



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

Religious Studies

RSS02

(Specification 2060)

Unit B Religion and Ethics 2

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

Once again, there were many pleasing scripts; the majority of candidates wrote in good detail, and were well prepared and well informed. Time management was good, and there were very few candidates who did not attempt two two-part questions. Candidates' evaluative skills appear to have improved, although quite a few centres are still dealing with evaluative questions simply by juxtaposing the different viewpoints of various scholars. This comment applies particularly to answers to 06 and 08.

Question 1

- 01** Centres have really got to grips with Kantian ethics. The best answers were very accurate with Kant's terminology and ideas, giving a good overview of the key words: deontology, autonomy, objectivity, the good will, categorical and hypothetical imperatives, duty, obligation, motivation, intention, and so on. Quite a few candidates dealt well with such complicated ideas as the synthetic *a priori* (although several candidates went into unnecessary detail concerning the differences between synthetic and analytic propositions, the analytic *a priori*, and so on). There was occasional confusion over hypothetical imperatives, where many candidates asserted baldly that Kant condemned them as being immoral, whereas the point of the comparison is to illustrate precisely the categorical (and not the hypothetical) nature of the moral command. Some candidates had prepared for a question on the application of Kant's ethics to an issue of their choice, and gave it anyway, not always with any particular regard for what Kant actually said. The weakest responses became entangled with the contrasting demands of utilitarian ethics, and in quite a few cases Kant was credited with a catalogue of utilitarian virtues. Weak responses also confused Kant's ethics with Natural Law Ethics.
- 02** The general feeling was that Kant's ethics do of course work, because people can still understand his central ideas, such as justice, fairness and universalizability. Most agreed that Kantian ethics *would* work given the chance, for the simple reason that, despite some of the more questionable aspects of the system, any society working on Kantian principles would be more cohesive, safe to live in, and protective of the rights of all. Equally, most agreed that the simple reason that Kantian ethics do not work is because there are no societies in which all Kant's principles could possibly be upheld. In particular, humans are emotional creatures, and there is no way in which human emotions can be banished from moral decision making: the Christian emphasis on the value of love is a case in point. Equally, it is impractical and probably undesirable not to consider the consequences of one's actions: Kant himself might have been able to live with the standards he set, but there were social and intellectual reasons for his elevated state of mind that do not apply to the vast majority of people today, and the majority of candidates referred to the ever-green case of the mad axe-murderer as proof of the point. It was interesting to note that an increasing number of candidates were inclined to defend Kant even on this point, and to argue that his system might be made to work, especially with the kind of modification suggested by W.D. Ross's concept of *prima facie* duties. There were very few weak responses, aside from those that confused Kantian with utilitarian theory.

Question 2

- 03** The question was quite open in its format, so candidates were at liberty to take the word 'development' to include Aquinas' development of Aristotle's ideas, or to refer primarily to Aquinas' formulation of Natural Law Ethics as a system. Most referred to both. A few mentioned Finnis, but not many who did so bothered to show how or why Finnis' system could be relevant to Aquinas' development of natural good. Weaker responses tended to go into unnecessary detail about Aristotle's four causes, relating what they said about them only tenuously to Aquinas' development of Aristotle's ideas. Most of those who attempted this question gave a good overview of Aquinas' concept of natural good cantering that concept on Aquinas' idea of a common human nature perfected in future fellowship with God. Most candidates had learned the list of the primary precepts, although some reproduced them in so abbreviated a form (presumably learned that way) that they were not particularly coherent. The secondary precepts were illustrated mainly through sexual ethics. There was a varied treatment of Aquinas' other

main principles: the role of reason, the confusion between real and apparent goods, the necessity to develop habitual virtues in support of reason, and the emphasis on intrinsic as opposed to instrumental good. Some wrote superbly on the place of natural law as being part of the fabric of reality itself.

- 04** This part of Question 2 was not handled so well as 03, with some candidates getting no further than the statement that there cannot be a natural good because the world is in such a bad state. Some candidates went on to make the same point at great length by simply listing examples of natural and moral evils in the world. The favoured reason for rejecting the idea that natural good cannot exist was that reason has obvious limitations, particularly when combined with free will: the fact that some people choose not to do good actions and not to make good choices does not deny the possibility that natural good exists. Moreover, people can easily be confused over the difference between real and apparent goods, but the fact that there are real goods that we can become confused about supports the notion that these are 'natural goods'. Apart from these, there were many different lines of approach. Some argued that cultural relativism shows that natural good cannot exist; others that it shows exactly the opposite, since even relativists have to admit that different cultures have a lot of common ground morally. Some argued that we do not have a common human nature, and that there are as many natures as there are sorts of choices; others that we must have a common human nature, since that commonality is implied by the very idea of being human in the first place.

Question 3

- 05** Although quite a few candidates achieved Levels 6 and 7 on this question, many answers suffered from a lack of knowledge of the technical aspects of the subject-material. The Specification support material indicates quite clearly the kind of thing that should be studied in order to articulate the concept of a 'best possible world', yet the number of candidates who referred to the formulations of it by the likes of Leibniz, Swinburne and Hick could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Most candidates referred coherently to some or all of the following: the creation of the world *ex nihilo* – from nothing, and what that implies; God's verdict in Genesis that the created world was 'good' / 'perfect'; the description of humans being made in God's image; God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence; general comments in the Psalms and elsewhere about the glories of the world - all of which were adduced as evidence that this world must be the best possible. Some added that the evils of the world nevertheless allow that this can still be the best possible world, since it can be argued that evil is formative in developing second-order goods of sympathy, empathy and benevolence. In support of this, most referred to the Irenaeus-Hick theodicy, that this world is perfect / the best possible world for soul-making, so it is 'fit for purpose'. Perhaps the weakest aspect of answers to 05 was the amount of time spent in rejecting the idea that this is the best possible world God could have created. Most of this discussion was irrelevant, since the question clearly requires candidates to explain why some people claim that this *is* the best possible world, not why it isn't.
- 06** The commonest approach was to discuss this suggestion in the context of the doctrine of the Fall, that any possible perfection was lost because of human free will. This viewpoint took many different turns both in rejection of the claim and in support of it. Rejection of the suggestion centred overwhelmingly on the problem of evil, for example as stated in the 'inconsistent triad' of propositions that evil exists in face of God's supposed omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Acceptance of it focused on some version of the thesis that it depends on what is meant by 'perfect': so, if perfection entails a mirror of God's perfection, then of course this world is not perfect; but the most rational explanation is perhaps that perfection means 'perfect for purpose', i.e. in the development of souls who come to know and love God. The weakest evaluations for this question tended simply to juxtapose the opinions of various scholars about the nature of the world, rounded off with a statement of preference (often unexamined) for one view or another.

Question 4

- 07** Answers to this question were very varied. The issue of how and why attempts have been made to conserve the living environment was often subsumed under general essays about environmental ethics that tended to score no higher than Level 4. Weaker responses were also characterised by a list of rather insubstantial examples of conservation centred on vague statements about recycling, using energy-saving light bulbs, and riding bicycles. Some responses confined themselves to the ‘why?’ part of the question, and these were capped at Level 4. Most candidates did of course make an effort to answer the question as a whole, and it was interesting to note that the ‘why?’ question was generally answered better, since candidates had quite a bit to say about stewardship. It was interesting also to note that quite a high proportion of candidates did not perceive any reasons for the current necessity to conserve the living environment other than theological ones, whereas there are clearly many pressing practical reasons for such conservation.
- 08** As with 06, this evaluation was often characterised by the juxtaposition technique, i.e. simply listing what various authorities have to say about the matter, as if that somehow amounts to an evaluation. In this respect, the published Levels of Response descriptors merit close study, since they are quite definitive: for example, to reach Level 5 (10-11 marks) there needs to be “some attempt at analysis or comment and *recognition of more than one point of view*”. For Level 6 (12-13 marks), different views need to be explained “with some supporting evidence and argument”, and there also needs to be some analysis and a general evaluation that is consistent *with a line or reasoning*. These descriptors cannot be met merely by stating what scholars say, since such statements usually amount to simple AO1 rather than to AO2. In practice, many candidates simply reiterated material already used to answer 07, listing arguments about the different interpretations of stewardship, but with no attempt to answer the question set. There were of course many who *did* evaluate, and they did so largely by using the same material, but with the very significant difference that it was used as *evidence for a point of view* and not simply as a bulletin of information. Evaluative answers looked at issues such as: the capacity of humans both to protect and destroy the living environment; the question of whether ethics should focus solely on humans or whether it should include other animals; the responsibilities that devolve upon humans according to religious texts, and how these are best to be interpreted, and so on. Good use was made of the contrast between ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ ecology.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.