



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS02 Religion and Ethics 2

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2010 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334). Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX
Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.

General Comments

The majority of candidates were well prepared for this examination. Responses were generally detailed and thoughtful, and time management was good, with the exception that quite a few candidates wrote disproportionately long essays on the part (b) questions, despite the fact that these are worth only half the number of marks by comparison with the part (a) questions.

Question 1 (a)

This question was answered well by many candidates, and was the most popular question overall. Some of the explanations of Kant's general theory of ethics were extremely erudite, although a number were over-long, given that the thrust of the question was to show how categorical imperativism might be applied to a selected issue. Although a few candidates became rather muddled as to the order and content of the three main formulations of the categorical imperative, most answers explained them accurately and clearly, and then judged the selected issue against each explanation. On occasion, the logic of the answer was better than the knowledge of what Kant actually said. For example, a number of candidates chose capital punishment as their issue, and applied the logic of Kant's formulations well enough, but were oblivious to the fact that Kant did not reject capital punishment as being sometimes appropriate. Those who knew the full extent of Kant's approach to this issue often scored maximum marks, being sufficiently well-informed to appreciate and examine the pathways of Kantian logic. A few candidates forgot to specify any issue at all, which defeated most of the object of the question.

Question 1 (b)

Weaker responses simply discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Kant's approach, without any reference to an ethical issue. Strangely, even some of those who had scored very highly in part (a) neglected to make their answers relevant to their chosen issue, or else referred to it briefly whilst discussing general strengths and weaknesses at length. Strengths were judged to be: universalizability, justice, and a safe society; weaknesses: inflexibility, ignoring consequences, ignoring emotions, and conflicting imperatives. Most candidates managed to illustrate at least two of these with reference to a selected issue.

Question 2 (a)

The general technique used to answer this question was to begin with Aristotle's Four Causes, illustrating how these explain the nature and purpose of objects in the world, and then going on to discuss Aquinas' system of Natural Law Ethics. Most candidates did a reasonable job of showing how Aquinas' primary precepts lead to a series of practical directives – for example the precept on reproduction leads to a series of rules concerning sexual conduct that have a profound impact on the lives of those who obey them. Some moved on to John Finnis' Natural Law system and analysed this in a similar fashion. A few candidates focused on particular issues with the Thomist theory, referring in particular to the practices of abortion and euthanasia, and to the practical effects of the doctrine of Double Effect. This approach worked equally well. Weaker responses tended simply to discuss Aristotle's Four Causes, leaving the examiner to infer how such a discussion might answer the question. Alternatively, some simply described the views of Aquinas and/or Finnis, again with little or no reference as to how Natural Law works in practice.

Question 2 (b)

Most candidates did well on this question. Quite a few began with the suggestion that since scientific laws seem to govern the entire universe, then a law-abiding universe must presumably contain some natural good, or goods, even if we are not sure what they are. Some suggested that natural good is what is dictated by God, for example God's moral laws; although trying to

justify this caused some candidates to acknowledge that they were on questionable ground. Some appealed to Kant and to Kantian reason (particularly the principle of universalizability, which seems to have attractions even for those who don't like Kant). Most concluded that although concepts of natural good do exist, they tend to be personalised, since there is no overall agreement. The latter suggestion was evidenced in particular by appeal to cultural relativism.

Question 3 (a)

Quite a number of the responses to this question conflated "status" and "duty", making general assertions to the effect that humans are the high-point of God's creation, but going little further than that. One favoured piece of evidence for this elevated view of human status was the relative order of creation for humans and animals, about which many candidates appeared to be inaccurately informed. Some commented on the Thomist doctrine that animals do not have souls, usually accepted without discussion, and used that as a springboard to discuss different ways in which animals and humans might be said to be different or similar. Most referred to the discussion about human responsibility for the environment as it is set down in Genesis, referring to the debate about whether human stewardship should be taken to mean domination/power over or responsibility for/care of the environment. The weakest responses on the whole took one of two approaches: some gave a series of inaccurate comments about stewardship; others wrote in general terms about environmental ethics, with little or no reference to religious teachings.

Question 3 (b)

Although there were some excellent answers to this question, the general tendency was to repeat much of what had already been offered in response to the (a) question. Many of the best responses were those that included Buddhist perspectives, where candidates made some excellent evaluative comments about the strength of Buddhist teachings about the status and duty of humans in the created world in the *absence* of theistic perspectives. Most candidates were scathing about what they saw as the limitations of religious ideas about human duties in the created world, particularly those which arguably encourage its exploitation and destruction, generally because they are anthropocentric. Many balanced this with the comment that although many individuals have a sense of religious responsibility towards the rest of creation, it is difficult for individual action to be effective.

Question 4 (a)

Weaker responses to this question tended simply to describe methods of protecting and preserving the environment. Some of these answers were several pages long, and went into great detail about global warming, toxic fumes, oil dumping, litter, and so on, without once referring to the ethical issues raised by these practices. For those who did answer the question as it was set, the issues referred to included: the morality of practices that lead to destruction of damage to human and animal habitats; the aesthetic loss arising from clear-felling of forests, indiscriminate dumping; oil spills; particular issues concerning mistreatment of the apes, whose DNA is very close to that of humans; experimentation on non-human species generally, causing pain and death; and so on. Some extended their discussion to the rights of future generations. Most linked their ideas in some way to religious teachings, particularly those which require stewardship of the environment on behalf of its creator.

Question 4 (b)

This question produced some of the weakest evaluation answers, primarily because, with a few exceptions, the word "forced" was simply ignored, so that many candidates got no further than talking about the need for environmental responsibility in general. The Specification refers

explicitly to the possibility of enforced responsibility as a required evaluation focus, so perhaps this was the result of misreading the question or of time pressure. Some candidates appeared to see this difficulty at the end, and added some comments about free will, or about the need to save the planet from near-certain destruction. Those who did tackle the question of enforcement often began with the issue of free will, suggesting that compelled responses are morally worthless and go against the religious idea of free moral choice. They then countered this by suggesting that global environmental disaster is so close that freedom of choice has to be abandoned in favour of enforced responsibility, since there will always be a greedy and influential proportion of humanity that cares only about self-enrichment. One useful line of argument was to refer to the measures in place in some countries which already enforce environmental responsibility, for example with smokeless zones, recycling and the like.