Metaphysics of God Exam Questions

These are the terms that are likely to be asked about in a 3 mark question.

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| **A posteriori** | Statements or propositions that can only be shown to be true or false through experience. |
| **A priori** | Statements or propositions that can only be shown to be true or false through reason. |
| **Analogy** | A comparison between two or more things, typically undertaken to explain the nature or properties of a particular thing. |
| **Analytic** | Statements that are true or false from the meaning of the terms involved. Analytical statements are often thought to be tautological. |
| **blik** | An attitude to or view of the world that is not held or withdrawn on the basis of empirical experience. |
| **Causal Principle** | An attitude to or view of the world that is not held or withdrawn on the basis of empirical experience. |
| **Cognitive** | Language which makes claims about reality that are true or false, i.e. language which states facts. |
| **Contingency** | In the context of existence; beings which depend on something else for their existence, and can be thought not to exist. |
| **Cosmological argument** | An argument that infers the existence of God using principles of causation, contingency or finitude about the universe. |
| **Deductive reasoning** | A form of reasoning where the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion. |
| **Eschatological** | Referring to the ‘last things’– death, the final judgment, and the ultimate destiny of human beings. |
| **Inductive reasoning** | A form of reasoning where the truth of the premises provides strong evidence of, but does not guarantee, the truth of the conclusion. |
| **Infinite regress** | A sequence (often causal) of reasoning which has no discernible end. |
| **Metaphysics** | A branch of philosophy which examines the fundamental nature of things, including the concepts that define the nature of things. |
| **Moral Evil** | Suffering that arises as the result of the actions of free agents. |
| **Natural Evil** | Suffering that arises independent of the actions of free agents / as the result of natural processes |
| **Necessity** | In the context of existence; beings which cannot be thought not to exist and were not brought into being by anything else. |
| **Non-cognitive** | Language which does *not* make claims about reality that are true or false, i.e. language which *does* *not* state facts. |
| **Ontological argument** | An argument which infers the existence of God from reason alone. |
| **Predicate** | The part of a sentence which affirms something about the subject. |
| **Property** | An attribute or characteristic of something which forms part of its identity. |
| **Reductio ad absurdum** | A form of argumentation that attempts to disprove a proposition by showing it leads to absurd or extreme unlikely conclusions. |
| **Reduction** | The process of explaining a process or event by referring to smaller, constituent components or parts. |
| **Sustaining Cause** | A cause that brings about its effect continuously, rather than at a specific moment, such that the effect depends on the continued existence and operation of the cause. |
| **Synthetic** | Statements which are true or false according to whether they correspond to states or facts about the world. |
| **Teleological argument** | An argument which infers the existence of God through observation of order, complexity and design in the universe. |
| **Temporal Cause** | A cause that brings about its effect at a time, such that the effect comes after the cause and can continue after the cause ceases. |
| **Theodicy** | An attempt to explain how or why an omnipotent, omniscient, supremely good God would allow the (apparent) presence of evil in the world. |

**The concept and nature of ‘God’**

**Explain the difference between an everlasting God and an eternal God. (3 marks)**

An everlasting God exists within time and has no beginning or end but experiences events temporally and sequentially. In contrast, an eternal God exists outside of time, meaning that He has no past, present, or future but instead experiences all of time simultaneously. Since He is not bound by temporal constraints, God’s knowledge and actions are not limited by time, and He perceives all moments at once rather than sequentially.

**Explain how the paradox of the stone might challenge the concept of God. (5 marks)**

The paradox of the stone challenges the concept of omnipotence by proposing that a logical contradiction arises given an omnipotent God. It asks: *Can God create a stone so heavy that He cannot lift it?* This question creates a dilemma because both possible answers seem to place a limit on God's power, therefore rendering him not omnipotent. If God can create the stone, then there is something He cannot do: lift it. This means there is a task beyond His power, contradicting the idea that God is all-powerful. However, if God cannot create the stone, then there is also something He cannot do—create such a stone. In either case, God appears to lack the ability to perform a task, meaning His power is not truly unlimited.

This paradox suggests that the very concept of omnipotence is self-contradictory. If being omnipotent means being able to do anything, then God should be able to both create and lift the stone. However, this scenario leads to a contradiction, as one ability prevents the other. The paradox, therefore, challenges whether the traditional definition of omnipotence is logically coherent.

**Explain how the Euthyphro dilemma might challenge the concept of God. (5 marks)**

The Euthyphro dilemma challenges the concept of God’s omnipotence and moral goodness. The dilemma is posed in the form of the following question:

*"Is something good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good?"*

This creates a dilemma because whichever answer is given present problems for the traditional concept of God. If something is good because God commands it, then morality becomes arbitrary. God could command anything, even actions we consider evil, such as murder or cruelty, and they would be "good" simply because God wills them. This would undermine the idea that God is good in a praiseworthy sense, as morality would depend solely on His will rather than being grounded in objective moral truths. On the other hand, if God commands something because it is already good, then morality must exist independently of God. This suggests that moral truths exist outside of God’s control, meaning that God is not the ultimate source of morality but is instead bound by an external moral standard. This would challenge the idea of God’s omnipotence, as it implies that moral truths are above God rather than determined by him. There, the Euthyphro dilemma challenges the concept of God by questioning whether God can be a coherent foundation for morality whilst also maintaining God’s moral goodness in a meaningful way.

**Explain how the existence of free human beings would present a challenge to the concept of an omniscient God. (5 marks)**

The existence of free human beings presents a challenge to the concept of an omniscient and omnibenevolent God because it raises the issue of divine foreknowledge and free will.

If God is omnibenevolent then he would create free human beings so that they can make genuine moral choices, allowing for love, virtue, and moral responsibility. Free will is considered essential for a meaningful relationship with God because forced obedience would not be genuine.

If God is omniscient, He must know everything, including all future events and every decision a person will ever make. However, if God already knows what a person will choose in the future, then their decision seems predetermined, which undermines the idea that they are truly free. For example, if God knows that a person will choose to do good tomorrow, then it seems impossible for them to do otherwise, as that would mean God’s knowledge was wrong, which contradicts His omniscience. Conversely, if a person truly has free will, meaning they could choose otherwise, then it seems God cannot know with absolute certainty what they will do. This creates a contradiction between divine omniscience and human free will.

To resolve this conflict therefore, it must be the case that God is not omniscient as he does not know what we will do, or we do not have free will because God knows what we will do. This would mean God is not omnibenevolent as he would have denied us the possibility of genuine moral choices and meaningful relationship with him. Either of these options would contradict the traditional theistic concept of God.

**Explain how the paradox of the stone might be resolved. (5 marks)**

The paradox of the stone challenges God’s omnipotence by asking: Can God create a stone so heavy that He cannot lift it? If He can create it, then He cannot lift it, and if He cannot create it, then He lacks the power to do so. Either way, there seems to be a limit to God’s power. However, omnipotence does not mean the ability to do the logically impossible. A contradiction, such as creating a stone that an omnipotent being cannot lift, is not a coherent task but a nonsensical statement. Just as God cannot create a square circle, He cannot perform logically incoherent actions, yet this does not mean He is not omnipotent.

Arguably, the above solution begs the question as it assumes the coherence of omnipotence when re-framing the question as asking God to create a stone so heavy that an omnipotent being cannot lift it. Instead, we can respond by supposing we allow that God can lift any stone and he can create any stone. God can create a stone of any size and can then lift that stone. That God cannot create a stone that he can’t lift is no limit on the stones that God can create. Nor is it a limit on the on God’s power of lifting stones as there is no stone he cannot lift. Therefore the paradox of the stone does not demonstrate that omnipotence is incoherent.

**Explain how the Euthyphro dilemma might be resolved. (5 marks)**

The Euthyphro dilemma challenges the concept of God’s omnipotence and moral goodness. The dilemma is posed in the form of the following question:

*"Is something good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good?"*

If something is good because God commands it, then morality seems arbitrary—God could command anything, even acts we consider evil, and they would be "good" simply because he wills them. However, if God commands something because it is already good, then moral truths exist independently of God, suggesting that he cannot change what is good and is therefore not omnipotent.

To solve this problem, we can draw a distinction between concepts and properties to explain how morality is the same thing as what God wills, but ‘God is good’ is not a tautology. The thought is that ‘God’ and ‘morally good’ are different concepts. It is not an analytic truth that goodness is what God wills. However, goodness is the same property as what God wills. For example, ‘water’ and ‘H2O’ are different concepts, and before the discovery of hydrogen and oxygen, people knew about water. They had the concept of water, but not the concept of H2O. And they didn’t know that water is H2O. So ‘water is H2O’ is not analytically true. However, water and H2O are one and the same thing, the two concepts refer to just one thing in the world. Water is identical to H2O. The same account can be given of ‘good’ and ‘what God wills’. They are different concepts, and people can have and understand the concept of goodness without the concept of God. So ‘God is good’ is not an analytic truth. However, what is good is the same thing as what God wills. It is not something separate which provides a standard for God’s will. Morality is dependent on God. This is a metaphysical truth (about what exists) but not a conceptual truth about morality. The Euthyphro dilemma is therefore a false dilemma as it fails to recognise this third possibility.

**Explain how the existence of free human beings and the challenge this would present to the concept of an omniscient God might be resolved. (5 marks)**

The existence of free human beings presents a challenge to the concept of an omniscient and omnibenevolent God because it suggests that if God is truly omniscient then he will know what we will do in the future and therefore we are not free. Alternatively, we are truly free and therefore God does not know what we will do and so is not omniscient.

In response to this problem, we can argue that the challenge misunderstands God’s relationship to time. God’s existence is atemporal, all of God’s life, including all events in time, is ‘present’ to God, part of the eternal ‘now’. Every moment in time is simultaneous with God, i.e. every moment in time is experienced as temporally present and simultaneous with God’s eternal present. This means that some event in the future to us is present to God. This isn’t to say that the future ‘pre-exists’, as though the future was now in time, but simply that God is simultaneous with both today and any date in our future. Both days are present to an eternal being, but in the sense of the eternal present, not the temporal present. God is atemporally aware of both ‘at once’. So God cannot foresee future events, i.e. God does not know about events in time before they happen. There is no ‘before’ for God. God’s knowledge of events in time is ET-simultaneous with when they happen. In other words, God only ever knows what is happening as it is happening. God is aware of all events in time in the (eternal) present. Therefore there is no conflict between God’s knowledge of our actions and our free will.

**Explain how the paradox of the stone might challenge the concept of God and how this might be resolved. (12 marks)**

**Explain how the Euthyphro dilemma might challenge the concept of God and how this might be resolved. (12 marks)**

**Explain how the existence of free human beings would present a challenge to the concept of an omniscient God and how this might be resolved. (12 marks)**

**Is the concept of God coherent? (25 marks)**

**Ontological Arguments**

**Explain St Anselm's ontological argument. (5)**

St Anselm’s ontological argument is an a priori argument that attempts to prove God’s existence through reason alone, without relying on empirical evidence. It is based on the definition of God as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived”. Anselm argues that even a fool who denies God's existence must have some concept of God in their mind, otherwise, they would have nothing to deny. Anselm claims that it is greater to exist in reality than merely in the mind. A being that exists only as an idea is inferior to a being that exists both in the mind and in reality. For example, a painter first has an idea of a painting before creating it. However, once the painting is brought into reality, it is greater than the mere mental concept. Similarly, if God existed only in the mind, then it would be possible to conceive of a greater being: one that exists in reality. Since God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived,” He must exist in reality as well as in the mind.

Anselm further develops this argument by claiming that God must exist necessarily, meaning that His non-existence is impossible. If God existed only contingently, then a greater being could be conceived—one that must exist. Since God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, He must have necessary existence. This form of deductive reasoning leads to the conclusion that God must exist by definition.

**Explain Descartes' ontological argument. (5)**

Descartes’ ontological argument follows his waves of doubt, where he refuses to accept as knowledge anything that he can doubt the truth of. As a result of this process, he deduces his famous cogito: he cannot doubt his own existence as a thinking thing. From here, he recognises that he has an idea of God and builds an a priori argument that attempts to prove God’s existence through reason alone, without relying on empirical evidence. Since such evidence is fallible and therefore insufficient justification for knowledge, Descartes seeks a rational proof instead.

The idea of God that Descartes discovers in his mind is that of a supremely perfect being. By definition, such a being would possess all perfections. Among other things, this being would be perfectly powerful (omnipotent), perfectly knowledgeable (omniscient), and perfectly good. Descartes argues that existence itself is a perfection. If God lacked existence, He would not be supremely perfect, as he would lack a perfection. This would contradict His definition and therefore, Descartes concludes that God must exist by definition.

To illustrate his argument, Descartes compares God’s existence to the properties of a triangle. Just as a triangle must have three sides and internal angles adding to 180 degrees, God must have existence as part of His essential nature. It would be a contradiction to conceive of God without existence, just as it would be to conceive of a triangle without three sides.

Descartes’ ontological argument concludes that God’s existence is necessary, meaning He cannot fail to exist. This form of deductive reasoning attempts to establish that God's non-existence is impossible.

**Explain Norman Malcolm's ontological argument. (5)**

Malcolm’s argument is an a priori argument for the existence of God which claims that God’s existence can be proven from the definition of God without need to empirical evidence. Malcolm defines God as an unlimited being, meaning a being that is completely independent, self-sufficient, and not subject to any external limitations. He therefore claims that God cannot exist contingently, as contingent existence implies dependence on something else, which contradicts the nature of an unlimited being. Therefore, God must either exist necessarily or not exist at all. If God’s existence were impossible, it would be because the concept of an unlimited being is logically incoherent, like a square circle. However, there is no logical contradiction in the concept of God, meaning His existence is not impossible. Since something that is not impossible must be possible, and an unlimited being cannot exist merely as a possibility, it follows that God must exist necessarily. This means that denying God's existence is incoherent, as it would entail denying the possibility of a necessarily existing being. Malcolm’s argument therefore concludes that, since God’s definition includes necessary existence, if God’s existence is possible, then he must exist.

**Explain Gaunilo's 'perfect island' objection to the ontological argument. (5)**

Gaunilo attempts to demonstrate that there must be a flaw in Anselm’s reasoning by applying the same logic to an island. Anselm argues that God, as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived," must exist in reality because existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone. Gaunilo believes that if this reasoning were valid, it could be used to "prove" the existence of anything. He asks us to imagine a perfect island, than which no greater island can be conceived. By Anselm’s logic, if it there truly is no greater possible island, then it must exist in reality because an island that exists is greater than one that does not. However, this conclusion is clearly false; just because we can conceive of a perfect island does not mean it must exist in reality. Gaunilo therefore argues that Anselm’s reasoning leads to false conclusions and can be used to "prove" the existence of anything we define as the greatest of its kind. Since we do not accept that a perfect island must exist, we should not accept that God must exist simply because he is defined as the greatest conceivable being.

**Explain Hume’s (Hume’s fork) objection to ontological arguments. (5)**

Hume criticises ontological arguments by using Hume’s Fork, which distinguishes between relations of ideas and matters of fact, asserting that all meaningful knowledge must fall into one of these two categories. Relations of ideas are statements that are true by definition, such as mathematical truths (*e.g., "a triangle has three sides"*). These are necessary truths because denying them would result in a contradiction. Matters of fact are statements that are verified through experience, such as *"the sun will rise tomorrow."* These depend on empirical observation and could be otherwise.

Hume objects to ontological arguments because they attempt to prove God’s existence as a necessary truth. However, according to Hume, necessary truths cannot be denied without contradiction. This means that if *"God exists"* were a necessary truth, then *"God does not exist"* would be a contradiction. However, this cannot be the case, because, as Hume argues, whatever we can conceive of as existing, we can also conceive of as not existing.

Similarly, claims about what exists are matters of fact, meaning they are synthetic propositions that can only be known through experience, rather than through pure a priori reasoning, which is what the ontological argument relies on. Therefore, Hume’s objection undermines all ontological arguments by asserting that no purely logical argument can establish the existence of anything, even God, since existence must be verified as a matter of fact.

**Explain Kant's objection to ontological arguments based on existence not being a predicate. (5)**

Ontological arguments claim that existence is a perfection, meaning that a being that exists is greater than one that does not. Kant objects to this by arguing that existence is not a predicate. A predicate is a property or characteristic that adds information about a subject. For example, in the sentence “The apple is red,” the predicate “red” adds information about the apple. However, Kant argues that existence does not function like other predicates because it does not add anything to the concept of a thing. He gives the example of 100 coins: imagining 100 coins in the mind and having 100 coins in reality are identical in concept. The only difference is that one exists, but this does not change the nature of the coins themselves. Kant applies this to God, arguing that saying “God exists” does not add any new property to the concept of God. If existence were a predicate, then saying “God does not exist” would remove a property from the concept of God. However, this is not the case, since the concept must remain the same in both claims in order for the theist and the atheist to be discussing the same thing when they argue about God's existence. Therefore, existence cannot be treated as a defining characteristic of God, and ontological arguments fail because they rely on the incorrect assumption that existence is a predicate.

**Explain Anselm’s response to Gaunilo’s perfect island objection. (5)**

Anselm responds to Gaunilo’s "perfect island" objection by arguing that his ontological argument applies only to God, not to contingent things like islands. Gaunilo had claimed that if Anselm’s reasoning were valid, then it could be use it to prove the existence of anything, for example, a perfect island. Anselm rejects Gaunilo’s objection by demonstrating why the same logic cannot be applied to other things. The ontological argument applies only to God, as only a necessary being can be proven to exist by definition.

Anselm first distinguishes between contingent beings (things that can exist or not exist, like islands) and necessary beings (things that must exist by definition). A perfect island, no matter how great, would still be contingent, as it depends on external factors such as water, land, and climate. To try to conceive of an island which must exist would be to attempt to imagine a necessary island which is clearly absurd since, as explained, islands must be contingent. In contrast, God is not contingent but a necessary being and so the logic can be applied to God, not to the island.

Anselm further argues that islands and other material objects cannot have intrinsic "perfection", as perfection in such things is subjective and dependent on human preference. There is no perfect size of an island or perfect number of palm trees. In contrast, God’s perfections are absolute, he is perfectly powerful, perfectly good, and perfectly knowledgeable. This also means that His existence is necessary, as necessary existence is the greatest form of existence, whereas the existence of a perfect island is not.

Therefore, the fact that Gaunilo’s ‘island ontological argument’ fails, does not undermine Anselm’s argument for God’s existence because Anselm has explained why the logic is only applicable to God.

**Explain St Anselm's ontological argument and Gaunilo's 'perfect island' objection. (12)**

**Explain Descartes' ontological argument and the empiricist objection from Hume’s fork. (12)**

**Explain St. Anselm/Descartes’ ontological argument and Kant’s objection based on existence not being a predicate. (12)**

**How convincing are ontological arguments for the existence of God? (25)**

**Teleological/Design Arguments**

**Explain the design argument from analogy as presented by Hume. (5)**

David Hume presents a design argument from analogy in which he suggests that the complexity and order in nature resemble the complexity and order found in human-designed objects, such as a watch or a machine. Since machines have intelligent designers, by analogy, the natural world must also have an intelligent designer: God.

Hume compares the universe to a human-made machine, arguing that just as machines have been intentionally designed to fulfil a purpose, so too must nature have been deliberately arranged by an intelligent being. The regularity and apparent functionality of natural systems (such as the movement of the planets) suggest a designer with intelligence and foresight, much like a human designer has when creating machines.

This argument is an a posteriori argument, relying on empirical observation of nature’s apparent order and drawing an analogy between human creations and the universe to infer the existence of God as the divine designer.

**Explain William Paley’s design argument from spatial order/purpose. (5)**

William Paley’s design argument is based on spatial order, meaning the precise arrangement of parts in nature that work together for a purpose. To make his argument, Paley asks us to imagine finding a rock on the ground. If asked how it got there, we might say it had always been there, and this explanation could be accepted, since the rock is simple and purposeless. However, if we found a watch, we would not make the same assumption. Unlike the rock, the watch has complex parts (gears, springs, hands) arranged in a specific way to fulfil a function (telling the time). This order and purpose suggest intentional design by a watchmaker. Paley considers a possible alternative explanation: that the watch was made by another watch, rather than a designer. He rejects this idea because it does not remove the need for an original designer. If a watch produced another watch, we would still need an explanation for how the first watch came to exist, given the complexity of the watch’s parts and the purpose evident from the arrangement of these parts. From here, Paley argues that living organisms and natural systems exhibit even greater complexity and functional arrangement than a watch. For example, the human eye is intricately structured for vision, just as a watch is structured to tell time. Since a watch requires a watchmaker, the complexity in nature must also require an intelligent designer—God. Similarly, even if nature’s complexity resulted from past natural processes, those processes must still have been designed by an intelligent creator. Paley’s argument is a posteriori (based on observation) and claims that the spatial order in nature provides strong evidence for a divine designer.

**Explain Richard Swinburne’s design argument from temporal order/regularity. (5)**

Richard Swinburne bases his argument on the way laws of nature consistently operate in an orderly and predictable manner over time. He argues that the universe follows regular, mathematical laws (such as gravity, electromagnetism, and nuclear forces) that are fundamental to the behaviour of everything in the universe. The fact that the universe is governed by laws rather than being chaotic or random requires an explanation. Swinburne argues that scientific explanations cannot account for the existence of these laws, because science itself relies on these laws to function. While science explains how things work within the framework of natural laws, it cannot explain why these fundamental laws exist in the first place or why they are fine-tuned. He also rejects chance as an explanation, arguing that the precise adjustment of these laws to allow for life makes chance highly improbable. If these laws were even slightly different, the universe would be chaotic or incapable of supporting life (e.g., if gravity were weaker, stars and planets could not form).

Since the existence and precision of these laws cannot be sufficiently explained by chance or science, Swinburne argues that we must turn to an external, non-scientific explanation. He draws upon the concept of "personal explanation," which we commonly use in everyday life. For example, when explaining the creation of an essay, we attribute it to an intentional, rational agent—a person writing with purpose. Similarly, Swinburne argues that the best explanation for the temporal order of the universe is an intelligent mind capable of designing it. This designer, he concludes, is God.

**Explain Hume’s objection that teleological arguments fail because they are arguing from a unique case. (5)**

Teleological arguments often move from observations of human-designed artefacts to the universe, either by an analogy between the two or by identifying common features. Hume criticises this move by claiming that, unlike human-designed objects (such as machines), we have only ever observed one universe. This means we cannot meaningfully compare it to anything else to determine whether it was designed. Hume argues that when we infer design in human artefacts (e.g., a watch), we do so based on past experience; we have seen watches being made by intelligent designers. However, we have no prior experience of universes being designed, so we cannot justifiably conclude that this universe was designed in the same way. Without multiple examples of universes to compare, the analogy between the universe and human-made objects is weak. Furthermore, Hume suggests that our only experience is of this universe, so we cannot claim to know its origins. Just as one could not infer the general laws of biology by studying only one animal, Hume argues that we cannot make grand conclusions about the origins of all universes based on our single example. Therefore, teleological arguments fail because they rely on a similarity between the universe and human-made objects, but this breaks down since we have no other universes to compare it to.

**Explain why evolution by natural selection causes a problem for Paley’s design argument. (5)**

Paley’s design argument concludes that the best explanation of the spatial order evident in nature, for example the human eye, is too intricate to have arisen by chance and must therefore have been designed by God. Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection challenges this by providing an alternative explanation for the apparent complexity and purpose found in nature. According to natural selection, random mutations occur which produce new traits in organisms. If these traits increase survival and reproduction, they are more likely to be passed on to future generations. Over millions of years, this process leads to the development of highly complex biological structures, such as the eye, without requiring a designer. These traits appear designed but this is only because we do not witness the extinction of other traits which were not passed on as they were not beneficial for survival or reproduction. This directly undermines Paley’s claim that complexity in nature must have been designed in the same way that a watch requires a watchmaker. Furthermore, Paley’s argument assumes that complexity implies purpose, but evolution shows that complexity can arise through a blind, unguided process driven by survival advantages rather than deliberate design. Since natural selection provides a scientific explanation for biological complexity, Paley’s inference of a designer is unnecessary.

**Explain Hume’s objection to the analogy made in design arguments. (5)**

David Hume argues that design arguments rely on a weak analogy between the universe and human-made objects. He criticises thinkers like Paley, who he believes compare natural complexity (e.g., the eye) to human artefacts (e.g., a watch) to infer a designer. Hume objects that a valid analogy requires strong similarities, but the universe and human machines are too different to justify the comparison. Human-designed objects are finite, small, and familiar, whereas the universe is vast, unique, and unlike anything we have designed. Just because we know that machines have designers does not mean the universe must also have one. Additionally, Hume argues that we only observe human objects being designed; we have never observed universes being created. Since we cannot compare multiple universes to see if design is a common feature, it is unjustified to assume the universe was designed based on a weak analogy to human artefacts. Therefore, Hume rejects the design argument’s analogy as flawed because the universe and human artefacts are fundamentally dissimilar and we lack experience of universe creation to support the claim. Since the version of the argument he is criticising relies on the analogy as a key premise, Hume argues the conclusion of a divine designer no longer follows once the analogy is removed.

**Explain examples of spatial disorder as an objection to Paley’s design argument. (5)**

Paley’s design argument is based on his observation of complexity and order in nature. He argues that this precision and the complexity cannot be explained by chance and are best explained by an intelligent designer. However, examples of spatial disorder challenge this reasoning. Spatial disorder refers to chaotic, inefficient, or harmful features in the natural world that seem inconsistent with the idea of a perfect designer. For example, the existence of genetic defects and vestigial organs (such as the human appendix) suggests that the universe is not perfectly designed. One example is the recurrent laryngeal nerve in mammals, which connects the brain to the larynx (voice box). Instead of taking a direct route, the nerve loops unnecessarily down into the chest and back up to the larynx, an inefficient detour that makes no sense from a design perspective. In giraffes, for instance, this nerve travels nearly 5 metres down the neck before looping back up, suggesting that the structure of living organisms is not the product of an intelligent designer but rather the result of natural evolutionary processes. If an intelligent designer created the world, we would expect consistent and flawless design, yet we observe wastefulness and suffering.

This objection undermines Paley’s analogy because if the world were designed like a watch, it would display consistent order and purpose. Instead, the presence of disorder suggests either no designer or an imperfect one. Since Paley argues for a benevolent and intelligent God, spatial disorder challenges the strength of his conclusion.

**Explain how the multiverse theory might be used as an objection to Swinburne’s teleological argument. (5)**

Swinburne’s teleological argument claims that the order and regularity of the universe, particularly the fine-tuning of physical laws, is best explained by the existence of a divine designer (God). He argues that the precise conditions necessary for life, such as the values of physical constants, are so unlikely that they require an intelligent cause rather than mere chance.

However, the multiverse theory challenges this by proposing that our universe is just one of many universes, each with different physical laws. If there are a vast (or infinite) number of universes, then it becomes inevitable that at least some universes will have conditions suitable for life purely by chance. Since we exist, we must be in one of the universes that support life, rather than in one of the many that do not. The multiverse theory removes the need for a divine designer, as it provides a naturalistic explanation for the fine-tuning Swinburne identifies. Instead of seeing the universe’s order as improbable, the multiverse suggests that it is not surprising at all, given the sheer number of possible universes. Therefore, the multiverse theory undermines Swinburne’s teleological argument by showing that the fine-tuning of our universe does not require God as an explanation, but can instead be accounted for by probability and natural selection across multiple universes.

**Explain how Ockham’s razor could be applied to the multiverse objection to Swinburne’s argument. (5)**

Swinburne’s teleological argument claims that the order and regularity of the universe, particularly the fine-tuning of physical laws, is best explained by the existence of a divine designer (God). The multiverse theory challenges this by offering the naturalistic explanation of multiple universes which would make the fine-tuning of this universe not very improbable at all.

Ockham’s Razor is the philosophical principle that states “entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity,” meaning that when presented with multiple explanations for something, we should prefer the simplest one that requires the fewest assumptions.

Swinburne claims that, when applied to the two explanations above, the existence of God provides a simpler explanation with fewer unnecessary assumptions. The multiverse theory requires us to assume the existence of countless unobservable universes, none of which can be empirically verified. In contrast, theism provides a single explanation, God, as the designer of the universe. Since positing an infinite number of universes is a more complex hypothesis than positing one divine designer, Ockham’s Razor suggests that theism is the simpler and more reasonable explanation. Since we have no direct evidence of these other universes, the principle suggests that we should prefer the hypothesis that requires fewer assumptions, which, according to Swinburne, is theism over the multiverse.

Alternatively, one might argue that the multiverse theory makes fewer assumptions when counting the quantity of assumptions by type rather than by token. Since we already know through our experience that a universe can exist, we are living in one, it is a simpler step to posit a multitude of universes rather than assume a new entity entirely. According to this application of Ockham’s razor, we are introducing a new type of entity “beyond necessity” because it is more reasonable to assume more of the same type of thing we already know exists.

**Explain why, even if the teleological argument succeeds, it does not prove the existence of the classical theistic God. (5)**

God, as defined traditionally, would be a necessary, all-powerful(omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient) and all-loving (omnibenevolent) being. The teleological argument claims that the complexity and order in the universe suggest an intelligent designer. However, even if the argument is successful in proving the existence of a designer, it does not necessarily prove that this designer is the God of classical theism.

Firstly, even if we grant that every premise of the teleological argument, there is a leap in logic from establishing that existence of a designer and determining that that designer is God. The argument does not establish that the designer is omnipotent, omniscient, or omnibenevolent. It only suggests that the universe was designed, but the nature of the designer remains unknown. The designer could be a lesser or limited being, rather than an all-powerful God.

Secondly, David Hume argues that the teleological argument could equally support the idea of multiple designers instead of a single God. Just as a ship or building is designed by many people, the universe could have been created by multiple deities, which would contradict monotheism.

Thirdly, the argument does not prove that the designer still exists. A designer could have created the universe and left it to function on its own, which is more in line with deism rather than theism. This challenges the idea that God is actively involved in the world.

Finally, the argument does not explain the existence of evil and suffering. If the world was designed by an all-powerful, all-good God, we would expect a perfect world. The presence of natural disasters, disease, and suffering raises doubts about the traditional theistic conception of God.

Therefore, even if the teleological argument proves the existence of a designer, it does not prove that this designer is the God of classical theism—it could be a limited being, multiple gods, or even an absent creator.

**Compare and contrast Paley and Swinburne’s teleological arguments. (12)**

**Explain the design argument from analogy as presented by Hume and his objections to the analogy. (12)**

**Explain William Paley’s design argument from spatial order/purpose and the problem caused by examples of spatial disorder. (12)**

**How convincing are teleological arguments for the existence of God? (25)**

**Cosmological Arguments**

**Explain the Kalām cosmological argument. (5)**

The Kalam argument seeks to demonstrate the existence of God by arguing that the universe must have had a beginning and therefore requires a cause. The argument begins with the observation of temporal phenomena in the uinverse, that is, things that occur and exist in time that are preceded by other temporal phenomena that are ordered in time. Whatever begins to exist must have a cause because something cannot come from nothing and things cannot cause themselves as they would have to exist temporally prior to themselves which is absurd. Second, the universe began to exist. This is supported by both philosophical reasoning and scientific evidence. Philosophically, an actual infinite past is impossible as this would mean that the chain of temporal causes would never have begun and therefore today would never have got here, but it has. Scientifically, our best theory regarding the origin of the universe is the Big Bang theory which suggests the universe had a definite beginning. If the universe had a beginning, it must have been caused by something beyond itself, as nothing can bring itself into existence. Since the cause of the universe must be outside of time and space, it cannot be something physical or contingent. Instead, it must be a necessary, eternal, and powerful being capable of creating the universe from nothing. This cause we call God.

**Explain Aquinas' 1st Way. (5)**

Aquinas’ argument from motion seeks to prove the existence of God based on this observation that things in the world are in motion, where motion refers not only to physical movement but also to change in state or condition. Aquinas argues that everything that is moved must be moved by something else, as nothing can move itself. This is because motion involves the actualisation of potentiality, and something that is merely potential cannot make itself actual. For example, a pan of cold water is potentially hot. The water moves from being potentially hot to being actually hot when heated by something else e.g. the hob. However, if every mover were itself moved by another, this would lead to an infinite regress, which Aquinas argues is impossible. This is because there would be no first mover and if you remove a cause, you remove its effects. Therefore, if you remove the first cause of change, there would be no others. However, we observe that there are others and so there must, therefore, be a first mover that is itself unmoved. This first unmoved mover must be pure actuality, having no potentiality, and must be the ultimate source of all movement and change. Aquinas concludes that this being is what people understand as God.

**Explain Aquinas’ 2nd Way. (5)**

Aquinas’ Second Way, is based on his observation of the existence of an order of causes in the world. However, Aquinas is not concerned with a temporal sequence of past causes stretching back in time, but rather with a hierarchical order of sustaining causes that must be in place at every moment to keep things in existence. Since nothing can sustain its own existence, these sustaining causes, he argues, causes follow in logical order: the first causally sustains the second, which causally sustains the third, etc. However, if every causes were itself sustained by another, this would lead to an infinite regress, which Aquinas argues is impossible. This is because there would be no first cause and if you remove a cause, you remove its effects. Therefore, if you remove the first cause, there would be no others and therefore nothing would be in existence. However, we observe that things are being sustained in existence and there must therefore be, a first causes that is itself uncaused. Aquinas concludes that this uncaused, necessary being is what people understand as God.

**Explain Aquinas’ 3rd way. (5)**

Aquinas’ Third Way is based on the distinction between contingent and necessary beings. He observes that in the natural world, everything that exists is contingent, meaning it is possible for it not to exist. Contingent beings are dependent on external factors for their existence and, at some point, they cease to exist. If everything were contingent, then there must have been a time when nothing existed. However, if at one time nothing existed, then nothing could have come into existence, because something cannot come from nothing. To avoid this problem, Aquinas argues that there must be at least one necessary being, something that does not rely on anything else for its existence and cannot fail to exist. This necessary being must have its necessity within itself rather than being dependent on another being, otherwise, the problem of contingency would simply be pushed back further. Aquinas concludes that this necessary being, which sustains all contingent beings, is what people understand as God. This argument emphasizes the need for an ultimate foundation for existence, without which nothing would exist at all.

**Explain Descartes' cosmological argument. (5)**

Descartes’ cosmological argument is based on the idea that his own existence requires an ultimate cause. Descartes begins with the certainty of his own existence which he establishes because it is impossible to doubt his own existence. He then argues that because he is a finite, imperfect being, he cannot be the cause of his own existence, as he lacks the power to sustain himself independently. Descartes dismisses the idea that he could have brought himself into existence or that he could sustain his own being from moment to moment. If he had the power to exist independently, he would have given himself all perfections, including freedom from doubt and imperfection, which is not the case. Descartes argues that cause of something must be at least as real as its effect and since he is a thinking thing with the idea of God, the cause of him must be at least a thinking thing with the idea of God. The cause of that being must either be the reason for its own existence or would also have to be caused by a thinking thing with the idea of God. If its existence is caused by another cause, then the point repeats: this second cause is in turn either the cause of its own existence or its existence is caused by another cause. An infinite regress of causes however is impossible as this would fail to provide a sufficient explanation for his current existence. Therefore, there must be a necessary, self-sustaining being that is ultimately responsible for his existence. This necessary being we call God.

**Explain Leibniz’s argument from the principle of sufficient reason. (5)**

Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason states that everything that exists, and every fact that is true, must have a reason or explanation for its existence/truth. He argues that there are two kinds of truths. The first are truths of reason which are necessary truths: their opposite is impossible and their explanation is found within them. The other are contingent truths. Contingent things do not contain within themselves the reason for their own truth and must therefore be explained by something else. Leibniz asserts that the claim ‘the universe exists’, is only contingently true as it could have been otherwise; there could have been nothing. The existence of the universe therefore requires explanation for why it exists rather than doesn’t. This explanation cannot itself be contingent, as this would lead to an infinite regress, where each explanation depends on another without ever reaching a final reason. To avoid this problem, Leibniz concludes that there must be a necessary being that contains the reason for its own existence within itself and provides the ultimate explanation for the existence of the universe. This necessary being, he argues, is God. Importantly, his argument does not rely on the universe having a beginning in time—rather, it shows that even an eternal contingent universe would still require a necessary being as its ultimate explanation.

**Explain Hume’s objection to cosmological arguments that an infinite series is possible. (5)**

Cosmological arguments assert that an infinite chain of causes is impossible because it would never provide a complete explanation. Hume object by arguing that an infinite regress of causes is possible, or at the very least, we don’t know that it’s not. This is a crucial premise in cosmological arguments and without it, the arguments become invalid. Hume argues that there is no logical contradiction in the idea of an infinite regress, meaning that it remains a viable explanation for the universe’s existence. He suggests that if every event in the chain is caused by a prior event, then the existence of the entire series is sufficiently explained by the existence of each individual link. There is no need to go beyond the chain to seek an external cause. For Hume, demanding an ultimate first cause is unnecessary if an infinite sequence of causes can account for everything that exists. Hume’s position undermines the assumption that an infinite regress is impossible and directly challenges the idea that there must be a stopping point in the chain of causes. If an infinite regress can exist, then the cosmological argument’s conclusion, that a necessary being must be the first cause, does not follow.

**Explain Hume’s objection to the causal principle in cosmological arguments. (5)**

The causal principle, which asserts that everything that exists must have a cause, is a key assumption in cosmological arguments which claim that the universe requires an external cause, which we ultimately call God. However, Hume argues that the causal principle is not analytic; we can deny it without contradicting ourselves. Without contradiction, we can assert ‘something can come out of nothing’ or ‘some natural things exist or change uncaused’. Logically, these claims may be true or false. That means that these claims are not only not analytic, they are also not *certain*. If they are not analytic, we can only know them through experience. Now, our experience supports these claims; they are probably true. But experience cannot establish that a claim holds *universally*, without exception. So we can’t know (for certain) that everything, without exception, has a cause. By rejecting the absolute certainty of the causal principle, Hume undermines the foundation of cosmological arguments. If it is possible for something to exist without a cause, then the universe itself may not require an external explanation, and the conclusion that God must be its cause does not logically follow.

**Explain the objection that the cosmological argument commits the fallacy of composition. (5)**

The fallacy of composition occurs when someone incorrectly assumes that what is true of the parts must also be true of the whole. An analogy often used to illustrate this fallacy is that each individual brick in a wall is small, but it does not follow that the wall itself is small. The objection argues that fallacy is committed in the cosmological argument by assuming that just because every object or event within the universe has a cause, it follows that the universe itself requires a cause. This assumption moves from observations about particular contingent beings to a universal claim about the entire cosmos, which may not be justified. This objection weakens the cosmological argument by suggesting that the demand for a cause of the entire universe may be unnecessary or mistaken. If the argument relies on a faulty logical step, then its conclusion that God must be the first cause (or that the universe relies upon a necessary being external to it), does not necessarily follow.

**Explain the objection to the cosmological argument that a necessary being is impossible. (5)**

This objection challenges the coherence of cosmological argument’s conclusion that God must exist necessarily. Hume argues that the idea of a necessary being is not logically possible because existence is never a property that something must have. Hume argues that if we can conceive of a being existing, including God, we can also conceive of that being as not existing. If we can imagine a being not existing, then it is not logically necessary. This undermines the idea that God must exist by definition, since a truly necessary being should be impossible to conceive as non-existent. Similarly, it is argued that the idea of a necessary being is based on a misuse of logical necessity. Russell distinguishes between analytic and synthetic truths: necessary truths (like mathematical statements) are analytic, meaning they are true by definition (e.g., “a triangle has three sides”). However, claims about existence, including “God exists,” are synthetic and depend on empirical verification. Since no being’s existence can be logically necessary in the way that mathematical truths are, the concept of a necessary being is flawed. This objection weakens the cosmological argument by questioning the coherence of a necessary being and undermining the claim that God's existence is logically inevitable. If necessary existence is impossible, then the cosmological argument obviously cannot succeed in establishing God, as a necessary being, as the ultimate explanation for the universe.

**Explain why, even if the cosmological argument succeeds, it may not prove the existence of God. (5)**

God, as defined traditionally, would be a necessary, all-powerful(omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient) and all-loving (omnibenevolent) being. The cosmological argument, argues that a necessary being must exist to explain why anything exists at all. However, even if the argument successfully establishes the existence of a necessary being, it does not necessarily prove that this being is God as traditionally conceived in classical theism.

Firstly, the cosmological argument does not show that the necessary being possesses the attributes of the God of classical theism—such as omnipotence, omniscience, or omnibenevolence. The argument only establishes that there must be something that exists necessarily, but this does not mean that this being is personal, intelligent, or even involved in the world.

Secondly, Hume and Bertrand Russell argue that the necessary being could simply be the universe itself. If the universe exists necessarily, then there is no need to posit God as an external cause. This undermines the idea that the necessary being must be a supernatural entity rather than just the cosmos itself.

Finally, even if the argument succeeds in proving a necessary being, it does not establish that only one necessary being exists, meaning that polytheistic or alternative explanations could be equally valid.

Therefore, while the cosmological argument may support the idea of a necessary being, it does not logically entail that this being is the God of traditional theism, meaning it fails to fully prove God’s existence.

**Compare and contrast [two versions of the cosmological argument]. (12)**

**Explain [*a form of the cosmological argument*] and the objection that an infinite series is possible. (12)**

**Explain [*a form of the cosmological argument*] and Hume’s objection to the causal principle. (12)**

**Explain Aquinas’ 3rd way and Russell’s objection that it commits the fallacy of composition. (12)**

**Explain [*a form of the cosmological argument*] and the objection that a necessary being is impossible. (12)**

**How convincing are cosmological arguments for the existence of God. (25)**

**Arguments Relating to the Existence of God: Problem of Evil**

**Explain the logical problem of evil. (5)**

God is defined by Descartes as a supremely perfect being. Such a being would have to be all-powerful, all-good and all-knowing as these characteristics would be necessary parts of his definition. The logical problem of evil claims that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good (omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent) God. The argument states that if God is omnipotent, he has the power to prevent evil. If God is omniscient, he has the knowledge of all evil that occurs. If God is omnibenevolent, he would want to prevent evil. Therefore, if he possessed all of these properties, God would have created a world in which there is not evil. This is considered a logical problem because it presents an explicit contradiction between the existence of an all-powerful, all-good God and the undeniable reality of evil. The argument claims that it is logically impossible for all of these statements to be true simultaneously. If evil exists, then either God is not omnipotent (lacking power to prevent it), not omnibenevolent (unwilling to prevent it), or does not exist at all. We can observe in our universe the existence of evil in both moral (e.g. murder) and natural (e.g. earthquakes) forms and therefore conclude that God does not.

**Explain the evidential problem of evil. (5)**

The evidential problem of evil argues that the sheer quantity, severity, and distribution of evil in the world makes the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God highly unlikely. The evidential problem argues that while God's existence is not logically contradictory, the nature and extent of evil provide strong evidence against it. Proponents of this argument would highlight the intense suffering in the world, such as natural disasters, diseases, and extreme cruelty, that seem unnecessary or preventable. For example, animals suffering intensely without any apparent greater good. If God were omnipotent and omnibenevolent, He would be expected to prevent such pointless suffering. Additionally, the distribution of evil raises doubts about God’s existence. Innocent people, including children, often experience immense suffering, while some guilty individuals go unpunished. This randomness makes it difficult to justify evil as part of a divine plan. Since such suffering appears unnecessary and excessive, the evidential problem of evil argues that the most reasonable conclusion is that God does not exist or that he does not have the attributes traditionally ascribed to Him.

**Explain the distinction between moral and natural evil. (5)**

The distinction between moral evil and natural evil is based on the cause of the suffering. Moral evil refers to suffering caused by human actions that result from free will and moral choices. Examples include murder, war, theft, and cruelty. These acts are directly caused by human decisions and could, in principle, be avoided if people acted morally. For instance, the Holocaust or acts of terrorism are examples of moral evil where human choices led to immense suffering. Natural evil, on the other hand, refers to suffering that occurs independently of human actions and is caused by natural processes. Examples include earthquakes, tsunamis, diseases, and genetic disorders. These events are beyond human control and often cause great suffering. For example, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which killed over 200,000 people, is a case of natural evil. The distinction is significant in the problem of evil, as moral evil is often justified through the free will defence, whereas natural evil is harder to explain within a theistic framework since it does not result from human actions.

**Explain Plantinga’s free will defence against the logical problem of evil. (5)**

Plantinga’s free will defence is a response to the logical problem of evil, arguing that the existence of evil is not logically incompatible with an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God. He claims that God could have a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil: the necessity of human free will. Plantinga argues that true free will requires the possibility of choosing evil. If God created humans who could only choose good, they would not be genuinely free. Plantinga claims that it is better for God to allow the possibility of evil than to create beings who are only capable of doing good because their decisions have moral worth which is intrinsically valuable and therefore the existence of free beings justifies the suffering that their choices inevitably bring about. God cannot create a world with free will whilst also guaranteeing that no evil exists. This is not a limit on God’s omnipotence however because free will logically entails the capacity to choose evil.

However, whilst this does seem to justify moral evil, it does not appear to explain natural evil (e.g. earthquakes). To address this, Plantinga proposes that natural evil could be the result of free will, not of humans, but of non-human agents, such as fallen angels (Satan and demons). If supernatural beings also have free will, then their actions could be responsible for natural disasters. While this explanation may seem implausible, Plantinga is offering a response to the logical problem of evil which claims God’s existence is impossible given the existence of evil. Therefore, he only needs to provide a logically possible way in which free will could account for both moral and natural evil, not argue that such an explanation is probable.

**Explain Hick’s soul-making theodicy. (5)**

Hick’s soul-making theodicy is a response to the problem of evil and an attempt to justify the existence of evil and suffering on the basis that it is a necessary part of human moral and spiritual development. Hick argues that God created humans as imperfect beings with the potential to develop virtues such as courage, compassion, and patience. These virtues cannot be created instantly; rather, they must be developed through experience, struggle, and overcoming suffering. Without challenges, humans would lack moral depth, as virtues like bravery and kindness only have meaning in the face of hardship. Hick also rejects the premise in the argument from suffering that God should have created a perfect world without suffering. He argues that such a world would be a "hedonistic paradise", where humans would have no real moral choices or opportunities for growth. Instead, our world contains "epistemic distance", meaning that God deliberately does not make his existence overwhelmingly obvious. This allows humans to develop faith and moral character freely, rather than out of fear or compulsion. Ultimately, Hick believes that all suffering has a purpose, as it enables humans to develop into "children of God", achieving moral and spiritual perfection in the afterlife. Thus, evil is not pointless but essential for human development, making it compatible with a loving God.

**Compare and contrast the logical and evidential problem of evil. (12)**

**Explain the logical problem of evil and Plantinga’s free will defence against it. (12)**

**Explain the evidential problem of evil and Hick’s soul-making theodicy. (12)**

**Does the problem of evil prove God does not exist? (25)**

**Religious Language**

**What does it mean to say that a person’s religious claim is unfalsifiable? (3)**

To say that a person’s religious claim is unfalsifiable means that it cannot be proven false, no matter what evidence is presented. A statement is falsifiable if there is some possible evidence that could show it to be false. For example, the claim *“God exists”* could be considered unfalsifiable because there is no clear way to disprove it through empirical evidence. Even if someone points to the existence of suffering or the lack of direct evidence for God, a believer can always reinterpret these as part of God's divine plan.

**What does Hick mean by eschatological verification? (3)**

Hick’s concept of eschatological verification refers to the idea that religious claims, particularly about God's existence and the afterlife, can be verified after death. Unlike scientific claims, which can be tested and confirmed in this life, some religious beliefs—such as the existence of Heaven—can only be proven true in the afterlife if they turn out to be correct. Hick makes this point in response to the verification principle being applied to religious language to demonstrate than that religious language is meaningful because it is verifiable in principle, even if only after death.

**What does Hare mean by a ‘blik’. (3)**

A ‘blik’ is a non-cognitive, unfalsifiable belief that shapes how a person interprets the world. A blik is not based on evidence or reason but is a fundamental perspective or way of seeing reality that cannot be proven true or false.

**Explain the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism about religious language. (5)**

Cognitivism and non-cognitivism are two types of answer to the question of whether and how religious language is meaningful. Cognitivism claims that religious language expresses beliefs. Beliefs can be true or false, so religious claims that can be true or false. To believe that God exists is to believe that the sentence ‘God exists’ is true. Religious language aims to describe the world. Cognitivists do not have to claim that this is *all* that religious language does. They do, however, argue that it is how religious language is meaningful.

Non-cognitivism claims that religious language does not express beliefs, but some other, non-cognitive mental state; religious claims do not try to describe the world and cannot be true or false. They express an attitude toward the world, a way of understanding or relating to the world. (We may still want to talk of religious ‘beliefs’ but this is better understood as ‘faith’ or ‘belief in God’ than as ‘belief that God exists’.)

**Explain how the verification principle can be applied to religious language. (5)**

The verification principle states that a statement is only meaningful if it is either analytic (true or false by definition) or empirically verifiable (testable by observation and experience). Since religious language often makes claims about God, the afterlife, and morality, which cannot be tested or observed, the verification principle suggests that religious statements are meaningless.

For example, the statement *“God exists”* is neither an analytic truth nor empirically verifiable, as God's existence cannot be tested using the senses or scientific methods. Similarly, claims like *“Heaven exists”* or *“God is omniscient”* cannot be verified through empirical evidence, leading Logical Positivists to reject religious language as meaningless.

**Explain how the falsification principle can be applied to religious language. (5)**

See below

**Explain how the story of the gardener can be used to argue that religious language used by religious believer is meaningless. (5)**

The parable of the gardener is used as an exercise in applying the falsification principle to religious language. The falsification principle states that for a statement to be meaningful, there must be some possible evidence that could prove it false. If no conceivable evidence could ever falsify a claim, then it is not a genuine assertion about reality but instead an unfalsifiable belief.

Anthony Flew applies this to religious language, arguing that religious claims are often unfalsifiable, meaning believers refuse to accept any evidence that could count against them. He uses the parable of the gardener, in which two people debate whether a gardener tends a hidden garden. One believes in the gardener but continually modifies their claim when no evidence is found, eventually asserting that the gardener is invisible, intangible, and undetectable. Flew argues that religious believers act in the same way; when challenged with evidence (e.g., the problem of evil), they modify their beliefs to make them unfalsifiable (e.g., *"Maybe God has a reason for allowing evil to occur"*), rendering religious statements meaningless.

Similarly, the claim *"God is loving"* seems meaningful, but when confronted with suffering, a believer might say *"God’s love is beyond human understanding."* If no evidence could ever disprove the claim, then it is not genuinely making a factual statement about reality.

Flew concludes that because religious claims are unfalsifiable, they are not actually making any meaningful claim about reality. This is because, to make a meaningful assertion about a state of affairs, one must also be denying some evidence that would prove it false. Since religious believers do not allow for such falsification, religious statements lack cognitive meaning.

**Explain Mitchell’s story of the trusting partisan in response to the claim that religious language is meaningless. (5)**

Basil Mitchell uses the story of the trusting partisan to respond to Flew’s challenge to the meaningfulness of religious language, specifically the falsification principle. Mitchell argues that religious language is not meaningless, even if religious claims are not straightforwardly falsifiable. In the story, a partisan (resistance fighter) meets a stranger who claims to be the leader of the resistance. The partisan chooses to trust the stranger, despite witnessing evidence that sometimes seems to contradict this (e.g., the stranger working with the enemy). While the partisan acknowledges the difficulty of the evidence, he does not abandon his belief but instead chooses to maintain trust in the stranger’s overall reliability. Mitchell compares this to religious belief, arguing that believers acknowledge that the problem of evil provides evidence against God's existence but still hold faith in God nonetheless. Evidence can be defined as facts that make the truth of a proposition more likely. Therefore, since even believers recognise that the fact of suffering makes it less likely that the proposition "God exists" is true, they are still making a truth-apt claim when they state that *"God exists."* This means that religious language still has cognitive meaning because believers do not simply redefine their claims to avoid falsification but rather engage with the evidence in a meaningful way.

**Explain Hare’s view that religious claims are ‘bliks’. (5)**

Hare argues that religious claims should be understood as ‘bliks’, meaning fundamental, unfalsifiable perspectives through which people interpret the world. Unlike factual statements, bliks are not truth-apt (i.e., they cannot be proven true or false), but they still influence how individuals view reality. Hare illustrates this idea with his parable of the lunatic. In the story, a student believes that all university dons are plotting to kill him. No matter how much evidence is presented to the contrary, he refuses to change his belief. This belief functions as a blik: it shapes his perception of reality but cannot be tested or falsified like a scientific claim. Similarly, Hare argues that religious beliefs function as bliks. A believer may claim *“God loves me”* or *“God exists”*, but these statements are not based on empirical evidence and cannot be falsified. Instead, they express a way of seeing the world that shapes a person’s attitudes and actions. Hare denies the view that religious claims must be falsifiable to be meaningful. In contrast, he suggests that religious language is meaningful in a different way, as an expression of a fundamental perspective rather than a testable hypothesis.

**Explain Hick’s view that religious claims can be verified eschatologically. (5)**

In response to the verification principle being applied to religious language and deeming it meaningless since such claims are neither analytic nor verifiable through empirical evidence, Hick argues that religious claims can actually be verified eschatologically. This means that, in principle at least, that their truth can be confirmed after death. Unlike scientific claims, which can be tested in this life, religious statements—such as *“God exists”* or *“there is an afterlife”* are not currently verifiable. However, if an afterlife exists, these claims would be proven true when people experience it. Hick illustrates this idea with his parable of the celestial city. Two travellers walk along a road: one believes it leads to a great city (symbolising Heaven), while the other believes it leads nowhere. Only upon reaching the end of the journey (death) will they discover who was correct. Similarly, if there is life after death, religious believers will ultimately have their faith verified. Therefore, Hick defends the meaningfulness of religious language, arguing that eschatological verification allows religious statements to be cognitive, truth-apt, and verifiable in principle.

**Explain why it may be argued the verification principle is self-defeating. (5)**

The verification principle, states that a statement is only meaningful if it is either analytically true (true by definition) or empirically verifiable (testable by observation and experience). However, it can be argued that the principle is self-defeating because it does not meet its own criteria for meaningfulness. The verification principle itself is neither an analytic truth nor empirically verifiable. It is not a definition (like *“all bachelors are unmarried”*), nor can it be tested through observation. Since it does not pass its own test, the principle would be meaningless by its own standards. Since the verification principle fails its own test for meaning, it undermines itself and cannot be a valid way to determine what is meaningful or meaningless.

**Compare and contrast the verification and falsification principles. (12)**

**Explain how the verification principle can be applied to religious language and the objection that the principle is self-defeating. (12)**

**Explain Flew and Mitchell’s disagreement about the meaningfulness of religious language. (12)**

**Is religious language meaningful? (25)**