

Connections in Religious Studies

- the conscience or sense of moral responsibility as possible evidence for the existence of God

“Critically assess the claim that the conscience provides evidence for the existence of God”.

This is how you might start this answer:

Kant argued that the existence of the conscience did suggest the existence of God. Our conscience tells us that we should do one action rather than another. If this is right, Kant concludes that we must be free, for if we were not free it wouldn't make sense to say we 'should' do something. He also argued for immortality as human action aspires to the highest good - summum bonum - which is not achievable in this life. It follows that there must be another life after this one. There are people who sacrifice their lives for others - this would only make sense if their highest good lay beyond this earthly life.

Kant argued that, as virtue and happiness do not always go together, there must be some other good in acting as one ought to act. This suggests the existence of God, who has ordered the world in such a way as to allow the highest good to be possible.

Kant is often misunderstood, and his reasoning is used as an 'argument for the existence of God'. The existence of the conscience is better thought of as proving the existence of belief in God. If a person believes that their conscience is telling them to do something that will not bring them happiness, they seem to believe that there is a higher good than their own happiness. Believing that one course of action is right and another is wrong leads to a belief in God. It would be misleading to agree with the quotation on the grounds of Kant's position, as it doesn't give evidence of God's existence. Kant would merely say that a moral person should believe in God's existence...

You have 45 minutes, so there is time to go into some detail here. There may be less to say about Aquinas, Butler, Newman and Adams in agreement with the quote. Explaining Freud's account of the conscience will use up some time, but remember to be critical of Freud!