

# Religious Studies: A Level Question bank

## Philosophy of religion

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## Religion and ethics

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# 1.1. Philosophy of religion: Ancient philosophical influences

- Discuss critically the philosophical views presented by Plato in his *Analogy of the Cave* [40]
- 'Aristotle is wrong to think worthwhile knowledge can be gained through sense experience'. Discuss [40]
- Assess the effectiveness of Aristotle's four causes in explaining the world. [40]
- Critically discuss Aristotle's understanding of reality [40]
- Analyse Aristotle's four causes [40]
- Discuss critically Aristotle's understanding of causation. [40]
- 'Plato's Form of the Good has a lot in common with Aristotle's Prime mover.' Discuss [40]
- "The Similie of the Cave tells us nothing about reality." Discuss [40]
- How convincing is Plato's idea of the Form of the Good? [40]
- To what extent has modern cosmology made Aristotle's views on the universe redundant? [40]
- Evaluate Plato's reliance on reason in an attempt to make sense of reality [40]
- Critically compare Plato's Form of the Good and Aristotle's Prime Mover [40]

# 1.2. Philosophy of religion: Soul, mind and body

- How convincing is Plato's view that the soul is distinct from the body? [40]
- 'People are no more than complex physical matter'. Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the view that talk of a mind-body distinction is just "category error" [40]
- Critically assess the view that human beings have immortal souls [40]
- 'There is no such thing as a soul.' Discuss [40]
- Assess whether substance dualism is a convincing approach to the questions of body and soul [40]
- "Religious faith demands belief in a separate body and soul." Discuss [40]
- 'The soul is a spiritual substance.' Discuss [40]
- "There is no evidence for dualism"" Discuss [40]

# 1.3. Philosophy of religion: Arguments based on observation

- 'Hume presents insurmountable challenges to a posteriori arguments for the existence of God'. Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the view that the existence of God is the best explanation for the existence of the universe [40]
- 'To what extent does Hume successfully argue that observation does not prove the existence of God? [40]
- "The world was created by chance, not by God's design." Discuss [40]
- How convincing are teleological arguments for the existence of God? [40]
- To what extent does Aquinas' cosmological argument successfully reach the conclusion that there is a transcendent creator? [40]
- "The universe is just there: it neither has nor needs an explanation." Discuss [40]
- To what extent is the cosmological argument successful in proving the existence of God? [40]

# 1.4. Philosophy of religion: Arguments based on reason

- 'The ontological argument fails because it rests on a logical fallacy'. Discuss [40]
- How persuasive are ontological arguments for the existence of God? [40]
- To what extent does Kant successfully criticise the ontological argument? [40]
- "A priori arguments for the existence of God are more persuasive than a posteriori arguments." Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically Kant's claim that existence is not a predicate [40]
- 'The logical fallacies in the ontological arguments cannot be overcome.' Discuss [40]
- Evaluate Anselm's argument in Proslogion 3. To what extent is it an improvement on his argument in Proslogion 2? [40]
- "Because God's nature is not known to us, there is no reasonable basis for claiming that God's existence is a necessary part of that nature." Critically evaluate this view [40]

# 1.5. Philosophy of religion: Religious experience

- 'Conversion experiences present powerful evidence for the existence of God'. Discuss [40]
- How convincing are William James' conclusions about religious experience? [40]
- 'Corporate religious experiences are less reliable than individual religious experiences.' Discuss [40]
- "Religious experiences do not provide sufficient evidence for the existence of God." Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the view that people who claim to have had experience of God should be believed [40]
- 'Religious experience shows that we can be united with something greater than ourselves.' Discuss [40]
- 'Religious experiences are all the product of a physiological effect.' Discuss [40]
- 'There is no way to establish the validity of religious experiences, so they are not a reliable basis for faith in God.' Discuss [40]

# 1.6. Philosophy of religion: The problem of evil

- 'Irenaeus' theodicy gives a more satisfactory response to the problem of evil than Augustin's theory'. Discuss [40]
- How convincing is the claim that it is necessary for there to be evil in the world if we are to have genuine free will? [40]
- Critically compare the logical and evidential aspects of the problem of evil as challenges to belief [40]
- "Everyone will freely come to God in the end." Discuss Hick's claim [40]
- "Evidence of evil and suffering in the world provides a greater challenge to the existence of God than the logical problem of evil." Discuss [40]
- Evaluate the success of Augustine in resolving the problem of evil [40]
- Assess the claim that natural evil has a purpose [40]

# 1.7. Philosophy of religion: The nature of attributes of God

- How fair is the claim that an omnipotent God should be able to do absolutely anything, even the logically impossible? [40]
- Discuss critically issues arising from the belief that God is omniscient [40]
- Assess Boethius's view that divine eternity does not limit human free will [40]
- How convincing is Boethius' view of God's relationship with time? [40]
- Discuss critically the view that God deliberately limits his own powers for good of humanity [40]
- "Richard Swinburne's account of God and time is unconvincing." Discuss [40]
- "No philosopher has successfully proved that God is good." Discuss [40]



# 1.8. Philosophy of religion: Religious language - negative, analytical or symbolic

- How effective is analogy in communicating religious ideas and beliefs? [40]
- 'Symbol is too often misleading for it to be useful in religious language'. Discuss [40]
- 'The best approach to understanding religious language is through the cataphatic way.' Discuss [40]
- "The only way in which meaningful statements can be made about God is the via negativa." Discuss [40]
- Critically compare the via negativa with symbolic language as ways of expressing religious beliefs in words [40]
- "We can never begin to describe God." Discuss [40]
- "All religious language is non-cognitive." Discuss [40]
- "Paul Tillich's symbolic theory of religious language tells us nothing useful about God." Discuss [40]
- 'Aquinas' analogical approaches to religious language are too limiting to support religion'. Discuss [40]

# 1.9. Philosophy of religion: Religious language - 20<sup>th</sup> century perspectives and philosophical comparisons

- To what extent can Wittgenstein's theory of language games help to resolve the issues raised by religious language? [40]
- "A non-cognitive approach to religious language provides valuable insights into the interpretation of religious texts." Discuss [40]
- How successfully does the language games concept make sense of religious language? [40]
- Antony Flew's falsification principle presents a significant challenge to religious language." Discuss [40]
- Assess the belief that talk about God is meaningless [40]
- "The verification principle is too flawed to be useful." Discuss [40]
- "Atheism is meaningless." Discuss [40]
- To what extent can Scripture mean anything if religious language is understood to be non-cognitive? [40]

# 2.1 Religion and ethics: Natural Law

- How helpful is Natural Law in making ethical decisions? [40]
- 'An action cannot be judged as bad simply because it doesn't achieve it's Telos'. Discuss. [40]
- 'The universe was designed with a Telos'. Discuss. [40]
- To what extent does Human Nature have an orientation towards The Good? [40]
- To what extent can the Doctrine of Double Effect be used to justify an action? [40]
- Discuss critically the use of the concept of 'telos' in Natural Law ethics [40]
- 'One of the greatest strengths of Natural Law is that it provides an absolute and universal standard for judging right and wrong'. Discuss [40]

## 2.2 Religion and ethics: Situation ethics

- To what extent is Situation Ethics a useful method of moral decision-making? [40]
- 'Situation Ethics is too subjective to be a practical ethical tool'. Discuss. [40]
- How true is the claim that Situation Ethics is religious? [40]
- Should serving agape be the guiding principle in moral decision-making? [40]
- 'An action is good if it produces the most loving result'. Discuss [40]

## 2.3. Religion and ethics: Kantian ethics

- To what extent is Kantian Ethics a useful method of moral decision-making? [40]
- 'Kantian Ethics is too abstract to be applied to practical ethical decision-making'. Discuss. [40]
- To what extent should moral decisions be guided by the principle of doing one's duty? [40]
- 'The fact Kant ignores human emotions means his ethical theory should be rejected'. Discuss [40]
- To what extent should ethical judgements about right and wrong be based on the extent to which duty is served? [40]
- 'Kantian ethics do not give enough importance to human emotions such as sympathy and compassion.' Discuss [40]

## 2.4. Religion and ethics: Utilitarianism

- Should ethics only be interested in seeking pleasure over pain? [40]
- 'Utilitarianism is completely impractical because it's impossible to predict how much pleasure or pain an action will cause'. Discuss. [40]
- Is Rule Utilitarianism an improvement on Act Utilitarianism? [40]
- 'Utilitarianism is useful as a moral tool in all situations'. Discuss [40]
- How useful is utilitarianism as a guide to moral decision-making? [40]
- 'Utilitarianism fails because it is impossible to measure happiness and harm'. Discuss [40]

## 2.5. Religion and ethics: Euthanasia

- 'There is a significant difference between not acting to prolong life and acting to end life'. Discuss. [40]
- Is applying agape the best way to decide what to do regarding Euthanasia? [40]
- To what extent should an individual have full autonomy over whether their life should end? [40]
- 'Sanctity of Life is now irrelevant'. Discuss [40]
- Should the Precepts be followed when making decisions about Euthanasia? [40]
- 'Natural law provides excellent moral guidance for people making decisions about euthanasia'. Discuss [40]
- How convincing is the claim that decisions about euthanasia should be made according to the principles of situation ethics? [40]

## 2.6. Religion and ethics: Business ethics

- To what extent is good ethics good business? [40]
- 'Corporate Social Responsibility is merely hypocritical window dressing designed to mask the greed of big business'. Evaluate this claim. [40]
- Does Globalisation help or hinder an ethical approach to business? [40]
- Can human beings flourish within Capitalism? [40]
- 'Kantian Ethics provides the best approach to business ethics'. Discuss. [40]
- Assess the view that Utilitarianism provides the best approach to business ethics. [40]
- 'The only purpose of a business is to make profit'. Discuss. [40]
- 'Corporate Social Responsibility is nothing more than a trick to try and make more profit'. Discuss. [40]
- Does globalisation make good business ethics impossible? [40]
- How successful is the Utilitarian approach to Business Ethics? [40]
- Evaluate the extent to which Kantian Ethics provides good guidance for doing business ethically. [40]



## 2.7. Religion and ethics: Meta-ethical theories

- Are ethical concepts, such as truth, in any way meaningful? [40]
- 'Statements such as 'stealing is wrong' are no more than expressions of emotion'. Discuss.
- Is it true to say that people 'just know' what is good, bad, right, and wrong? [40]
- To what extent should ethics concentrate on what is meant by the word 'good'? [40]
- How convincing is the view that moral statements refer to facts that can be observed? [40]

## 2.8. Religion and ethics: Conscience

- 'The Conscience is just someone's cultural response to decision-making'. Discuss [40]
- To what extent is Freud right to remove God from his approach to Conscience? [40]
- Is Conscience separate from Reason? [40]
- Should the Conscience always be obeyed? [40]
- Evaluate the idea that 'Conscience is just the Super-Ego'. [40]
- 'Aquinas' understanding of the conscience is convincing.' Discuss [40]
- To what extent should the conscience be regarded as a reliable guide to moral decision making? [40]

## 2.9. Religion and ethics: Sexual ethics

- 'There is no need for religious rules about private sexual behaviour between consenting adults'. Discuss. [40]
- How useful is utilitarianism in making decisions about the ethics of premarital sex? [40]
- How useful is Natural Law in making decisions about the ethics of homosexuality? [40]
- To what extent do religious beliefs and practices concerning sex and relationships have a continuing role in the area of sexual ethics? [40]
- To what extent are natural law ethics helpful in guiding decisions about sexual behaviour? [40]
- How far might utilitarianism provide useful guidance in discussions about the ethics of homosexuality? [40]

# 3.1. Christian Thought: Augustine's teaching on human nature

- Critically assess the significance of Augustine's teaching on human relationships before the Fall [40]
- "Augustine's view of human nature is deeply pessimistic'. Discuss [40]
- How fair is the claim that sin means humans can never be morally good? [40]
- "It is impossible for modern people to believe Augustine's teachings about the historical Fall of humanity." Discuss [40]
- "If the Fall did not actually happen, the Christian teaching on human nature makes no sense." Discuss [40]
- To what extent has Augustine's teaching on human nature caused more harm than good? [40]

## 3.2. Christian Thought: Death and the afterlife

- Critically assess the view that in Christian teaching all people will be saved [40]
- Discuss the view that the idea of purgatory makes more sense than hell [40]
- To what extent is the view that purgatory is a metaphor for a spiritual state of mind convincing? [40]
- "Heaven is not a place but a state of mind." Discuss [40]
- How persuasive is the view that God's judgement takes place immediately after death? [40]
- "Purgatory is the state through which everyone goes." Discuss [40]
- "Without the reward of heaving Christians would not behave well." Discuss [40]
- Assess the view that there is no last judgement; a person is judged by God at the moment of their death [40]
- "Heaven is the transformation and perfection of the whole of creation" Discuss [40]
- Could hell be eternal? Discuss [40]

## 3.3. Christian Thought: Knowledge of God's existence

- To what extent is faith the only means of knowing God? [40]
- "Humans have an innate knowledge of God." Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the view that Christians can discover truths about God using human reason [40]
- "Faith is all that is necessary to gain knowledge of God." Discuss [40]
- To what extent can God be known through the natural world? [40]
- "Because of the Fall, people can have no natural knowledge of God." Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the idea that the existence of God can be known through reason alone [40]
- "God can be known because the world is so well designed." Discuss [40]
- Is natural knowledge of God the same as revealed knowledge of God? [40]

## 3.4. Christian Thought: The person of Jesus Christ

- 'Jesus' teaching was only about becoming a moral person.' Discuss [40]
- To what extent was Jesus merely a political liberator? [40]
- "There is no evidence to suggest that Jesus thought of himself as divine." Discuss [40]
- "Jesus was more than a political liberator." Discuss [40]
- How convincing is the claim that Jesus' relationship with God was unique? [40]
- Assess the view that the miracles prove Jesus was the Son of God [40]
- "Jesus' relationship with God was so unique that it is of no help to Christians today." Discuss [40]

## 3.5. Christian Thought: Christian moral principles

- 'The most important source for Christian ethics is Church teaching.' Discuss [40]
- How fair is the claim that there is nothing distinctive about Christian ethics? [40]
- "The Bible is all that is needed as a moral guide for Christian behaviour." Discuss [40]
- How fair is the claim that the principle of love is all that is necessary for Christian ethics? [40]
- "In order to lead a moral Christian life, Christians need more than just the Bible for guidance." Discuss [40]
- "The Church should decide what is morally good." Discuss [40]
- To what extent do Christians actually disagree about what Christian ethics are? [40]
- "Christian moral principles are not self-evident." Discuss [40]
- To what extent are Christian ethics personal or communal? [40]
- To what extent is acting with love sufficient to live a good life? [40]



## 3.6. Christian Thought: Christian moral action

- To what extent was Dietrich Bonhoeffer justified in his teaching on civil disobedience? [40]
- 'Bonhoeffer's theology is still relevant today.' Discuss [40]
- 'Using the will of God as a guide for moral behaviour is impractical, as in most circumstances it is impossible to know what God wants us to do.' Discuss [40]
- 'The Bible is the only authority for Christian ethics.' Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the claim that Bonhoeffer's theology puts too much emphasis on suffering [40]
- "Civil disobedience is never necessary for Christians who live in Christian countries." Discuss [40]
- "Bonhoeffer's most important teaching is on leadership." Discuss [40]
- "Christian ethics means being obedient to God's will." Discuss [40]
- To what extent was Bonhoeffer's religious community at Finkenwalde successful? [40]

## 3.7. Christian Thought: Religious pluralism and theology

- To what extent does a theologically pluralist approach undermine the central doctrines of Christianity? [40]
- "Non-Christians who live morally good lives and genuinely seek God can be considered to be "anonymous Christians". Discuss [40]
- "If different world religions offer different paths to salvation, then Jesus died on the cross for nothing." Discuss [40]
- "The best response Christians can make to living in a multi-faith society is to take an inclusivist approach." Discuss [40]
- "Theological pluralism does not undermine Christian beliefs." Discuss [40]
- Critically assess the argument that the most honest view is that only one religion can actually be true [40]
- To what extent is theological inclusivism not persuasive? [40]

## 3.8. Christian Thought: Religious pluralism and society

- Christians should seek to convert others to Christianity at every opportunity." Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the view that inter-faith dialogue is of little practical use [40]
- How fair is the claim that the Scriptural Reasoning Movement relativises Christian belief? [40]
- Discuss critically the view that Christians should seek to convert people who belong to other faith communities [40]
- "Social cohesion is not the aim of inter-faith dialogue." Discuss [40]
- Analyse the view that Christians should not seek to convert people from other faiths to Christianity [40]
- Critically compare *Redemptoris Missio* and *Sharing the Gospel* [40]
- Christians should try to convert atheists. Discuss [40]

## 3.9. Christian Thought: Gender and society

- "For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church." (Ephesians 5:23) Critically assess this teaching for 21st century family life [40]
- "In a Christian society, men should have authority over women." Discuss [40]
- With reference to *Mulieris Dignitatem*, discuss critically the view that motherhood gives women a liberating dignity [40]
- "Secular views of gender equality have undermined Christian gender roles." Discuss [40]
- How convincing is the claim that the idea of family is entirely culturally determined? [40]
- "There is no such thing as an ideal Christian family." Discuss [40]
- To what extent should Christians resist secular views of gender? [40]
- "Men and women are equal but different." Discuss [40]

## 3.10. Christian Thought: Gender and theology

- Assess the view that Mary Daly's theology proves that Christianity is sexist [40]
- "Christianity should be abandoned by feminists because it is essentially sexist." Discuss [40]
- Assess whether Christianity and feminism are compatible [40]
- "Rosemary Radford Reuther's feminist theology is more acceptable than the thinking of Mary Daly." Discuss [40]
- Discuss the view that using feminine terms of God is unnecessary [40]
- Assess the view that a male saviour cannot save women [40]
- To what extent does it matter whether God is presented in male or female terms? [40]
- 'If God is male, then man is God'. Discuss [40]

# 3.11. Christian Thought: The challenge of secularism

- 'Secularism does not pose a threat to Christianity.' Discuss [40]
- "Inter-faith dialogue strengthens Christian communities." Discuss [40]
- "Christian values are more than just basic human values: they have something distinctive to offer." Discuss [40]
- How fair is the claim that Christianity has a negative impact on society? [40]
- 'Secularists who say Christianity is a source of unhappiness are wrong.' Discuss [40]
- "Christianity should continue to be a significant contributor to values and culture." Discuss [40]
- How fair is the claim that Christianity is a major cause of personal and social problems? [40]
- "Freud's analysis of religion as wish fulfilment was right." Discuss [40]
- To what extent are spiritual values just human values? [40]
- "Secularism does more harm than good." Discuss [40]
- "Secularism presents an opportunity for the Church to develop new doctrines and practices." Critically evaluate this idea [40]

## 3.12. Christian Thought: Liberation theology and Marx

- "Christianity is better than Marxism at tackling social issues." Discuss [40]
- Discuss the claim that Christianity should not show preference to the poor and oppressed, but should treat everyone equally [40]
- "Christian thinkers should not engage with the ideologies of atheists such as Marx." Discuss [40]
- Discuss critically the view that liberation theology would be more successful if it became more Marxist in its outlook [40]
- "The sole concern of theology should be the preferential option for the poor." Discuss [40]
- To what extent should theology be about changing the world not interpreting it? [40]
- Assess the view that in theology orthodoxy is more important than orthopraxis [40]
- "Marx does not offer a satisfactory solution to the problem of the exploitation of the poor." Discuss [40]
- 'Liberation theology has not engaged with Marxism fully'. Discuss [40]