



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

Religious Studies

RSS01

(Specification 2060)

Unit A Religion and Ethics 1

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

There were some very good answers to all questions and the great majority of students appeared to use their time well. Some students wrote introductions to each part of each question which often extended to half a page or more; this meant that over the paper as a whole they were writing as much as two sides without scoring many, or in some cases any, marks. Introductions are of value if they help students to focus on the question but are often neither necessary nor creditworthy. Many answers would have been improved by a greater focus on the wording of the question; there were a significant number of generally well-informed answers that were only partially relevant.

Question 1 *Utilitarianism*

- 01 This was a very popular question, and there were some very well informed answers. Some students summarised the general principles of utilitarianism, sometimes very briefly, rather than explaining them. Others listed the whole of the hedonic calculus as part of their answer but this was not required by the question, although some reference to the calculus could have helped explain the idea that utilitarianism concerns itself with consequences. Explanation of the distinctive features of Mill's utilitarianism was often better, but few explained how the ideas of higher and lower pleasures could be taken into account when making moral decisions. One common mistake was to assume that Mill was a strong rule utilitarian, which is not the case.
- 02 There were some very good answers to this question. Students explored the idea that utilitarianism seeks to maximise pleasure and minimise pain, and used examples such as the sadistic guards to show that when the pain of one person generates the pleasure of others, a simple reading of the hedonic calculus could justify allowing the pain to continue. Some also noted Mill's saying that 'It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied' taking it to mean that not pursuing lower pleasures, and so suffering to some degree, can be worthwhile in the pursuit of higher pleasures. There were very few examples of situations in which utilitarians might have a choice between using money (for example) to increase the happiness of those who were already content or to prevent the suffering of those who were in pain, although such examples would have got to the heart of the issue. A few students offered personal or religious arguments about whether the ending of pain should take priority, but these were not relevant.

Question 2 *Situation Ethics*

- 03 There were some excellent answers to this question but many others would have been improved by better use of examples, and there were many examples of over-long, and often largely irrelevant, introductions. 'Pragmatism' and 'Contextual Relativism' were often clearly explained, although in dealing with relativism some students omitted the idea that actions should be relative to love. Explanations of 'Personalism' were often well-supported with examples which helpfully contrasted it with legalism. Explanations of 'Positivism' were generally less effective: many did explain that Situation Ethics is based on the **faith** that love is the highest good, but others suggested that it had something to do with having a positive attitude.
- 04 There were some good answers which were aware of contrasting opinions within Christianity on this issue. Most compared situationism with the example of Christ to support the idea and then used legalistic Christian responses to argue against it.

Question 3 *Religious teachings on the nature and value of human life*

- 05 There were some very good answers to this question but many that wrote generally about the nature and value of life instead of focusing on what was asked. Others offered overviews of the teaching of more than one religion, but some of these answers offered vague generalisations rather than accurate examples. Some of the best answers, from a Christian perspective, focused on the sanctity of human life, its intrinsic value, and teaching on equality. In dealing with non-human life, many good answers considered the value of animals as part of God's creation, their rights and the limitations on those rights. Many students contrasted the value of human and non-human life,

which was often effective although not required. Some used embryos as examples of non-human life; this was rarely effective because many then stated, or clearly implied, that they were actually human.

06 This question allowed students to focus on the nature of human life and what it means to be human. Many good answers considered the unique nature accorded to humanity in many religions, often with reference to the idea that human beings have a soul and a moral awareness, and some used teaching from Buddhism or Hinduism to argue that believers could accept the view to some extent.

Question 4 *Abortion and euthanasia*

07 This was a very popular question and many students answered it well. However, many confused active and passive euthanasia with voluntary and non-voluntary, and some offered only a very limited range of reasons why some people might want euthanasia. There was some very effective use of case studies although some students simply named a person rather than explained the circumstances that led them, or their relatives, to ask for euthanasia. The best answers tended to include a wide range of examples, including some 'good' reasons relating to dignity, quality of life and pain relief for example, and some 'bad' reasons such as pressure from family, guilt and the expense of keeping people on life support machines.

08 This question required arguments for and against the view 'no one has the right to keep me alive when...I want to die' but many students presented arguments for and against euthanasia in general which were not entirely relevant. Some also offered personal opinions when the question asked about religious believers. The best answers from a Christian perspective tended to argue that a believer's duty to God to keep the person alive had to take priority over that individual's right to die. Arguments based on love and compassion were used to support the counter argument as were arguments that it was keeping someone alive 'artificially' that went against God's will.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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