A-level Philosophy
Unit 3: Key Themes in Philosophy
Mark scheme

2170
June 2016

Version: 1.0 Final
Mark schemes are prepared by the Lead Assessment Writer and considered, together with the relevant questions, by a panel of subject teachers. This mark scheme includes any amendments made at the standardisation events which all associates participate in and is the scheme which was used by them in this examination. The standardisation process ensures that the mark scheme covers the students’ responses to questions and that every associate understands and applies it in the same correct way. As preparation for standardisation each associate analyses a number of students’ scripts. Alternative answers not already covered by the mark scheme are discussed and legislated for. If, after the standardisation process, associates encounter unusual answers which have not been raised they are required to refer these to the Lead Assessment Writer.

It must be stressed that a mark scheme is a working document, in many cases further developed and expanded on the basis of students’ reactions to a particular paper. Assumptions about future mark schemes on the basis of one year’s document should be avoided; whilst the guiding principles of assessment remain constant, details will change, depending on the content of a particular examination paper.

Further copies of this mark scheme are available from aqa.org.uk
A-level Philosophy Unit 3

Generic mark scheme

**AO1: Knowledge and understanding** – demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant issues arising in the themes or texts selected for study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>13–15</td>
<td>Answers in this level provide a comprehensive, detailed and precise account of philosophical arguments, positions and concepts relevant to the question, demonstrating a full understanding of the issues raised.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 4     | 10–12 | Answers in this level:  
**Either** provide a clear, detailed and precise account of a relatively narrow range of positions and arguments relevant to the question so that, while the response is clearly focused, detailed and precise, it is not comprehensive and some avenues remain unexplored.  
**Or** the range of points selected and applied may be quite full but descriptions of philosophical positions, arguments and concepts may lack some detail. Understanding, while good, may not always be precise. |
| 3     | 7–9   | Answers in this level:  
**Either** present a range of knowledge generally so that relevant positions are identified and explained but specific arguments will be rare and those given will lack detail and precision (this type of response may be quite lengthy but lacking philosophical impact).  
**Or** relevant positions, concepts and arguments are introduced and accurately stated but exposition fails to develop beyond a bare outline. |
| 2     | 4–6   | Answers in this level:  
**Either** demonstrate a basic grasp of relevant arguments and positions through offering a sketchy and vague account lacking depth, detail and precision. Positions may not be clearly described and, at the bottom of this band, descriptions may also be inaccurate and confused in places.  
**Or** answers may be relevant but very brief and undeveloped. |
| 1     | 1–3   | Answers in this level demonstrate a very limited grasp of relevant positions and arguments. Knowledge and understanding of at least one aspect of relevant positions, arguments or concepts will be present. |
|       | 0     | No relevant philosophical knowledge. |
### AO2: Interpretation, analysis and application – interpret and analyse philosophical argument, applying relevant points and examples

#### Level 5  13–15 marks

A range of points are selected to advance discussion. Points are made and examples used are pertinent and judiciously selected; the nuances of the question will be specifically addressed.

Answers in this level critically analyse the range of points and examples selected for discussion to advance a clear, directed and analytical treatment of the issue.

The implications of positions discussed are considered and explored.

#### Level 4  10–12 marks

Answers in this level:
- **Either** critically analyse a relatively narrow range of relevant points and examples to provide a clear, detailed analysis of philosophical arguments and positions.
- **Or** consider a wide range of material without fully exploiting it, so that some points are not analysed in detail or with precision and some implications are not explored. Critical discussion is focused and generally sustained although some points may not be clearly directed.

#### Level 3  7–9 marks

Answers in this level:
- **Either** select a range of relevant points and examples to provide a focused discussion of relevant philosophical positions, arguments and concepts in which analysis is brief, lacking in detail and precision.
- **Or** interpretation is very narrowly focused, and analysis centres on a partial appreciation of the issue.

#### Level 2  4–6 marks

Answers in this level:
- **Either** select some relevant points but analysis may be basic, sketchy and vague so that critical points are not developed.
- **Or** apply and analyse a range of philosophical concepts and arguments without sustaining a focus on the question.

Answers lower in the level may exhibit both of these tendencies in discussions of a limited range of points where the focus on the question may be largely implicit.

#### Level 1  1–3 marks

Answers in this level provide a limited analysis of philosophical arguments and positions:
- **Either** through offering a brief, fragmentary interpretation and analysis of the issues.
- **Or** through offering a tangential account in which some points coincide with the concerns of the question but relevance is limited.

#### 0 marks

No relevant philosophical points.
**AO3: Assessment and evaluation** – assess arguments and counter-arguments. Construct and evaluate arguments in order to form reasoned judgements.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 5</strong></td>
<td>17–20 marks</td>
<td>Reasoning and argumentation are effective, penetrating and expressed with some insight and sophistication. The construction of argumentation is relevant and sustained and reads a coherent and integrated whole. Answers in this level advance a clear evaluative judgement: at the lower end of this level this may consist of a balanced summary of the strengths and weaknesses of positions or points evaluated throughout. The response is legible, employing technical language accurately and appropriately, with few, if any, errors of spelling punctuation and grammar. The response reads as a coherent and integrated whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 4</strong></td>
<td>13–16 marks</td>
<td>The critical appreciation of points raised is employed to advance a reasoned judgement although this may require further support. Some material will be explicitly evaluated although the construction of argumentation may lack some insight or sophistication and positions reached may not convince completely. At the bottom of this level evaluative conclusions might acknowledge some key strengths and weaknesses of relevant positions. The response is legible, and technical language is employed with partial success. There may be occasional errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar and the response reads as a coherent whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
<td>9–12 marks</td>
<td>Answers in this level: Either evaluate some relevant points and argumentation but may not advance a position or reach a judgement in relation to the issue as a whole. Or positions are listed and juxtaposed so that evaluation is implicit in the order or number of points made and judgements may be made on the basis of limited argumentation. At the bottom of this level juxtapositions lack depth, detail, subtlety and precision. The response is legible, employing some technical language accurately, with possibly some errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td>5–8 marks</td>
<td>Answers in this level: Either exhibit a limited attempt to develop argumentation, rather they describe a view. Or argumentation is confused in places. Judgements may be reached which do not seem to be justified by the reasoning provided. The response may be legible, with a basic attempt to employ technical language, which may not be appropriate. There may be frequent errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td>1–4 marks</td>
<td>Argumentation is likely to be brief, judgements may be asserted without justification and reasoning is confused, misdirected or poorly expressed. Technical language may not be employed, or it may be used inappropriately. The response may not be legible and errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar may be intrusive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>0 marks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>No relevant philosophical insights are presented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A-level Philosophy Unit 3  Question-specific mark scheme
Examiners should note that the content suggested in the question-specific mark scheme is intended as an indication of the range of issues students are likely to draw from but is not exhaustive, and other relevant material and approaches should be credited. Note also that the range of potentially relevant material mentioned is not intended as a prescription as to what students’ responses ought to cover and examiners should refer to the Generic mark scheme when awarding marks.

Assess whether all the features of consciousness can be reduced to the physical.  [50 marks]

AO1
• The question concerns the possibility of a physicalist reduction of consciousness and students might approach the question through specific physicalist theories, such as identity theory or functionalism, or in terms of physicalism more generally.
• Students are being invited to consider ‘features of consciousness’ and are likely to focus on qualia and intentionality, although other features that might be considered include the subjective point of view, privacy, indubitability & privileged access; being indivisible or unextended, capable of language use, being undetermined, normativity, the capacity for reason.
• Insofar as behaviour can be considered physical, logical behaviourism and the possibility of an analytic reduction could figure, but care would need to be taken to maintain focus.
• The view that reduction is possible is likely to be contrasted with forms of dualism and/or non-reductive monism (biological naturalism, anomalous monism).

AO2
Arguments for the claim:
• Appeals to science: there is no room for irreducible properties or substances within physics. The physical universe is causally closed, the problem of interaction, the principle of the conservation of energy. The purely physical origins of human beings.
• Empirical evidence for the neural dependence of all mental phenomena (eg drugs, brain damage). Explanatory power: the success of the neural sciences in explaining behaviour and experience in terms of neurological processes.
• Ockham’s razor: materialism is to be preferred over dualism as the simpler theory, so long as it explains the phenomena (at least) as well as dualism.
• The phenomenological fallacy: introspection may not reveal how things really are within the ‘mind’.
• Reductivism is consistent with other successful reductions in the history of science (eg sound to compression waves of air).
Arguments against the claim:

- Introspection as a source of direct knowledge of the immateriality of the mind. Cartesian arguments for the irreducibility of consciousness (and responses), ie doubt, epistemological argument, argument from indivisibility (eg the masked man fallacy).

- Reduction of the mental to the physical leaves out the hard problem: how does the brain produce the mental? Does reduction ignore the reality of intentionality, qualia and the subjective point of view? Can emergent properties be truly novel? Ned Block, Jackson’s thought experiments.

- Zombies: if we can conceive of brains without minds, then mind doesn’t require brain and so there must be more to being minded than the physical.

- How if mind is independent of the brain are we to explain mental causation? Property dualism appears to lead to epiphenomenalism and the counter-intuitive claim that mental states are causally inefficacious. On the other hand how is substance dualism to account for causal interaction between such radically distinct kinds of substance?

- Frege’s distinction between sense and reference may be used to show that our vocabulary of mental states and of brain states may be different without this implying their referents are ontologically distinct.

AO3
Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and a range of judgements might be defended.

- They may argue that the features of mentality are irreducible and then may go on to defend a particular theory which endorses this claim, eg substance dualism, property dualism, epiphenomenalism, biological naturalism, anomalous monism.

- Or they may oppose the claim. Some doing so may go on to recommend a form of reductivism, most likely identity theory (type or token versions) or functionalism (all the features of mentality are reducible to functional states of the brain).

- They may argue that some features are irreducible but others are reducible.
Assess whether mental states can cause actions.  

**AO1**

- The common sense view that mental states, such as acts of volition, sensations, reasons, desires and beliefs cause actions should be outlined. Students may give examples of such apparent causal influence.
- Different accounts of mental causation could be explored, most likely substance dualism, but also materialist accounts, (identity theory, functionalism, biological naturalism, anomalous monism). Students who discuss just one of these theories are likely to be partial. The better responses should keep focus on the issue itself.
- In contrast there are several theories studied that deny mental causation and students are likely to select some of the following for discussion: parallelism, occasionalism, epiphenomenalism, behaviourism, eliminativism.

**AO2**

**Arguments for the claim that mental states cause actions**
- Appeals to everyday experience of mental states causing actions. The common sense or folk psychological view has much to recommend it, eg because it is successful at predicting and explaining behaviour, because it has endured.
- Descartes’ response to the problem of interaction. ‘Animal spirits’ convey the mind’s influence to the body and vice versa via the pineal gland.
- Reductive materialist accounts of the mind. Identity theory: if the mind is the brain, then it is clear that it influences the body. Neuroscientific evidence of the brain controlling behaviour.
- Functionalism: mental states are to be defined by their causal role, so necessarily they causally influence behaviour.
- Anomalous monism: although there are no causal laws relating events described in mentalistic terms such as beliefs and desires with events described in physical terms, they can be causally related under purely physical descriptions.
- Biological naturalism: if mental states are higher order properties of the brain then they can have a causal influence on our actions via the ordinary physiological route.

**Arguments against the claim that mental states cause actions**
- Some students will focus on dualist interactionism and so explore reasons for being sceptical about the possibility of an immaterial mind having a causal influence on the material body.
- The failure of dualism to explain mental causation. Immaterial substances have no spatial location or mass, so no way of affecting material substances. For two substances to causally interact they must have common properties, eg extension. Descartes’ conjecture concerning the pineal gland and animal spirits as failing to address the difficulty.
- The physical universe is *causally closed*, so it is not possible for something non-physical to have a causal impact on the physical. Causal closure implies behaviour is over-determined.
• The claims of the interactionist appear to contravene the law of the conservation of energy because the mind must introduce energy into the physical universe from without in order to exert a real influence on it.

• The homunculus fallacy: the difficulty of supposing the mind to be an agent acting upon the body and receiving sense data from it. The threat of infinite regress.

• Behaviourism: the problem of mental causation as a pseudo-problem to be dissolved by conceptual analysis. The mind does not cause action, but is a way of talking about actual and potential behaviour.

• Experimental evidence to suggest that volitions occur after actions (Libet) so that it is an illusion that conscious decisions cause actions.

• Reasons are not causes of action since they do not fit into law like regularities. Normative constraints are irreducible to physical laws.

AO3
Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and students should form a reasoned judgement about whether or not the mind has a causal influence over our actions.
Students may go on to embrace a particular theoretical position (see below) although this is not a requirement of the question.

• If rejecting the idea that the mind has any causal influence over action they may recommend:
  • Dualist positions: parallelism or occasionalism: The appearance of a direct causal relationship is an illusion.
  • An epiphenomenalist position: that the mental is caused by the physical, but has no reciprocal causal influence. The mind as is a by-product. We are ‘conscious automata’.
  • Materialist positions: eliminativism (folk psychological concepts don’t pick out real features of human beings, and if there are not mental states they can have no influence on our actions); behaviourism, (mental states are constituted by behaviour; they are not the cause of behaviour).

• Alternatively, those claiming that the mind does influence our actions may recommend some form of interactionism, either interactionist substance dualism, or a materialist account: identity theory functionalism, anomalous monism or biological naturalism.
Assess the view that government (the state) is unnecessary. [50 marks]

AO1

The view involves the rejection of the various ideological justifications of the state and students are likely to explore the conservative, liberal, libertarian and state socialist arguments to this end. Political power is not required to ensure security, enable cooperative behaviour and the conditions for economic development, defend natural rights, arbitrate in disputes, mete out justice, redistribute wealth, provide public goods, etc.

The view that the state is unnecessary may be associated with anarchism and/or Marxism.

AO2

Arguments for the view that government is unnecessary

Students may explore reasons for being positive about the state of nature. Social contract theorists such as Hobbes and Locke are not sufficiently critical in their account of human nature; they project flaws produced by socialisation (acquisitiveness, competitiveness) into the state of nature (Rousseau). If human beings are naturally free, equal, co-operative and sympathetic, social organisation can operate according to non-coercive voluntary means. Hierarchical power structures are artificial, so not natural or necessary.

Since our observation of human nature is necessarily of humans subject to political authority we cannot know what it would be like without government and so cannot judge whether it is required.

Without laws, informal agreements, social pressures and moral constraints would ensure the smooth running of society.

Without the institution of private property, the state is no longer needed to protect us from property crime.

The oppressed condition of mankind subject to government might be contrasted with accounts of a liberated life without, eg communism, public ownership of the means of production, the freedom to develop one’s self through freely chosen labour, a community of equals, etc. Forms of anarchism, eg humans organising themselves informally, and voluntarily adopting co-operative behaviour, conforming to a shared morality, etc. Examples of self-organising / cooperative behaviours which don’t involve submission to political authority, eg from the animal kingdom (insect colonies), the free market, within international relations, primitive societies, communes, anarchism during the Spanish civil war may figure.

Marxist arguments:

What is considered ‘necessary’ reflects the ideology of the ruling class, so the view that humans are competitive and self seeking, or security seeking and morally corrupt reflect the ideology of the bourgeoisie (liberalism) or the aristocracy (conservatism). Human nature is determined by its social situation or by its relation to the means of production, and so cannot be treated as a given from which judgements about how they can live may be inferred. With common ownership of property, government will become unnecessary.

Liberal and conservative ideological justifications of political authority reflect class interests and so do not establish its necessity.
• Some students are likely to go further and explore arguments to show that government is not only unnecessary, but positively harmful:
• Governments are not only not needed for genuine moral behaviour but positively undermine genuine moral autonomy since we each have a duty to act according to an autonomous assessment of what is right (Kropotkin). Godwin’s ‘principle of private judgement’.
• The sovereignty of the individual over their own person and property is inviolable. The state has no business interfering in the freely chosen actions of individuals. We do not ask to be under the jurisdiction of the state and so have no duty to accept its authority.
• The exercise of political power offends against our natural rights: We all have a natural and equal right to freedom, so no one can be justly subordinated to another’s authority without their consent. Since no state can obtain the consent of all citizens its use of power must be illegitimate.
• The state uses violence to compel individuals to accept its jurisdiction and to conform to obligations it unilaterally imposes. So its authority is illegitimate and never necessary.

Arguments for the view that government is necessary
• Hobbes: humans without government descend into a war of each against each, whence the need for a social contract and a powerful sovereign.
• Conservative arguments: man is a social animal (Aristotle) and the individual depends upon the state if he or she is to flourish. History shows that human nature is not perfectible, but requires the clear guidance of traditional authority. Humans are naturally unequal, so hierarchy is natural and thus individuals must submit to authority in order to preserve good order. The organic metaphor as showing that social instability will follow if humans do not accept traditional political authorities.
• Locke and classical liberalism: government as a necessary evil required to ensure stability and the rule of law, and protect natural rights. The state acting as a neutral umpire between competing individuals. The social contract.
• Liberal and welfare liberal arguments: empirical evidence shows that human beings are naturally self-seeking, acquisitive, competitive, etc. Political authority is necessary to protect and maximise the natural rights to freedom and security through defence against violence, theft and fraud. Human beings can only flourish if provided with the means via the welfare state (education, health care provision). Political authority makes possible the fruits of cooperation (infrastructure, art, etc.).
• People’s private judgements concerning what is for the greatest good are unreliable and so they need to be guided by the law. It is unrealistic to suppose people can be brought by their use of reason to act for the good and to respect others. The tragedy of the commons, prisoner’s dilemma: individual decisions do not optimise social utility without some external guidance. So submission to governmental authority is needed.
• Students may appeal to actual human societies to argue that they all exhibit authoritarian structures and so this is inescapable or natural. Historical arguments: the alternatives, anarchism, communism, have shown themselves to be unworkable in practice. So government is necessary.
AO3
Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and a judgement about whether or not government is necessary should be defended:

- Students may argue for a positive account of human nature which allows us to live without submitting to political authority and hold out the possibility of a communist or anarchist utopia. Our species lived without government for most of its history. So government is not necessary or desirable.

- Alternatively, they may say that government may be desirable, eg because of the social benefits it affords us, although alternatives are still possible, so it is not strictly necessary.

- Or they may argue that government is necessary.

- Students may also legitimately argue that we cannot know whether government is necessary, eg because human nature cannot be known, or that there is no such thing as an essential or fixed human nature.
The rights of the individual should always take priority over considerations of social utility.’ Discuss. [50 marks]

AO1

- The question concerns how conflicts between rights of individual persons and the satisfaction of the needs, wants or preferences of society as a whole, should be resolved.
- Students may explore the notion of individual rights. They may be considered natural, God given or ours by virtue of our possession of certain capacities, such as free will and rationality; or in virtue of our ‘moral worth’ because humans are ends in themselves (Kant).
- Individual rights might include rights to self-preservation (Hobbes) or life, liberty and property (Locke). They involve equality before the law. Individual rights would also include social or legal rights, eg the right to vote.
- References may be made to the UN Charter or European Convention on human rights which include certain social and economic rights (eg to education, health and welfare provision).
- Hohfeld’s classification of rights may figure: claim rights, liberty rights, powers and immunities.
- Utilitarianism may be outlined.

AO2

Arguments for the claim that individual rights should take precedence over considerations of utility

- Rights cannot be derived from and trump the principle of utility (Dworkin). They are essential to protect the individual from the dangers of utilitarian calculations. Examples of how utilitarian reasoning can lead to conclusions which conflict with our moral intuitions about the rights of individuals (killing a patient to save five others, arresting an innocent person to avert a riot, etc.) might be used to argue that rights should take precedence.
- Locke’s self-ownership thesis / Nozick may be used to defend an absolute right to property. Considerations of social utility fail to justify redistributive taxation as forced labour.
- The infringement of certain rights (eg a mother’s right not to be tortured to death by her son) would be superlatively evil so that no morally decent person would consider them no matter what the consequences might be (Gewirth). The principle of intervening action: we are only morally responsible for our own actions, so that rights should not be violated even if doing so would prevent further rights being violated by another agent, eg that not to torture would lead to a terrorist group annihilating a city (Gewirth).
- If it is argued that rights are grounded in human nature (status based rights), then they may be considered inviolable. In support of this view Kantian consideration about autonomous agents possessing intrinsic human worth as ends in themselves may be explored, the possession of free will, rationality, or the ability to reflect on how to live, suggest human persons deserve certain absolute rights. Or Locke’s claim that we can recognise our natural rights by reason. If natural rights are thought to originate in divine decree, then they may be considered inviolable.
• If natural rights are considered inviolable, this has the practical moral benefit of protecting people from abuse from governments.

• Rule utilitarian arguments for rights may be explored: social recognition of certain rights will maximise utility and so should be respected even when immediate considerations of utility appear to advocate violating the right.

Arguments against the claim that individual rights should take precedence over considerations of utility

• The utilitarian argument that it must be wrong to uphold a right if so doing leads to catastrophic consequences for social utility. Examples from the literature (eg in self-defence in the case of an unjust war; if strapped to a tank [Nozick]; the trolley problem; the explorer who must choose whether to kill a native to save more lives [Williams], etc.).

• Critiques of the notion of rights which are independent of social utility. Any right must be grounded in a statute, otherwise it is not worth the paper it's not written on, and so cannot trump utility. If natural rights trump utility because they are God given, then this relies on the existence of God, which might be questioned. Since the 'natural rights' we supposedly possess are not self-evident nor universally agreed upon they don’t exist and so cannot override considerations of utility. Legal rights should be selected according to its usefulness for human wellbeing (Bentham).

• The social contract: we give up certain rights in order to live in peace and prosperity. So individual rights may justly be overridden to serve utility, if the individual gives consent.

• Mill's derivation of rights from the principle of utility. Rights as compatible with social utility. The importance of respecting individual rights, eg to freedom of speech or choosing how to live, to the proper flourishing of the individual.

AO3

Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and a range of judgements may be defended:

• At one end they may claim that individual rights always take precedence over utility so that it is never justified to violate an individual's right.

• Or they may argue that some fundamental rights cannot be justifiably violated, (eg the right to life, or not to be tortured) but others may, (eg the right to property), in order to achieve the greater social good.

• It may be argued that respect for individual rights is necessary to promote social utility and that any conflict is merely apparent. Students may defend rule or two level utilitarianism.
0 5

Assess whether sceptical arguments are successful in showing that we cannot attain knowledge.

[50 marks]

AO1

- The question concerns the sceptic’s challenge to claims to knowledge and whether it can be met. The question mentions sceptical arguments and students should select specific arguments for discussion.
- Since the question concerns knowledge in general, the most pertinent arguments will be those which lead to global scepticism. However local sceptical arguments raising doubts about the possibility of knowledge within a particular domain are also relevant.
- Some students may discuss the definition of knowledge and the need for justification.
- Some students may elect to discuss scepticism about the existence of the physical world and examine the philosophy of perception drawing on the Knowledge of the External World AS module. Relevant material from other units is to be credited.

AO2

Students should analyse some sceptical arguments. The attraction of such arguments is that their premises are generally plausible and the inferences apparently valid.

- The sceptical arguments most likely to figure:
  - Students focusing on scepticism about the senses are likely to emphasise the difficulty of moving from appearance (sense data) to reality. Indirect realism leads to the veil of perception problem and solipsism.
  - If we cannot reliably distinguish sense deception, illusions, hallucinations, dreams, etc. from veridical perception, we may not be able to claim perceptual knowledge. Descartes’s demon, and the brain-in-a-vat scenario are likely to figure.
  - The infinite regress of justification: according to the JTB account, knowledge requires a justification, but in order effectively to justify a belief, the justification must itself be an item of knowledge. But this leads to an infinite regress of justificatory reasons, meaning that there can be no ultimate justification for any belief.
  - If knowledge is justified true belief, what counts as sufficient justification? Whether certainty is necessary for knowledge; infallibilism. If we define justification in such a way as to prevent the possibility of being mistaken, then knowledge may well be impossible.
  - Defeasibility: it is always possible for the justification of any belief to be defeated by facts unknown to the subject. But if we can never know we are properly justified in holding a belief, then this may be taken to imply that knowledge is impossible.
  - The physical world is too unstable to be the object of genuine knowledge (Plato).
Arguments to show that sceptical arguments are unsuccessful:

- Problems with moving from local to global scepticism. Certain sceptical scenarios may be argued to rely on knowledge they claim to doubt and so are self-defeating: eg sense deception must be detected via the senses; dreams are parasitic on waking life, recognising that you’ve had dreams which are just like waking life shows we can distinguish dreams and reality.

- While knowledge of reality is indeed impossible we can have knowledge of appearances. Phenomenalism closes the gap between appearance and reality and defeats scepticism by analysing physical objects in terms of experience. So we can have knowledge of the physical world.

- Specific arguments to meet the brain-in-a-vat scenario, (eg Putnam, the meaning of the claim to be a brain in a vat would be empty because it would fail to refer to anything; the whole scenario is empty since it makes no practical difference / cannot be verified).

- Radical scepticism relies on an overly strict definition of knowledge, eg infallibilism requires that we eliminate the possibility of error. If this demand is seen as unreasonable an alternative account of what constitutes knowledge might be defended, such as that knowledge is true belief which tracks the truth, which is caused by a reliable process, etc.

- Arguments from common sense: certain claims, such as those about externally existing physical objects (eg Moore’s hands) are epistemically basic. It makes no sense to doubt such beliefs. Sceptical arguments start from premises which are more doubtful than the conclusion. If I know I am standing up, then I can know I’m not dreaming (Moore). Such beliefs could be said to be knowable without the need for further justification.

- Alternatively it could be argued it only makes sense to call knowledge what can be doubted (Wittgenstein).

- Even if it is possible to doubt certain beliefs, this doesn’t mean that they are doubtworthy. In the absence of good reason to doubt them we are justified in calling them ‘knowledge’. The best explanation sufficient for knowledge.

- Arguments from ordinary language: ‘knowledge’ gets its meaning from its use in everyday linguistic contexts and there are criteria which we use to determine the correct use. The sceptical use of the word takes it from this context and so misuses the word, but if we keep to ordinary usage, sceptical worries lose their force.

- Philosophical doubt involves a suspension of judgement about beliefs, but this doesn’t amount to genuine doubt. In practice we can do no other than accept them. Mitigated scepticism and the view that although radical scepticism shows knowledge is strictly speaking impossible, instinct is a more powerful basis for belief than reason and belief proportionate to the evidence is the best we can hope for.

- Transcendental arguments: what are the conditions of possibility for the sceptic’s argument to be intelligible? Students might argue that the claim that I am prone to error shows a commitment to the possibility of truth and falsehood in one’s beliefs and so of knowledge. Kantian arguments about the conditions of possibility for objective experience being the positing of an external reality.

- Knowledge is possible in certain domains and so defeats global scepticism, eg knowledge of one’s own conscious states or sense data, of mathematics or a priori truths, of the forms, of my own existence as a thinking thing, of the basic propositions of common sense.

- Students may point out that to deny that knowledge is possible raises the question of the status of this denial. Is it known or not? If not, then it may not be a worthwhile judgement, if it is, then at least one thing is known and it is false.
AO3

Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and a judgement should be made about whether sceptical arguments succeed in showing that we cannot attain knowledge.

- Students may conclude that the sceptical arguments considered show that knowledge cannot be attained. They may go on to consider whether and how the impossibility of knowledge should impact on our belief system.
- Or they may argue that the arguments fail and so that knowledge can be attained.
- Or they may argue that some sceptical arguments are successful and others not.
- This may lead them to conclude that there are some domains where knowledge claims may successfully resist sceptical attack, eg knowledge of one’s own existence, concerning the contents of our own minds, the a priori, or basic beliefs; whereas there are other domains where knowledge cannot be attained.
- They may argue that some types of knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance and/or practical knowledge escape sceptical attack and so are attainable, whereas propositional knowledge does not.
‘Any claim that cannot be verified by sense experience is meaningless.’
Discuss. [50 marks]

AO1

• The claim should be associated with an empiricist or verificationist critique of metaphysics.
• If all knowledge comes from experience, then claims about what cannot be established through experience are not possible items of knowledge. Hume’s fork.
• Synthetic propositions are only properly cognitive or scientific if they have empirical content or make confirmable predictions, so all talk of what cannot be verified by sense experience is not factually significant and is therefore speculative nonsense.
• The verification principle: if a proposition is neither analytic, and nor can it be verified (in principle or in practice) by reference to experience, then it is not meaningful.
• The view that the propositions of logic, maths and geometry are empty of empirical content.
• The question may be seen as asking whether synthetic a priori knowledge is possible.
• Examples of meaningless claims may figure because they deal with transcendent entities, eg claims about the Forms, religious claims about God or an afterlife, religious experiences, claims about ‘matter’; or because they express attitudes rather than describe facts (aesthetic and ethical claims).
• The question is quite permissive so responses focusing on empiricist inspired approaches to dealing with scepticism should be credited – eg the idea that genuine knowledge must be justified by sense experience (the verification principle, Hume’s fork or Kant’s claim that intuitions without concepts are blind). The bounds of knowledge as circumscribed by what can be reduced to sense experience.
• Some may include discussion of universals seeing the claim as a defence of nominalism.

AO2

Arguments for the claim

• If a claim is not connected to any possible experience, it’s not clear that it can be about anything, and so is empty of content. If the truth or falsehood of a claim makes no difference to experience, it is uninformative. Claims which concern (putative) entities which transcend experience have no content and so are ineffable and meaningless.
• If a claim is analytic, then knowledge of it doesn’t require reference to experience. But if it is synthetic, then only reference to experience can determine its truth or falsehood. So, there cannot be meaningful propositions that both tell us about the world and are knowable a priori.
• Verificationism overcomes scepticism about the external world. Phenomenalism and the claim that what is real is exhausted by sense experience may be explored. We can speak meaningfully about the physical world only because we are speaking about actual and potential sense data. Matter as a philosophical confusion.
Developments of verificationism to meet objections:

- Response to the accusation of failing its own test. The principle is a definition of meaning and so analytic and meaningful. [Response, the metaphysician now has no reason to care about being 'meaningful' according to the verificationist's stipulative definition]
- The distinction between verification in principle and in practice. Strong and weak versions of the principle.

Problem for the claim

- Whether claims about events occurring before or after the appearance of conscious beings are meaningful. Whether it is plausible to reduce historical claims to claims about what is currently observable. [Response that they are meaningful as they concern what would be observed were there observers present.]
- How can claims about unobservable entities (e.g., electrons) be verified? [Response that they must be analytically resolvable into observation statements.]
- Holism. If observation statements cannot be tested independently of the theoretical frameworks in which they occur, then they cannot be verified. Yet, they are meaningful.
- The view leads to solipsism, since the existence of other minds cannot be reduced to sense experience.
- The verification principle is too strong and excludes much of what we ordinarily take to be meaningful e.g., aesthetic or ethical claims. So it a poor definition of our everyday understanding of meaningfulness.
- Anti-realist accounts of meaning may be used to claim that meaning need not be cognitive. The idea of meaning as use may be proposed as a preferable alternative.
- The verification principle is neither analytic nor verifiable, so meaningless by its own test.
- Even science fails conclusively to verify its claims because they go beyond the evidence (problem of induction). It is impossible to prove general propositions for certain. It is impossible to verify claims about the past or future. [Ayer's weak version of the principle as a response: a claim is meaningful if empirical evidence can count towards its truth.]
- The problem that general laws cannot be verified may lead to falsificationism as an alternative. A claim that cannot be falsified by experience is meaningless.
- Propositions of logic, maths and geometry as meaningful. Whether geometry tells us about the structure or reality without the need for empirical verification. Kantian arguments for synthetic a priori knowledge of e.g., causality.
- Rational principles as meaningful, e.g., nothing can come from nothing, the principle of sufficient reason, universal causation.

AO3

Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and a judgement should be made about whether claims that are not verifiable should be considered meaningless.

- At one end they may agree with the claim and support the verificationist account of meaning.
- Some of those who disagree may go on to recommend an alternative account of meaningfulness (although this is not a requirement of the question).
‘Utilitarianism provides a stronger basis for resolving moral problems than deontology.’ Assess this claim using at least one moral problem of your choice to inform your answer.

[50 marks]

AO1
The specification asks students to study moral theories ‘in relation to at least one ethical problem’ so the problem to be discussed is open, but credit should be given for the level of philosophical detail students are able to draw on.

The question also requires knowledge of utilitarianism and deontology, so marks should also be awarded for the level of understanding of the theory or theories shown.

- Utilitarianism recommends acting in such a way as to maximise aggregate happiness. Act and rule versions may figure. The right action as what maximises the satisfaction of preferences.
- Deontology recommends following one’s duty. Different accounts of how we discover our duties might be explored, most likely Kant although contract theory, natural law, Ross’s prima facie duties could also figure as could responses focused on rights or intentions.

The question concerns the relative worth of these normative theories in providing us with guidance when faced with moral problems and this idea may be explored. Utilitarianism may be characterised as offering a calculus (eg Bentham’s felicific calculus) by which we may determine the relative merits of different courses of action. Kantian ethics may be understood in terms of giving us a decision making procedure – attempting to universalise a maxim to determine whether there is a ‘contradiction in conception’ or ‘in will’. Both may be said to give us one universal principle (the utility principle or categorical imperative) from which we can derive the right action in any particular case.

AO2
Material students may draw on is extensive and will depend in large measure on the nature of the problem selected for discussion.

Points about the relative merits of utilitarianism and deontology that are likely to emerge from the discussion include:

Considerations in favour of the claim. Why utilitarianism may be considered the stronger.

- Utilitarianism provides a simple mechanism for making moral decisions; it is sensitive to the demands of particular situations since it requires consideration of the consequence of our actions which are measurable. Students might contrast the practicality of utilitarianism with the abstract nature of deontological principles.
- Actions cannot have intrinsic worth irrespective of their impact on human wellbeing; deontology is too rigid, not sensitive to the complexities of particular situations; following rules may mean allowing a greater evil.
- Depending on the problem discussed, it is likely that some will explore the principle of double effect, the acts-omissions, or killing and letting die distinctions, in order to show how it can be acceptable to allow bad consequences to ensue if they are foreseen but not directly intended, or if they occur because of an omission rather than an act.
• Students might explore difficulties involved with the conflict between duties.
• Deontologists’ focus on the agent’s motivation is narcissistic. The problem that concern with motivation is about keeping one’s own conscience clean while turning a blind eye to very real consequences.
• Different versions of utilitarianism may figure (rule, preference), as a way of dealing with objections to hedonistic and act versions. Standard objections to act utilitarianism which involve sacrificing individual rights to calculations of general utility, free riders, or the impracticality of individuals calculating each situation anew, may be met by arguing that general rules should be adopted just if their adoption leads to greater aggregate happiness or preference satisfaction.

**Considerations against the claim. Why deontology may be considered the stronger.**

• Only motives for action guided by maxims which can be universalised without contradiction can be moral. The importance of the good will and being motivated by categorical imperatives rather than means-end reasoning.
• Practical difficulties with utilitarianism: human happiness cannot realistically be calculated, different individuals’ pleasures are incommensurable; consequences are unpredictable; the problem of comparing higher and lower pleasures; it is undecidable how far into the future our calculations should be extended or whether long or short term pleasures should weigh more heavily. Deontology as simpler.
• Utilitarian calculations involve using agents as a means to an end; they justify actions which go against our moral intuitions; ignore the intrinsic wrongness of certain actions/individual rights; ignore moral integrity and individual responsibility.
• Problems with hedonism: utilitarianism as a ‘pig philosophy’ (Carlyle); not all pleasures are good; Nozick’s experience machine.
• Difficulties with justifying the utility principle (moving from what is desired to what is desirable, the is-ought gap, open question argument and naturalistic fallacy) might be explored, but some care would be needed to maintain focus on practical ethics.
• Appeals to cases which suggest rights trump considerations of utility.

It is expected that discussion of the above or equivalent points will be explored in terms of the specific problem selected, so that responses which consider the relative strengths of the two theories with little reference to a problem should be considered poorly focused.

**AO3**

Assessment will figure in the discussion of the arguments and students should reach a judgement which theory provides the stronger basis for resolving moral problems.

• Students may reject or accept the claim.
• Alternatively, they may argue for a more nuanced conclusion which outlines certain strengths and weaknesses inherent in the two approaches.
• They may argue that we should not adopt either one to the exclusion of the other, so that we incorporate a recognition of the need for both in our moral deliberations.
• They may recommend rule utilitarianism as an effective compromise between the two.
• Or they may reject both as equally weak, and this may lead to a recommendation of virtue ethics, most likely on the grounds that no decision making procedure can be expected to deliver answers to moral problems unless we already possess the practical wisdom to apply them, or that real life moral difficulties are complex and require a more flexible approach.
Assess whether it is possible to derive moral truths from natural facts.

[50 marks]

AO1

• The focus is on ethical naturalism: the view that moral claims can be reduced to non-ethical, empirically discoverable facts.

• This is likely to be identified as a realist and as cognitivist view (moral claims admit of truth and falsehood and can be known). As such it may be contrasted with the views that moral truths are based on transcendent facts, on God’s will, on non-natural facts (intuitionism) or self-governing reason; as well as with anti-realist positions.

• The view rejects the fact-value distinction and implies that better scientific knowledge of the world, or of human nature in particular, should increase our moral understanding. Moral claims may be confirmed by empirical investigation.

• Positions mentioned on the specification which may be seen as deriving moral truths from natural facts include virtue ethics, utilitarianism, the view that moral judgements concern relational properties, the analogy with secondary qualities, and descriptive relativism, although other positions may feature.

AO2

General arguments for realism are likely to be explored:

• Appeal to our ordinary moral attitudes: we experience morality as something that is binding and objective. There is conviction and universal assent about the wrongness of certain actions. These are best explained if there is a fact of the matter about what is right and wrong.

• Moral argument presupposes a commitment to the possibility that our moral opinions can converge on the truth, which suggests there are moral truths.

• The possibility of moral social progress implies an objective standard of right and wrong.

To be well focused these should be coupled with reasons to suppose naturalism is superior to other forms of realism:

• Ethical naturalism may be defended on the basis of a general naturalist position. All facts must be natural, so that if ethics is to have any basis, it must be natural too. Naturalism promises to demystifyiphys ethical discourse. Non-natural facts would be ‘queer’ and it is difficult to explain how we could acquire knowledge of them (Mackie).

Arguments made by different naturalist theories of ethics:

• Utilitarianism. Bentham’s / Mill’s arguments for the utility principle. The fact that human beings universally recognise pleasure or happiness as the ultimate goal of all action, shows that maximising happiness must be the ultimate good. Given humans desire happiness it is right to maximise it.

• Virtue ethics / Aristotelian naturalism. A naturalistic investigation of human beings will reveal what constitutes a flourishing existence for us. A well-functioning human being develops a virtuous character and the practical knowledge of how to live well. Neo-Aristotelian naturalism (Foot, Hursthouse).
• It may be argued that although moral claims cannot be analytically reduced to natural facts, what we can meaningfully value is nonetheless constrained by the facts. Moral truths are not free floating, but supervene on facts. Students may discuss the supervenience relation and argue that moral properties depend on natural ones.

• Hume: moral judgements are grounded in natural facts about human sentiments of approval and disapproval.

• The analogy with secondary qualities may be used to defend naturalism. If humans are so constituted as to value certain aspects of the world, then these values are knowable as facts about human beings (eg McDowell).

• Response to the problem of how natural (moral) facts can motivate behaviour that moral beliefs concern reasons for action, and so are objective relative to human desires (a relational property).

• Cultural relativism: morals judgements are expressions of culturally determined values. These can be discovered by empirical investigation.

• Responses to the open question argument: two terms may pick out the same property without being identical in meaning, eg ‘water’ and ‘H2O’, the identity is not analytic and so can only be discovered a posteriori. Analytic truths are not necessarily obvious.

Arguments to show that moral truths cannot be derived from natural facts.

• Hume’s law: no factual description of an action can entail a value judgement concerning it. Empirical investigation cannot discover any fact of the matter corresponding to our moral judgements. A complete scientific account of reality would not include terms of moral approval or disapproval. The point might be related to the thesis that reason alone cannot provide motivation for action and/or that beliefs are distinct from desires. So moral judgements are derived from feelings of approval and disapproval and are not factual.

• Logical positivism: moral judgements do not admit of empirical test or verification. Moral values cannot be detected by the senses and so cannot be known. If moral judgements are not factually significant they don’t admit of truth and falsehood and are not meaningful. Moral judgements as expressive. Emotivism.

• Hare: to call something ‘good’ is to commend it and so it cannot be defined in terms of facts which are not. Moral disagreement concerns a difference of opinion concerning which facts should be commended; it involves a disagreement about the standards we should apply, rather than a disagreement over the facts. Prescriptivism.

• Naturalistic fallacy and the open question argument. Moore’s non-naturalistic realism.

• The tension between the objectivity and practicality of moral judgements: naturalism cannot explain the action guiding nature of ethics. Internalism may be urged: humans are naturally constituted to regard certain facts as motivational. If there is a necessary connection between moral reasons and motivation, naturalism must be false. The amoralist is not possible, that is, it is impossible to make a moral judgement and not be motivated by it.

• Bentham/Mill’s move from facts to values, ought to is, as invalid. The fact that we are motivated to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, doesn’t entail that we ought to act accordingly. What is desired is not necessarily desirable.

• Moral opinions motivate us to act in certain ways. But this means they must be necessarily connected to our desires. But in this case moral propositions must be to do with how we want the world to be, not with how it is, and so are not reducible to natural facts.
• The relativity of moral judgements (e.g., across different cultures) suggests they are not objective and not determined by the facts.

   Moral realists cannot explain the supervenience of moral properties on natural ones.

Juxtaposition of other realist theories which claim that moral truths can be discovered without reference to natural facts, are likely to be tangential unless these alternatives are used to reveal the failings in naturalism. Similarly, general discussions of anti-realist views would need to be related carefully to the issue to maintain focus.

AO3

Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and students should make a judgement about whether it is possible to derive moral truths from natural facts.

• At one end they may endorse the claim that moral truths can be derived from natural facts, and may go on to support a position that claims this, such as utilitarianism or descriptive relativism (although this is not a requirement of the question).

• Or they may accept that there are indeed moral truths, but argue that they do not derive from natural facts, but from some other source, such as reason or intuition (but again this is not required).

• They may argue that there are no moral truths, so that a fortiori they do not derive from natural facts, and defend a form of antirealism or error theory.
Religious language is meaningful because it is part of the religious ‘form of life’. Discuss. [50 marks]

AO1

• The quotation expresses the antirealist, Wittgensteinian inspired view that religious concepts derive their significance from the social context in which they occur. Religious claims are intelligible only as part of a set of cultural practices or mode of living, and what makes them meaningful is the role they play within an autonomous system of rules, or language game. To understand religious claims is to understand how they are embedded in the life of the believer and the religious community.

• Religious language may appear superficially to make empirical claims but the depth grammar is not making statements of fact, but expressing commitment to a way of living and an emotional and/or moral attitude. Religious language as a game governed by a set of rules, or depth grammar which is distinct from the empirical or scientific rules that govern scientific discourse. So religious claims have their own internal standards of rationality.

• This view is likely to be contrasted with cognitivist positions which argue that language is meaningful just if it is factually significant.

AO2

Arguments for the claim

• Wisdom’s parable of the invisible gardener may be used to show that the believer’s use of religious language reflects a difference of attitude to life, rather than a difference in their understanding of the facts. So religious language is not descriptive but meaningful because it is expressive of attitude.

• Braithwaite, may be used to argue that religious language is prescriptive rather than descriptive. It expresses commitment to certain moral principles and rules of conduct.

• That it is an error to judge religious language by standards of rationality which are alien to it, in particular those of empirical science. External standards of rationality cannot meaningfully be applied, so religious claims cannot be criticised as lacking evidence or of not being justified or true or probable. Religious claims make no empirically testable predictions and so their meaning cannot derive from any apparent factual content. The error of thinking that belief in God or the day of judgement are empirical hypotheses.

Arguments against cognitivism:

• The overly restrictive conception of meaning offered by cognitivists, eg the verification principle. Meaning has to do with more than what is factually significant. Examples of how religious language reflects attitudes and commitment to a way of life may figure, eg prayer.

• Beliefs can be meaningful even while they are not verifiable or falsifiable because basic. Hare’s paranoid student and blicks. Core beliefs may be unfalsifiable, but still play an important role in one’s life. Religious talk is meaningful because it shapes one’s entire belief system. Hick and ‘seeing as’: faith as a way of interpreting experience.

• If religious claims are part of a form of life, this need not imply they are completely isolated from rational evaluation or from other forms of life. Religious claims may be amenable to doubt, and so sensitive to empirical evidence eg because of the problem of evil, trials of faith (Mitchell).
Arguments against the claim

- Such approaches to religious language don’t sit easily with most believers’ realist commitments. ‘God exists’ make a real ontological commitment to the existence of God. Wittgenstein's analysis seems to reinterpret religious language.

- If religious language is best interpreted as attempting to make ontological claims, then it may be argued that it fails and verificationist or falsificationist arguments levelled against it, so that it is meaningless.

- The problem that to treat religious language as autonomous isolates religious belief from rational critique. Moreover, if the rules of scientific enquiry cannot be employed in the religious sphere, then neither can religion have anything to say about secular forms of life.

- Disputes over articles of faith appear to be disputes over facts (literal interpretations) rather than over how to live.

- A meaningful proposition must make positive predictions about how our experience would be if it were true. If religious claims are accepted as failing to have any empirical content, then they must be empty of significance.

AO3

Assessment will figure in the discussion of the above or equivalent arguments and students should make a judgement about whether or not religious language is meaningful because it is part of the religious ‘form of life’.

- Students may argue that religious language is not meaningful so that a fortiori it is not meaningful because of its role in a form of life. Meaningful utterances must be factually significant (verificationism, falsificationism).

- Or they may argue that religious language is meaningful, but not because it is part of a form of life, and support an alternative account of its significance, eg because it can be verified by religious experience, by empirical evidence (eg the cosmological argument), eschatologically, or because it is symbolic, mythic.

- Or they may agree that religious language is meaningful, and that what makes it meaningful is that it is part of a form of life.

Or they may reject the interpretation of ‘Wittgensteinian fideism’ that the religious form of life or language game is incommensurable with other uses of language and argue that the interconnections are more complex.
The occurrence of religious experiences makes the existence of God probable.' Discuss.

[50 marks]

AO1

The question concerns the argument from religious experience for the existence of God. The quotation is most naturally interpreted as focused on the third person version of the argument; and the claim that the testimony of others provides sufficient inductive evidence to establish the likelihood of God’s existence.

Nature of religious experience itself might be explored (e.g. via Swinburne’s 5 types; James’ transient, ineffable, noetic, passive; or Otto’s ‘numinous’, *mysterium tremendum*, and *mysterium fascinas*), mystical experience of union with God; spiritual awakening; ecstasy; near death experience, Buber’s I-thou experience, etc. Such experience as involving an awareness of a being beyond the self.

AO2

Arguments to show that religious experiences make God’s existence is probable.

- Experience and testimony are important sources of knowledge so that religious experiences give us a strong *prima facie* reason to believe God exists. Just because our experiences can be deceptive doesn’t mean we should suppose they are in the case of religious experiences. Swinburne’s Principles of Credulity and Testimony; empiricist (all beliefs are grounded in experience); or positivist (scientific knowledge is based in observation) considerations might be invoked in support of the idea that the weight of evidence supports the probability that God exists.

- Swinburne’s cumulative argument that religious experience alongside other arguments, tips the balance in favour of theism.

- The historical argument, that the experiences of key figures have profoundly shaped history, so that it makes it likely their experiences were genuine. Because they are often life-changing it is evident that religious experiences appear genuine to those having them. Conversion experiences also suggest they are genuine since the person having the experience doesn’t appear to be predisposed to belief. Also religious experiences often lead people to live better lives. Their good effects suggest they are genuinely from God.

- If there is a God, we would expect him to want to make himself known to us, so that religious experiences would be likely to occur.

- Religious experiences are widespread and similar between people and so corroborate each other. The cumulative argument supports the probability of God’s existence. The sheer number of reports suggest that God is the likely cause of (or best explanation for) at least some of them.

- If it is conceded that religious experiences often occur to people in unusual physical states, this doesn’t establish that they are not veridical. To see the whole of Paris you need to go up the Eiffel Tower (Davies), and in the same way to experience God, you may need to be in an unusual physical state.

- Naturalistic explanations cannot show that religious experiences are not of a transcendent reality, since empirical science can only make claims about what falls within the natural realm.
• While it is true that people from different religions describe their experiences of the divine differently, this doesn’t show that there isn’t some core experience which is the same for all (Otto). Or it may be that there is one God but that people interpret him in terms of their own perspective, heritage and religious background (the analogy of the blind feeling an elephant).

• Religious experience is self-authenticating and so to have one is sufficient to attain subjective certainty of God’s existence. Such certainty might be said to make God’s existence certain rather than probable.

• It may not be possible to provide evidence to demonstrate the veracity of religious experiences, but the belief that one is experiencing God may be like other beliefs that we just know without justification, eg knowledge of other minds, or of the external world (Owen).

Arguments against the claim that religious experiences make God’s existence is probable.

• Sceptical arguments about the veracity of the senses may be invoked to argue that human experience generally is unreliable, (although the mere possibility of error is no reason to regard religious experience as particularly unreliable).

• But the point can be developed that religious experiences appear particularly prone to sceptical attack, since they are preternatural. Naturalistic explanations for them are likely to be explored, eg that religious experiences often happen when in an unusual physical state, (eg Christ not eating in the desert). Expect references to mystical practices (self-flagellation, starvation); temporal lobe epilepsy; the ‘God spot’; Persinger’s experiments; shamanism, ecstatic trances; to suggest religious experiences are not veridical.

• Psychological explanations of religious experiences, such as wish fulfilment, might also figure. The need for security in a hostile world leads us to search for a father figure and so the experience of God is a projection (Freud). It may be argued that religious experiences tend to happen to religious people who have a desire to believe they are genuine.

• Experience of an incorporeal, atemporal, transcendent being cannot be like other experiences which are confined to this world and as such claims about such experiences should be treated with caution. Indeed, perhaps it is incoherent to speak of ‘experiencing’ here. Given that experience of God must be radically unlike experiencing anything else, how are we to recognise it as an experience of God?

• Religious experiences are not independently verifiable. They cannot be repeated and don’t admit of independent checks. If it is not possible to conduct experiments to establish their authenticity so they are not scientifically respectable. If religious experiences are accepted as being ineffable, then to speak about them is to utter nonsense. They can only be of psychological interest, but not a basis for knowledge.

• The fact that religious experiences are supposed to establish the existence of the God of a particular revealed religion can be used against their veracity. People from different religions have different gods revealed to them. Not all these experiences can be genuine since each religion denies the truth of the other. But if there is no reason to prefer one religion’s experiences over the others’, the veracity of all religious experiences must be equally doubtful (Hume).

• The claim that religious experiences are self-authenticating is viciously circular. The distinction between subjective and objective certainty.

• Hume’s inductive argument against the occurrence of miracles.
AO3

- Students may argue that religious experiences establish God’s existence as more than merely probable, but as a certainty. The subject of experience as directly aware of his reality, the experience as self-authenticating.

- Or they may argue that the weight of testimony makes God’s existence probable.

- They may argue that the evidence is not sufficient to make God’s existence probable, and recommend agnosticism or atheism.

- Or they may argue that the evidence gives no support to the idea that God exists and may urge that his existence is impossible (eg because the idea is incoherent) or because claims about his existence are meaningless.