



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

**Religious Studies**

**RSS02**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit B Religion and Ethics 2**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

There were many good scripts, and many centres showed clear evidence of attention to the detail of the Specification. Having said that, there was also some indication of candidates ignoring parts of the Specification in the hope of being able to answer questions on selected areas. This applied particularly to Questions 01 and 02, where knowledge of Kantian ethics was generally good, but where candidates were often unsure of how the concept of the *summum bonum* fits into Kant's ethical theory. Equally, with Questions 03 and 04, candidates were usually reasonably fluent in explaining Aristotle's four causes, but were often unable to deal with the issue of whether or not cause is at the centre of life. Narrow selection does not build a firm foundation for A2 work. There were of course many first-rate answers to these questions, but there were many where candidates had clearly not even considered the claim that "cause is not at the centre of life", despite this being an 'issue arising'. Those who had considered it found no difficulty at all in answering in depth, and candidates were at liberty to take any number of lines of argument, such as the nature of cause and effect in general, the views of Aristotle and/or Aquinas in particular, and the possibilities of what else might be at the centre of life. Again, these observations are intended to be helpful, and not to be critical, and they do not detract from the achievements of the majority of candidates on this paper.

### Question 1 *Kant and ethics*

- 01** Weaker responses generally offered nothing more about the *summum bonum* over and above translating it as the *highest/ supreme good*, the bulk of the essay being taken up with an account of Kant's ethics, under the impression that doing so also explained the *summum bonum*. The fact that many such accounts were detailed illustrates the general comment made above, that some candidates are selecting not just areas of the Specification for exclusive study but areas within areas. Despite their detail, they were weak because for the most part they did not answer the question. Candidates often did not mention the *summum bonum* until two-thirds of the way through the essay, and some contented themselves with saying, 'If people obey the categorical imperatives, then they will reach the highest good'. High-grade essays (and there were of course many of these) generally outlined the *summum bonum* at the start, beginning with Kant's postulates of freedom, immortality and God, and following Kant's logic from 'ought implies can' to the postulate of an after-life state in which perfect duty is combined with perfect happiness. Kant's emphasis on duty, obligation, reason and the categorical imperatives then followed on organically.
- 02** Those who identified the *summum bonum* with the whole of Kant's ethics necessarily carried this confusion into Question 02, and thereby found themselves trying to explain how Kant's theory of ethics can be the weakest part of Kant's theory of ethics. The general consensus otherwise was that the *summum bonum* is weak because it brings a teleological focus into a deontological theory. Others mentioned this, but repeated Kant's insistence that the *summum bonum* is merely a postulated consequence of his ethical theory which in itself carries no requirement for action. Most suggested that the inflexibility of the ethical theory, or the problem of conflicting duties, or the refusal to acknowledge the importance of consequences or of emotions were more serious weaknesses. Some disliked what they saw as Kant importing religion into his theory, although the best answers were generally keen to point out that the *summum bonum* is a postulate, and not an alleged fact.

### Question 2 *Natural Law and ethics*

- 03** Most had a good working knowledge of the four causes. The weakest answers mixed up the causes, and often confined themselves to a simple explanation of how the causes work, usually with reference to a statue. The best answers fleshed out the causes with their background in the difference between act and potential, discussed Aristotle's concept of a First Efficient Cause, and looked at the direction of the theory in pointing towards *eudaimonia*. Some candidates engaged in a very learned discussion about the meanings of the Greek terms. Some referred to the on-going development of the theory in Aquinas' thought and in the theory of causation generally. This was perfectly acceptable, although a few candidates confused Aristotle with Aquinas, and wrote only about the latter.
- 04** There were many different interpretations of this. Some of the most erudite considered Hume's ideas about causation; some evaluated the coherence of Aristotle's concept of causation; some looked at Aquinas' theological use of causation, particularly his arguments about the First Cause.

Where the centrality of cause was rejected, it was usually in favour of emotion in general, or love in particular, or purpose, for example. Much of this made very interesting reading.

### **Question 3 *Religious views of the created world***

- 05** Some candidates clearly used this as a fall-back question, and had only a vague idea of what the question was asking. Despite the issue of the status of the non-human world being firmly lodged in the section of the Specification dealing with 'religious views of the created world', quite a number interpreted "the non-human world" as a reference to heaven, which produced some very odd answers indeed. There were many good answers, however, in which candidates discussed religious ideas about the status of humanity in relation to the living environment and the inorganic world. One useful point of contrast was between Christian anthropocentric ideas and the more integrated approach of Buddhism.
- 06** Answers to this question related naturally to the religious views discussed in 05. Most argued that only those views which accorded intrinsic value to the whole environment made sense, and in this respect Buddhism was judged to make a lot more sense than the views of the theistic religions. In parallel, most suggested that theistic ideas about the special status of humanity have a lot to answer for in the current degradation of the world, since they have no basis in fact: for example evolutionary theory shows that humans are merely part of what has evolved. Others acknowledged the force of such arguments, but pointed out that the theistic ideas of stewardship, if taken in a more common-sense way, do acknowledge the value of the environment as a whole, and these ideas do indeed "make sense". On the whole, the best answers did as the question asked, and considered issues of "status", whereas many essays simply ignored that word.

### **Question 4 *Environment, both local and worldwide***

- 07** Of those candidates who answered both 05/06 and 07/08, a proportion of responses used exactly the same material to answer these questions. The best responses to Question 07 related 'responsibility' in the theistic religions to issues such as God's perfect nature, the believer's right relationship with God, and the requirements of stewardship. Again, there was some good use of Buddhist (and sometimes Hindu) tradition, for example concerning the implications of the doctrine of *ahimsa*.
- 08** Answers to this were generally very good. Religious views were considered to be inadequate for fairly obvious reasons, such as: the lack of agreement between the different religious traditions about how the environment should be treated; the antiquity of the scriptures being considered and their lack of any detailed scientific knowledge about environmental issues; the unfounded and damaging anthropocentric claims of most religious teachings about environmental responsibility, and so on. Conversely, most argued that religions are becoming increasingly aware of the fragility of the biosphere, and of the absolute dependence of humanity on the rest of that biosphere, so that there are many environmental agencies now operating with a religious agenda. Equally, candidates argued that although religious scriptures cannot offer technical/scientific solutions to environmental problems, they can still offer principles (such as *agape* and *ahimsa*) that are indeed adequate in helping to deal with environmental threats.

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