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Edexcel

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE

In Religious Studies (8RS0)

Paper 1: Philosophy of Religion

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Examiner's Report 8RS0 01 AS Philosophy of Religion paper

Introduction

This paper saw a good range of responses with many candidates writing in good detail, using scholarship well and demonstrating a sound understanding of the key ideas examined. There were pleasing examples of careful AO2 skills (assessment and analysis) in many responses and most candidates appeared to manage their time well which is most encouraging. Where candidates did not perform as well, they presented brief responses or answers that contained much more narrative than analysis in questions that required AO2 skills.

Q01 Explore the nature of religious experience. (8)

This question saw a variety of responses most of which scored well. Many candidates focused on the nature of religious experience carefully and drew on the work of William James; many used key terms well eg numinous, ineffable and propositional or non-propositional. The most effective responses displayed a wide range of knowledge that was developed effectively. Some candidates wrote about the impact of religious experience indicating its nature and others identified types of experience and made this relevant to the question.

Weaker responses tended to describe a particular encounter at length and not address the nature of the religious experience as specified in the question. Some candidates erroneously focused on religious experience as an argument for the existence of God and presented material on credulity and testimony that did not meet the requirements of the question.

Q02 Assess the strength of ideas about movement **and** about cause and effect in the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God. (9)

There were varied approaches to this question in terms of structure. Some candidates presented a summary of each area of the question and then offered counter argument in the second part of the essay, while some dealt with each part of the question in continent and assessment and then proceeded to the next part. Both approaches are of course legitimate, but the most effective responses tended to be were those that integrated their AO2 material throughout their AO1 right from the start of their essay, thus maintaining the right AO2 focus in the response regarding the strength or otherwise of these ideas. Many candidates focused exclusively on Aquinas and did so well. Others also used material from Russell and Copleston, Leibniz and William Lane Craig. A good number of candidates discussed counter argument to the ideas concerning infinite time, quantum physics or fallacy of composition.

Weaker responses focused too much on AO1 material, for example, using language throughout such as 'Aquinas wrote ...', 'The argument states ...' or

'another part of the argument is ...' without then assessing the information. Only a few candidates offered responses on the Design argument instead of these features of the Cosmological argument.

Q03 Assess the strengths of **one** theodicy or solution to the problem of suffering. (9)

This question saw very many good, secure and detailed responses that considered the strength or otherwise of the presented theodicy or solution. Augustine and Irenaeus were very popular, as was Process Theodicy, which if selected tended to be done rather well with careful consideration of the implications of the nature of God here. Responses often discussed how the theodicies fit in with/contradict the Bible and there was good use of scholarship too.

Weak responses simply presented the content of a chosen theodicy with little or no assessment of its strength or spent too much time detailing the problem of suffering as an introduction. Other weak responses presented a general survey of how suffering may be a test of faith, how believers trust God anyway, and that 'we should help the poor' in very simple terms.

Q04(a) Explore the characteristics of *a posteriori* and *a priori* arguments. (8)

This question served as a good discriminator. Strong responses here demonstrated clear understanding of both types of argument with no confusion. Some offered an example without simply describing that argument but indicating how it qualified as each type. The best responses showed excellent clarity of knowledge with good development. Candidates confidently applied terms such as inductive and deductive, and proof and probability and they made links to arguments based on design, cosmology, religious experience and the ontological arguments. Many candidates created their own examples of *a priori* and *a posteriori* reasoning discussing unicorns, the 'blueness' of the sky, or whether the sun will rise tomorrow.

Weaker responses indicated that some candidates were clearly more confident on one of these types and presented a partial response; or wrote a couple of sentences only on each with little, if any development. The weakest responses were very confused and/or had the terms the wrong way round.

Q04(b) Analyse the view that the Ontological Argument is a successful proof for the existence of God. (20)

It is always wonderful to see that, although barely a year has passed since these candidates were sitting GCSE exams, they are able to grapple with a topic such as the ontological argument so effectively. Answers usually started by discussing

the ideas of Anselm then moving on to Gaunilo and Descartes and then often also discussing the ideas of Kant, Plantinga and Malcolm. Candidates accurately used terms such as *reductio ad absurdum*, predicate and necessary being. There were some excellent paragraphs about 'possible worlds'. Some of the strongest responses considered the notion of 'proof' in relation to this argument in comparison to probability offered by other arguments, although this was rare.

Weaker responses presented simple outlines of the argument with little assessment. Some became confused and wrote about perfect worlds with a perfect designer and then discussed the problem of evil and suffering.

Summary

Based on the performance on this paper candidates should:

- Apply material carefully to the question and avoid anecdote or re-telling incidents
- Balance time in an answer that includes AO2 marks between content and assessment/analysis to avoid lengthy narrative before AO2 marks can be accessed
- Continue to learn key terms to be able to use them confidently without confusion
- Practice identifying exactly what a question is asking for to avoid presenting material that will not be able to earn marks
- Develop skills to present a line of argument, such as after presenting strengths or weaknesses, offer conclusion and verdicts on the success or otherwise of these rather than simply presenting them as a point of view