



Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit RST4A Section C Religious Experience

June 2011 Examination Candidate Exemplar Work



2011 (June) Unit RST4A Section C Religious Experience

Example of Candidate's Work from the Examination

Grade B

- 11 **Examine how claims made about having a religious experience can be verified.**
(45 marks) AO1

Candidate Response

A vast number of the population claim to have had some form of religious experience which research by David Hay shows this as including 31% of Britons and 35% Americans. As claims become more regular, it is essential to verify them; this can be achieved in a variety of ways.

Scholars throughout history have created general definitions for religious experiences, and described certain characteristics it is fundamental that the experience must contain in order for it to be verified. Medieval mystic, Theresa of Avila came up with her three-fold test of: the experience must conform to the teachings of the church, secondly, the priest must agree that the experience could and has occurred for the individual. Lastly, there must be an increase in charity and humanity. This increase is seen in the case of Zakkehus after his conversion when he loses his greed and repays taxes. A later scholar to investigate a definition of a religious experience was William James, he stated how they must all have the 4 key features of ineffability (impossible to explain) transcendence (beyond time and space), noetic quality (must give an insight into faith) and possibility (the person feels helpless at the height of their experience). All these features can be seen in Muhammad's night journey. He found the sighting of heaven and hell difficult to explain, but through seeing these his faith has been personally increased. It was said that he went beyond time and space as he knocked a cup over at the start of his experience and by the time he returned after what he felt was hours, the water was still pouring out as if it had been knocked over that split second. In addition, scholar Rudolph Otto claimed that an experience is not eligible for verification unless the 'numinous' has been experienced. This is the feeling of the 'holy other', and if this presence of God is not experienced, then the experience cannot possibly be genuine.

Furthermore, claims of religious experience can be verified by the way in which the individual carries out their life and actions after the experience. Swinburne described how there would be a major change in morality and behaviour. If the person is not shown to have an increase in morality, they have most likely not had an experience, as they are said to be so striking and profound that all morals and behaviours improve e.g. Emma Philips was a 'tearaway' youth who was a very common crime offender and drug user. She had an experience when she tried to commit suicide by jumping under a train, but believed an angel caught and saved her. She changed her life after this and became a strong individual in her local church.

In addition the experience must fall into one or more of four specific types of experience to be verified; conversion, vision, revelation or a mystical experience. A vision is when an individual actually sees something of the religious supernatural world described by Ninian Smart as a perception of the invisible world. A revelation is when a new religious truth is uncovered, and something of the holy world is shown. A conversion is the transferring to a religion, this can be from one religion to another, from low faith to high faith or from no religion to strong religious beliefs. Mysticism, from the Greek word 'mu' meaning close, is when the individual experiences/feels close to something of the Holy world. Guru Nanak's experience can be verified as he felt the presence of God whilst bathing, as was then lifted into the heavens and shown exactly what the court of the Lord was like.

He was then revealed part of the Guru Granth Sahib, clearly showing a propositional revelation. After this experience he formed Sikhism and converted from Sikhism. This shows how his experience can be successfully verified. Scholars would also confirm it as Franks Davis said of revelation they are short but powerful, the experience shows new truth which is instantaneously believed to be true and definitely from an external truth. All of which are true is Guru Nanak's case. When considering conversions they must conform to Swinburne's criteria of prior interest in converting, there must be a dramatic event in one's life, they must be like other cases of conversion. These are all true in the case of St Augustus.

Moreover, for a religious experience claim to be true it seems only right that the person should have been in a fit state to have an experience, as many people will not accept induced experiences as accurate religious examples. If a person is taking drugs or using ascetic means (deprivation) the mind could be playing tricks on them, making it illogical to accept that they have had an experience. Also, if the individual seems to making the claim for their own personal gain then it should not be verified e.g. David Koresh claimed to have had a revelation to show he was the 'son of God' and started up a cult. Although it became perfectly obvious that he was money-grabbing and raping young girls; basically using his experience for his own personal gain. If any part of an experience is not credible or logical it seems only right that the claim not be verified, as also described by scholar David Hay. Furthermore group experiences e.g. the visions at Knock or mysticism like Sufis are easier to verify as more than one person is experiencing it and can verify claims of others.

Lastly, if the claim of a religious experience is made then it should be verified as this is the simplest thing to do. Swinburne's principle of credulity means that if someone claims that they have had a religious experience, they probably have so it should be verified. The principle of testimony shows that if an individual is not known as being dishonest or a known liar, then their claim of a religious experience should be verified, for example in the case of the Vatican II, the world's most trusted and holy people claimed to have a revelation and this was accepted and verified as there was no reason to disbelieve it. Similarly, Ockham's razor states how the simplest answer is the best. If the simplest answer is to verify an experience as religious then this should be verified in such a way.

Overall, a claim of religious experience can be verified if it fits the components of various scholarly understandings, as well as being shown as having religious connotations and being life-changing in the aftermath.

Commentary

Level 5 – 35 marks

The answer is a good length (around 1000 words).

The selected material is mostly accurate and mainly relevant – but not always clearly expressed.

A range of ideas is included, e.g. – the experience must have the features associated with a religious experience, it must 'pass' the threefold test, it must conform to one of the definitions, not be undermined by the mental state of the experient and explaining it as religious must be the simplest thing to do.

It lacks much in the way of examination of the ideas (for example considering whether these ways of verifying an experience are meaningful only for believers).

- 12 'Religious experience, whether verified or not, has little significance for people today.'
Assess this claim. (30 marks) AO2

Candidate Response

A religious experience is the gaining of truth or new understanding of God after a certain moment when the individual feels that they have come into contact with the ultimate reality. They are rather common and are present in all religions showing instantly that they must be of some significance to different religions as revelations alone are mentioned 82 times in the Bible. However, it is arguable to what extent, religious experience verified or not, have significance for people today.

Firstly, in a variety of ways religious experiences are now of little significance. Many experiences are said to be outdated and irrelevant to society of the 21st century e.g. propositional revelations are said to have been the reason for scripture like the Bible and Qu'ran. Within these texts are outdated views, for example, all homosexuals should be put to death. This is of little significance to people today as homosexuality is widely accepted. Also, the amount of people attending religious groups and places have vigorously dropped. As the ways in which religious practice is meant to be performed (as described in scriptures) in dropping to low levels, religious experiences are shown to have much, much less significance to people today.

However, as religious experiences are the foundation of many experiences, and a high percentage of the world claim to be religious, these experiences are shown as having significance. Moses become founder of Judaism after a propositional revelation and vision of the Burning Bush. As there are still a high percentage of Jews this is shown as having a high significance to them. St Paul also further established Christianity after his conversion on the road to Damascus. This still has strong significance to people today as they still follow these exact religions and hold these specific beliefs. Propositional revelations used to uncover texts are also still of high value and significance today as they are used as ways to practise from testimonies, and act as a guideline on how a religious person should behave. The fact that these are still followed, shows the significance religious experiences clearly still have for people today.

Yet, in the 21st century, and since the Renaissance period to a large extent, science and technology have become more fundamental, trusted and significant in peoples lives. Many people will not follow this idea of religious experiences as they believe that 'seeing is believing' and without evidence, these religious experiences have no significance to people today. Science has even been used to disprove religious experiences as they have discovered that people that have visions have a stronger right-sided brain (controls illogical thought) making experiences insignificant as they are shown to be the works of the brain. Persinger through his helmet and James through use of laughing gas also stripped significance from religious experience as people claimed to have them when provoked rather than randomly. They have little significance for people today as people now require proof.

For all people having these experiences in these presents times, they are shown to be of high significance as they are life-changing. All scholars talk of how the individuals life is changed for the better and as Robert Thouless claims, people have a 'moral conversion'. He used the fictional example of 'swearing Tom', whom once a foul-mouthed drunk turned into a religious, helpful and virtuous man, changing his nickname to praying Tom. This shows the significance for people today as if they have an experience their morality increases and their life changes for the better. Experiences are also shown as significant as they lead to an increase in faith, and without them the number of religious believers would dramatically fall.

Yet many sociologists such as Karl Marx claim that in society there is no need for God and religion is just a way to protect the 'capitalist system'. As more people turn to these ideas, religious experiences lose validity and significance.

Similarly, psychologist Freud makes the claim that religion is just a barrier against a frightening world. This makes experiences lose some significance as it shows that people lie about experiences in order to comfort themselves.

Lastly, they are shown to be of significance as in religious practice groups such as Sufis and through Kabbalah, people induce experiences. This shows they are significant as people are purposely trying to have them in order to become closer to the ultimate reality, something people still desire.

In conclusion, to some extent this statement is seen to be true as science and proof are more important today. However, to a larger extent it is not true as long as there are religious followers then religious experiences will be significant. There is still high interest in them from scholars and many people make false claims to get fame and fortune e.g. Koresh showing just how significant they are. Also, if verified, rather than not verified, the experience holds more significance as people believe it to a larger extent.

Commentary

Just level 5 – 21 marks

Different views are explained – with some examples in support, so the answer is clearly above level 4 – but there is very limited critical analysis so it is not well into level 5.

On the whole the answer presents rather than analyses ideas and is clearly not a discussion of the ideas presented as it would need to be for level 6.

Grade A

- 11 **Examine how claims made about having a religious experience can be verified.** (45 marks) AO1

Candidate Response

A religious experience is an encounter with God which can be a public or private experience. The experience itself can take four forms whether it is a mystical experience, a conversion experience, a visionary experience or a revelation experience. The experience itself can happen to you whether you are religious or not.

One way a religious experience can be verified is by using the three fold test of Teresa of Avila : it must agree with th teaching of the Church, be accepted by a priest and improve the person's charity and humanity. As well as this the person will not try and get financial gain out of the experience. All of these are a way of verifying whether a person has had an experience or not.

Richard Swinburne came up with the principle of credulity, and this is where it is argued that if a person claims to have had a religious experience then the chances are that they probably have had the experience. This is because we know other things in the world that exist but we don't question it. This is shown with love, we know it exists and we know whether we love someone or not, we don't question it. This is another way that religious experiences could be verified.

Richard Swinburne also came up with the principle of testimony. This is where it is argued that unless someone is a compulsive liar or known to be mentally unstable or under the influence of drugs, then we should believe them, because we have no good reason not to. This would mean someone like Emma Philips wouldn't pass because she was known to have mental health issues before claiming to have the experience. This is another way that a religious experience can be verified.

Another view that could be used is Ockhams razor, and this could help verify whether a religious experience happened. This is shown in the fact that Ockhams razor argues that the most simple explanation is probably what did happen. So if a person believes that they have had a religious experience and it's the only explanation then the chances are they probably have. This is another way that religious experience can be verified.

Another way is to see whether there has actually been a change in the persons attitude or behaviour. This is because if they change the attitude they have towards life and have a more positive attitude, then the chances are they have had a religious experience. This is shown particularly with St Paul, before his conversion experience he was a Christian hater. However after this conversion as a form of religious experience he turned to Christianity and actually ended up dying for his Christian beliefs.

Also you could measure a persons claim about religious experience by comparing it to views that scholars have had, and the characteristics that scholars claim. For example you could compare it to the views of William James who argues that the person struggles to put into words the fact that they have the experience it is ineffable. For example try trying to explain to a blind person what the colour blue looks like. James himself used the idea of classical music, the music is lost in the translation. James also argued that the experience itself cannot be sustained, and saw that 20 minutes to 2 hours was normal. He also saw it that the person themselves just feel that the experience just happened to them. This would be used to verify a religious experience because you could see whether you had, had any of these characteristics.

You could also measure it against other scholars such as Rudolf Otto who argued the idea of the numinous. He argued that just like James the person who has had the experience struggles to put the experience in words. Otto argues that the person becomes totally wrapped up in the experience and they find it fascinating and are in awe of it. The person finds it totally mysterious. This could be used to verify a religious experience through seeing if a person or you yourself had, had any of these feelings. Otto himself used the example of a bridge collapsing over the river Rhine, the people went out and saw the mess and destruction and there was a feeling of awe, which is also shown with Moses and the burning bush. So this shows another way that a person could verify whether a religious experience happened or not.

Overall however we know that it is very hard to verify whether a person has had a religious experience or not. This is due to the fact that the nature of religious experiences is that they are very subjective to an individual and therefore it is hard to tell whether a person is telling the truth.

Commentary

Level 5 – 35 marks. Clear and straightforward.

Much more concise than the previous answer (around 800 words) but largely covers the same ground and again lacking in examination.

- 12 **'Religious experience, whether verified or not, has little significance for people today.'**
Assess this claim. (30 marks) AO2

Candidate Response

There are many ways in which a religious experience does and doesn't have significance for people today.

For believers, religious experience does have significance today in many ways. For example through revelational scripture, this is because through propositional revelations scripture has been revealed. This is shown with Muhammad and his revelations as through his revelations Muhammad received parts of the Qu'ran over a 23 year period. This is significant to people today because the Qu'ran is the basis of Islam and is the fundamental part. The Qu'ran contains the Shar'ia law which is a guide for how Muslims get to heaven. This is also shown with Moses's revelation experience, where he gained knowledge of the ten commandments. The ten commandments were originally 512 however these were condensed down to ten. This is relevant today because it contains all the rules that Christians and Jews must live by, so that they get into heaven and is guide on how to live their life.

Another way in which they are significant today is through moral behaviour. This is particularly shown with St Paul because due to his conversion experience he stopped hating Christians and actually went round trying to convert people and in the end actually died for his beliefs. This is also shown with Alan Mortlock who went from being a man committing crime to having the bible being a very important part of his life after his visionary experience. Religious experiences have also led to religious practise this is shown with the speaking in tongues. This is because through this religious experience they feel that it is actually God speaking through them. This again shows the significance that religious experiences still have today. Another religious experience that leads to religious practise is the Toronto blessing and is where they feel that Gods energy is running through their body and end up in the fits of laughter.

Another way it is relevant is that some people practise their religion to bring about a religious experience, this is shown with Sufi's who practice Sufi dancing to try and bring on a religious experience so that they can be at one with God. In kabbalah people practise meditation and prayer. As well as this they really study the zohar to try and bring on a religious experience this shows that it is still significant today. They are also significant today because they occur in a variety of different religions such as the Red Indians who had a sun dance revelation where they were told not to take the spoils but they did leading to consequences. Religious experiences have also led to the founding of religious experience such as Joseph Smith which led to the founding of the Mormons. This is significant today because there are still Mormons in the world today. Overall these are ways in which religious experiences are significant for people today.

However a religious experience has little significance for many people because science has shown that a religious experience can be induced in different ways. This is shown with James who saw that laughing gas produced the same feelings as those having had the religious experience. Therefore this makes religious experiences insignificant today because it means that they cannot be trusted. This makes some people today believe that all religious experiences in the past were actually the result of temporal lobe epilepsy, because people who have had an epileptic fit, claim to have the same kind of feelings to those who had a religious experience, like flashing lights and a sense of a presence being there.

Another way a religious experience isn't significant today is through the fact that scholars have different views on what a religious experience is, this makes it hard for a religious experience to be believed because how can a religious experience be all of these different things. Another way they have little significance is through the fact that religion itself isn't so important to people today, people like to rely on science and logic. This is because these can actually be proved for example you can look to see whether it actually snowed on Christmas day 2000 and can be proved if it is true or not by looking at records. Religious experiences cannot be verified in the same way.

A big reason why religious experiences aren't significant is through the fact that there is no way to prove whether a religious experience happened or not, they could be lying. Also how do we know if the person is mentally well, yes they can have tests but at the time the person who claims to have the experience could actually be under the influence of drugs. There is no way of knowing. These are all reasons why religious experiences have little or no significance today.

Overall today for a religious believer religious experiences will always be significant to them. This is likely to stay the same even when 'truths' are revealed which are later proved to be wrong. For a religious experience to have more significance for people today I think they will have to have an experience themselves. Or a person that they know and love have an experience then they may well believe in religious experiences and therefore have more significance today.

Commentary

Level 6 – 24 marks – this response only just reaches level 6.

There is some discussion of the ideas that are presented rather than just explanation. Clear evidence is provided to support the idea that religious experience is significant for some religious believers. The other side of the debate largely consists of an explanation why some people reject the claim that religious experiences happen.

This is relevant as a discussion, but the evidence that religious experience has no significance is different than an explanation as to why it has no significance, and the answer could have included examples of those who live life without reference to religious experience and replace its authority and influence with other things.

Grade A*

- 11 **Examine how claims made about having a religious experience can be verified.**
(45 marks) AO1

Candidate Response

Religious experiences are experiences where an individual or a group of people can come into contact with a supernatural being or event. These experiences tend to be subjective, and so cannot be tested scientifically. Due to this reason several scholarly tests have been developed to test whether claims of religious experiences have taken a place.

One method that can be used to test the claims of religious experiences, are through 'general tests' which consists of tests made by Swinburne and a threefold test by St Teresa of Avila.

Swinburne developed two tests, one being the 'Principle of credulity' and the other being the 'principle of testimony'. The 'testimony of credulity' argues that if a person or group truly believes that they have encountered a supernatural being, and there is no reason to doubt it then they probably have, for example if St Paul argued that he saw Jesus, and there were no other explanations for this, then he probably did. This is a posteriori style argument, in which many people argue is not a good enough test, as it is an inductive argument, based on an unreliable and descriptive premise and conclusion. However, Swinburne would argue that this test is legit, because many people experience love, fear and hatred however these feelings cannot be scientifically measured, but we still know they exist. Therefore the principle of credulity is a good way of testing claims of religious experience, because if we accept, on someone's word, that love exists, then the feeling of someone coming into contact with God should be also accepted.

The other test by Swinburne is the principle of testimony. This is also an a posteriori argument in that unless there is a reason as to why someone shouldn't be believed, e.g. a mentally unbalanced person, or a proven liar, then the claims of a religious experience should be believed. This test was used by the Prophet Muhammad to prove that he had a religious experience. The prophet was known as 'Al-Amin' which means that he is the most trustworthy one. Due to this reason his claims were believed to be true in which Swinburne argues that this test should also be used in the modern day.

Another general test was the St Teresa of Avila. She made a threefold test, in which if the religious experience coincides with this than it should be believed to be true. The first test was that the knowledge and understanding gained from the religious experience had to coincide with the teachings of the religion or the church. For example, the part where St Paul during his trip towards Damascus, was told by God that Jesus was his son, or in the Transfiguration of Jesus' experience, where his companions were told that he was the son of God, this coincides with the Biblical teachings. Due to this reason the claims of a religious experience were accepted. The second test is that the claim must be accepted by a religious leader. The last test is that experience must leave the person or group with 'humility' good behaviour, in which they don't seek popularity.

A similar way to test the claims of a religious experience is by testing how much the claims coincide with the scholarly description of the typology of religious experience. What is meant by this is that many scholars have conducted research into all forms of religious experiences, which are conversions, vision, mystical and revelation experiences. Franks Davis conducted research into revelations, whilst Swinburne researched conversion. To test whether the 'claimer' has had a religious experience, questions can be asked to see whether first of all the claims can fall into one or more categories of the typology and whether they contain characteristics as found by the scholars.

For example, to test whether someone has undergone a conversion, one question that can be asked is whether individual has changed from being an atheist to someone who believes in religion, or whether they have changed from one religion to another. In this case if the answer is yes, then they have undergone a conversion (which means to change from one thing to another or increased faith in a set of beliefs). Next questions can be asked to see if the claimer has the characteristics of a conversion. For example James argued that the person undergoes a complete transformation in which their moral behaviour (concept of right and wrong) changes. If the answer is 'yes', then the claims can fall into category of religious experiences therefore showing that this test can help the claimer to see whether first of all if they have had a religious experience and second of all they learn what 'kind' of religious experience they had, therefore verifying the claims of religious experience.

The last way of trying to verify a set of claims is by seeing what consequence it has had on the 'claimer'. If the claimer undergoes what Thouless called 'moral conversion' whereby the moral behaviour and attitude of the person completely changes then it can be said that the claims can be true. For example, Thouless used the idea of 'swearing Tom' who was immoral, but after going to church and being told that God can take peoples' sins away, Tom went home and prayed. After this he felt completely new and sinless like he had a religious experience. Afterwards he changed from swearing Tom to 'praying Tom' where he led a better moral life. Due to this change in behaviour, the claims of religious experiences can be classified, because only a true encounter with a religious being can lead to a change in behaviour. This can be seen in the case of Mary Magdalene, who was a prostitute, but after her conversion, she stopped and instead became one of the followers of Christ. Due to this reason seeing a change in behaviour is a good way to verify claims because change in behaviour is reasonable and expected after a religious experience.

In conclusion, there are several tests that can be used to verify claims of religious experiences, in which examples of past religious experiences have been used to illustrate how useful these tests are or how they work. Overall, the most reliable way of testing the claims of a religious experience is to notice for a change in moral behaviour. This is because if religious experiences are ineffable, then this should mean that scholars cannot fully know what the full characteristics of a religious experience is, and also religious experiences are open to all religious traditions, e.g. Islam, and so cannot be tested using Avila's test. However, they're still reliable, but arguably the best test is looking for a change in behaviour, because it is 'physical' and can be easily observed and so be easier to verify the claims.

Commentary

A level 6, bordering on level 7 answer.

It is quite long – over 1100 words and largely accurate and relevant.

There is a good range of ideas and clear reference to scholars and use of technical terms.

The ideas are presented and, to an extent, unpacked. The unpacking, for example of the first of Teresa of Avila's tests, is not always fully coherent, and some of the ideas are not clearly distinguished - for example the identification of experiences with reference to the typology of religious experience and their identification according to their effect.

- 12 **'Religious experience, whether verified or not, has little significance for people today.'**
Assess this claim. (30 marks) AO2

Candidate Response

Religious experiences historically have been important for several reasons, such as the establishment of religions, religious movements, faith, moral behaviour, and religious practices. However some people, such as scientists argue that they are no longer significant for people today. There are several reasons for this, however despite these reasons it is debateable to a large extent it has little significance for people today.

There are several reasons why religious experiences are of little significance for people today. Firstly, religious experiences tend to be subjective, and cannot be scientifically proven to have occurred, in which due to this many people reject claims as being insignificant. Jan Thompson argued that people like to believe that they are rational beings, who use evidence to base their conclusions on. This is especially the case where in the modern day and age, enlightened way of thinking and scientific research is highly valued, and is seen as the only source of 'truth'. And so due to people being more sceptical, and unwilling to believe something they can't see religious experiences are of little significance for people today, especially due to the fact that not everyone is religious, therefore don't have any evidence to believe in it.

However, this argument is limited because there are religious experiences that leave 'physical' indication that it did indeed occur, for example propositional revelation (scriptures). Many people still have faith in God, due to these religious experiences, such as revelations, because they provide a source of faith, moral behaviour and practice. Many Muslims see the Qu'ran central to their belief, because for them it is proof that God is real. This is because the Qu'ran cannot be changed (not even a line) in which for many people, this provides proof that God exists, therefore increasing their faith (belief in God).

Due to this reason religious experiences can be seen as significant, because even today many people look towards revelations, such as the Bible or Torah, to provide evidence for them which gives them faith in God, therefore people still need religious experiences (in order to provide them with faith and practices to follow e.g. prayer).

Related to the last point, religious experiences are needed by people because it helps people to lead morally correct lives, which helps to establish harmony in society. Many religious experiences such as near death experiences, visions or revelations, helps to make morally good people. This is because it causes a fear within them. For example the vision of John and judgement day, where these who were bad will go to hell. Due to the threat of judgement day (punishment) many people still need religious experiences, as it helps to establish law abiding citizens, therefore helping the people within society. For example Christianity (10 commandments) teaches 'thou shall not murder' – if people don't believe in this many would kill each other. And so due to the fact that religious experience help to establish good moral behaviour, it can be said that religious experiences are vitally important, and so significant for many people today, which can be said to be the case in Saudi Arabia where the whole country is run by Shariah law (a law which derives from propositional revelation).

However, the problem with many religious experiences is that it does not have wide appeal. In most cases individuals get religious experiences which they interpret according to their cultural background. For example Christians would see Jesus or the virgin Mary, whereas Hindus would see Brahman. Due to these differing interpretations, many religious experiences don't have a wider appeal, and so the religious experience is only significant to the person who has had it, but not significant to the majority of people.

Furthermore due to religious experiences being ineffable (difficult to describe) many religious experiences are not understood or has no effect on people, which is why religious experiences are of little significance for people today.

Also, scientific research/results have started to explain natural causes for religious experiences, which is why they have little significance to people. Scientists have found that mental illness such as epilepsy affects the temporal and frontal area which leads to religious experiences. Also, scientists such as Stace have found that drugs such as cocaine, or 'AVE' (machine that stimulates the temporal lobe) both produce religious experiences. Due to these reasons many people have started to believe that religious experiences are not from the claimer but instead due to natural reasons. Due to this reason many verified religious experiences, such as revelations, or visions are seen as unreliable because these often received them probably in a mentally unbalanced state, for example Jesus who saw the devil in the forest had been fasting for 40 days, and when Muhammad saw Angel Gabriel he too was fasting – all suggesting that natural causes had led to the false religious experiences. And so due to this reason many people agree that religious experiences are delusions (such as Richard Dawkins) and so not significant for many people today, especially atheists.

Overall, religious experiences are not significant for some people because it cannot be scientifically proven and natural reasons for them sound more reasonable in which people in the modern day and age would be likely to believe because people want to be rational. However for others, such as religious people, it is still significant as it provides continuity for their faith. However, it can be argued that religious experiences are still significant today for a large number of people, because religions tend to be dominant in the East, and many people still today believe in religion, e.g. 56% still pray to God throughout the world. Due to this reason to a large extent religious experiences are still significant because they're the source of many faiths and religions even today.

Commentary

Level 6: 27

Different views are presented, explained and discussed and there is both evidence that such experiences are significant and evidence that for some people they are not.

There are a few obvious weaknesses: e.g. the argument that religious experiences are significant because they encourage people to lead good lives, needed to be balanced with recognition that others do not need the encouragement of 'divinely sanctioned laws' to live in this way – instead the impression is that the absence of such revelation would lead to anarchy. In addition, the use of the word 'people' could have been more precise since it is clear that on occasions this refers only to religious believers and on others it clearly refers to non-believers.