



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS03 Philosophy of Religion

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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General Comments

Although questions 1 and 2 were the most popular, a significant number of candidates attempted the question on Jung. The least popular question was the question on the Nietzsche quotation "God is dead".

A few centres had entries where the entire candidature selected the same questions. It was not clear, whether these centres had prepared candidates for only two of the four areas, or whether they just preferred those particular topics. To reduce the content to the bare minimum of two areas is to give a student a very limited experience of the subject. Answers from some centres frequently followed a similar pattern which suggested that candidates were repeating class notes regardless of the focus of the question asked.

Overall, the quality of work was of an encouraging standard, showing good understanding of some challenging material.

Question 1

Part (a)

Many candidates seemed unable to address the focus without first giving a detailed account of the cosmological argument. A list of the main criticisms were then summarised at the end. A good answer required an explanation of the criticisms, in which reference to the cosmological argument was relevant. A significant number of candidates seemed unable to explain the criticisms without evaluating them. This suggested that either they were just repeating their class notes, or they were not aware that part (a) questions are always AO1 and part (b) questions are always AO2. In general, there is no cross credit of material from part (a) to part (b).

Most candidates referred to the apparent contradiction of everything needing a cause yet God was said to be uncaused. Equally popular was Russell's fallacy of composition, but few seemed to understand it and limited themselves to stating that "just because we have a mother why should the universe have a mother?" In explaining a criticism of the argument it is necessary to make clear how the criticism challenges the argument.

Part (b)

Weaker candidates tended to just repeat the criticisms rather than assess them. Some clearly struggled to handle their material in a different way. Many candidates failed to identify any strengths and so presented a one sided answer. To achieve the higher levels there had to be evidence of reasoning and analysis rather than just listing points. Clearly, many candidates find this skill of evaluation difficult and present an AO1 rather than an AO2 answer.

Question 2

Part (a)

There were some good answers that highlighted the key characteristics and exemplified them through the religious experiences of such people as Teresa of Avila and Wesley. Weaker answers tended to narrate the religious experience without highlighting the key characteristics. Good reference was often made to the work of William James, though weaker candidates just listed James' four characteristics without any explanation.

There were a surprising number of candidates who seemed confused between mystical and conversion experiences. A few failed to make any distinction and discussed religious experiences in general.

Higher level answers made good use of examples and had a wider range of either characteristics or different types of conversion and mystical experiences.

Part (b)

Many candidates went away from whether or not a religious experience could be verified and considered whether or not religious experiences were genuine. Although much of the material could have been valid if used appropriately such candidates often failed to do so. Many referred to Persinger's helmet but then failed to explain how this linked to the focus of the question.

However, there were some good answers showing understanding of the philosophical problems involved in verifying a subjective experience and many candidates made reference to Swinburne.

Question 3

Part (a)

Most candidates seemed aware of Jung's work related to archetypes. Weaker candidates failed to define what they meant by an archetype or to give examples, especially the God image and the self image, which are significant in explaining Jung's understanding of the collective unconscious and religion. Higher level answers developed their answers into the idea of the importance of individuation. Some candidates seemed to have prepared for a question on Freud and so spent a lot of time comparing the views of Jung with Freud.

Part (b)

This was well answered and most candidates were aware that Jung did not reject religion or a belief in God. There was evidence of some good evaluation showing reasoning and analysis. Jung's positive approach was often highlighted and candidates appreciated that the context of his theory was not an argument for/against the existence of God. Many candidates concluded that Jung's theories could prove nothing in terms of God's existence.

Question 4

Part (a)

Some candidates ignored the focus of the question and wrote general answers about the rise of atheism or the inability to prove the existence of God. Other candidates clearly did understand the meaning of the phrase but then failed to develop their answers linked to Nietzsche's view that God is no longer relevant to society. Instead, they discussed why atheism had developed in modern society.

The higher level answers showed knowledge of the origin and context of the saying.

Part (b)

The lower level answers were one sided in support of God is dead, identifying science and changing moralities as the cause. Higher level answers presented evidence of pockets of growth in religion as well as the reinterpretation of spirituality. There was evidence of some good reasoning and critical analysis that drew a justified conclusion.