



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies 1061

RSS02 Religion and Ethics 2

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - January series

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General comments

There were some pleasing scripts, although some of the answers for part (b) questions were noticeably weaker than those produced in response to part (a). On the whole, candidates wrote in good detail, and had both prepared well and been informed well.

Question 1 (Topic 1 *Kant and ethics*)

Part (a)

There were some excellent answers to this question. The best answers consistently addressed Kant's concept of duty, showing how reason and the human moral faculty relate to duty itself; for example, reason uses the three formulations of the categorical imperative to produce absolute laws which are the duty of all rational beings to obey. Weaker responses sometimes explained the difference between hypothetical and categorical imperatives in some detail, but did not explain how this difference related to Kant's idea of duty. In the same way, some candidates wrote persuasively about the nature of Kant's 'kingdom of moral ends', but again did not make it clear how this related to duty.

Part (b)

The majority of candidates did what the question asked, which was to consider the claim that 'doing your duty is the only thing that matters' within the context of *Kant's* ethics. There were a number of interesting suggestions offered; for example, that reason matters far more than duty, because without reason, duty cannot be accessed. Others argued that the good will matters more than either reason or duty, because Kant stressed that the good will is the only thing that is intrinsically good; also, it is the good will that impels you to do your duty. Some candidates ignored the first three words of the question, and simply discussed the value of duty as an ethical concept, or compared deontological ethics with utilitarianism. Where this happened, candidates generally could not access higher than Level 3.

Question 2 (Topic 2 *Natural Law and Ethics*)

Part (a)

Some of the responses to this question were superb. Most candidates explained 'development' in terms of Aquinas' modification and development of Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes and of human purpose. Some candidates limited the developmental idea to Aquinas' views on the role of Natural Law Ethics within the Christian tradition. Both approaches produced some very sound answers. Some candidates became rather deeply involved in an explanation of Aristotle's four causes, explaining in detail the nature of act and potential, and the nature of the First Efficient Cause. Much of this material was not made relevant to the specific question concerning the development of the idea of Natural Law in ethics. A small number of candidates confused Aquinas' concept of Natural Law with that of John Finnis.

Part (b)

The majority of responses gave a well balanced assessment on the relevance of Natural Law Ethics. It is generally held that society is well protected by an absolutist deontological system such as that of Aquinas. Society still has a need for protection against would-be murderers, rapists and thieves, and since Natural Law offers that protection, it will always be relevant. Moreover, for those who believe in God, Natural Law remains a reliable guide to moral

behaviour, for example to those millions of Christians in the Roman Catholic Church. Also, Aquinas' system offers a solid justification for administering punishment to those who break the rules, which was perceived as a great strength by comparison with relativist ethical systems with less clear-cut guidance on how to behave. The general feeling was that on balance, Natural Law has become not irrelevant, but *less* relevant, because the modern definition of human nature is much wider than that offered by Aquinas. It includes, for example, an acknowledgment that homosexuals have a right to sexual expression and happiness. Some candidates again confused Aquinas and Finnis, and some simply asserted (with no reference to Aquinas) that Finnis had made Natural Law relevant in the 21st century.

Question 3 (Topic 3 *Religious views of the created world*)

No candidates attempted this question.

Question 4 (Topic 4 *Environment, both local and worldwide*)

Part (a)

Answers to this were generally sound, but sometimes limited in scope. Nearly all candidates put the focus of their answers on issues concerning 'stewardship', making the point (at some length) that being stewards of the environment means caring for it, although this was not always unpacked in detail. Candidates did acknowledge that the Christian tradition, for example, was sometimes narrow, particularly the anthropocentric view, which tends to govern approaches to environmental issues by seeing the world purely through human eyes. The best answers selected a variety of *teachings* relating to human responsibility for the environment, both from scripture (for example the rules on gleaning) and from church teaching (for example what the various churches advise their followers about environmental issues).

Part (b)

Most were critical of any religious view that puts humans at the centre of all moral concern to the detriment of the environment as a whole, and most offered the convincing example of the undeniably precarious state of the environment throughout the world. There was general agreement that religious teaching and advice spells out quite well what people ought to be doing to protect the environment, but that there is a gap between the rhetoric and what actually gets done. Just about all candidates rejected the absolute nature of 'no value', and concluded that religious teachings were of 'some' value; and on the whole, just about all candidates produced a good rationale for that judgement.