



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

**Religious Studies**

**RST3B**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit 3B Philosophy of Religion**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **General comments**

There were many well-developed answers to this year's paper, showing that the students had appreciated the areas that they had studied. There were few students whose factual knowledge was shallow or inaccurate. The biggest weakness was in shaping their knowledge to address the set question. The examiners are not expected to select the relevant material from a student's response that can be credited, so it is futile for students simply to write down all that they know about a topic. Also, students need to focus more on the actual wording of the question as that gives clear guidance to the expected balance of an answer. The term "outline" requires far less content than the term "examine". Some students' handwriting is very difficult to decipher. While examiners will do their best, sometimes students make it impossible for the examiners to credit passages that simply cannot be read. It is worthwhile for students to practise writing under the pressure of time, to ensure that their handwriting is still legible.

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

**01** This was the most popular question on the paper. Most students had a good knowledge and understanding of Anselm's ontological argument, though some failed to include the point that existence of reality is greater than existence in the mind. These answers said that because people can imagine God, therefore God exists, which is not what the argument states. Many students included Gaunilo's response and Anselm's second stage of the argument in response to Gaunilo. There was no requirement to include Gaunilo in this part of the question but it did help some students to move into the second part of the argument. The main problem in this question was that students had only been asked to outline Anselm's argument, so only the central points of the argument were expected. There was a limit of Level 4 (19 marks) for this part of the question. References to Descartes, Kant etc were irrelevant here. The second element of this question was an examination of the relationship between faith and reason in the ontological argument. This required students to study how much Anselm's argument was actually a prayer and how much it was a logical argument. Good students showed how Anselm wanted to use human reason to reinforce his faith commitment, not to create faith out of nothing. Unfortunately, many of the weaker students either omitted this part of the question totally or simply stated that Anselm's work was a prayer and did not examine any further how this might have affected what Anselm developed. The question was focused on the role and faith and reason within the ontological argument. Those students who responded by dealing with the role of reason and faith in belief did not address this part of the question.

**02** Many students examined the argument as a proof of the existence of God, which was a valid approach, but the question did allow a wider examination. Those who looked at the validity of the argument itself did well with the material and could make reference to Gaunilo, Kant, Hume, Gasking and Russell among other thinkers. Good students also brought in the development of the argument presented by Malcolm, Hartshorne and Plantinga. The main weakness in some of the students' responses was their failure to analyse the different approaches. Presenting the ideas side by side shows knowledge but the AO2 skill includes personal response to the material.

### **Question 2 *Religious language***

**03** The central point of this question was an examination of the problems raised by religious language. Those students who started with the problems managed the question very well. There is a wide range of issues that could be addressed: the ability to use human language about the divine, the limitations on the divine imposed by the use of language, the provability of religious language, the symbolic nature or otherwise of religious language etc. Good students focused on a few areas and examined the problems raised

in detail, though many limited themselves to its provability. Unfortunately, too many students simply began examining responses to religious language without linking their material to particular problems. Occasionally, a short comment like “this raises a problem for religious language because..” appended to the end of a paragraph was intended to help address the question, but the whole focus of what had gone before was not on the question, so it was difficult to give these statements great credit.

- 04** There were some students who tried to give an answer to this question without having any knowledge of the idea of language games. There were some good answers that dealt with issues like the impossibility of inter-religion discussion if each religion has its own language game. Many students appreciated why Wittgenstein introduced the concept of language games in an attempt to overcome the issues raised by logical positivism. However, they were also able to show the limitations of this approach as applied to the symbolic nature of religious language, the unprovability of religious language etc. Again, students made a useful selection from the vast range of areas that could be included in the discussion. Those students who were familiar with the issue of language games were able to make good critical analytical comments on the approach.

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

- 05** This was not a popular question. While many students were able to give a good explanation of the hard materialist approach to the idea of body and soul, the situation became more difficult when they tried to explain the dualist approach. Most students focused on Plato’s ideas. Unfortunately the discussion tended to focus purely on the nature of the soul in Plato and any comment on the relationship to the body was a fleeting reference. Having got distracted by the nature of the soul, many students then brought in the ideas of the afterlife, reincarnation and resurrection, which all ignored the relationship of the soul with the body, except for an accidental comment. While it is possible to answer this question by initially examining the idea of the soul, there has to be a major element of the answer that deals with the soul’s relationship to the body for the question to be properly addressed.

- 06** This question was not well answered on the whole, as most students ignored the importance of what is needed for “I” to survive. Those who looked at the ideas of reincarnation, resurrection and replica theory all had the opportunity of examining in what way the elements that make up the individual can survive in the new state: the combination of mind, soul, bodies and memories. However, few students made use of this opportunity, restricting themselves to stating what each of these ideas expressed. Too many students got bogged down with near-death experiences, examining the evidence for these events, but rarely linking near-death experiences to the idea of personal survival after death. Some students limited themselves to looking at the changes that might occur in a person who had some close to death experience, rather than looking at the main idea of what it means to survive death – or not.

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

- 07** There were many good attempts to present different ideas about why there is evil in a world created by God. Those who focused on the idea of evil disproving the existence of God did not really address the central issue. Most students presented good explanations of parts, if not the whole, of Augustine’s idea of the fall: bringing evil into the world, distorting God’s perfect creation, natural evil being the punishment, the idea of plenitude etc. On the whole students tried to keep the focus on natural evil, as required by the question, but sometimes they slipped into discussing purely moral evil, without making any link to natural evil. Good presentations were made of Hick’s Irenaean theodicy and the role of natural evil in giving opportunity for soul development. Some students mentioned the free will defence but did not develop the idea of needing a world in which things,

including nature, can and do go wrong. Many students tried to include the ideas of process theology, but the expression of these ideas was not always clear.

**08** Students often tried to compare the justification for natural and moral evil, and there was some good analysis, reflecting different responses to these two areas. Some of the answers limited themselves to examining the justification for moral evil, with a very brief comment on natural evil. Some of the essays gave the feel of being rushed because of poor time-keeping in the examination, which might explain the imbalance of some of the pieces offered. Some students explained why they felt there was no justification for any type of evil. While weaker students simply presented the ideas of thinkers like Dostoevsky, Mackie and Rowe, the better ones analysed their arguments in the context of the question. There were some really insightful comments made by the students.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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