



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS03 Philosophy of Religion

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General Comments

There were some very good answers that reflected a high level of knowledge and understanding of the course topics. Some candidates did not seem to be aware that the first parts of the question (01, 03, 05, 07) are AO1 and the second parts (02, 04, 06, 08) are AO2. For instance, some candidates gave criticisms of the cosmological argument in answer to 01. Similarly with part 05 where candidates gave criticisms of Freud's view of religion.

It was noted that in some instances, the same two questions were answered by every candidate from that same centre. This may indicate that some centres are selecting to only teach two of the four topics. If this is so, then it would seem to seriously limit both the candidates' experience of the philosophy of religion and the choice of questions they can answer in the actual examination. A number of examiners noted that all candidates in some centres gave almost identical answers. This suggests that candidates are just repeating learnt notes and ignoring the specific focus of the question, since notes tend to give general summary of the topic. Such a general answer is likely to only be credited at a level 3 or below.

Candidates continue to struggle to present high level AO2 answers and fail to reason and critically analyse. Far too often, answers drift into listing arguments for and against a view/claim with no attempt at weighing up how successful those arguments are.

The common structure of "on the one hand... however, on the other hand..." is not an ideal template. Although it does provide at least two contrasting views there is no evaluation of those views. Such an answer is more AO1 (information) than AO2 (evaluation). There needs to be some analysis of the argument that shows some reasoning and weighing up. In other words, there needs to be some engaging with the information rather than just listing various arguments.

A significant number of candidates wrote out the actual question. There is no point in doing this and candidates are penalising themselves by reducing their time available to answer the questions.

Question 4 was the least popular question answered and question 1 was the most popular.

Question 1 *The cosmological argument*

Part 01

There is a tendency for candidates to just give a general presentation of the cosmological argument regardless of the question set in this section. Every question set has a particular focus and it is important that candidates centre on this focus in their answer, in order to achieve the higher levels.

The focus was the rejection of infinite regress and God as the necessary being. For levels above 5, there needed to be some explanation of "infinite regress" and its significance to the argument. Likewise, there needed to be some explanation of "necessary being" and the philosophical need for God to be necessary rather than contingent.

A number of candidates discussed infinite regress in relation to Craig's form of the argument, and this was credited. Although only Aquinas is referred to in the specifications, if the question does not specify Aquinas then other forms of the cosmological argument can be used and will be credited where appropriate. However, it should also be noted that full marks can be gained if only Aquinas has been studied, and it is valid to set a question specifically about Aquinas' form of the argument but it would not be valid to set a question specifically about any other form of the argument.

It is clear that many candidates find the cosmological argument quite difficult. There were obvious confusions between the first Two Ways, and also between contingent and necessary. Another misunderstanding was between infinite regress and infinite universe.

Some weaker candidates still give a lengthy biography of Aquinas which has no relevance to the question set, whilst others described all Five Ways.

Part 02

A surprising number of candidates did not seem to know many criticisms of the cosmological argument. Even fewer picked up on the word “proves”. Often illustrations were given as part of explaining a weakness of the argument, but the illustrations were rarely explained. It was left to the examiner to work out what it illustrated and its relevance.

Question 2 *Religious experience*

Part 03

This was not a very popular question, which was surprising as there is much material available about the challenges to religious experience by philosophy and by science.

The weaker candidates tended to give a summary of the various types of religious experience. The stronger candidates illustrated their examples of challenges by reference to particular types of religious experience. The challenges by science were usually quite fully discussed. However, those of philosophy were often much briefer in coverage and candidates were clearly not so confident with the material in this area.

Again, some candidates started to assess those challenges in answer to part 03 and then seemed confused what to do when they attempted part 04.

Part 04

There were a number of candidates who gave good evaluative answers, though the majority tended to give more a shopping list of arguments without any attempt at analysing or weighing up the success or failure of those arguments.

Question 3 *Psychology and religion*

Part 05

There were some good answers with candidates giving a clear and wide ranging coverage of Freud’s view of religious belief. The weaker candidates tended to centre on the Oedipus complex, whilst the stronger candidates related Freud’s various theories to examples of religious belief.

Part 06

Most candidates who answered this question contrasted Freud’s view as an example of religion related to unbalanced mental health with Jung’s more positive approach. Although this was quite an acceptable approach, it seemed a pity that the discussion was not wider ranging. Very few candidates seemed to be aware of criticisms of Freud’s theories.

Question 4 *Atheism and postmodernism*

Part 07

Although this was the least popular question, it was generally well answered with a wide range of material. The main weakness in answers concerned the focus on “rise” of atheism. Many covered a breadth of areas but did not always make clear how those areas gave rise to atheism. For instance, empiricism was often discussed, but how this linked to atheism was not always explained.

Part 08

Most candidates struggled to answer this question. Many seemed content just to argue that religion still existed and in some parts of the world, was increasing. However, the issue of how successful responses to the challenge of atheism are is much more wide ranging, yet candidates often seemed to limit their discussion.