



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

**Religious Studies**

**RST3B**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit 3B Philosophy of Religion**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General comments

Most candidates had a good understanding of the topics under consideration. They were able to express good insights into aspects of the questions, though some candidates failed to address the set question. Sometimes candidates responded by simply presenting information that came under the general topic area, without consideration of how to use the material in the light of the question.

### Question 1 *Ontological argument and the relationship between reason and faith*

**01** This was a very popular question and many candidates were able to give a clear explanation of the first part of Anselm's presentation in the *Proslogion*. Some candidates presented what the argument said, in some cases by almost directly quoting Anselm. The candidates might have the knowledge of the argument, which is good and creditable. However, the question asked "Analyse the reasoning". Candidates needed to go into the methodology and to explain how Anselm presents the information in a logical way, showing how each part of the argument links to the next point. Some candidates failed to mention the second part of Anselm's argument, the argument for God being necessary rather than contingent. Good candidates at this point mentioned Gaunilo's criticism and used it as a stepping stone to introduce the second part of the argument. A number of candidates got side-tracked into presenting arguments against the ontological argument, which were not relevant for this question. Most candidates raised the issue of whether the purpose of Anselm's work was to prove the existence of God or to reinforce the belief of someone who is already committed to God. Those candidates who failed to cover both aspects of the question (the analysis and the purpose) could not achieve more than Level 5. Candidates must pay careful attention to what is being covered by the question.

**02** Some candidates addressed this issue very well and were able to present coherent arguments about how the weaknesses and strengths of the argument can be of use to the non-believer. Able candidates included the issue of the logical format of the argument and how reason therefore might appear to show that failure to believe was irrational. Some candidates were able to show how faith adds an extra dimension and that reason alone was not sufficient to arouse faith. The most common weakness in answering this question was for candidates to simply present arguments against the ontological approach and tag onto the end a statement of how this would (not) help the non-believer. This method of answering the question did not allow candidates to show any evaluation skills so it limited the marks available. While the candidates who referred to how the argument might help the believer gained some credit if their statements were part of a contrast, simply stating that the argument was useful for faith did not merit any credit.

### Question 2 *Religious language*

**03** There were some weak answers here, often because the candidates did not have any relevant material to write about, despite the topic being clearly on the Specification. Many less able candidates started their discussion on non-cognitive language by explaining what cognitive language is and then bringing in the issue of verification and falsification. Their answers then became side-tracked into discussing the verification/falsification arguments, which were not relevant. Better candidates were able to make reference to Braithwaite and moral discourse and to how religious language seeks to evoke the presence of, rather than prove, the existence of God. The coverage of symbolic language was stronger, with most candidates able correctly to identify the work of Tillich. Those who referred to language itself being symbolic, as well as religious language having to use symbols to reveal what could not easily be put into words, produced impressive answers.

**04** This question comes straight from the Specification. It was surprising how many candidates simply referred to religious language being meaningful, rather than language being able to talk meaningfully about God. While there are very strong overlaps between religious language and language about God, the latter is more focused and helps the candidate to be more specific in what is included in the answer. Many candidates were able to produce good answers referring to verification and falsification. Many also included the idea of religious language having meaning as part of the language game and made reference to analogical language. These responses were creditworthy. It was surprising how few candidates brought in the idea that God is transcendent and so cannot be limited by human words. Some candidates made reference to the *via negativa* but they often did not make the link to the question explicit.

### **Question 3 *Body, soul and personal identity***

- 05** Most candidates were able to see that this question was an AO1 question. Most were able to recognise that there needed to be some presentation of different types of post-mortem existence. There was no requirement to evaluate the meaningfulness of each of these forms of existence, nor was there any credit for those who looked at the work of thinkers who denied there was any post-mortem survival. The area that caused most candidates difficulty was their failure to analyse what is meant by “I”: to what extent do “I” survive the death of my body, how do “I” carry on according to these different understandings of life after death. Most candidates were able to present some understanding of the replica approach of John Hick, but candidates should be wary of simply rewriting the whole of a thinker’s supporting examples as time is of the essence in exams and focusing on one small detail can produce imbalanced answers.
- 06** Too many candidates answered this as if it were an AO1 question, just presenting different opinions about what is the soul. Some gave long explanations of Plato’s views, including a lengthy description of the analogy of the cave. Many others gave long descriptions of near death experience accounts without really bringing the material in line with the question. The good candidates were able to evaluate how “reasonable” any particular ground was, including coverage of the believable nature of scripture, the existence of ghosts, the inability to prove the soul scientifically etc. It is important to stress to candidates that the second part of each question demands an evaluation of the relevant material, not just a presentation of different pieces of information.

### **Question 4 *The problem of evil***

- 07** This was a popular question and many candidates had good understanding of some of the many approaches that could be included in this question. Many of the candidates started with the Augustinian understanding of evil and creation and showed how this relates to the free will defence. Some of these candidates could have stressed the role of free will more, with some suggesting that free will only appeared after Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit, rather than seeing the eating as itself an expression of free will. Modern concepts of free will, especially that of John Hick, were well understood and expressed. Only the best candidates were able to show how free will requires total freedom and non-interference from God. Not many candidates developed the understanding that natural evil is simply the way that the world is structured and that humans need to live in a world that appears to be random if free will is not going to be restricted by too much regularity. Candidates could have developed the aspect of their answers that dealt with the purpose of the free will defence, to further explain how the free will defence removes any suggestion of God being limited because evil does not raise issues about the classical understanding of the nature of God. It was clear that bad time management had deprived some candidates of the opportunity to cover all that they knew in relation to the question.
- 08** Most candidates were able to include relevant material in their answers to this question. There was again an issue of spending too long giving all the details of a scholar’s analogy, on this occasion Kirkegaard’s king and peasant story (sometimes included by candidates in answer to 07 with sometimes the details repeated in both answers). The correct reference to relevant stories in an appropriate context is sufficient to show that the candidate knows the material. How the material is used is of far more importance than the material itself. The biggest weakness in the answers to this question was the candidates’ failure to address the issue of “how far is it satisfactory?”. Many candidates simply presented material for both sides of the argument without any attempt at evaluation. Also many candidates failed to include any reference to the idea of God being the creator of the world and what this should suggest about the world and evil. Candidates would benefit from analysing the question carefully before they start to write.

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