



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Religious Studies

RSS03

(Specification 2060)

Unit C Philosophy of Religion

Report on the Examination

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General comments

As in previous sessions, questions 1 and 2 were the most popular. However a significant number of students attempted the question on Jung and his understanding of religion. The least popular question was the question on the rise of atheism.

It was noticeable that in some schools and colleges all the students selected the same choice of questions, and their answers frequently followed a similar pattern which suggested that students were repeating class notes regardless of the focus of the question asked. Both A01 and A02 questions have a clear focus. It is this tendency to ignore the focus of a question that remains the major reason for underperformance by students.

Poor handwriting was another common comment from the examiners. Despite the time and trouble spent trying to read poor handwriting, there remains a risk that words can be misread.

Question 1 *The Cosmological argument*

01 Regardless of the focus, many students continue to give an outline of Aquinas' cosmological argument. There was reference to God as First Mover, First Cause and Necessary Being, but these were often almost incidental and not developed.

Students who achieved higher levels of response discussed whether the cosmological argument suggested God as sustainer or a more deistic view of God. Few related this debate to the different types of cause.

There were some very good answers, showing a high level of understanding of some difficult philosophical ideas. The ideas of God contained in the cosmological argument are not the easiest to express in an essay.

Many students made reference to other forms of the cosmological argument which enabled them to widen their discussion. However, full marks could have been gained just by answering on Aquinas as the specification does not demand that other forms of the argument have to be studied, though other forms of the argument will be credited where appropriate.

02 A significant number of students ignored the 'reasonable to believe in God' aspect of the statement and so listed criticisms of the argument without relating to the focus of the question. Some students who referred to the concept of fideism did not always understand it and often used it as an argument to support the cosmological argument as reasonable for belief in God. However, there were some very good answers that showed maturity in their discussion of the issue.

Question 2 *Religious experience*

03 Many schools and colleges appeared to have given little attention to religious experience as an argument for the existence of God and students seemed to struggle with the question. A significant number of students resorted to providing the characteristics of religious experience and attempted to relate those to the focus of God's existence. Weaker students limited their answers to a few specific examples of religious experiences without any reference to the question. Other students had clearly studied this aspect of the specification and were able to discuss Swinburne's arguments.

04 Once again the focus was often ignored. Many students seemed to have prepared an answer about the genuineness of religious experiences rather than whether they can prove God exists. There were some detailed accounts of the work of Ramachandran and

of Persinger's helmet but then students failed to explain how their work related to the question. Good answers discussed the problem of the subjective nature of the experience and the difficulty of establishing the source of the experience. Some students also focussed on the philosophical problem of 'proof'.

Question 3 *Psychology and religion*

05 A number of students confused Jung with Freud, but most had an understanding of Jung's theories. The theories of archetypes, though given in some detail, were not related back to Jung's understanding of religion. In particular, there was often no reference to individuation. However, there were some very good answers that included discussion about Jung's understanding of religious experience.

06 Some answers demonstrated good, reasoned responses that were thoughtful in their consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of Jung's understanding of religion. Weaker answers simply listed the strengths and weaknesses without explaining why they were considered to be strengths or weaknesses. In addition, they then made no attempt to assess how far they agreed with the statement.

Even though students did address the focus they often listed points on either side. To achieve the higher levels there has to be evidence of reasoning and analysis rather than just the listing of points. Clearly, many students find this skill of evaluation difficult and present an AO1 rather than an AO2 answer.

Question 4 *Atheism and postmodernism*

07 Though this was the least popular question answered, it produced some good thoughtful answers. Most students were able to examine some key reasons, although in some cases the question was answered in a very simple form. A number of reasons for the rise of atheism are listed in the specification but not all the reasons were required to gain maximum marks. What was important was the explanation, and the need to make it clear why the selected reason (such as the problem of evil) led to atheism. Some students misjudged their timing and spent too long on part (a) and so gained very few marks on part (b).

08 The focus of religion being in retreat in the modern world was often ignored, with many students merely repeating the material given in part (a). Good answers went beyond discussion about church attendance and brought in other areas such as views of postmodernism. This could be debated on both sides, e.g. rejection of traditional religion or growth in numbers engaging in personal spiritual search. Often students did not address the "to what extent" aspect of the evaluation.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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