



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Religious Studies

RSS01

(Specification 2060)

Unit A Religion and Ethics 1

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

There were many excellent scripts in which candidates showed thorough knowledge and understanding of the material. There were some full-mark answers to each question and while questions 1 and 4 remained the most popular, a significant number tackled question 2. As noted below, answers to question 3 were generally less focused on the question and therefore weaker. Most candidates seemed to use their time well, but a minority clearly rushed their last answer or left it incomplete. Candidates need to be aware that it is important for them to write legibly.

As always, the best answers focused clearly on the question set while weaker answers were often more general or appeared to focus on a different question than the one set. Some AO2 answers did not focus on the issue raised and some simply presented a point of view rather than engaging in any debate. There were also, however, very good answers which focused on the issue and presented, and evaluated, a range of relevant arguments.

Question 1 *Utilitarianism*

01 This was a very accessible question and many candidates answered it very well. The best answers clearly used the chosen issue(s) to illustrate the general principles of utilitarianism, for example by showing how consequences might be calculated in practice, or how a utilitarian approach could differ from a deontological approach. Weaker answers were often less focused and tended to explain their chosen issue in detail and state what Bentham and/or Mill might have said about it rather than use it as an example to develop the points made.

02 This was another very accessible question which many candidates answered very well. Weaker answers tended to rehearse the general strengths and weaknesses of utilitarianism without applying them to the statement being debated. A few confused the debate by discussing whether religious believers would use utilitarianism or not, which was not directly relevant.

Question 2 *Situation Ethics*

03 This was a broad question and it proved accessible to most candidates, although only some had a good grasp of all three of the required aspects. Some wrote a general summary of Situation Ethics, and while such summaries generally included some relevant material, it was often limited. The idea of relativism was often well explained and some very good examples were used, many taken directly from Fletcher's work. Many candidates also had a good understanding of 'situation' and often related it both to relativism and pragmatism. 'Conscience' however was less well known and some candidates had little or nothing to say about it. Some, however, were clearly aware of Fletcher's distinctive idea that conscience is something you do rather than have and that it involves a loving approach to a concrete situation in which a decision is required.

04 There were some excellent responses to this question. Most argued, with much evidence in support, that Fletcher appeared to reject all traditional moral laws. The usual counter-argument was that the law of love remains and so although Situation Ethics rejects legalism, it is not antinomian. Others successfully argued that traditional moral laws are not rejected, but merely put aside when love demands it.

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

05 There were some very good responses to this question but a significant minority of candidates muddled nature and value of life and so wrote a general and only partly relevant answer. In such answers there was often limited reference to the idea of quality of life and some candidates found it difficult to relate the idea of self-sacrifice to the idea of the value of life. Others clearly explained that while some religions teach that all human life is intrinsically valuable regardless of its quality, many also teach that service to God has a higher value so self-sacrifice may be called for.

06 There were some very successful debates on this issue. Most arguments referred to animals and considered situations in which the statement would be wholly or partly rejected, Buddhism and/or Hinduism were often used to argue that it would be accepted in some contexts.

Some candidates identified a human foetus as non-human life. This often resulted in rather confused and largely unsuccessful arguments, many of which were in the end self-defeating because they conceded that the foetus was human after all.

Question 4 *Abortion and euthanasia*

07 There were many well-focused answers which showed good knowledge and understanding of much relevant religious teaching. Many candidates were able to support their answers with reference to scripture or other sources. Some summarised views about abortion and euthanasia found in different religions, and such answers were only partly relevant. Some candidates failed to mention euthanasia, so limiting the marks that could be awarded and some offered non-religious arguments although these were not asked for and could not be credited.

08 The best answers recognised that a debate about self-sacrifice was relevant here as much as a debate about autonomy, and good use was made of 'hard' cases where, for example, a mother declined treatment for cancer, knowing that a delay would be fatal, in order to protect the life of her unborn child. Arguments in support of living wills / advance directives were also considered alongside those supporting assisted suicide. Most candidates referred to religious arguments against euthanasia/suicide but answers which made no reference to religion were also acceptable.

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