7.4 Atheism, Agnosticism and the Nature of Non-Belief: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8062 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Evaluate the view that agnosticism is a more reasonable position than atheism or theism. In your answer you should give reasoned arguments to support this statement, give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view, refer to religious arguments and non-religious arguments, and reach a justified conclusion. This question is worth 12 marks plus 3 marks for SPaG.

(Total for Question 1 is 15 marks)

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2 Give three examples of reasons people sometimes give for becoming non-religious in contemporary Britain, other than the problem of evil or scientific accounts.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

3 Explain two reasons why some religious believers might describe themselves as agnostic rather than as convinced theism. Give a reason and a linked development for each.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Explain two reasons why agnosticism might appeal to some people. Give a reason and a development for each.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Explain two reasons why the requirement for empirical evidence is important to many non-religious people when forming beliefs about God. Give a reason and development for each.

(Total for Question 5 is 6 marks)

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Mark scheme · 7.4 Atheism, Agnosticism and the Nature of Non-Belief: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 4 A well-reasoned, balanced evaluation. Arguments are developed on both sides with clear use of religious and non-religious reasons, and the conclusion is justified and explained. **10-12**

Level 3 A clear evaluation with developed arguments on at least one side and some consideration of the other side. Religious and non-religious arguments are used but may not be fully balanced. **7-9**

Level 2 A limited evaluation with some relevant points on both sides but little development. References to religious or non-religious arguments are basic. **4-6**

Level 1 Simple statements or assertions with little or no development and limited reference to relevant arguments. **1-3**

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Indicative content:

- Arguments supporting agnosticism as reasonable: it recognises limits of human knowledge and avoids dogmatism when evidence about God is contested.
- Agnosticism emphasises epistemic humility and fits with scientific attitudes that treat claims as provisional pending evidence.
- Religious responses criticise agnosticism for failing to trust revelation, scripture or personal religious experience which theists regard as valid sources of knowledge of God.
- Atheistic responses argue agnosticism is too passive, and that available evidence or philosophical arguments justify disbelief rather than suspension of judgement.
- Consideration of moral or existential aspects: some claim agnosticism leaves less guidance than theism, while others value its openness.
- A balanced conclusion might accept agnosticism as reasonable for some questions while arguing that for others, either theistic or atheistic positions have stronger support depending on the evidence and experience cited.

Question 2

lack of religious upbringing or community, oe **B1**

cultural or moral disagreements with organised religion, oe **B1**

personal experience of religion failing to meet needs, or negative experiences with religious institutions, oe **B1**

Answer: Any three: lack of upbringing; disagreements with organised religion; negative personal or institutional experiences.

Question 3

point 1: some believers accept that human understanding of God is limited and so adopt agnosticism about certain attributes or actions of God, oe **B1**

development 1: this can express theological humility while retaining a general religious identity, oe **B1**

point 2: others may find conflicts between different religious claims and prefer to suspend judgement on which is true rather than commit to a single theistic claim, oe **B1**

development 2: this reflects caution in accepting doctrinal claims without what they consider adequate grounds, oe **B1**

Answer: E.g. theological humility about human knowledge of God; suspending judgement in face of conflicting religious claims.

Question 4

point 1: agnosticism allows people to avoid dogmatic claims when evidence is unclear, oe **B1**

development 1: this can be attractive in pluralist societies where certainty on metaphysical questions is contested, oe **B1**

point 2: agnosticism respects limits of human knowledge and scientific method, oe **B1**

development 2: people who value scientific inquiry may prefer provisional conclusions rather than absolute denial or affirmation, oe **B1**

Answer: E.g. avoids dogma when evidence is unclear, suitable for pluralist societies; respects limits of knowledge and fits a scientific approach.

Question 5

Level 3 A detailed answer that explains two reasons clearly with developed supporting detail, making the importance of empirical evidence explicit and linked to non-religious approaches to knowledge. **5-6**

Level 2 A competent answer that explains one or two reasons with some development, but with limited depth or linking to non-religious approaches. **3-4**

Level 1 A basic answer offering one or two simple points about evidence without development. **1-2**

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Indicative content:

- Many non-religious people accept empirical evidence as a reliable basis for belief because it is publicly testable and repeatable, and so prefer claims that can be investigated.
- Empirical evidence connects to the scientific method, which explains natural phenomena without invoking supernatural causes, so non-religious people may see it as a stronger basis for understanding the world.
- A demand for evidence helps avoid accepting claims on the basis of tradition or authority alone, which appeals to those who prioritise critical thinking and scepticism.
- For some, empirical standards protect against being misled by false claims and support provisional beliefs that can be revised if evidence changes.

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