



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

**Religious Studies**

**RSS03**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit C Philosophy of Religion**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

Although questions 1 and 2 were the most popular, a significant number of candidates attempted the question on psychology and religion. The least popular question was the question on atheism and agnosticism.

A significant number of centres had entries where the entire candidature selected the same choice of questions. It was not clear whether these centres had prepared candidates for only two of the four areas, or whether they just preferred those particular topics. It has been noted in previous examiner's reports that to reduce the content to the bare minimum of two areas is to give a student a very limited experience of the subject.

Answers from the same centre frequently followed a similar pattern which suggested that candidates were repeating class notes regardless of the focus of the question asked. Both AO1 and AO2 questions have a clear focus. It is this tendency to ignore the focus of a question that remains the major reason for underperformance by candidates.

Some examiners also commented that the quality of some scripts suggested that perhaps the candidates had been entered too early and would have benefited from waiting until the summer exams.

### Question 1

**01** Most candidates gave an outline of Aquinas' cosmological argument. However, a significant number had difficulty in explaining why Aquinas rejected infinite regression and /or providing a coherent explanation of his third way related to contingency and necessary being. A number of candidates were able to use correctly the illustration of wood, fire and heat and the move from potentiality to actuality. Weaker candidates often linked the illustration to Aquinas' second way, using it as a reason for cause.

Many candidates included criticisms of the argument in their answer which if used in answer to part 02 could have gained a higher mark on 02. Discussion of other cosmological arguments were also common but were not credited unless they were clearly linked by candidates to Aquinas' argument.

Higher level candidates were able to make some reference as to why the argument leads to the conclusion that God is required and addressed the "attempts to prove" aspect of the question. There were some good discussions about the argument being an inductive argument.

**02** Most candidates ignored the focus about "value for religious faith" and answered in terms of whether the argument was successful. This is an issue that is clearly listed in the specification. Regardless of the question set, candidates seem to regard question 1 (01 and 02) as a summary of the cosmological argument and a list of criticisms of the argument. Candidates need to be directed to identify the particular focus of each question and select their material accordingly.

### Question 2

**03** For many candidates, the question was regarded as a "write all you know about religious experience", and therefore such answers lacked depth. The majority of candidates chose to place the emphasis on the characteristics of a religious experience. Weaker candidates failed to give relevant examples to support the point being made, or would provide an example but fail to explain how it linked to the particular aspect of religious experience that was being discussed.

Higher level candidates were able to provide a breadth of relevant religious experiences and support with examples. A number of candidates focussed on the more subjective elements of religious experiences and discussed the effect on people in terms of religious life and religious understanding.

- 04** Once again the focus was often ignored. Many candidates seemed to have prepared an answer about the genuineness of religious experience. However, the actual question was whether those who have not experienced a religious experience could understand them. Although much of the material could have been credited if used appropriately, such candidates often failed to do so.

Many candidates referred to Ramachandran or Persinger's helmet but then failed to explain how their work could help understanding of a religious experience. However, there were some good answers showing understanding of the problems of the uniqueness, ineffability and subjective nature of the experience.

### **Question 3**

- 05** Most candidates who answered this question could write at some length on the Oedipus complex but struggled with the idea of archetypes. In addition, there was confusion and lack of clarity as to the relevance such information had for religion. Very few links were made to religion. For instance, the archetypes were just listed and no links made to religion or individuation. Indeed, many candidates even failed to include reference to the God archetype.
- 06** Many candidates ignored the focus of the question and gave what seemed a prepared answer about positive and negative views of psychology towards religion. In contrast, some answers demonstrated good, reasoned responses that were thoughtful in their consideration of the extent to which God has been explained away by psychology. A number of candidates drew a distinction between God as a subjective projection and God as an objective reality.

### **Question 4**

- 07** Many candidates gave a brief definition of atheism and agnosticism and then ignored the focus of the question and wrote general answers about the reasons for the rise of atheism. The higher level answers showed knowledge and understanding of atheism and agnosticism. There were references to Thomas Huxley and the philosophical context to agnosticism. They were able to give examples and then drew out differences between the two positions, noting that there was positive and negative atheism.
- 08** The focus of atheism being in retreat in the modern world was again often ignored, with many candidates merely listing the causes of atheism or why religion has declined. Those that did address the focus often tended to list points on either side. To achieve the higher levels there had to be evidence of reasoning and analysis rather than just listing points. Clearly, many candidates find this skill of evaluation difficult and present an AO1 rather than an AO2 answer.

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

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