



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

Religious Studies

RST3A

(Specification 2060)

Unit 3A Religion and Ethics

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

This proved to be an exam which caused few surprises. It differentiated between candidates who really understood the material and those who had merely learnt their class notes. The questions were straightforward, asked in an uncomplicated way and straight from the Specification. They presented similar demands from the candidates. They all appeared to be equally popular.

However, a couple of points need to be made. Many candidates were obviously well prepared for the exam, so much so that it was obvious in many cases that they had written answers to similar questions before in class. However, many of these candidates then tried to fit the essay which they had already written to the question before them on the exam paper, and in most cases this was not wholly satisfactory as there were subtle changes of emphasis. Centres need to urge their candidates to use their information to fit the question before them, not the other way round.

There was also much evidence to suggest that centres are only studying two out of the four topics. This is **not** recommended as centres are diminishing their candidates' chances of success by reducing candidate choice. This was particularly noticeable with question 01, where many candidates appeared to have prepared for a question about 'conscience'. When they were disappointed, they appeared to be unprepared to answer a different question, and so continued to answer 01 including their prepared notes about 'conscience'.

Question 1 *Libertarianism, free will and determinism*

01 This was a popular question; unfortunately, some candidates had prepared an answer about 'conscience', rather than 'the personality' and 'moral self'. Both topics are clearly highlighted in the Specification as being areas from which questions might be posed. Several candidates were obviously wanting a question about libertarianism and determinism, and were not going to be put off from the desire, writing accordingly.

02 Relatively few candidates discussed the notion that there might **not** be moral responsibility with libertarianism. Ironically, many had mentioned the aspect of no moral responsibility in Question 01, but seemed to be unaware of its relevance in 02, suggesting that some candidates are learning answers rather than really understanding the material studied. A few candidates went so far as to suggest to the examiners that they had misprinted the question! Several answers ended up saying that there was moral responsibility in libertarianism but no moral responsibility in determinism. This, of course, was not answering the question set, and answers along these lines rarely achieved more than level 3. However, there were some very good, thoughtful evaluative answers to this question.

Question 2 *Virtue Ethics*

03 This was another popular question. Unfortunately a few candidates chose an ethical issue which was an issue in science and technology. Most candidates were able to write a good explanation of Virtue Ethics. However, fewer were able to apply it to an ethical issue well, and centres would be advised to concentrate more on this area as there were some very liberal interpretations of some of the intellectual and moral virtues of Aristotle. Moreover, some candidates opted for explaining how Virtue Ethics could **not** be applied to their chosen ethical issue, which is an interesting but alternative question.

A few candidates interpreted the question as meaning that they could write about several ethical issues. Whilst the intention was that candidates would only apply Virtue Ethics to one ethical issue, the wording of the question did allow for this interpretation and full credit was given where appropriate.

04 Some candidates ignored the first seven words, and regurgitated answers about the strengths and weaknesses of Virtue Ethics. However, there were many excellent answers with well supported arguments, often attributed correctly to scholars.

Question 3 *Religious views on sexual behaviour and human relationships*

- 05** This was an extremely popular question, with many excellent answers. Most candidates seemed to understand the need to ground their views in scripture or teachings. There were still a significant number of candidates who gave generalised answers, along the lines of 'Christians believe that...' or 'Christianity teaches that...' with no further reference point. The majority of answers were from the perspective of Christianity. Credit was allowed for candidates who interpreted the question as asking for a fundamentalist, liberal and conservative view of scripture affecting the interpretation of scriptural teachings about sexual behaviour although few candidates interpreted the question this way. Variant views within the chosen religion should have been cited in order to achieve level 7.
- 06** This part of the question was fairly straightforward, and usually well answered. However, little credit was given for the stance that Christian teachings about sexual behaviour are still relevant today simply because there are lots of Christians in the world, nor for the mentioning that there had been a recent royal wedding in a church.

Question 4 *Science and technology*

This question was relatively straightforward. There were many good and thorough answers.

- 07** Some candidates did not consider variant views within a religion; others talked about cruelty to animals as opposed to animal experimentation *per se*. Most answers appeared to be from the perspective of Christianity; centres may wish to look at the Church of Scotland's website and the work of Andrew Linzey for extra material about variant views within Christianity's response to animal experimentation. There were a few candidates who talked about pigs being exposed to blast at Porton Down as part of defence experiments; they failed to mention that these pigs were terminally anaesthetised before the procedure and thus deeply unconscious, knowledge of which fact would alter the point candidates were making.
- 08** There were also good answers for 08, with some excellent debate informed by scholarly opinion. However, weaker candidates merely talked about whether religious views (or scientific views) were good or bad.

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