AQA

ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RST3B Philosophy of Religion

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

General Comments

There were many excellent scripts, some of which scored full marks. All the questions proved accessible and candidates were often able to respond with detailed answers.

Question 1 *Ontological argument and the relationship between reason and faith*

Part 01

This was a very popular question, and there were many good answers, however, a number of candidates wasted time in part 01 by outlining the argument before attempting to answer the question. Many candidates were able to outline the three key objections to the ontological argument identified in the specification, for example, the idea that existence is not a predicate, but only some explained how these applied to the argument. There was some good use of scholarship in many answers, but some candidates simply offered different presentations of a single criticism. This rarely added much to the answer and moved the focus away from explaining the objection and its significance for the argument as a whole.

Part 02

The best answers to this part of the question showed a clear understanding of faith and constructed their argument around it. In contrast some candidates did not seem to recognise the issue, although it came directly from the specification, and rehearsed the strengths and weaknesses of the argument instead. This was not what was required. Many argued that proof would negate faith by removing the need for a personal commitment, others made good use of the idea that faith is an attitude of trust to argue that it would be unaffected by the failure of the ontological argument to prove the existence of God. Another approach argued that the 'God' of the argument was not the God of faith which made the argument irrelevant to faith.

Question 2 *Religious language*

Part 03

Candidates were clearly familiar with the verification principle but some simply outlined it rather than explaining its impact on religious language. There was good use of scholarship in many answers, but, in general, better use could have been made of examples of religious language to explain why they have been considered meaningless. In some cases a summary of religious responses to the verification principle was simply an outline of many of the differing views of religious language with little explanation of how they were a response to the challenge of verification. More discriminating answers tended to focus on the responses identified in the specification – the idea that religious language expresses a blik, and eschatological verification. Such answers often also included reference to religious language as non-cognitive and therefore not making informative statements that could be open to verification, and to language games. Such answers were more tightly focused on the question.

Part 04

This question followed on directly from part 03 and did not require candidates to repeat their outline or summary of the various responses they had selected. Most, but not all, realised this. The most discriminating answers evaluated the success of their chosen theories in responding to the challenge of the verification principle, and then considered other issues raised by this view of religious language. For example, if religious language is an expression of a blik, i.e. of a perspective or framework of interpretation, it may well be beyond the challenge of verification, but that does not mean that all believers would accept the view that religious language is merely

the expression of a blik. Less discriminating answers tended to review the strengths and weaknesses of all the views of religious language mentioned. It is hoped that answers will become more discriminating in future.

Question 3 *Body, soul and personal identity*

Part 05

There was some excellent use of scholarship in some answers to this part of the question, other answers, however, were very superficial and gave only a stereotypical account of near death experiences. Some good answers referred to the cognitive, affective, paranormal and transcendental features of near death experiences identified on the Greyson scale, but these only made sense when they were put into the context of the experience as a whole. Others used research by such people as Atwater, Moody and Ring. It was important for candidates to avoid simply listing features and the best answers were selective. The result was an overview of Near Death Experiences, which reflected their main features and some of their diversity, and used examples to illustrate the points made.

Part 06

The best answers here showed a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence of post mortem survival provided by Near Death Experiences. Particular attention was paid to the difficulties of assessing subjective experiences, the possibility of alternative natural explanations for the experiences and the simple fact that the person reporting the experience was not actually dead. Weaker answers tended to report ideas like the 'dying brain theory' without using them as the basis of an argument. Some simply offered opinion rather than engaging in debate, such answers could earn only limited reward.

Question 4 *The problem of evil*

Part 07

This was another very popular question and it was generally well done, although some candidates offered the Augustinian theodicy or the free will defence instead of, or as well as, Hick's theory. There was often good use of technical terms and phrases like 'epistemic distance' and many candidates clearly understood why freely developed virtues are considered intrinsically valuable in contrast to those that could be instantly created. Some answers showed a very limited understanding of the role of natural evil in maintaining the epistemic distance and in soul making. Indeed some answers outlined the theodicy in such a way that there was almost no reference to evil at all.

Part 08

The best answers to this part of the question showed a clear understanding of what a theodicy tries to achieve and evaluated the theory accordingly. In contrast, weaker answers often simply rehearsed the strengths and weaknesses of the argument without drawing any real conclusions. Greater use could have been made of the argument that the second order goods developed through exposure to evil are only valuable in the context of a world with evil in it – i.e. courage and patience are only virtues in a world where they are required. This suggests that the theodicy is a circular argument – evil is good because it develops the virtues, the virtues are good because evil exists.