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

A. Inductive arguments – cosmological

- Inductive proofs

- the concept of 'a posteriori'.

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

  2. cause and effect

  3. contingency and necessity

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

B. Inductive arguments – teleological

- St Thomas Aquinas' Fifth Way - concept of governance

- archer and arrow analogy

- William Paley's watchmaker - analogy of complex design

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

C. Challenges to inductive arguments

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

- David Hume - problems with analogies

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

- apprentice god;

- plurality of gods;

- absent god (teleological).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

D. Deductive arguments - origins of the ontological argument

- Deductive proofs;

- the concept of 'a priori'.

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

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

E. Deductive arguments - developments of the ontological argument

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

- analogies of triangles and mountains/valleys.

- Norman Malcolm - God as unlimited being:

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

F. Challenges to the ontological argument

- Gaunilo, his reply to St Anselm;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A. The problem of evil and suffering

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

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

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

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

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

Augustinian type theodicy

- Evil as a consequence of sin

- evil as a privation

- the fall of human beings and creation

- the Cross overcomes evil, soul-deciding

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

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

- moral contradictions of omnibenevolent God and existence of Hell

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

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

Irenaean type theodicy

- Vale of soul-making

- human beings created imperfect

- epistemic distance

- second-order goods

- eschatological justification

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Visions

- Sensory

- Intellectual

- Dreams

Conversion

- individual/communal

- sudden/gradual

Mysticism

- Transcendent

- Ecstatic

- Unitive

Prayer

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

B. Mystical experience

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

  2. Noetic

  3. Transient

  4. Passive

- Rudolf Otto – the concept of the numinous

- mysterium tremendum

- the human predisposition for religious experience.

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

- Claims of religious experience rejected on grounds of misunderstanding

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

- Challenges: individual experiences valid even if non-verifiable

- Claims could be genuine - integrity of individual

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

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

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

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

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

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

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