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Examiners' Report January 2011

GCE Religious Studies 6RS02 1B

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January 2011

Publications Code US026815

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Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Investigations Paper of January 2011 demonstrated a remarkable level of scholarship evident across all areas of study and some answers demonstrated the engagement that candidates had with their area of investigation. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres chose to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. Some candidates were very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that Centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. It is important to stress again that the 'Investigations' unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve students as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning. Questions were designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and all valid answers were considered.

Candidates were mostly entered for the correct paper but there were still a few entries for particular areas of study where it might have benefitted the candidate more to consider entry for a different area of study. It is important to ensure candidates know which area of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper.

Some topics share generic ideas across a number of different areas and it is vital that candidates know the **distinctive** features of their investigation so that in the exam candidates know which question to answer i.e. question 1, 2 or 3. It is worth noting that the difference between discussing an ethical issue, for example, in Area C and Area D would be in the kind of emphasis required by Area of Study; Area 1C requires a range of ethical and/or religious teachings applied to a medical issue whilst Area D requires a more detailed knowledge of the ethical precepts of the World Religion(s). Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was in a box that did not match the answer.

Variation in achievement was related to answering the question and to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Importantly, in the exam itself there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer. Each question consistently referred to the assessment objectives with the trigger word 'Examine' for AO1 and 'Comment on' for AO2. These dictated the structure of the question and helped candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations. The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' will always appear in the question to ensure that the generic question can be answered with material from any appropriate investigation.

Preparation for the exam must also pay attention to enabling candidates to develop their management of material studied throughout their investigations and to how best structure their content to **answer** the specific question. Success can be undermined by writing up a rote-learned answer which was not adapted in any way to the question set.

This report features work produced by the candidates in the actual examination. The mark scheme itself is generic to all questions. It was not possible to include exemplars for some questions that attracted a small entry in this examination series.

Question 1

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE; MEDITATION

There was a broad range of interesting well-researched responses: the best responses had a good range of scholarship which integrated their material into a coherent response rather than just re-telling a range of views/theories/life/work within the chosen investigation.

The question asked for simple extrapolation from standard theories and ideas the candidates will have encountered as part of the syllabus.

Many candidates responded to the question with fluency and there was evidence that the question stimulus had helped candidates to make effective use of the material they had prepared. Candidates examined various types of experiences and considered a number of contentious issues. Some candidates very skilfully selected and adapted material relevant to the demands of the question. Many candidates presented material that was clearly following a line of independent inquiry. Overall the majority of candidates were well prepared for this question but some candidates seem to have anticipated a different question and had difficulty with manipulating their material. Whilst they still produced essays of merit, their AO2 marks were weaker than their AO1 scores. This approach adopted by some candidates produced many competent essays but fewer of the more outstanding and independent essays. There was some evidence of candidates from the same centre who used the same quotes, essay structure and material.

The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' led to responses ranging from general statements with little or no reference to a particular topic, to some very precise analyses of particular ideas and scholars. Some candidates covered a lot of topics, often in a rather shallow way, providing a general narrative account of views of religious experience. Swinburne and James were probably the most popular scholars mentioned, but there were also interesting discussions focussing on Freud or existentialism. Of the weaker scripts it was common to see accounts of miracles and a discussion of Hume interpreted by the candidate as an account and discussion of a religious experience. Some candidates gave a good outline of the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience and considered its strengths and weaknesses; such essays gained some credit, but these candidates struggled to relate their responses closely to the question set. Candidates must be reminded that the demands of this paper are different to the demands of 6RS03. Many candidates responded very well to the question of communication with God and demonstrated fluent control over their material. A very wide range of approaches to the question was examined by candidates who referred to various scholars and religious traditions.

This essay is an example of a response that engages immediately with the question.

Communication with God or the ultimate comes in the form of religious experience; something which FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER describes as the 'essential soul of religion'. Without religious experiences providing us with a clear interaction of God then we can never really hope to understand Him. ~~For~~ TERESA CEAVILA stated that through ^{personal} communication 'God establishes himself ~~as~~ inside the interior of the soul so deeply that when I return to myself it is wholly impossible to doubt that I have been in God and God in me'. If one is able to communicate with God then a knowledge of Him can be possessed that couldn't in any other way. However, as WILLIAM JAMES suggests, how can one verify claims that people have actually had direct communication with God?

If communication with God is a possibility, then undoubtedly we are able to garner some knowledge and understanding of Him, ~~that~~ and it is

certainly true that direct communication would provide us with some knowledge that it would not be possible to receive to receive through word of mouth, but ~~is~~ the problem remains that it is not possible to verify. JOHN HICK suggests the only way forward is eschatological verification but that is hardly sufficient, and really tells us nothing within this life. However, even if it were true that communication with God is something possible, ~~that~~ it does not stop the fact that we can know God and have understanding of God without communication. Even if this meant that all the scriptures were false because it is not possible for there to be any contact with God, we can still have the knowledge of God as a conviction; something which FEUER would tell us comes from our own minds. Perhaps therefore, even as many theists believe, we find ~~the~~ knowledge of God from within ourselves.



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Examiner Comments

In the introduction the candidate comments on the question through a fluent adaptation of three different scholars/sources.



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Examiner Tip

Have confidence to express yourself in a way that shows mastery over your material and awareness of the question.

Question 2

MIND AND BODY

The question was very well done by the some candidates who really tried to explore the relevance of their study for questions about the nature and meaning of personal identity. A popular approach for this question focussed on Life after Death as a way of analysing the difficulties or implications of accounting for personal identity within this context. The best answers systematically examined forms of monism and dualism and addressed/tackled issues of personal identity successfully. Scholarship was largely very good in this question with reference to Descartes and other scholars within the field. There was much evidence of competent philosophical analysis of a range of viewpoints both ancient and modern.

There was evidence of very thorough responses offering a technically adept, detailed, and scholarly analysis of dualism and monism with accurate extrapolation from this material for an understanding of personal identity. There were some responses which did less well on the evaluation; these responses often provided a solid account of the various positions within the mind body debate but paid lesser attention to the question of how this is relevant for understanding personal identity. The range of scholars included in the majority of essays was impressive and candidates conducted a learned discussion of the issues in question with fluency. Weaker responses included learned material which did not answer the question set and were defined by a simplistic approach and difficulty in manipulating the material.

The extracts from two different essays below demonstrate how far candidates were able to address the question with reference to the topic they had investigated.

In Conclusion, i believe that mind and body is not essential to understand people. You do not need dualism to know everything about someone. I completely disagree with the arguments for dualism, as the ~~philosophy~~ Philosophers seem to complicate things, which leads them to question themselves. If someone questions ~~themselves~~ themselves, how are ~~you~~ you supposed to believe them? I think Eliminate ~~the~~ materialism makes sense, as ~~it~~ i believe to understand someone, you need to know how they feel, not what is causing the sensation of thought. So concluding all of this i don't believe in Dualism, or that you need to understand people by knowing about their mind, matter and body. ~~as there isn't enough information or evidence to back it up. I am not completely ruling out Dualism out, but until there is enough relevant and correct information or evidence, i will stick with my decision.~~



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Examiner Tip

Your conclusion can be strengthened if you can answer the question by a final statement that summarises the thrust of your essay.

This example shows how the candidate expressed a viewpoint with ease.

The relationship between the mind and the body is important towards understanding personal identity; it is questionable as to where the essence of us lies, whether it is our appearance, our memories and ~~our~~ personality, or our soul or soma pneumatikon. Personal identity is important to those who believe in life after death as it is this which they wish to carry on, therefore it is important as to whether our mind and body are separate and the study of what is beyond and what will carry on. It is also important if you're a monist and you believe yourself to be a ~~the~~ single entity. Without acknowledgement about where your identity lies and what it is, you cannot develop yourself as a person. Not only this, but when people are faced with trauma's which may affect their body or their mind, they must understand it in order to keep their identity. ^{*new para*} If someone is in accident and become

in a vegetative state, you do not think they are a different person with a different identity. When someone is in an accident where their appearance has severely changed but their memories and personality are still the same, you do not think they are a different person with a different identity. Therefore, perhaps it is not only your mind which holds your memories and personality but also your physical appearance which gives you your whole personal identity. If you lose both of these, ^{personality} then you are not the same person, but still with strands of either of them, you are still able to be recognised as the same person and therefore still hold your personal identity.

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Examiner Comments

The candidate engages in a full discussion and makes a good attempt to comment on theories discussed in the essay.

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Examiner Tip

It is good practise to conclude your essay with reference to the question. This clearly expressed viewpoint supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument is more convincing.

Question 3

A STUDY OF ONE/MORE PHILOSOPHERS OF RELIGION

Good quality answers focussed on an interesting range of philosophers with many candidates choosing to compare and contrast two different philosophers; thus allowing for easier AO2 comment on the challenges posed by the study of their works. The most popular combination was Kierkegaard and Sartre. The obvious enthusiasm some candidates had for the area of study was clearly conveyed by very mature essays in which the significant challenges were very carefully teased out. Most gave a good analysis of the philosopher they had investigated. Philosophers ranged from C.S. Lewis to Plato, Nietzsche, Descartes (very popular) Sartre and Kierkegaard and an increased number focused on Aquinas. The best answers referred to a range of ideas or works by the chosen philosopher and placed them in the correct context of their time and discussed the significant challenges in studying and assessing their work with great ease.

There was evidence of a variety of quality of response and weaker responses simply offered a biographical account of the scholar in question without paying attention to the demands of the question. Occasionally this approach is justified in that some responses related Kierkegaard's life experiences to the development of his philosophy; however, weaker responses relied too heavily on irrelevant storytelling, ignored the question and simply offered an account of the main highlights of a particular scholar's thinking without further comment. In this range not many answers included much by way of comment from scholars on the views of their philosophers, and although this was not a requirement it did enhance the answers of candidates who were able to do it. Some candidates chose one idea/argument from their philosopher and did a strengths or weaknesses of that view; whilst this was not necessarily a bad approach it was most often done at a simpler level and not fully focused on the question in terms of concluding about the challenges posed when assessing or studying these ideas. Some candidates tended to argue from the outset for the existence of God rather than answering the question; this was especially apparent in responses that focussed on Aquinas.

The following extracts from two essays show responses which either ignore the question or develop a more reasoned approach that achieves higher levels in both assessment objectives.

Does God exist?
I have chosen whether to discuss whether it is possible to prove the existence of God. I will use philosophers including William Lane Craig, Bertrand Russell and David Hume to support my claims and also the cosmological arguments to support and provide an answer to my question. I will ~~also~~ use the cosmological argument to help provide an answer to my question. The cosmological argument is an a posteriori one. It is based on the claim that every exists needs a cause.

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Examiner Comments

This introduction gives no indication as to how the question might be addressed or whether the candidate is aware of the question.

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Examiner Tip

Do NOT ignore the question. It is there for the purpose of enabling you to show how you can manage your material.

This essay makes a more reasoned attempt at meeting the demands of the question.

However many would challenge this, which poses significant problems when assessing Aquinas' work. Due to the vulnerability of his way, many have used a more modern, scientific theorem to try and disprove Aquinas. Isaac Newton's first ~~best~~ law of motion states that "everything will continue ~~at~~ to be in motion until it is put at rest." and some argue that when applied, the theory of evolution ~~and~~ contradicts the First way, as the world seems to have started from the Big Bang, not from God.

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Examiner Comments

The candidate attempts to integrate the question into their presentation of material investigated.

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Examiner Tip

Answer the question! This will impact positively on your overall achievement.

This paper attracted a wide spectrum of responses and the majority of candidates had clearly engaged with enthusiasm a topic of interest and produced under examination conditions a fluent answer. It must be noted that the best candidates have set a very high standard in this examination session by the individuality of their investigations. Congratulations to centres and candidates who worked so hard to achieve high standards and to reinforce the value of creativity and independent learning that is made possible through the Investigations Unit.

This conclusion does not refer to the question at all. It is an example of a pre-prepared approach that has difficulty with addressing the question.

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