it can be described).
- You could argue that the verification principle only questions meaningfulness and not truth.
- Assess the ideas of Hick, and discuss whether he is able to refute the verification principle.
- You could use the language games of Wittgenstein as part of your evaluation.

2 Critically assess the views of Paul Tillich on religious language. [35]

AO1

- Explain problems with religious language.
- Explain Tillich's views on the use of symbols when trying to describe God and how religious symbols communicate beliefs.
- Explain that Tillich recognised that the meaning of symbols can change over time and even be lost entirely and that they were culturally dependent.
- You could explain that in different generations the same symbols could be interpreted in different ways.

AO2

- You could argue that Tillich was successful in using symbols so that religious language is able to express religious beliefs.
- You could also discuss the Vienna Circle to assess Tillich's work.

3 Evaluate the claim that analogy can be successfully used to express the human understanding of God. [35]

AO1

- You need explore some kind of definition of analogy.
- If you use the work of Thomas Aquinas you could explain the difference between analogy of proportion and analogy of attribution.
- You could also examine Aquinas' discussion of the use of equivocal and unequivocal language in this context, and explain why he rejected them.
- You will need to explore thoroughly the issues of proportion and attribution, explaining both of their meanings, and Aquinas' arguments.

AO2

- Assess the extent to which Aquinas was successful in producing a system that allowed a method of expressing the human understanding of God or whether it can be criticised in the same way as other approaches to religious language.
- Assess whether we can even use human language to talk about God.
- You could assess this view by comparing it with other kinds of religious language.

4 Critically compare the use of myth with the use of analogy to express the human understanding of God. [35]

AO1

- Do not just write everything you know about religious language in general – you need to stick to the specific question: myth and analogy.
- Explain what is meant by myth and analogy and then assess their various strengths and weaknesses.
- You could examine myth as a way to a much deeper meaning, for example using the Genesis myth to show truths about God as creator rather than as a literal account.
- Explain the way Aquinas and others use analogy as an important way of expressing ideas about God.
- Explain analogy of attribution and proportion.

AO2

- In your assessment, you should be aiming simply to compare myth and analogy in a critical manner.
- Assess the issues involved in any attempts by human beings to understand and talk about God.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both myth and analogy.

5 Critically assess the claim that religious language is meaningless. [35]

AO1

- Explain the work of the logical positivists, the forming of the Vienna Circle, and the verification principle.
- You could then explain Wittgenstein and his language games, especially the 'rules' of the games.
- You could also discuss the Vienna Circle and how they approached religious language.
- You could address the issue of strong and weak verification.

AO2

- Evaluate logical positivism's views on reality (of our world, and how it can be described), and assess how far Wittgenstein contributed to language and its meaningfulness.

6 'The falsification principle offers no real challenge to religious belief.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- You could begin by explaining the falsification principle and go on to apply Flew's university debate.

AO2

- In evaluating Flew's argument you could assess the arguments put forward by Hare and Mitchell during the symposium.
- You could also discuss 'bliks', the partisan story (Mitchell), and Hick.

Chapter 2

1 'Visions are not caused by God but can be explained by science.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- You could begin by explaining what visions are, using examples.
- You need to consider if these visions are normal and found in everyday life, or you could consider the scientific approach, using potential explanations such as medical conditions like epilepsy.

AO2

- You could use Swinburne's principle of credulity to evaluate the question.
- Or you could assess the personal nature of visions and critically assess whether they can be of value to other people.
- You could look for scientific evidence based around chemical reactions in the brain.
- You could discuss of the effects of the mind on the body.

2 Critically assess, with reference to William James, the argument from religious experience. [35]

AO1

- Explain what religious experience means.
- You could consider private and public experiences.
- You need to explain James' specific terms regarding religious experience.

AO2

- You could evaluate the importance of religious experience in relation to religious believers.
- Or you could evaluate the scientific theories behind religious experiences.

3 'Corporate religious experiences prove the existence of God.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- Define what is meant by a 'corporate religious experience', and give a few examples
- You could consider Swinburne or James in exploring corporate religious experiences.

AO2

- Assess the strength of the arguments put forward by the different scholars.
- You could use Freud, Dawkins or Marx to counter corporate religious experiences.

Chapter 3

1 To what extent can God reveal himself through sacred writings? [35]

AO1

- Explain how scripture can be seen as 'the word of God'.
- Explain propositional and non-propositional views on faith and scripture.
- It is possible to use writings from any religious tradition.

AO2

- If you have used liberalist and fundamentalist approaches for the question, you could assess the evidence of how God has revealed himself.
- If you have used propositional and non-propositional approaches, you could consider how far the evidence points to faith rather than God.

2 'God is most clearly revealed to humanity through scripture.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- Examine the extent to which scripture can be seen as 'the word of God', and so reveals God directly.
- Explain propositional and non-propositional views on faith and scripture.
- Alternatively you could use the liberal and fundamentalist approaches to scripture.

AO2

- If you have used liberalist and fundamentalist approaches for the question, you could assess the evidence of how God has revealed himself.
- If you have used propositional and non-propositional approaches, you could consider how far the evidence points to faith rather than God.
- You could also evaluate whether other ways such as visions/voices etc. might reveal God more clearly.

Chapter 4

1 'A belief in miracles leads to the concept of a God who favours some but not all of his creation.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- Examine different definitions of miracles and the problems involved in them.
- You could consider Wiles' questions around miracles, as well as how God is seen to answer prayers through miracles.
- You could argue that God may be helping through nature.

AO2

- You could agree with the view put forward by Wiles and assess whether God is capable and willing to help.
- You could then evaluate the extent to which this it is a reasonable approach to try to understand the mind of God.

2 Evaluate Hume's claim that miracles are the least likely of events. [35]

AO1

- You need to examine Hume's views on miracles, especially regarding the principle of induction.
- You could explain Hume's view on evidence and the consequences of belief in miracles.
- Or you could compare Hume with Wiles.

AO2

- For the evaluation you could use Ward or Swinburne to argue against these views on miracles.
- Assess how far Hume (and others) were successful through analysing their methods.

3 Critically assess the view that the concept of a miracle is inconsistent with belief in a benevolent God. [35]

AO1

- Explain what is meant by the concept of miracle, using the different definitions.
- Explain this concept through Wiles or Dawkins.
- You could also explain Ward and his ideas about God intervening.

AO2

- You must consider the benevolence of God against how he is only seen to help a few people in the world at any time.

Chapter 5**1 Critically assess the philosophical problems raised by the belief that God is omnipotent.****[35]**

AO1

- Explain what it might mean to say that God is omnipotent.
- You need to address the issue of whether or not there is evidence for there being an omnipotent God.
- Discuss the evidence on both sides.
- You could also examine the responses of the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus.

AO2

- You need to evaluate the evidence for or against the existence of an omnipotent God, assessing Polkinghorne, Dawkins or Hawking.
- Or you could critically assess the theodicies.

2 Critically assess the philosophical problems raised by the belief that God is omniscient.**[35]**

AO1

- You could begin by explaining the problems with an omniscient God, and Swinburne's views.
- Or you could consider the problem of evil in relation to this question.

AO2

- You could assess how far language can go in explaining omniscience.
- If you considered the problem of evil in AO1, you could evaluate the inconsistent triad.

3 'Boethius was successful in his argument that God rewards and punishes justly.'**Discuss. [35]**

AO1

- Briefly discuss the context of believing in a God who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.
- Or you could begin by explain Boethius' view and especially his ideas of necessity. You need to be clear on his ideas.

AO2

- Evaluate Boethius' argument: how he talks about a God who can have no involvement with the world, or how he asks questions about how Christians understand God.

4 Critically assess the problems for believers who say that God is omniscient. [35]

AO1

- You could begin by explaining the problems with an omniscient God, and Swinburne's views.
- Or you could consider the problem of evil in relation to this question.

AO2

- You could assess how far language can go in explaining omniscience.
- If you considered the problem of evil in AO1, you could evaluate the inconsistent triad.

5 Assess the claim that the universe provides no evidence for the existence of an omnipotent God. [35]

AO1

- Explain what the implications of God being omnipotent are, and if there is evidence for his omnipotence.
- You could examine the responses of the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus.
- Or, you could look at the universe and consider its order and complexity.

AO2

- You need to evaluate the evidence for or against the existence of an omnipotent God.
- You could critically assess Polkinghorne Dawkins or Hawking.
- Or you could critically assess the theodicies.

Chapter 6

1 'Resurrection is more likely to be true than reincarnation.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- Explain exactly what is meant by both resurrection and reincarnation (for the latter, you must explain how it features in Hinduism).
- Examine the problems associated with mind and body identity, including the teachings of Christianity or Aquinas.
- Or you could consider Hick's Replica Theory.

AO2

- Assess what might count as evidence for the success of one belief over another.
- Evaluate how these beliefs stand against other religious groups or more scientific perspectives, including (alleged) evidence of experiences like past lives.

2 Evaluate the claim that there can be no disembodied existence after death. [35]

AO1

- You need to explain 'disembodied existence' and 'life after death'.
- You need to consider scholars who have argued the existence of life after death, especially dualists.

AO2

- You could evaluate based on identity and what 'I' means after life without a body.
- You could alternatively use Humes or Dawkins but you must evaluate how far conclusions can be drawn from empirical evidence.

3 Evaluate the claim that the soul is distinct from the body. [35]

AO1

- You could explain Plato's and Aristotle's views on this, or you could explain the Cartesian viewpoint.
- You could look at Ryle (regarding Descartes and his category error) or Hick's Replica Theory thought experiment, or Aquinas.
- You could also explain the views of Atkins and Dawkins.

AO2

- You need to evaluate the arguments discussed in AO1.
- Or you could assess the view that the soul does not exist.

4 To what extent is belief in an afterlife necessary in resolving the problems raised by the existence of evil? [35]

AO1

- You could refer to the theodicies of Augustine, Irenaeus and Hick, and explore the issues of living in a world where evil is present.
- Or you could explore the ideas about an afterlife and suffering/reward.
- You could also explore Dawkins' ideas.

AO2

- Assess how far the theodicies are successful.
- Evaluate the kind of God that would have to exist regarding suffering and humans making mistakes in their lifetimes.
- You must conclude how far belief in an afterlife is necessary to resolve the issues raised by the existence of evil.

5 'Theories of resurrection of the body are logically coherent.' Discuss. [35]

AO1

- You could explain theories regarding resurrection, for example, Hick's Replica Theory thought experiment, or explore materialist criticisms of dualist views.
- You could consider Jesus' resurrection in the Bible, and the problem of identity in an afterlife.
- You could also use Russell in your discussion.

AO2

- You need to assess how far arguments for bodily resurrection are successful to judge whether they are logically coherent.
- You could also assess the question of identity and the questions surrounding 'I' and physical bodies.