Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Introduction

This year saw some good responses across the questions but there were also some more general issues worth addressing here.

The best way for candidates to improve is to remember to answer the question, not a question they would prefer or feel more knowledgeable about. Some candidates may have misread the question but simple tips such as underlining or circling key words should help them engage with what exactly is being asked.

Another issue that can be improved is timing. It is important to have a time management plan. Many candidates appear to have struggled with their timing this year.

Responses to Q1 (8 marks) were often long, taking the full page available, whilst responses to Q4(b), the final (20 mark) question, were often stilted and possibly cut short.

The trigger words for each question should remind candidates of the weighting of AO1 and AO2 marks and successful candidates apply this to their answers.

Question 1

This required an exploration of key ideas about the Process theodicy, however some candidates who were unaware of the term 'Process theodicy' despite it being clearly on the Specification. This indicates candidates are disadvantaged if centres do not cover the whole Specification or candidates select topics to focus on in their own revision rather than covering all of the material. Some candidates presented material about other theodicies (such as the Augustinian) therefore were not addressing the question. It is vital to write an answer to the question on the paper, not simply present knowledge of something related to the overall topic. Centres should urge caution here; it is very important that candidates read the question carefully and answer the set question. This requires only AO1 material. Candidates who launched into an assessment of ideas were penalising themselves by not presenting strictly AO1 material.

The better answers explained key ideas about the Process theodicy such as it challenges the view that God is perfect; negates the problem of the inconsistent triad; claims that God is also the sufferer who understands; that God is not considered omnipotent and does not know the future etc. Good answers identified relevant

scholars such as David Griffin and A.N. Whitehead. Many candidates were able to confidently and accurately explore the logical conflict between the statements 'God exists' and 'evil exists'. and explained how the presence of suffering therefore causes difficulties for belief in God. Some of the weaker answers were confused about the concept of Process theodicy and relied on a simple explanation of some examples of suffering in the world.

Question 2

Most candidates tackled this question well and engaged effectively with Swinburne's principles of testimony and credulity. Most of the responses reflected the AO1 requirement of the question and gave informative summaries, some wove in James and Otto and applied this to themes of credulity and testimony or the burden of proof which was well done.

Responses that achieved fewer marks usually had less AO2, and typically described the experiences of individuals who had been subject to a religious experience such as St Paul, Muhammad or Nicky Cruz with little attention to the 'assessing the strengths' issue in the question. Higher achieving responses were focused about their use of experiences as evidence for the principles being supportive of an argument for the existence of God. It was pleasing to see ongoing assessment in some responses; they tend to read better and ensure the candidate is meeting the demands of the question throughout rather than with an 'added on' conclusion after presentation of narrative.

Some good use was made of the Swinburne's cumulative argument. The best answers had clear structures and good conclusions which tied their views into the 'strengths' of the principles in relation to religious experience as a basis for an argument for the existence of God.

Question 3

This was largely very well-answered reflecting the popularity of this topic. The strongest responses balanced their time carefully between explaining the problem of evil and suffering and how the problem challenges belief in the existence of God. The better responses were presented well and made continual reference to the question and developed material that explored the inconsistent triad argument reflecting the challenge that God's attributes are inconsistent with evil and suffering. Weaker responses spent too long on the problem of evil and suffering with rather repetitive versions of the material (for example Epicurus, Hume and Mackie) and therefore did not have time to assess adequately the challenges to God's existence.

Question 4a

There were many candidates who were unaware of the term 'Kalam' despite it being clearly on the Specification. Some left their scripts entirely blank, others ignored the unknown term and wrote about the cosmological argument generally, focusing on Aquinas et al with different degrees of success.

The better answers picked out the key features of the Kalam argument; some candidates wrote enthusiastically about al-Kindi, al-Ghazali and William Lane Craig; they discussed the question of infinite regress, the idea that the universe must have had a definite starting point, the compatibility with modern science and the benefits of an a posteriori argument, the Kalam version leads to the possibility of God as the reason for the existence of the universe. Some of the weaker responses included very confused connections to key terms such as 'deductive'; some answers fixated on one aspect and had little developed detail.

Question 4b

This question saw a wide range of responses. There was very good use of scholarship in the best answers and many answers revealed candidates' detailed knowledge and included analysis of the ideas of philosophers such as Aquinas, William Lane Craig, Bertrand Russell, Copleston, Ockham, Swinburne, Leibniz etc.

Good responses focused on the failures in the Cosmological Argument, but not simply as a list of problems. The fallacy of composition was often included and used very well, and good answers constantly referred back to the premise in the argument and whether it was a convincing or not. These answers gave scholarly replies to the problems in the Cosmological Argument, often using the work of Copleston and Swinburne. The strongest answers were not merely descriptive but analytical throughout. Students analysed each of the reasons, gave examples, counter arguments and made judgements. Weaker responses just gave a list of objections from Hume, Russell, and/or Dawkins. Some of those students who had not made judgements throughout their essay then missed a further opportunity by only writing a short conclusion (e.g. 'it is unconvincing') without showing how the argument had been undermined.