Theme 1: Arguments for the existence of God – inductive, AS

A. Inductive arguments – cosmological

- Inductive proofs

- the concept of 'a posteriori'.

- Cosmological argument: St Thomas Aquinas' first Three Ways
  1. motion or change

  2. cause and effect

  3. contingency and necessity

- The Kalam cosmological argument with reference to William Lane Craig (rejection of actual infinities and concept of personal creator)

B. Inductive arguments – teleological

- St Thomas Aquinas' Fifth Way - concept of governance

- archer and arrow analogy

- William Paley's watchmaker - analogy of complex design

- F. R. Tennant's anthropic and aesthetic arguments - universe specifically designed for intelligent human life

C. Challenges to inductive arguments

- David Hume - empirical objections and critique of causes (cosmological)

- David Hume - problems with analogies

- rejection of traditional theistic claims: designer not necessarily God of classical theism;

- apprentice god;

- plurality of gods;

- absent god (teleological).

- Alternative scientific explanations including Big Bang theory and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:

➢ Whether inductive arguments for God's existence are persuasive.

➢ The extent to which the Kalam cosmological argument is convincing.

➢ The effectiveness of the cosmological/teleological argument for God's existence.

➢ Whether cosmological/teleological arguments for God's existence are persuasive in the 21st Century.

➢ The effectiveness of the challenges to the cosmological/teleological argument for God's existence.

➢ Whether scientific explanations are more persuasive than philosophical explanations for the universe's existence.

D. Deductive arguments - origins of the ontological argument

- Deductive proofs;

- the concept of 'a priori'.

- St Anselm - God as the greatest possible being (Proslogion 2).

- St Anselm - God has necessary existence (Proslogion 3).

E. Deductive arguments - developments of the ontological argument

- Rene Descartes - concept of God as supremely perfect being;

- analogies of triangles and mountains/valleys.

- Norman Malcolm - God as unlimited being:

- God's existence as necessary rather than just possible.

F. Challenges to the ontological argument

- Gaunilo, his reply to St Anselm;

- his rejection of the idea of a greatest possible being that can be thought of as having separate existence outside of our minds;

- his analogy of the idea of the greatest island as a ridicule of St Anselm's logic.

- Immanuel Kant's objection - existence is not a determining predicate: it cannot be a property that an object can either possess or lack.

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as

➢ The extent to which 'a priori' arguments for God's existence are persuasive.

➢ The extent to which different religious views on the nature of God impact on arguments for the existence of God.

➢ The effectiveness of the ontological argument for God's existence.

➢ Whether the ontological argument is more persuasive than the cosmological/teleological arguments for God's existence.

➢ The effectiveness of the challenges to the ontological argument for God's existence.

➢ The extent to which objections to the ontological argument are persuasive.

Theme 2: Challenges to religious belief - the problem of evil and suffering, AS

A. The problem of evil and suffering

- The types of evil: moral (caused by free will agents) and natural (caused by nature).

- The logical problem of evil: classical (Epicurus) - the problem of suffering.

- J. L. Mackie's modern development - the nature of the problem of evil (inconsistent triad).

- William Rowe (intense human and animal suffering) and Gregory S. Paul (premature deaths).

B. Religious responses to the problem of evil (i)

Augustinian type theodicy

- Evil as a consequence of sin

- evil as a privation

- the fall of human beings and creation

- the Cross overcomes evil, soul-deciding

- challenges to Augustinian type theodicies: validity of accounts in Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3

- scientific error - biological impossibility of human descent from a single pair (therefore invalidating the 'inheritance of Adam's sin)

- moral contradictions of omnibenevolent God and existence of Hell

- contradiction of perfect order becoming chaotic - geological and biological evidence suggests the contrary.

C. Religious responses to the problem of evil (ii)

Irenaean type theodicy

- Vale of soul-making

- human beings created imperfect

- epistemic distance

- second-order goods

- eschatological justification

- challenges to Irenaean type theodicies: concept of universal salvation unjust

- evil and suffering should not be used as a tool by an omnibenevolent God

- immensity of suffering and unequal distribution of evil and suffering.

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as

➢ The extent to which the classical form of the problem of evil is a problem.

➢ The degree to which modern problem of evil arguments are effective in proving God's nonexistence.

➢ Whether Augustinian type theodicies are relevant in the 21st Century.

➢ The extent to which Augustine's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.

➢ Whether Irenaean type theodicies are credible in the 21st Century.

➢ The extent to which Irenaeus's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.

D. Religious belief as a product of the human mind – Sigmund Freud

- Religion as an illusion and/or a neurosis with reference to collective neurosis

- primal horde

- Oedipus complex

- wish fulfilment and reaction against helplessness.

- Supportive evidence including reference to redirection of guilt complexes and reference to instinctive desires deriving from evolutionary basis (Charles Darwin).

- Challenges including lack of anthropological evidence for primal horde

- no firm psychological evidence for universal Oedipus complex

- evidence basis too narrow.

E. Religious belief as a product of the human mind – Carl Jung

- Religion necessary for personal growth with reference to: collective unconscious

- Individuation

- Archetypes

- the God within

- Supportive evidence including recognition of religion as a source of comfort and promotion of positive personal and social mindsets arising from religious belief.

- Challenges including lack of empirical evidence for Jungian concepts and reductionist views regarding religious belief arising from acceptance of Jung's ideas.

F. Issues relating to rejection of religion - Atheism

- Rejection of belief in deities; the difference between agnosticism and atheism

- the rise of New Atheism (antitheism)

- its main criticisms of religion: non-thinking

- infantile worldview

- impedes scientific progress.

- Religious responses to the challenge of New Atheism: rejection by religious groups of New Atheist claims regarding incompatibility of science and religion

- increase in fundamentalist religious activity relating to morality and community

- increase in religious apologists in media.

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as

➤ How far religious belief can be considered a neurosis.

➤ The adequacy of Freud's explanation of religious belief.

➤ The extent to which Jung was more positive than Freud about the idea of God.

➤ The effectiveness of empirical approaches as critiques of Jungian views on religion.

➤ The success of atheistic arguments against religious belief.

➤ The extent to which religious responses to New Atheism have been successful.

A. The nature of religious experience with particular reference to:
Visions
- Sensory

- Intellectual

- Dreams

Conversion
- individual/communal

- sudden/gradual

Mysticism
- Transcendent

- Ecstatic

- Unitive

Prayer
- types and stages of prayer according to Teresa of Avila.

B. Mystical experience
- William James' four characteristics of mystical experience:
    1. Ineffable

    2. Noetic

    3. Transient

    4. Passive

- Rudolf Otto – the concept of the numinous

- mysterium tremendum

- the human predisposition for religious experience.

C. Challenges to the objectivity and authenticity of religious experience
- With reference to Caroline Franks Davis (description-related; subject-related and object-related challenges).

- Claims of religious experience rejected on grounds of misunderstanding

- Claims delusional - possibly related to substance misuse, fantastical claims contrary to everyday experiences

- Challenges: individual experiences valid even if non-verifiable

- Claims could be genuine - integrity of individual

- one-off experiences can still be valid even if never repeated

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as
- The impact of religious experiences upon religious belief and practice.

- Whether different types of religious experience can be accepted as equally valid in communicating religious teachings and beliefs.

- The adequacy of James' four characteristics in defining mystical experience.

- The adequacy of Otto's definition of 'numinous'.

- The extent to which the challenges to religious experience are valid.

- The persuasiveness of Franks-Davis's different challenges.

Theme 3: Religious Experience, Year 2

D. The influence of religious experience on religious practice and faith

- Value for religious community including: affirmation of belief system

- promotion of faith value system

- strengthening cohesion of religious community.

- Value for individual including faith restoring

- strengthening faith in face of opposition

- renewal of commitment to religious ideals and doctrines.

E. Miracles, the definitions of

- St Thomas Aquinas (miracles different from the usual order)

- David Hume (transgression of a law of nature)

- R.F. Holland (contingency miracle)

- Richard Swinburne (religious significance)

- Consideration of reasons why religious believers accept that miracles occur: evidence from sacred writings

- affirmation of faith traditions; personal experience.

F. A comparative study of two key scholars from within and outside the Christian tradition and their contrasting views on the possibility of miracles

- David Hume – his scepticism of miracles including challenges relating to testimony based belief

- credibility of witnesses

- susceptibility of belief

- contradictory nature of faith claims

- Richard Swinburne – his defence of miracles, including definitions of natural laws and contradictions of Hume's arguments regarding contradictory nature of faith claims and credibility of witnesses.

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as

➢ The impact of religious experiences upon religious belief and practice.

➢ Whether religious communities are entirely dependent on religious experiences.

➢ The adequacy of different definitions of miracles.

➢ How far different definitions of miracles can be considered as contradictory.

➢ The effectiveness of the challenges to belief in miracles.

➢ The extent to which Swinburne's responses to Hume can be accepted as valid.

Theme 4: Religious language, Year 2

A. **Inherent problems of religious language**
- Limitations of language for traditional conceptions of God such as infinite and timeless

- challenge to sacred texts and religious pronouncements as unintelligible

- challenge that religious language is not a common shared base and experience

- the differences between cognitive and non-cognitive language.

B. **Religious language as cognitive, but meaningless**
- Logical Positivism - Verification (A. J. Ayer) – religious ethical language as meaningless

- there can be no way in which we could verify the truth or falsehood of the propositions (e.g. God is good, murder is wrong)

- falsification nothing can counter the belief (Antony Flew)

- Criticisms of verification: the verification principle cannot itself be verified

- neither can historical events

- universal scientific statements

- the concept of eschatological verification goes against this

- Criticisms of falsification: Richard Hare – bliks (the way that a person views the world gives meaning to them even if others do not share the same view)

- Basil Mitchell – partisan and the stranger (certain things can be meaningful even when they cannot be falsified)

- Swinburne – toys in the cupboard (concept meaningful even though falsifying the statement is not possible)

C. Religious language as non-cognitive and analogical
- Proportion and attribution (St Thomas Aquinas) and qualifier and disclosure (Ian Ramsey)

- Challenges including how far analogies can give meaningful insights into religious language

- A consideration of how these two views (Aquinas/Ramsey) can be used to help understand religious teachings.

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:
➢ The solutions presented by religious philosophers for the inherent problems of using religious language.

➢ The exclusive context of religious belief for an understanding of religious language.

➢ The persuasiveness of arguments asserting either the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of religious language.

➢ How far Logical Positivism should be accepted as providing a valid criterion for meaning in the use of language.

➢ To what extent do the challenges to Logical Positivism provide convincing arguments to nonreligious believers.

➢ Whether non-cognitive interpretations are valid responses to the challenges to the meaning of religious language.

D. Religious language as non-cognitive and symbolic

- Functions of symbols (John Randall)

- God as that which concerns us ultimately (Paul Tillich)

- *Challenges including whether a symbol is adequate or gives the right insights.*

- *A consideration of how these two views (Randall/Tillich) can be used to help understand religious teachings*

E. Religious language as non-cognitive and mythical

- Complex form of mythical language that communicates values and insights into purpose of existence.

- Supportive evidence – different forms of myths to convey meaning: creation myths

- myths of good against evil

- heroic myths.

- Myths help to overcome fears of the unknown

- myths effective way of transmitting religious, social and ethical values.

- *Challenges: problem of competing myths*

- *meanings of myths change over time as they reflect the values of society as societal constructs*

- *demythologisation of myths results in varying interpretations*

- *myths often incompatible with scientific understanding of the world*

F. Religious language as a language game

- Meaningful to people who participate in same language game (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

- Supportive evidence – non-cognitive language provides meaning to participants within language game

- consider use of language not meaning; language games fit with coherence theory of truth

- religious language as expressions of belief

- *Challenges, including rejection of any true propositions in religion that can be empirically verified*

- *does not allow for meaningful conversations between different groups of language users*

- *does not provide adequate meaning for the word 'God'*

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as

➢ The effectiveness of the terms non-cognitive, analogical and mythical as solutions to the problems of religious language.

➢ The relevance of religious language issues in the 21st Century.

➢ The extent to which language games provide a suitable way of resolving the problems of religious language.

➢ Whether symbolic language can be agreed as having adequate meaning as a form of language.

➢ How far the works of Randall and Tillich provide a suitable counter-challenge to Logical Positivism.

➢ Whether the strengths of language games outweigh the weaknesses