



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS04 Religion, Philosophy and Science

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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General Comments

There were fewer really outstanding scripts in this session but it was pleasing to see that the standard in the middle to top of the mark range was appreciably higher. Many candidates seemed to be able to write with authority and the standard of written English was also generally good.

This paper required candidates to show precise knowledge of science and how it affects religious and philosophical belief. It was good to see that many centres have prepared their candidates well in this area. However there are many candidates who seemed genuinely confused about the science. It is important that centres prepare their candidates carefully and it is recommended that clarity rather than complexity be pursued.

It is still the case that some candidates are not familiar with the need to keep AO1 for part (a) and AO2 for part (b). There was more evidence of analysis in the AO2 sections and this was welcome. Centres are reminded that candidates must evaluate their material for AO2 and not simply describe it.

Question 1

This was a very popular question. Most candidates clearly understood what was meant by “two understandings of miracle” and were able to express the ideas together with supporting examples. Some candidates were able to outline Hume’s arguments but also went on to discuss how fair they were. In part (a), this was unnecessary. Some answers came unstuck in part (b) because they preferred to focus on Hume instead of science. In addition, there was a fair amount of discussion of Wiles and Pike here. Their contributions in the context of a question on scientific interpretation of miracles were hard to credit.

Question 2

The knowledge of the creationist position was well understood by many candidates and it was pleasing to see the depth and breadth of information presented. However, it was clear that some candidates did not understand the term ‘creationist’ at all. Answers, as a result, often consisted of catch-all information covering the most liberal understandings of Genesis as well as the narrower interpretations. Some candidates wrote that creationists accepted the theory of evolution. This is true, but only to the extent that evolution can be shaped to the primacy of the biblical texts. In part (b), fewer answers focused on whether it was creationism that could be reasonable. Many candidates preferred to talk about science and religion. This was only relevant where it related to the demands of the question. Some candidates focused on ‘unreasonable’ but most did not.

Question 3

This was the most popular question by some margin. The range of knowledge shown by a large number of candidates was pleasing and there were many answers which were maturely and thoughtfully expressed. The principal focus was the attack of science on the Design Argument and credit was given to mention of Darwin, Dawkins, the Big Bang theory where the candidate drew out the implications for design and even the Epicurean analysis.

Although he is listed in the specification, it was marked that a number of candidates did not seem to know much about Dawkins. Those candidates who only referred to Hume’s critique could not score highly. Basic errors of science were most prevalent here: Darwin did not know about genes and the Big Bang is not all about random behaviour. Part (b) was answered best by the candidates who understood a bit of the chronology of the design argument. In other words, that Paley’s argument had been fundamentally undermined by Darwin but that

Swinburne and others had incorporated the consequences of Darwinian thinking into a newer more modern understanding of design. It was harder to give credit to candidates who thought that Paley could be seen as still surviving in the light of the scientific critique outlined in part (a).

Question 4

This was answered by only a very few candidates. The best answers recognised the need to focus on mysticism (as listed in the specification) rather than on the impact of religion in general. Candidates were able to draw parallels between mystical traditions and quantum mechanics but answers were often short and under-developed.