7.6 The Argument from Miracles: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8062 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Explain two contrasting views about whether miracles provide good evidence for God's existence. Refer to a philosopher of religion in your answer.

(Total for Question 1 is 5 marks)

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2 This question is about the argument from miracles for the existence of God. It is the AQA-style 24-mark, five-part question.

(a) State one example of a miracle attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. **(1)**

(b) Give two reasons why Hume was doubtful that testimony to a miracle should ever be believed. **(2)**

(c) Explain Hume's argument that a wise person should never believe testimony that a miracle has occurred. Refer to a philosopher of religion in your answer. **(4)**

(d) Explain two contrasting responses to Hume's argument against believing in miracles. Refer to a philosopher of religion in your answer. **(5)**

(e) Evaluate this statement: 'Miracles are the best evidence for the existence of God.' In your answer you should: refer to religious and philosophical teaching, refer to different points of view, reach a justified conclusion. **(12)**

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(Total for Question 2 is 24 marks)

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Mark scheme · 7.6 The Argument from Miracles: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

view 1: some argue miracles are strong evidence for God, since an event that breaks the laws of nature, especially one connected to prayer or religious significance, is most plausibly explained by the direct intervention of an all-powerful God, oe **B1**

development: e.g. many believers view healing where medical explanation has been ruled out as a sign of God acting in the world, oe **B1**

view 2: Hume argued the testimony for any miracle will always be outweighed by the uniform experience that establishes the law of nature it is said to violate, oe **B1**

development: Hume also argued witnesses to reported miracles are rarely numerous, well-educated and of unquestionable honesty, making error or deception more likely than a genuine violation of natural law, oe **B1**

reference to a philosopher of religion made accurately, oe **B1**

Answer: Contrast: miracles as strong evidence for divine action vs Hume's argument that testimony can never outweigh the evidence for a law of nature.

Question 2

(a) e.g. turning water into wine at Cana (John 2); healing a man born blind (John 9); calming a storm (e.g. Mark 4); accept any genuine biblically-attested example, oe **B1**

(a) Answer: E.g. turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2).

(b) witnesses to reported miracles are rarely of sufficiently proven good sense, education and integrity to rule out error or deception, oe **B1**

(b) people have a natural love of surprise and wonder, which leads them to exaggerate or believe extraordinary stories too readily; accept also: miracle reports are disproportionately common among less critically educated peoples, or that different religions' miracle claims contradict and so cancel each other out, oe **B1**

(b) Answer: Any two: unreliable witnesses; love of surprise/wonder; disproportionate among less critical societies; rival religions' claims cancel out.

(c) point 1: Hume argued a wise person always proportions their belief to the evidence, and the evidence for the regularity of nature is as strong as any evidence can be, since it rests on the repeated, unbroken experience of everyone, oe **B1**

(c) development: because a miracle is defined as a violation of that regularly-observed law, the evidence against a miracle having happened will always be at least as strong as, and usually stronger than, the evidence of human testimony in its favour, oe **B1**

(c) point 2: Hume concluded that testimony could only outweigh this evidence if it would be even more improbable for the testimony to be false than for the reported miracle to be true, a bar he believed had never actually been met, oe **B1**

(c) development: on this basis, Hume argued we are never rationally justified in believing testimony to a miracle, since the counter-evidence of nature's uniformity always weighs at least as heavily, oe **B1**

(c) Answer: Hume: belief should be proportioned to evidence; the evidence for natural regularity always outweighs, or at best balances, miracle testimony.

(d) view 1: some agree with Hume that since our whole experience of nature confirms natural laws hold without exception, a single, unrepeatable, unverifiable report is never sufficient grounds to override that weight of evidence, oe **B1**

(d) development: they add that Hume's specific reasons for doubting miracle testimony, questionable witness quality, love of the wonderful, and contradiction between rival religions' miracle claims, still apply to modern reported miracles, oe **B1**

(d) view 2: critics argue Hume defines a 'law of nature' too rigidly, since science itself regularly revises what counts as a law when new, well-evidenced exceptions are found, so ruling out miracles by definition may be circular, oe **B1**

(d) development: others argue that if there is already independent reason to believe an all-powerful God exists, an act of God suspending a natural law is not inherently improbable, meaning good testimonial evidence could in principle be sufficient, contrary to Hume's assumption, oe **B1**

(d) reference to a philosopher of religion made accurately, oe **B1**

(d) Answer: Contrast: Hume's sceptical position defended vs the circularity/'if God exists, a miracle is not improbable' response.

(e) **L4** A well-argued, balanced answer that considers more than one point of view in a developed way, using accurate and detailed references to religious and philosophical teaching to support each point, and reaches a clear, justified conclusion. **10-12**

(e) **L3** A clear and reasoned answer that considers more than one point of view, supported by relevant references to religious and philosophical teaching, though the justification of the conclusion may be less developed. **7-9**

(e) **L2** A reasoned answer that considers at least one point of view, with some relevant supporting evidence, but with limited or no consideration of an alternative view. **4-6**

(e) **L1** One or more relevant points are made, but with little or no supporting evidence and no reasoned conclusion. **1-3**

(e) **L0** No relevant content. **0**

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(e) Indicative content:

- Agree: reported miracles, such as Jesus's healings or the miracle at Cana, are presented in scripture as signs pointing to God's power and presence, and for believers these accounts, combined with continued modern reports (e.g. at Lourdes), provide direct evidence of God acting in history.
- Agree: Aquinas argued miracles are acts of God working outside the usual order of nature, and since only an all-powerful being could suspend or exceed that order, a genuine miracle is strong evidence such a being exists.
- Agree: many believers hold that a personal or community experience of an inexplicable, timely and religiously significant event, e.g. an unexpected recovery from serious illness after prayer, is more immediately convincing to them than abstract philosophical arguments.
- Disagree: Hume argued the uniform experience that establishes a law of nature will always provide stronger evidence than the testimony of a miracle's violation of it, so a rational person should never conclude a miracle has occurred on the strength of testimony alone.
- Disagree: Hume's specific reasons for distrusting miracle testimony, unreliable witnesses, a human love of the wonderful, and the fact that competing religions' miracle claims cancel each other out, all count against relying on miracles as evidence.
- Disagree: even where an event cannot currently be explained scientifically, this is not proof it can never be explained naturally, since scientific understanding has often later explained events once labelled miraculous.
- Disagree: even if a specific unexplained event is granted, this alone does not identify which religion's God, if any, is responsible, since believers from many incompatible traditions report miracles in support of their own faith.
- A balanced answer might conclude that whether miracles count as the best evidence depends on how much weight a person gives to unrepeatable testimony over the uniform, tested regularity of natural law, and whether the sceptic's demand for verification is itself reasonable given the nature of a claimed unique, unrepeatable divine act.

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