



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

**Religious Studies**

**RSS03**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit C Philosophy of Religion**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

The paper produced the full range of marks and there were some very good answers that reflected a high level of knowledge and understanding of the four unit topics. Similar points were noted by the examiners as have been noted in previous reports. They were:

1. Some candidates still do not seem to be aware that the first parts of the question (01, 03, 05, 07) test AO1 (knowledge and understanding) and the second parts (02, 04, 06, 08) test AO2 (evaluation). For instance, some candidates gave responses to the weaknesses of the cosmological argument in answer to 01.
2. In some instances, the same two questions were answered by every candidate from that same centre. It might be that the candidates felt more confident about those particular parts of the Specification. However, it might also indicate that some centres are selecting to teach only two of the four topics. If this is so, then it would seem seriously to limit both the candidates' experience of the philosophy of religion and the choice of questions they can answer in the actual exam.
3. There were some centres where all the candidates in that centre gave almost identical answers that failed to address the focus of the question. The information was correct, but not always relevant to the question asked. This suggests that candidates are just repeating learnt notes and ignoring the specific focus of the question, since notes tend to give a general summary of the topic. Such a general answer is likely to only be credited at a level 3 or below.
4. Candidates continue to struggle to present high level AO2. Previous reports have observed that the common structure of "on the one hand... however, on the other hand..." is not the best template. Although it does provide at least two contrasting views, there is no evaluation of those views. Such an answer is more AO1 (information) than AO2 (evaluation). There needs to be some analysing of the argument that shows some reasoning and weighing up. The level descriptors refer to "reasoned argument" which is more than just listing arguments.
5. There is some indication that candidates are being taught a topic but without reference to the actual Specification. For instance, a significant number of candidates did not understand the wording of question 08, even though the exact wording appears in the Specification.
6. Examiners commented on the poor handwriting of many candidates. There is always a risk that poor handwriting will be misread.

As in previous exams, Question 4 was the least popular question answered and Question 1 was the most popular.

### Question 1 *The Cosmological argument*

**01** There is a tendency for candidates to just give a general presentation of the cosmological argument regardless of the question set in this section. Every question set has a particular focus and it is important that candidates centre on this focus in their answer. The focus was the weaknesses of the cosmological argument. Aquinas' argument is the only argument referred to in the Specification so full marks could be obtained by considering the weaknesses of Aquinas' argument, although, because no specific cosmological argument was specified in the question, other forms of the cosmological argument could be discussed. However, it should also be noted that it is valid to set a question specifically about Aquinas' form of the argument but it would not be valid to set a question specifically about any other form of the argument.

Candidates who only listed the weaknesses tended to gain levels 3-5. Those who explained why they constituted a weakness, tended to gain levels 6-7.

Some less able candidates gave a lengthy biography of Aquinas which has no relevance to the question set, whilst others describe all Five Ways.

**02** Most candidates were able to identify some strengths of the argument and then listed again all the weaknesses that they had mentioned in 01. However, the focus was weighing up the extent to which strengths outweighed weaknesses. That requires some sort of evaluation, weighing one against the other and justifying a conclusion. As was mentioned earlier, candidates continue to find this skill difficult to master.

## **Question 2 *Religious experience***

- 03** A significant number of candidates seemed unaware of any characteristics other than William James' four characteristics of a religious experience. Characteristics of visions seemed to cause the most difficulty to candidates, with some candidates only addressing the "conversion" part of the question. Where examples were given, they were rarely explained and linked back to the characteristics. Some answers consisted of just a narrative of famous visions and conversions. In contrast, the strongest candidates illustrated their answer with specific examples that were clearly linked to the characteristics.
- 04** Where a claim is to be assessed in an AO2 question, the claim is usually controversial in some way, so that there is a clear focus to discuss and debate. In this question it was the sweeping claim that **all** religious experiences have natural explanations. Very few candidates addressed that aspect but instead they gave lists of possible natural explanations. Such an approach limits the level attainable as directed by the level descriptors.

## **Question 3 *Psychology and religion***

- 05** This question had the highest percentage of candidates being awarded a level 6-7. There were some good answers that had a clear and wide ranging coverage that addressed the focus. As expected, many candidates were able to give good accounts of Freud's and Jung's understanding of religious beliefs but made only passing reference to the focus about Jung's understanding being more positive than that of Freud.

Less able candidates tended to give confused accounts of Freud's understanding of religious beliefs and made very limited reference to Jung. Only the strongest candidates explained the importance of individuation to mental health.

- 06** Many candidates seemed to struggle to answer this question. There was little awareness of the possible response of religion to the challenge from psychology, or why psychology is a challenge to religion. The topic area is clearly given in the Specification but many candidates did not seem to have been prepared for this debate.

## **Question 4 *Atheism and postmodernism***

- 07** Although this was the least popular question, it was generally well answered with a wide range of material. There were a number of candidates who had clearly learned the reasons for the "rise" of atheism and tried unsuccessfully to relate this material to the question set. The strongest candidates were able to include some discussion of the core idea of the rejection of discovering truth and having absolute knowledge. In contrast, the less able candidates were only able to make very general statements about postmodernism.
- 08** Most candidates struggled to answer this question and showed a lack of understanding of "affirmation". This led some candidates just to argue that people were becoming atheists. This question is a topic area that is clearly listed in the Specification and in the very wording as per the question set. Candidates should have been prepared for this debate.

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