



**General Certificate of Education**

**Religious Studies (2060)**

**RSS01 Religion and Ethics 1**

**Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - June series*

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## General Comments

Many candidates responded to these questions with well-informed and well-constructed answers. There was a tendency for candidates to write over-long answers to the second part of each question which sometimes equalled the length of the first part, even though that carries double the marks. Excessively long answers are not necessary and, on occasion, they meant that the candidates ran out of time, or that their answers to the first part of the question were relatively undeveloped.

### Question 1 *Utilitarianism*

#### Part 01

This part of the question asked candidates to 'Examine' the way Bentham's utilitarianism may be applied to the chosen issue which required more than a straightforward description. The best answers focused on the application of the theory rather than simply outlining it and then making a few comments on what it might say about the chosen issue. Such answers showed a good understanding of how the hedonic calculus might be applied in decision-making and showed a good understanding of what consequences would be considered and how the 'happiness' generated would be measured. There was some good use of brief case studies to illustrate the points being made, and these often allowed candidates to show how anyone using the calculus could reach different decisions in different circumstances, and why, in some contexts, the calculus may offer only limited help.

Some weaker answers focused on a general topic, rather than on specific issues relating to it. For example, some candidates who chose the topic of transplants often included considerable detail about different types of transplant and how organs may be taken from live donors, cadavers or animals. Such detail often added little to the answers, and in some cases only general comments about Bentham's theory were added. Generally it was more effective to identify specific issues such as: Should organ donation be something we have to opt out of rather than opt in to as at present? How should the recipients be chosen? Should donors be paid?

A very wide range of issues were used but in some cases candidates showed little understanding of the one they had chosen. A very few candidates muddled Bentham and Mill, a few others muddled utilitarianism and Situation Ethics. It is strongly recommended that candidates do not use the same issue for their discussion of utilitarianism and Situation Ethics.

#### Part 02

There were many well-considered and well-argued responses to this part of the question, which showed a good understanding of the issue. Most were aware that decisions made following Utilitarianism could flatly contradict core religious teaching like the Ten Commandments. Alternative views considered possible similarities between the two approaches which could lead to identical decisions being taken in many cases. Some candidates did not focus on the question and wrote about the general weaknesses of utilitarianism instead, but others offered a really focused discussion about how far an ethic based on the pursuit of happiness could be compatible with the values of a religious approach to ethics.

## **Question 2 *Situation Ethics***

### **Part 03**

There were many excellent answers to this part of the question and candidates generally showed a good understanding of all the technical terms used. In general they were better at showing why Situation Ethics is not legalistic than they were at showing why it was not antinomian. Weaker answers tended to explain all three key terms (Situation Ethics, legalism and antinomianism) without any reference to the middle way, and some answers included lists or summaries of the four presumptions and six principles without using them to answer the question. Better answers often focused on the presumption of personalism, to show that Situation Ethics is not legalistic, and the idea of 'relativizing the absolute' or the law of love, to show that it is not antinomian. They also showed that Fletcher did not rule out following existing moral teaching unless love required it, all of which explained why he considered Situation Ethics to be the middle way. Some candidates debated rather than explained this view, this was not required by the question.

### **Part 04**

This question was based on an issue that is explicitly identified in the specification but some candidates had no clear idea about what it could mean to describe Situation Ethics as 'practical' and so found it difficult to focus their answers. Some very good answers argued that the emphasis on pragmatism and on the concrete situation in which the decision was to be taken meant that Situation Ethics was practical while the difficulties some decision makers could face in making decisions based on love made it less so.

## **Question 3 *Religious teaching on the nature and value of human life***

### **Part 05**

Most of the candidates who attempted this found it straightforward, but some answers were very general. A few limited their understanding of 'free will' to the idea that if we have 'free will' we have permission to do what we want, and therefore that since religion has many rules it is against free will. Limited credit could be given for this but it missed the point of the question. Many explained that humans had free will, and then wrote about what religion expected them to do with it and why it was important to use it properly. This was creditworthy, but the focus in such answers tended to drift and candidates spent more time explaining the teaching about how to behave than the teaching about free will. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism were the three religions most commonly referred to. The best answers were well informed and referred specifically to religious teaching, often identifying differing strands of thought within their chosen religion.

### **Part 06**

This issue is explicitly identified in the specification and many candidates had clearly considered it and were able to offer a reasoned argument. However, others appeared to have no understanding of the meaning of 'fatalistic' and tried to build an answer around the idea that life was 'fatal'. Such answers generally achieved very little. Many good answers debated whether everything that happened, no matter how bad, should be passively accepted as 'the will of God', (or fate or karma) and whether or not this meant that we should not try to prevent or control such events.

## **Question 4 *Abortion and Euthanasia***

### **Part 07**

There were many well-informed answers to this question, but a number of candidates did little more than list various points at which human life is said to start without offering any explanation or comment. Some answers showed little awareness of the list of possible starting points given in the specification and these tended to be very general. A good number effectively included arguments from scholars such as Peter Singer and Mary Ann Warren about the criteria for personhood and many showed a clear understanding of objections to the idea that life begins at (for example) conception, viability and birth.

### **Part 08**

As many candidates recognised, the debate required by this question arose directly from the material dealing with the beginning of life in part 07. Some candidates, however, did not focus on the main issue, but instead offered general arguments for and against abortion, or, with slightly more relevance, argued whether it was right to kill unborn babies or not. In some cases candidates started with a general debate about killing the unborn and then focused on the central issue half way through their answer. This suggested that they had started without analysing the question clearly enough and had not planned their answer. The best answers defined 'murder' in some way and then debated whether any unborn could be 'murdered' in any sense of the word.