



RS.TC12 Atheism, Agnosticism and the Nature of Non-Belief

AQA 8062 · Calculators not allowed · about 50 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show all your working.

- 1** Which one of the following best defines agnosticism, as used in discussions about belief in God or ultimate reality?

- ☐ A. the belief that God exists and intervenes in the world
- ☐ B. the denial that any gods exist
- ☐ C. the view that the existence of God cannot be known
- ☐ D. the practice of following a religious tradition

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Give two clear reasons people sometimes give for not believing in God, naming each reason briefly and simply in the context of modern discussion about non-belief.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Outline two brief reasons, other than the problem of evil, that some people give for a lack of belief in God in modern Western societies.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Explain two reasons why some people identify as atheists rather than agnostics. Give a reason and a linked development for each.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

- 5** Explain two contrasting beliefs about the existence of God, one from a religious point of view and one from a non-religious point of view. Refer to a source of wisdom or authority for the religious belief in your answer.

(Total for Question 5 is 5 marks)

- 6** Give three short reasons why some people describe themselves as agnostic rather than atheist or theist, in the context of modern debates about knowledge and belief.

(Total for Question 6 is 3 marks)

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

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** State two clear differences between atheism and agnosticism, and for each difference give a short explanation of what the difference means.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9** 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 9 is 3 marks)

- 10** Explain two ways that identifying as an atheist or agnostic might influence a person's ethical decisions or moral life. Give a reason and a linked development for each.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** 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 11 is 6 marks)

- 12** Explain three features of atheistic naturalism, as a non-religious worldview, and how each feature supports a lack of belief in God.

(Total for Question 12 is 3 marks)

- 13** 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 13 is 4 marks)

- 14** 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 14 is 15 marks)

Mark scheme · RS.TC12 Atheism, Agnosticism and the Nature of Non-Belief

Question 1

- **B1** selecting C, the view that the existence of God cannot be known, oe
- **Answer: C**

Question 2

- **B1** one reason: lack of empirical evidence for God, oe
- **B1** second reason: the existence of evil and suffering seems incompatible with an all-powerful, loving God, oe
- **Answer: Any two, e.g. lack of empirical evidence; problem of evil and suffering.**

Question 3

- **B1** any one valid brief reason, for example scientific explanations for origins reducing need for God, oe
- **B1** any second valid brief reason, for example perceived contradictions or diversity of religions causing scepticism, oe
- **Answer: Any two from: science offers alternative explanations; diversity/contradictions between religions; lack of personal or cultural religious formation.**

Question 4

- **B1** point 1: atheists often claim there is no convincing evidence for God, oe
- **B1** development 1: therefore they reject belief in God as unsupported and see atheism as the rational position, oe
- **B1** point 2: some atheists accept naturalistic explanations for the world and think supernatural explanations are unnecessary, oe
- **B1** development 2: this leads them to prefer scientific enquiry and methodological naturalism over faith-based claims, oe
- **Answer: E.g. no convincing evidence so disbelief is rational; naturalistic worldview makes supernatural explanations unnecessary.**

Question 5

- **B1** religious belief: theism, the view that God exists and is the creator and sustainer of the world, oe
- **B1** development: many theists cite scripture as a source, for example Psalm 19:1 'The heavens declare the glory of God', as evidence of God's role in creation, oe
- **B1** non-religious belief: atheism, the denial that God exists, often based on the view that there is insufficient evidence, oe
- **B1** development: atheists may point to scientific accounts of cosmology and evolution as alternatives to theistic explanations, oe
- **B1** explicit reference to a source of wisdom or authority for the religious belief, named correctly, oe
- **Answer: Contrast example: theism citing Psalm 19:1 as evidence of God in creation, versus atheism arguing insufficient evidence and offering scientific accounts as alternatives.**

Question 6

- **B1** they believe God's existence cannot be known, so they suspend judgement, oe
- **B1** they think evidence is currently insufficient either way, oe
- **B1** they value epistemic humility and prefer to acknowledge limits of human knowledge, oe
- **Answer: Any three: belief that God's existence cannot be known; insufficient evidence either way; epistemic humility/limits of knowledge.**

Question 7

- **B1** 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
- **Answer: E.g. avoids dogma when evidence is unclear, suitable for pluralist societies; respects limits of knowledge and fits a scientific approach.**

Question 8

- **B1** difference 1: atheism is the positive denial that God exists, oe
- **B1** explanation 1: atheists assert there is no God, not just that it is unknown, oe
- **B1** difference 2: agnosticism is the view that God's existence cannot be known, oe
- **B1** explanation 2: agnostics suspend judgement and claim insufficient knowledge to assert belief or disbelief, oe
- **Answer: Any two differences explained, e.g. atheism denies God's existence, agnosticism suspends judgement because it claims knowledge is unavailable.**

Question 9

- **B1** 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
- **Answer: Any three: lack of upbringing; disagreements with organised religion; negative personal or institutional experiences.**

Question 10

- **B1** point 1: without belief in divine command, some non-believers base ethics on secular philosophy or human wellbeing, oe
- **B1** development 1: this can lead to emphasis on consequences, rights or social contracts rather than obedience to religious rules, oe
- **B1** point 2: agnostics may act morally from a sense of uncertainty and responsibility rather than divine reward, oe
- **B1** development 2: this may produce an ethical stance focused on evidence, empathy and human flourishing, oe
- **Answer: E.g. secular ethical frameworks emphasising wellbeing rather than divine command; agnostics acting from responsibility and humanistic concerns.**

Question 11

- **Level 3** (5-6): 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.
- **Level 2** (3-4): A competent answer that explains one or two reasons with some development, but with limited depth or linking to non-religious approaches.
- **Level 1** (1-2): A basic answer offering one or two simple points about evidence without development.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **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.

Question 12

- **B1** feature 1: commitment to natural explanations, oe
- **B1** feature 2: rejection of supernatural causation, oe
- **B1** feature 3: reliance on empirical science for knowledge claims, oe
- **Answer: Any three features explained briefly: natural explanations; reject supernatural causation; rely on empirical science, each linked to why they support non-belief.**

Question 13

- **B1** 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
- **Answer: E.g. theological humility about human knowledge of God; suspending judgement in face of conflicting religious claims.**

Question 14

- **Level 4** (10-12): 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.
- **Level 3** (7-9): 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.
- **Level 2** (4-6): A limited evaluation with some relevant points on both sides but little development. References to religious or non-religious arguments are basic.
- **Level 1** (1-3): Simple statements or assertions with little or no development and limited reference to relevant arguments.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **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.