



General Certificate of Education

## **Religious Studies (1061)**

RSS02 Religion and Ethics 2

# **Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - June series*

**This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)**

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: [www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2009 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

#### COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334). Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX  
*Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.*

## RSS02 *Religion and Ethics 2*

### General comments

There were, in particular, three clear patterns that emerged from candidates' responses to the questions in this assessment opportunity.

Firstly, there is a considerable gap between the technical level at which candidates had prepared for questions on Kantian ethics and the technical level at which they had prepared for other parts of the Specification. With regard to Kant, much of what centres are delivering is very good indeed.

Secondly, there is often a noticeable imbalance in the amount of writing that candidates offer for the second part of questions as opposed to the first part of questions, in that the former are often considerably longer than the latter. Given that the first part of questions are worth double the marks awarded for the second part of questions, this is a serious issue for examination technique.

Thirdly, answers to evaluation questions frequently neglected to address the specific wording of the question in favour of general evaluations of the topic.

The overall achievement of many candidates was very impressive.

### Question 1 (Topic 1 *Kant and ethics*)

#### Question 01

The best answers offered a reasonable balance between the two thrusts of the question, i.e. the difference between deontological and teleological ethical systems, and how these are picked out in considering Kantian ethics. The majority of candidates gave a good analysis of Kant's deontological approach, although very few noted that there might be teleological aspects to Kant's theory, if only by implication, for example in his views about the *summum bonum*. A significant number of candidates confined their discussion of the key differences between deontological and teleological systems to the issue of consequences, or merely gave a simple account of Kant's ethics. The strongest answers were often those which considered both aspects of the question together. Kant's views about the synthetic *a priori* status of ethics were mentioned incidentally in some responses as candidates did not appear to understand why Kant said it or how it could be included in the answer.

#### Question 02

Weaker responses gave a brief evaluation of Kant's ethics in general, or confined themselves to lengthy (and gory) versions of the scenario of lying (or not lying) to the mad axe-murderer. Mid-level responses tended to discuss whether or not Kant's ethics fail. The best responses answered the question, and considered specifically whether or not Kant's deontological approach fails because it ignores consequences. Most candidates gave both sides of the argument and said that it did fail because it was unrealistic in a modern age where it is nonsensical not to think about consequences, and yet it didn't because it still has the power to get us out of the moral mess of relativism, although candidates did not reach a conclusion. Some candidates wrote a powerful refutation of the claim in the essay title, pointing out that the categorical imperative is about a kingdom of moral *ends*, and that the *summum bonum* is the looked-for consequence of perfect completion of moral duty, i.e. Kant does not ignore consequences in general, he simply ignores them when making ethical decisions.

---

**Question 2 (Topic 2 *Natural Law and ethics*)****Question 03**

Most candidates were able to give at least the key points of Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes. Most candidates illustrated this by using the example of the four causes of a statue, or of human beings. Some candidates explained their ideas further by referring to the difference between act and potential: form being a thing's actuality, and matter a thing's potentiality. A small number of candidates put Aristotle's ideas into the general context of Aristotle's attempt to explain that the primary realities are empirical things. Some candidates appeared determined to answer a question on Natural Law Ethics, apparently oblivious to the specific request of the question to discuss Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes as opposed to Aquinas' doctrine of ethics.

**Question 04**

As with Question 03, those candidates who were determined to answer a question on Natural Law Ethics extended their answers on Aquinas to cover an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Natural Law. Some overlap between Aristotle's doctrine of causation and Aquinas' use of the doctrine in his theory of Natural Law is of course justified, but that justification needed to be given and not simply to be assumed. The best responses focused on the question set, discussing issues such as: how Aristotle's doctrine copes with the possibility that objects can have more than one final cause; how Aristotle's understanding of causation fits in with more modern theories; the place of Aristotle's ideas in the history of philosophy, and so on. Some evaluations were nothing short of superb, and showed an impressive level of preparation and discussion.

**Question 3 (Topic 3 *Religious views of the created world*)****Question 05**

This question produced some of the weakest answers on the examination paper, primarily because many candidates had a very limited understanding of the different interpretations that are put on the notion that God sustains the created world. The weakest responses were confined to comments about God's role as creator, and did not develop the answer to include what needed to be said about his role as sustainer. Some candidates referred only to miracles, others only to the work of the Holy Spirit. The best responses were of two kinds. Some responses gave a detailed and broad analysis of God's role as sustainer in terms of *willing* the continued existence of the universe and in terms of his keeping chaotic forces under control. Others included these ideas but mixed them with a variety of others, including for example the view that God's sustaining activity is carried out by the natural physical processes of the world, such as evolution, and by the role of humans as stewards of creation.

**Question 06**

On the whole, this question was addressed well. Weaker responses simply discussed the problem of evil and made no attempt to relate the discussion to the possibility of God sustaining the world. The strongest responses usually (although not always) began with the 'inconsistent triad', i.e. if God sustains the world, then his claimed omnipotence and omnibenevolence do not sit well with the existence of natural and moral evil. The problem is compounded by God's omniscience, since an all knowing creator must have been aware of the full extent of evil in the universe and of the need to sustain order amidst chaos. Most candidates gave a good analysis of the different theodicies, particularly Process Theodicy, with its distinctive take on God's role as sustainer.

**Question 4 (Topic 4 *Environment, both local and worldwide*)****Question 07**

Most candidates were able to give at least the key points of how pollution threatens the environment, referring to a range of concerns about pollution of the atmosphere, soil, forests, water and so on. One or two referred interestingly and humorously to noise pollution, giving appropriate examples. Explaining the ethical problems raised by the different types of pollution was done less successfully. Many candidates confined this part of their answer to vague generalizations such as, 'We have no right to pollute God's world', and 'God will punish polluters by sending them to hell'. Stronger responses explained a variety of ethical issues, such as those raised by utilitarian approaches, 'narrow ecology', 'deep ecology', speciesism, the role of emerging economies, different interpretations of 'stewardship', and so on.

**Question 08**

Answers to this question were frequently vastly longer than those given to Question 07. Most of what was written was in fact very good. One successful approach, for example, was to suggest that on one level, it makes little difference whether we protect the environment for the good of humans, or for the good of animals, or for the good of the environment as a whole, since the good of all species and all things is inextricably interlocked. The best way, in short, of securing the good of humankind is to secure the good of the environment as a whole. A small number of candidates suggested that this approach could be extracted from a neo-naturalist approach in meta-ethics, which takes the line that 'good' is that which contributes to the flourishing of human beings, or, more broadly, to the good of the environment as a whole. As an issue of examination technique, it is useful to make candidates aware of the ease with which discussion of whether or not 'protection of the environment should be only for the good of humankind' can gravitate naturally to a discussion of general environmental issues. Most candidates did keep to the task, and covered a wide range of issues, such as: the value of anthropocentric approaches to environmental protection; the value of religious approaches to the environment which understand the environment as somehow 'fallen'; aesthetic considerations; issues about justice and fairness; and, in particular, questions about the precise nature of human responsibility for the world.