



**General Certificate of Education**

**Religious Studies 1061**

**RSS01 Religion and Ethics 1**

**Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - January series*

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## **RSS01 Religion and Ethics 1**

### **General comments**

There were many very interesting answers to the questions set, but also some common errors which limited the marks that could be awarded. The most popular questions were Question 1 on Utilitarianism and Question 4 on Euthanasia, but the other two questions, on Situation Ethics and the Nature and Value of Human Life, were also tackled by a significant number of candidates. Candidates appeared to manage their time well on the whole, although a small number clearly rushed their answers and then, when they were left with time on their hands, added in a large number of after-thoughts. This should be avoided as far as possible. Even when the material was relevant it rarely added a great deal to an answer since it was not integrated into the commentary or argument.

### **Question 1 (Topic 1 *Utilitarianism*)**

#### **Part (a)**

Many well-informed answers summarised Utilitarianism. Candidates typically rehearsed the greatest happiness principle and the hedonic calculus, and then briefly contrasted Act and Rule Utilitarianism. Mill's qualitative approach was also mentioned by many candidates, although their grasp of how this could be used in making moral decisions was less certain. Higher scoring answers tended to focus on the idea that decisions were right or wrong according to consequences. Such answers made good use of the appropriate technical terms 'consequential' and 'teleological', both of which are given in the Specification. Other candidates seemingly used these terms in their answers with little sign of any real understanding. The greatest weakness in many answers was an almost total lack of explanatory examples. The command word for the question was 'Explain' which requires candidates to 'expand on main points with reasons, examples or illustrations', but most candidates summarised instead. Since the level descriptors limit the marks that can be awarded to an answer lacking examples to Level 4, many candidates effectively penalised themselves.

#### **Part (b)**

This question asked candidates to respond to one of the issues identified in the Specification, i.e. increasing pleasure is more important than ending pain and suffering. It was apparent that some candidates had addressed the issue before coming to the examination and had chosen examples to use in their debate. Others appeared to be unaware that this could be an issue, or showed little appreciation of what the issue was. Some took ending pain and suffering to mean killing someone. Others argued, more successfully, that some pain was essential to the appreciation of suffering and so should be allowed to continue. Some applied the hedonic calculus to the problem and argued that the right action would be the one that achieved the best final outcome in the particular circumstances of the case. This was often illustrated well with an appropriate example. A very small number of candidates focused on dilemmas where a single resource could be used either to remove one person's pain or increase the pleasure of another.

### **Question 2 (Topic 2 *Situation Ethics*)**

#### **Part (a)**

This proved to be a very accessible question, although some candidates did not develop each of their chosen principles fully and few candidates paid sufficient attention to the underlying idea of Christian love. The most common confusion was between 'Love only is always good' and 'Love is the only norm', but since all six principles are closely linked this was rarely a significant

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issue. Answers varied in their use of examples, but in some answers they were used to give fuller and clearer explanations of each principle.

**Part (b)**

The question arose directly from the issues given in the Specification and from the second of the six principles. Most candidates were able to offer contrasting views of Christian ethics, i.e. situationism and legalism, but most ignored the latter part of the claim to be assessed, that the law of love should override all others **when necessary**. It would have been useful for candidates to discuss when it might be necessary for love to override law, not least because situationism does not dismiss the value of established moral law, and it does deal with exceptional situations when the application of that law would result in consequences no Christian would want.

**Question 3 (Topic 3 *Religious teaching on the nature and value of human life*)****Part (a)**

This question tested candidates' understanding of the value of human life, but many candidates wrote, at some length, about the nature of human life, either instead of, or as well as, its value. Some answers were rather vague, and showed only a general grasp of relevant religious views. Some higher scoring answers which drew on the Christian tradition made good use of terms such as 'imago dei' and sanctity of life. A number of candidates usefully considered several aspects of 'value', for example they considered who human life had value for (e.g. self / others / God) and what it had value for (e.g. opportunity for development / contribution to life / intrinsic worth). Some candidates pointed to self-sacrifice or martyrdom as evidence that human life is not so valuable that it should be preserved at all cost.

**Part (b)**

This focused on the question raised in the issues section of the Specification, 'How far can religion support the idea of equality?' There were some very interesting answers many of which drew on ideas of original sin, or the inherited consequences of sin in a previous life, and some which were well informed about minority views concerning race in some traditions. The issue also allowed candidates to focus on whether treating people the same was treating them equally and it was very pleasing to see that some of them realised this and were able to discuss the morality of positive discrimination. Weaker answers focussed generally on the issue of equality and some included irrelevant reference to gender discrimination.

**Question 4 (Topic 4 *Abortion and euthanasia*)****Part (a)**

Candidates were asked to explain the arguments in favour of euthanasia, but some, disappointingly, offered arguments against. Some weaker answers offered the consequences of euthanasia for the individual and the family as an argument in its favour without relating points made to any ethical view. A number of candidates suggested what a situationist might say, but did not relate that to religion in any way. The most common ethical argument offered was utilitarian and concentrated solely on the pain / pleasure calculation. Better answers were aware of the dilemma for anyone committed to reducing or removing unnecessary suffering and many were aware of the view, expressed by the Roman Catholic Church among others, that it is permissible in some situations to refuse forms of treatment that would prolong life, and permissible to give heavy doses of pain killer, even if they resulted in death. The best answers discussed active and passive euthanasia separately.

**Part (b)**

There were some very interesting answers to this question; however some candidates wrote about the right to die instead of the right to life. The debate about the right to life could have been illustrated from any context. Most candidates chose abortion. Some focused on the right to be kept alive regardless of the resources it took to do so. Some used capital punishment and life-threatening pregnancies as arguments to support the view that the right to life was not absolute. Others pointed out that the ideas of stewardship, and the idea that ‘God gives and God takes away’ means that no human has a right to life since it is a gift from God, or that right to life is never absolute since God may demand that this life is given up in his service.