



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS01 Religion and Ethics 1

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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General Comments

There were some excellent scripts. Maximum marks were achieved by some answers to every question, and this resulted in some very high-scoring scripts. A few candidates appeared to run out of time, possibly because their part (b) answers were too long. A very few candidates ignored the instructions to answer two questions and chose to answer one part of each question instead. In such cases, marks could only be awarded for the two highest scoring answers.

Question 1 (a)

This was a very popular question and there were many well-informed answers, which focused tightly on the question asked. However, a number of candidates ignored the instruction to **explain** the idea that utilitarianism is consequential and simply described the system of moral decision-making instead. Some, for example, listed the hedonic calculus with no explanation of any element of it, or any illustration of how it can be used to calculate consequences. This limited the marks that could be awarded. Answers aiming to achieve above level four should always be supported by evidence or examples. Outlines of Mill's utilitarianism did not always focus on the different type of consequences he looked for in morally good actions, or on the way certain rules could be justified by the consequences of people following them.

Question 1 (b)

There were some excellent answers, some of which were far longer than they needed to be. A concise and focused argument can score maximum marks.

This question is one of the issues highlighted in the specification, so candidates were expected to have considered it prior to the examination. Some produced thoughtful responses, supported by clear argument, which often focused on the nature of true happiness. Some, for example, argued that the pursuit of physical pleasures was not worthwhile as the only goal, while spiritual happiness was entirely worthwhile. Some argued that the pursuit of personal pleasure was not a good goal, while the pursuit of the happiness of all was an excellent ambition. Some answers did not focus on the idea of happiness as a goal, and simply commented on the nature of happiness. Others offered the idea that other goals were equally important and then stated that they were important because they led to happiness. In such answers, the reasoning became rather confused.

Question 2 (a)

There were some excellent answers which focused on issues that allowed a broad explanation of how Situation Ethics may be applied. Some candidates generalised about an issue without paying any attention to the idea that, in Situation Ethics, all decisions have to be made situational, but the best answers considered the use of Situation Ethics in specific, and often contrasting cases. Some of the best answers made effective use of examples in which arguably 'unloving consequences' followed from obeying traditional Christian moral laws. These were used to explain why the decision maker would set the 'law' aside in this situation. A few cases were drawn from real life, but most appeared to be constructed for the purpose of debate. This was perfectly acceptable. Some used cases discussed by Fletcher in Situation Ethics. This was creditworthy, but one case was not enough to explain fully how Situation Ethics applies to an issue, because of the way its decisions are likely to vary from case to case.

The issues which proved particularly successful in illustrating the differences between a legalistic Christian approach and a Situation Ethics approach included: the use of condoms to protect against the spread of HIV; saviour siblings; embryo research and torture. Those that proved far less successful were those where there was no hint of tension or conflict with traditional Christian thinking. Such answers often failed to acknowledge that someone making

decisions situationally is guided by the law, unless the outcome of following that law is considered unloving.

A very few candidates muddled Situation Ethics and utilitarianism and used Bentham and the hedonic calculus in their answer in some detail. Some simply outlined the six principles and four presumptions of Situation Ethics and then made some general points about how they could be used. Such answers often showed more knowledge than understanding and limited the marks that could be awarded.

Question 2 (b)

This tested candidates' ability to debate the strengths and weaknesses of Situation Ethics and there were some very good answers. Most argued that it was more or less satisfactory depending on your prior values, and your confidence in human decision-making. The most obvious answer, that those with a traditional, legalistic Christian approach would not find this method of decision-making satisfactory, was generally well argued and such answers were often supported with reference to headline statements on the subject from authority figures. However, many arguments included sweeping generalisations which showed a limited understanding of both more traditional Christian moral teaching and of Situation Ethics. In particular, they seemed to assume that Situation Ethics rejected law completely, or failed to consider the unsatisfactory outcome of using traditional moral laws in cases where Situation Ethics would have set them aside.

Question 3 (a)

There were some very well-informed and broadly based answers to this question. Most, but not all, candidates dealt with both gender and race, although race was often treated in less depth. Many answers dealing with Christianity showed a good understanding both of biblical teaching and of historical attitudes to gender, and made good use of biblical references. There was a tendency to use 'headline ideas' only when dealing with other religions, and care should be taken to avoid sweeping generalisations. In some answers very effective use was made of debates about gender roles taking place in the Church today. There was an excellent opportunity to explore the debates about gender roles in other religions, for example, Islam.

Question 3 (b)

Many answers used the idea of sanctity of life to argue that all persons are of equal value to God. This provided an effective, one-sided, answer when it was well-developed. Others considered the context in which the value of each person was being taken into account – e.g. usefulness to society, distribution of medical resources. They considered hard cases in which the value of one person above another might be decided on the basis of disability. Others were aware of traditions linking disability and sin or bad karma. Some sweeping generalisations were evident in some answers, showing limited understanding of the teaching of the religion.

Question 4 (a)

Most, but not all, candidates recognised that this question only required arguments **against** abortion, but some simply rehearsed arguments both for and against. Many of the arguments were presented clearly, but the range was sometimes quite limited. For example, some candidates merely offered arguments based on the sanctity of life and the Ten Commandments. There were some very vague generalisations about the commandment 'Do not murder', but many understood that it only applied to abortion if the unborn was considered a person at the time that the abortion took place. There were also some very effective presentations of arguments from an Islamic perspective

Some candidates reported what people thought rather than summarising the arguments to support their position. They may have stated, for example, that Roman Catholics were opposed to abortion, but not offered their arguments against it. Ethical arguments were less thoroughly treated than religious ones. There was however some interesting arguments based on the contrasting rights of a new born baby delivered after 24 weeks and a viable foetus of the same age, with many arguing that the distinction between the two was untenable.

Question 4 (b)

This topic is highlighted for study in the specification and many candidates had clearly debated the issue prior to the examination. Some clearly understood the principle of double effect and how it could apply to this issue, others however, failed to appreciate that the choice was between the life of the mother and the 'rights' of her child. They rehearsed objections to abortion unrelated to this dilemma including those relating to how the baby had been conceived (e.g. rape), or what the pregnant woman wanted to do rather than have a baby (e.g. keep her body looking young).

Some very good answers challenged the idea that the developing foetus had any rights, many contrasted the possible value of the potential life with the actual value of the mother's life. Others focused on the idea of the child as an innocent life which others had a duty to protect, and argued that the mother herself would have to make a decision whether the unborn 'life' should have to be sacrificed in order to save her own. Examples of situations in which mothers have made that decision would have been particularly useful here.