

Philosophy & Reason 2019 v1.2

Unit 2 sample assessment instrument

May 2020

Extended response — analytical essay

This sample has been compiled by the QCAA to assist and support teachers in planning and developing assessment instruments for individual school settings.

Schools develop internal assessments for each senior subject, based on the learning described in Units 1 and 2 of the subject syllabus. Each unit objective must be assessed at least once.

Assessment objectives

This assessment instrument is used to determine student achievement in the following objectives:

1. define and use terminology relating to the application of reason in the context of philosophy of religion to demonstrate an understanding of meaning
2. explain concepts, methods, principles and theories of reason in the context of philosophy of religion
3. interpret and analyse arguments, ideas and information using the techniques of reason in the context of philosophy of religion
4. organise and synthesise ideas and information from the area of philosophy of religion to construct arguments
5. evaluate claims and arguments inherent in theories, views and ideas relating to philosophy of religion
6. create responses that communicate ideas and arguments relating to philosophy of religion.

Subject	Philosophy & Reason
Technique	Extended response — analytical essay
Unit	2: Reason in philosophy
Topic	1: Philosophy of religion

Conditions			
Duration	Approximately 15 hours of the time allocation for Unit 2		
Mode	Written	Length	1500–2000 words
Individual/group	Individual	Other	While some research may be undertaken, it is not the focus of this technique.
Resources available	See attached stimulus material.		
Context			
Within the topic of ‘Philosophy of religion’, you have been exploring how the fundamentals of reason are used to engage with religious conceptions of god and morality. You have also been interpreting and analysing philosophical arguments, ideas and information about the existence of a god or gods.			
Task			
You are required to respond to the following question: ‘To what extent is the problem of evil/suffering a rational philosophical argument against the existence of a god or gods?’ Present your response in the form of an analytical essay that draws on the provided stimulus material, as well as your understanding of the role of reason in discourse about the existence of a god or gods.			
To complete this task, you must:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain, interpret and analyse this philosophical argument against the existence of a god or gods • construct arguments, using philosophical ideas and information, to evaluate the problem of evil/suffering as a case against the existence of a god or gods. • ensure that use of the provided stimulus material is evident in your response • use appropriate terminology, concepts, methods, principles and theories of reason related to philosophy of religion • adhere to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – genre conventions of an analytical essay – language conventions – referencing conventions. 			
Stimulus			
See attached stimulus material.			

Checkpoints		
<input type="checkbox"/> Initial planning check: at approximately 3 of 15 hours (e.g. notes on philosophical concepts, methods, principles and theories related to the task)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Second progress check: at approximately 7 of 15 hours (e.g. information gathered from the stimulus material provided and any other material you use)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Draft due: at approximately 12 of 15 hours (including reference details)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Final submission: at approximately 15 of 15 hours		
Criterion	Marks allocated	Result
Defining, using and explaining Assessment objectives 1, 2		
Interpreting and analysing Assessment objective 3		
Organising, synthesising and evaluating Assessment objectives 4, 5		
Creating and communicating Assessment objective 6		
Total		
Authentication strategies		
• The teacher will provide class time for task completion.		
• Students will provide documentation of their progress at indicated checkpoints.		
• The teacher will collect copies of the student response and monitor at key junctures.		
• The teacher will conduct interviews or consultations with each student as they develop the response.		
• Students will use plagiarism-detection software at submission of the response.		
• Students must acknowledge all sources.		
Scaffolding		
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Stimulus

Source 1: The problem of evil

Perhaps the most compelling and noteworthy argument against theism is what is referred to as the problem of evil. Philosophers of the East and the West have long recognised that difficulties arise for one who affirms both the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God and the reality of evil. David Hume, quoting the ancient Greek thinker Epicurus (341–270 BCE), got to the heart of the matter with the following pithy observation:

Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? [T]hen he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? [T]hen he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? [W]hence then is evil? (Hume D 1779, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part X, p. 63)

There are different ways the problem of evil can be formulated. In fact, it is probably more accurate to refer to “problems” of evil. One formulation is construed as a logical problem. For the logical problem of evil, it is asserted that the two claims, (1) an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God exists, and (2) evil exists, are logically incompatible. Since evil ostensibly exists, the argument goes, God (understood traditionally as being omnipotent and omnibenevolent) must not exist.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the logical argument held sway. But by the end of that century, it was widely acknowledged by philosophers of religion that the logical problem had been rebutted. One reason is that as claims (1) and (2) are not explicitly contradictory, there must be hidden premises or unstated assumptions which make them so. But what might those be?

The assumed premises/assumptions appear to be something along these lines: (a) an omnipotent God could create any world, (b) an omnibenevolent God would prefer a world without evil over a world with evil, and (c) God would create the world he prefers. Given these claims, (1) and (2) would be logically incompatible. However, it turns out that at least (a) may not be true, even on a classical theistic account. It could be that a world with free agents is more valuable than a world with no free agents. Further, it could be that such free agents cannot be caused or determined to do only what is morally right and good, even by God. If this is so, in order for God to create agents who are capable of moral good, God had to create agents who are capable of moral evil as well. If this is a logical possibility, and it seems to be so, then premise (a) is not a necessary truth because God cannot create just any world.

In addition, premise (b) is not necessarily true either. For all we know, God could use evil to achieve some good end, such as bringing about the virtues of compassion and mercy. As long as (a) and (b) are possibly false, the conclusion of the argument is no longer necessarily true, so it loses its deductive force. This response to the logical argument from evil is called a defense, which is distinguished from a theodicy. The aim of a defense is to demonstrate that the arguments from evil are unsuccessful given a possible scenario or set of scenarios, whereas a theodicy is an attempt to justify God and the ways of God given the evil and suffering in the world. Both defenses and theodicies have been used by theists in responding to the various problems of evil.

From: ‘Philosophy of religion: Logical problems,’ by Chad Meister, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, www.iep.utm.edu/religion, 18 September 2019. Used with permission.

Source 2: The problem of suffering

Recognition of the problem of suffering goes back to biblical times; indeed the book of Job remains one of the most profound and intense ever produced. Job, according to the story, is an upright and prosperous man who, through no fault of his own and with God's full knowledge, is visited by a succession of terrible afflictions including pain, disease, impoverishment and the loss of his family. Although he first responds to his misfortunes stoically — 'the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' — he is eventually driven in his anguish to question and protest against the ways of God. But after God appears in response to his challenge, and through a series of unanswerable questions makes Job realise the limitations of his own understanding, he 'stops his mouth', resolved never again to be so presumptuous as to doubt God's wisdom or justice.

That people (and other animals for that matter) really do suffer is surely an incontrovertible fact: a datum that can neither be ignored nor denied. If God is omniscient he must be aware of this. If he is omnipotent then presumably he could prevent it if he so desired. And if he is omnibenevolent and morally perfect he would presumably want to prevent it. It is a strange kind of love that would not wish to alleviate the suffering — in some cases the truly agonising, unbearable suffering — of the beloved. And it is a strange kind of justice that metes out such misery in what appears to be a perfectly indiscriminate manner. The problem for anyone who accepts the traditional Judeo-Christian idea of God [the omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent (OOO) God] is how to reconcile these four statements:

- There is widespread suffering.
- God is omnipotent.
- God is omniscient.
- God is morally perfect.

From: Horner, C & Westacott, E 2000, *Thinking through philosophy: An introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 230–237. Used with permission.

Source 3: The God of orthodox theism

The predominant conception of God within the Western world, and hence the kind of deity that is normally the subject of debate in discussions on the problem of evil in most Western philosophical circles, is the God of “orthodox theism”. According to orthodox theism, there exists just one God, this God being a person or person-like. The operative notion, however, behind this form of theism is that God is perfect, where to be perfect is to be *the greatest being possible or, to borrow Anselm’s well-known phrase, the being than which none greater can be conceived*. (Such a conception of God forms the starting-point in what has come to be known as “perfect being theology”; see Morris 1987, 1991, and Rogers 2000). On this view, God, as an absolutely perfect being, must possess the following perfections or great-making qualities:

1. *omnipotence*: This refers to God’s ability to bring about any state of affairs that is logically possible in itself as well as logically consistent with his other essential attributes.
2. *omniscience*: God is omniscient in that he knows all truths or knows all that is logically possible to know.
3. *perfect goodness*: God is the source of moral norms ... or always acts in complete accordance with moral norms.
- ...
7. *omnipresence*: God is wholly present in all space and time. This is often interpreted metaphorically to mean that God can bring about an event immediately at any place and time, and knows what is happening at every place and time in the same immediate manner.

From: Trakakis N, n.d., *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ‘The evidential problem of evil: Orthodox theism’, www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evi/#SH1a. Used with permission.

Source 4: Good and evil

Clarifying the underlying conception of God is but the first step in clarifying the nature of the problem of evil. To arrive at a more complete understanding of this vexing problem, it is necessary to unpack further some of its philosophical baggage. I turn, therefore, to some important concepts and distinctions associated with the problem of evil, beginning with the ideas of “good” and “evil”.

The terms “good” and “evil” are, if nothing else, notoriously difficult to define. Some account, however, can be given of these terms as they are employed in discussions of the problem of evil. Beginning with the notion of evil, this is normally given a very wide extension so as to cover everything that is negative and destructive in life. The ambit of evil will therefore include such categories as the bad, the unjust, the immoral, and the painful. An analysis of evil in this broad sense may proceed as follows:

An event may be categorised as evil if it involves any of the following:

- a. some harm (whether it be minor or great) being done to the physical and/or psychological well-being of a sentient creature;
- b. the unjust treatment of some sentient creature;
- c. loss of opportunity resulting from premature death;
- d. anything that prevents an individual from leading a fulfilling and virtuous life;
- e. a person doing that which is morally wrong;
- f. the “privation of good”.

...

Turning to the many varieties of evil, the following have become standard in the literature:

Moral evil. This is evil that results from the misuse of free will on the part of some moral agent in such a way that the agent thereby becomes morally blameworthy for the resultant evil. Moral evil therefore includes specific acts of intentional wrongdoing such as lying and murdering, as well as defects in character such as dishonesty and greed.

Natural evil. In contrast to moral evil, natural evil is evil that results from the operation of natural processes, in which case no human being can be held morally accountable for the resultant evil. Classic examples of natural evil are natural disasters such as cyclones and earthquakes that result in enormous suffering and loss of life, illnesses such as leukemia and Alzheimer’s, and disabilities such as blindness and deafness.

From: Trakakis, N n.d., ‘The evidential problem of evil: Good and evil’, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evi/#SH1b. Used with permission.

Source 5: Logical problem of evil

The existence of evil and suffering in our world seems to pose a serious challenge to belief in the existence of a perfect God. If God were all-knowing, it seems that God would know about all of the horrible things that happen in our world. If God were all-powerful, God would be able to do something about all of the evil and suffering. Furthermore, if God were morally perfect, then surely God would want to do something about it. And yet we find that our world is filled with countless instances of evil and suffering. These facts about evil and suffering seem to conflict with the orthodox theist claim that there exists a perfectly good God. The challenged posed by this apparent conflict has come to be known as the problem of evil.

...

H. J. McCloskey (1960, p. 97) wrote,

Evil is a problem, for the theist, in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand and belief in the omnipotence and omniscience of God on the other.

From: Beebe, JR n.d., 'Logical problem of evil', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu/evil-log/. Used with permission.

...

Source 6: God's choice to create morally significant agents

[For Alvin Plantinga] persons have morally significant free will if they are able to perform actions that are morally significant. Imagine a possible world where God creates creatures with a very limited kind of freedom. Suppose that the persons in this world can only choose good options and are incapable of choosing bad options. So, if one of them were faced with three possible courses of action—two of which were morally good and one of which was morally bad—this person would not be free with respect to the morally bad option. That is, that person would not be able to choose any bad option even if they wanted to. Our hypothetical person does, however, have complete freedom to decide which of the two good courses of action to take. Plantinga would deny that any such person has morally significant free will. People in this world always perform morally good actions, but they deserve no credit for doing so. It is impossible for them to do wrong. So, when they do perform right actions, they should not be praised. It would be ridiculous to give moral praise to a robot for putting your soda can in the recycle bin rather than the trash can, if that is what it was programmed to do. Given the program running inside the robot and its exposure to an empty soda can, it's going to take the can to the recycle bin. It has no choice about the matter. Similarly, the people in the possible world under consideration have no choice about being good. Since they are pre-programmed to be good, they deserve no praise for it.

According to Plantinga, people in the actual world are free in the most robust sense of that term. They are fully free and responsible for their actions and decisions. Because of this, when they do what is right, they can properly be praised. Moreover, when they do wrong, they can be rightly blamed or punished for their actions.

It is important to note that [Plantinga's view] directly conflicts with a common assumption about what kind of world God could have created. Many atheologists believe that God could have created a world that was populated with free creatures and yet did not contain any evil or suffering. Since this is something that God could have done and since a world with free creatures and no evil is better than a world with free creatures and evil, this is something God should have done. Since he did not do so, God did something blameworthy by not preventing or eliminating evil and suffering (if indeed God exists at all). In response to this charge, Plantinga maintains that there are some worlds God cannot create. In particular, he cannot do the logically impossible. [He] claims that God cannot get rid of much of the evil and suffering in the world without also getting rid of morally significant free will.

From: Beebe, JR n.d., 'Logical problem of evil', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu/evil-log/. Used with permission.

Source 7: Suffering and the limits of choice

A God who gave agents only ... limited responsibilities for their fellows would not have given much. God would have reserved for himself the all-important choice of the kind of world it was to be, while simply allowing humans the minor choice of filling in the details. He would be like a father asking his elder son to look after the younger son, and adding that he would be watching the elder son's every move and would intervene the moment the elder son did a thing wrong. The elder son might justly retort that, while he would be happy to share his father's work, he could really do so only if he were left to make his own judgements as to what to do within a significant range of options available to the father. A good God, like a good father, will delegate responsibility ... [Otherwise, the father runs the risk of stopping his sons growing into] creatures with significant knowledge, power and freedom.

...

But though suffering may in these ways serve good purposes, does God have the right to allow me to suffer for your benefit, without asking my permission? For surely, an objector will say, no one has the right to allow one person A to suffer for the benefit of another one B without A's consent. We judge that doctors who use patients as involuntary objects of experimentation in medical experiments which they hope to produce results that can be used to benefit others are doing something wrong. After all, if ... [the arguments for the necessity of suffering to allow for 'soul-making'] are sound, ought we not all to be causing suffering to others in order that those others may have the opportunity to react the right way?

...

But the primary safety limit [to suffering] is that provided by the shortness of our finite life. Unending unchosen suffering would indeed to my mind provide a very strong argument against the existence of God. But that is not the human situation.

...

God has the right to allow natural evils [natural events that cause suffering that occur outside of human decisions, e.g. earthquakes] to occur (for the same reason as he has the right to allow moral evils to occur) — up to a limit. It would, of course, be crazy for God to multiply evils more and more in order to give endless opportunities for heroism, but to have *some* significant opportunity for real heroism and consequent character formation is a benefit for the person to whom it is given. Natural evils give us the knowledge to make a range of choices between good and evil, and the opportunity to perform actions of especially valuable kinds.

From: Swinburne, R 1996, *Is there a God?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, pp. 99–110. Used with permission.

Source 8: The necessity of suffering

[In his argument against suffering as being necessary, Rowe argues that] there exist instances of intense suffering which are gratuitous or pointless.

...[A]n instance of suffering is gratuitous, according to Rowe, if an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented it without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. A gratuitous evil, in this sense, is a state of affairs that is not (logically) necessary to the attainment of a greater good or to the prevention of an evil at least as bad.

Rowe builds his case ... by appealing to particular instances of human and animal suffering, such as the following:

E1: the case of Bambi

“In some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering” (Rowe 1979: 337). Used with permission.

...

[According to Rowe] even if we discovered that God could not have eliminated E1 ... without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse, it would still be unreasonable to believe this of *all* cases of horrendous evil occurring daily in our world. E1 ... [is] thus best viewed as representative of a particular class of evil which poses a specific problem for theistic belief. This problem is expressed by Rowe in the following way:

(P) No good state of affairs we know of is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being's permitting E1 Therefore,

(Q) It is likely that no good state of affairs is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being in permitting E1 ...

P states that no good we know of justifies God in permitting E1 ... From this it is inferred that Q is likely to be true, or that probably there are no goods which justify God in permitting E1 ...

From: 'The evidential problem of evil: William Rowe's evidential argument from evil', by Nick Trakakis, , *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evil/#SSH2c.i, 18 September 2019. Used with permission.