



**General Certificate of Education**

**Religious Studies (1061)**

RSS03 Philosophy of Religion

**Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - June series*

**This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)**

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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## **RSS03 *Philosophy of Religion***

### **General comments**

Candidates achieved the full range of marks and there were some scripts that were of a very high quality. It was encouraging to see technical language used appropriately and many answers showing good philosophical understanding.

It appears that the division of questions into two clear parts – the first part addressing AO1, and the second part addressing AO2 – has supported candidates to marshal their responses in a more focussed way.

Question 4 was the least popular question. Often candidates from within the same centre answered different combinations of questions from across the four topics on the Specification. This was encouraging, as it indicated that centres are teaching all four topics and so enabling the candidates to have a wide choice of questions in the examination and benefit from the breadth of study offered by the Specification.

Examiners noted that, in many instances, candidates' handwriting was particularly poor and in some cases extremely challenging to read.

### **Question 1 (Topic 1 *The Cosmological argument*)**

#### **Question 01**

There were many excellent answers to this question, showing a good understanding of Aquinas' first three ways. The argument was often expressed in terms of premises and conclusion, with explanation of the differences between the three ways and why Aquinas' rejection of infinite regress led to the conclusion that God existed. In the First Way, many candidates referred to Aquinas' illustration of wood, fire and heat, and the move from potentiality to actuality. In contrast, other candidates merely gave the briefest of outlines and often confused the First and Second Ways. They then went on to either discuss other cosmological arguments or to give a criticism of Aquinas' three ways. A number of candidates discussed all five of Aquinas' arguments for God. Candidates are strongly advised to read the question carefully as marks can only be awarded for material that addresses the focus of the question set.

Those candidates that did focus on Aquinas' first three ways often found the Third Way, about necessity and contingency, the most challenging to discuss.

#### **Question 02**

The second part of each question requires candidates to evaluate arguments / ideas. The focus was on how far it is reasonable to believe in God. A number of candidates did exactly what was asked of them and discussed the strengths of Aquinas' argument. However, most candidates neglected to address the focus of the question and merely gave a resume of the criticisms of Aquinas' arguments without any attempt to address how reasonable they show it is to believe in God. Such answers could achieve only a limited level and mark.

Candidates should be aware that evaluation requires the construction of a reasoned argument, which is very different from listing points for and then listing points against an issue. Evaluation requires some attempt to weigh up the respective strengths and weaknesses of arguments presented.

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**Question 2 (Topic 2 *Religious experience*)****Question 03**

For many candidates, this question elicited a response that amounted to little more than writing all that they knew about forms of religious experience. However, the focus was on **variety**, both between and within the forms of religious experience. The command word 'examine' anticipated some discussion of illustrations that highlighted different elements of the particular form.

Again, there were some excellent answers that used illustrations as ways of drawing out the variety within religious experiences. Able candidates commented on the illustrations and related them to the focus of the question, whilst less able candidates merely narrated the examples without comment or discussion.

The Specification refers to three specific types of religious experience: visions, conversion and mystical. However, not all three were required in depth to achieve Level 7. Some candidates discussed types of religious experience that were not listed on the Specification; these received credit as appropriate.

Some candidates included miracles as a type of religious experience. This can be confusing because of the different definitions and understandings of 'miracle' and because miracles tend to claim to show the action of God in the world rather than the subject having a direct experience of God. Therefore, it is not always clear that miracle accounts are valid examples of religious experience. If miracles are used as an example, then the religious experience element of them needs to be drawn out from the example chosen.

The marks allocated to questions give a guide to the proportion of time that candidates are both expected and advised to spend answering them. Hence, it is expected that candidates will spend approximately 25 minutes addressing the first part of each question. Therefore, it is important to be concise and avoid long introductory paragraphs that merely repeat the question.

**Question 04**

A significant number of candidates neglected the focus of the question (to fully understand) and instead discussed whether there was evidence for believing that a religious experience had happened. Whilst some credit was awarded to these answers, candidates should be aware that 'believing' is not the same as 'understanding'. Many candidates wrote at length about Persinger's helmet and natural explanations. Only a small number of candidates went on to argue that, because religious experiences have natural explanations, they can therefore be understood. Most candidates made some reference to the subjective nature of a religious experience and its ineffable nature.

**Question 3 (Topic 3 *Psychology and religion*)****Question 05**

The question focussed on psychology's challenge to religious belief. Therefore, candidates needed to explain psychology's views of religion and explain why these approaches and understandings could be seen as a challenge to religious belief. The Specification lists Freud and Jung, but other psychological understandings of religion were credited. Level 7 could also be awarded if candidates gave a full answer using Freud only.

There were some excellent answers that showed a good understanding of the views of Freud and Jung, and which made it clear how these theories could be seen to challenge religious belief. However, many candidates read the question as an opportunity to merely write about

Freud's / Jung's views about religion, and made no reference to any challenges these views might pose to religious belief.

Candidates wrote at length about the Oedipus complex, but many accounts were confused and unclear as to what relevance it had for religion. A similar problem arose with Jung and archetypes. Some candidates made little or no reference to religion in their answer. Such answers could, therefore, only be awarded a lower level mark.

**Question 06**

Many candidates seemingly struggled with this question, possibly as a result of not having identified any challenges in Question 05. Others seemed put off by the word 'religion', not appreciating that this could include general criticisms of the various psychological theories. Once again, candidates often limited the marks they could achieve by failing to construct a reasoned argument. Instead, they listed points without any attempt to weigh up their various strengths and weaknesses.

**Question 4 (Topic 4 *Atheism and postmodernism*)**

**Question 07**

This was the least popular question on the examination paper and the least well-answered. Many candidates could write little more than a sentence or two about each term. Some candidates confused the terms. Agnosticism was particularly poorly discussed. It was of concern that some candidates seemingly attempted this question without having studied the topic.

**Question 08**

The focus of religion being in retreat in the modern world was often neglected, with many candidates merely listing the causes of atheism. Some candidates failed to address the reference in the question to the modern world and instead dealt with issues such as Galileo and the scientific revolution. It was expected that there would be some reference to postmodernist views of religion and a number of centres had clearly prepared their candidates well for this area. There were also some good discussions about secularization and the growth of religions in some parts of the world.