



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
January 2011**

**Religious Studies**

**RSS01**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit A Religion and Ethics 1**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

There were some excellent answers to all the questions on this paper and these showed clear evidence of both close analysis of the question set and of planning. However, some answers were very general and not directly focused on the exact question set. A significant number of candidates wrote longer answers than necessary on the AO2 section of the question and, in some cases, their answers to the corresponding AO1 section lacked the breadth and/or depth and /or examples needed to score highly.

### Question 1

**01** This question focused on different processes of moral decision-making found in Utilitarianism. In response, however, many candidates wrote a general summary of the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill which did not always focus on the question. The best answers showed how, in Act Utilitarianism, each situation would be assessed separately using the hedonic calculus. Many showed a good understanding of the various elements of the calculus, and some correctly remembered the technical terms. This was impressive, but it was not necessary for candidates to use those terms in their answer: their understanding of the concepts was much more important. The general idea of predicting and calculating the consequences of alternative actions, and preferring the one that generated the greatest happiness for the greatest number, was generally understood, but there was only limited use of examples. In some cases candidates considered the weaknesses of the theory, but these were not required by the question.

The explanation of Rule Utilitarianism was generally much less impressive: many candidates simply outlined Mill's theory of higher and lower pleasures but barely touched on rules or their importance. Some could refer to examples of rules such as 'always drive on the left in the UK', but showed little or no understanding that the rules were chosen or decided on the basis of how they contributed to the greater good. Credit was given for explanations of weak and strong rule utilitarianism where these were offered.

**02** The strongest answers to this question came from those with a good understanding of rule Utilitarianism who understood that what may bring happiness to the community can also go against the interests of the individual. This was often used alongside the 'sadistic guards' example to argue in favour of the claim. The most common counter arguments were that Mill's utilitarianism favours the elite over the community as a whole, while Act Utilitarianism could be seen to favour the individual by taking the details of each situation into account rather than applying general guidelines. A number of answers were one-sided and did no more than explain a point of view.

### Question 2

**03** This question focused on one of the key ideas of Situation Ethics. The best answers explained the meaning of agape, often with close attention to Fletcher's text, and then explained its role in Situation Ethics as, for example, the only intrinsic good and the ruling norm of Christian decision-making. There was some good use of examples to show what commitment to acting with love actually meant in concrete situations. Weaker answers tended to summarise the four presumptions and the six principles with no, or very limited, explanation, and made little attempt to relate them to the question.

**04** Many candidates had clearly considered this issue, and showed that while Fletcher would agree with the claim, others, including traditional Christians, could argue that God has made certain actions intrinsically wrong, so they are always wrong regardless of the reason for doing them. Lying, murdering and adultery were often quoted in this context. Some answers effectively used Fletcher's examples of situation ethics in action to support their case, especially the example of sacrificial adultery.

### **Question 3**

- 05** There were some very well-informed answers to this question, but many were rather short and lacking in depth, breadth and/or examples to support the points made. Some candidates referred to only one religion, often Christianity: others brought in contrasting or complementary ideas from a second faith, often Buddhism. Both approaches resulted in some good answers. Some weaker answers included broad, partly accurate, generalisations about religious teaching while better answers accurately reflected different lines of thinking within a faith, for example about free will. Many answers included the idea that to be human was to be a moral being. Better answers illustrated this by showing that humans had a sense of right, wrong and duty, but weaker answers simply wrote at some length about how a particular religion expected people to behave. Some of the material presented could have been used to support the idea that to be fully human was to be like Buddha, or Christ-like, or to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad, but the information was rarely applied in any way that made it relevant.
- 06** Candidates generally showed a good understanding of the status of males and females in their chosen religion(s) and could present arguments both for and against the claim made. There was often clear awareness of a diversity of approach within religions which allowed the argument that this claim was true of some traditions but not others. There was also a clear appreciation by some candidates that differing male and female roles did not necessarily equate to inequalities between the genders, and that differences were sometimes cultural rather than religious. Weaker answers often offered a single point of view without considering any counter-arguments, or made sweeping and only partly accurate generalisations about the status of women in particular religions, especially Islam and Hinduism.

### **Question 4**

- 07** Many candidates had a good understanding of the work of hospices and the care they offer to the dying. Understanding of palliative care was generally less accurate. In some cases, this appeared to be because candidates did not recognise the phrase, although their later discussion showed that they were aware of the concept. Understanding of the possibilities voluntary euthanasia could offer the dying varied considerably, but some were not only aware of what it was but could distinguish between passive euthanasia e.g. carrying out the terms of a living will / advance decision by not giving life-extending treatment, or by withdrawing life support, and active euthanasia, e.g. carrying out a request from a terminally ill individual to end their life through lethal injection. Many candidates knew that the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland makes this a live option. Reference to case studies was limited but sometimes very effective. Not all the chosen cases were relevant, the question concerned the care for the dying, not care of those who were not dying but felt that they faced an unbearable quality of life e.g. because of paralysis.
- 08** In general the argument that hospices make euthanasia unnecessary was well-presented. Candidates clearly understood the argument that the need to 'end it all' often equates to the need to end physical and mental suffering and that hospices may provide an alternative way of achieving this. A range of arguments against the claim were used – including cost, continuing mental suffering, loss of dignity and the possibility that pain may not be fully controlled. There was limited reference to case studies, but where they were used they were often very effective.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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