ASSESSMENT and QUALIFICATIONS ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS02 Religion and Ethics 2

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

General Comments

Overall, the general standard was excellent: many candidates wrote with intelligence and perception. It needs to be said that some candidates are narrowing down their field of study to the degree that they are leaving themselves no margin for error when dealing with questions which happen to be outside their comfort zone. This was particularly apparent with the questions on Kant and Finnis. For the former, the context of the *summum bonum* caused consternation to some. For the latter, candidates either knew Finnis or they did not, and for those who did not, their detailed knowledge of Aristotle and Aquinas for Natural Law did not take them very far. Having said that, there were many excellent scripts on both the Kant and the Finnis questions, with many candidates scoring maximum marks. Answers to the questions on *Religious views of the created world* and *Environment, both local and worldwide*, do not yet reach the level of excellence displayed by some of the answers to questions from the sections on *Kant* and *Natural Law*, primarily because for the cr*eated world*, candidates sometimes do little more than retell scripture, and for *the environment*, many produce little more than vague comments about global warming.

Question 1 *Kant and ethics*

Part 01

The weakest responses simply described Kant's theory of ethics, without reference to the *summum bonum*. Some did refer to the *summum bonum* but got little further than translating it. Most managed to say that the *summum bonum* was the goal of Kant's system. The best answers described the *summum bonum* in the context of Kant's postulates concerning freedom, immortality and God: a life spent in following the categorical imperative, in accordance with Kant's ideas about reason and duty, leads to the *summum bonum*, which in effect was Kant's explanatory framework for his ethical theory.

Part 02

Some candidates appear to have expected a question on the strengths and weaknesses of Kant's theory of ethics, some of which was relevant to the question, although most of it was not. Most, in fact, made a reasonable job of the question, referring not least to the religious dimensions of the *summum bonum*. In favour of compatibility, candidates referred for example to the generally deontological tone of Kantian ethics and religious ethics, to the similarity between imperatives and commandments, and to the emphasis in both on reason, motive and duty. Against it, most said that Kant's system does not involve divine commands, and insists on the autonomy of moral law. Although most candidates made some good points on the issue of compatibility, very few paid any attention to the word "completely".

Question 2 *Natural Law and ethics*

Part 03

Mention was made in the General Comments above of the significant number of candidates who knew little or nothing about Finnis. In so far as Finnis' Natural Law theory is based around seven basic goods and nine principles of practical reasonableness, those candidates who knew the goods and the principles were very well equipped to explain them in detail, and took full advantage of that opportunity. The weakest answers simply referred to Aquinas' system and its background in Aristotle, sometimes bringing in a reference to Finnis merely by saying that 'Finnis updated their theories', which clearly did not take those candidates very far.

Part 04

Those who knew little or nothing about Finnis' version of Natural Law obviously had as much of a problem with this question as they did with 03. Some tried to deal with this by outlining the strengths and weaknesses of Aquinas' system, which received some general credit in so far as the strengths and weaknesses of any derived system must stem in part from the parent system; nevertheless the question was focussed clearly on Finnis, so such responses were generally superficial. Candidates usually praised Finnis' common-sense emphasis on aesthetics and sociability, for example, or they approved of his system's lack of reliance on God, which has the potential to widen the circle of those who like the theory. Most criticised Finnis' approach to homosexuality. In so far as the question states that "Finnis' Natural Law theory has more strengths than weaknesses", the number of candidates who got round to commenting on the word "more" was inexplicably small.

Question 3 *Religious views of the created world*

Part 05

A common approach here, for those who referred to Christian teaching, was to give a paraphrase of the text of the opening chapters of Genesis. Some candidates did this in such a way that they ended up making a list of pious declarations about God, often with no scholarly or critical comment whatsoever. The question gives candidates a fairly wide remit about what to include, so the lack of technical input from weaker responses led to a number of low-scoring essays. Stronger answers were far more robust. Some noted that God's intention/purpose forms the basis of a natural law approach, so that natural theology is a key tool for examining God's nature and purpose – a useful example being the design argument. Others looked at the alleged perfection of creation, at the creation of humans in God's image, and at the resulting implications about the importance of human reason and morality. Some therefore analysed the nature of persons, on the assumption that human rationality and purpose must reflect God's intentions. Such approaches often worked very well.

Part 06

The perfection of God's world was frequently alleged by simply quoting from the creation narratives. The idea of perfection was challenged from a variety of platforms, not least from the non-theistic perspective of Buddhism. Nearly all candidates referred to the current imperfect state of the world, as manifested by the existence of both moral and natural evil, and theodicies were frequently invoked in explanation. Those who gave faith-based statements in answer to 05 generally continued that approach for 06, making generally unsubstantiated statements about the origins of human (and angelic) sin. Comparatively few got as far as a technical discussion of 'best possible world' theory, for example through Leibniz's view that 'perfection' can only mean 'perfect for purpose'. There is a considerable body of scholarly literature on this debate, and since the possibility that this is the (or a) best possible world is listed in the Specification, it really needs to be studied in greater depth for this section.

Question 4 *Environment, both local and worldwide*

Part 07

Candidates were often well-informed about issues concerning Third World development, although some essays quietly ignored the key word, "ethical". The weakest responses were those that simply detailed the differences between rich and poor nations. Others got no further than suggesting that the rich nations had no right to attempt to restrict Third World development, all of which goes to show that candidates do need to read questions more closely as opposed to firing off answers based on two or three words selected at random from those questions. Those who did read the question usually had no problem with detailing the reasons for attempts to restrict development, based in the need to control the damaging effects of uncontrolled industrial development. These effects range from global warming to military expansion, and give rise to a raft of accompanying ethical issues. Candidates who read the question, and who knew the material, produced high-quality answers.

Part 08

Nearly all candidates answered this well, or at least produced a balanced evaluation. Some discussed the question as a follow-on from the national concerns discussed in 07, whereas others put the focus on the activities of individuals. In either case, the general consensus was that the gravity of the environmental threat has become so intense that there can be no spectators in the fight to protect the environment. Some of the best answers pointed out that some issues can be solved only by rich governments, not rich individuals, since most individuals lack the ability to control industrial infrastructure, technological development, economic policy and the like. Conversely, despite the oversight of governments, only individuals can properly control their own behaviour in the way that they deal with the environment, and this includes the vast numbers of poor people in the world. Some suggested that in the developing world, the word 'poor' is becoming an increasingly relative term, since the industrialisation of huge nations such as India and China will eventually give the vast numbers of 'relative poor' huge political clout.