



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

Religious Studies

RSS02

(Specification 2060)

Unit B Religion and Ethics 2

Report on the Examination

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General comments

As in previous examinations, knowledge of the ethical theory behind Kant and Natural Law was generally very good, whereas knowledge of the debate about environmental ethics and about the created world was not so impressive. Students could improve their performance in the latter two parts of the Specification by improving their technical knowledge of the subject material, since responses are not infrequently generalised and simplistic. Time management was good, with nearly all students giving appropriate balance to both parts of each question.

Question 1 *Kant and ethics*

- 01** Weaker responses generally confused ‘deontological’ with ‘teleological’, which produced inaccurate answers. A few wrote in detail about Kant’s deontological approach but forgot to contrast it with teleological ones. Some had no doubt that all teleological theories are grossly immoral, and that being a consequentialist can allow you to cheat on your husband or wife, murder, and behave with complete immorality so long as you get the right result. The majority made a good job of the question, and there were many superb and detailed replies. There was a lot of interest in the *summum bonum*, and one favoured comment was that it gives Kant’s theory a teleological flavour, although Kant himself would not have agreed, since the *summum bonum* is, properly, part of his inference to the existence of God.
- 02** Most answers presented an even balance in the deontological v. teleological contrast. The mad axe-murderer made his (or her) customary appearance, balanced against the unforeseen-and-possibly-calamitous consequences of act-utilitarian decisions. Some suggested that Kant’s examples of contradictions in the will / contradictions in nature meant that Kant habitually contradicted himself. Some forgot about Kant, and wandered across into Divine Command Theory or Natural Law. Some just discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Kant’s theory of ethics. Quite a few liked Kant, but wanted to mix him with W.D. Ross’s ideas about prima facie duties. Students were clearly well prepared for questions about Kant, in so far as answers were generally coherent and carefully constructed. Some of the very best answers argued that the answer to the question depends on the meaning/interpretation of the word “works”.

Question 2 *Natural Law and ethics*

- 03** There were quite a few who answered this question knowing little or nothing about double effect. Where that happened, the approach was usually to give a general overview of Natural Law Ethics from Aristotle through to Aquinas and Finnis, which gained some background credit but was obviously very limited. Most referred to double effect in connection with ectopic pregnancy, but many got little further than that. In order to progress from Levels 4 and 5 to levels 6 and 7, for example, knowledge of how double effect might apply in other contexts would have been helpful; alternatively a greater knowledge of the rationale behind the principle would have given broader-based answers.
- 04** Success in answering this question was in direct proportion to the understanding of double effect given in answers to Question 03. Most suggested that the problem with the principle is that the rules can be bent to obtain any desired result, which was high-sounding, but rarely accompanied by specific examples. One favoured scenario was the case of the terrorist who threatens to detonate a nuclear warhead over a city. The terrorist has a daughter, and torturing the daughter to obtain information as to the whereabouts of the warhead was often given as an acceptable option under double effect. This could hardly be a valid case, however, since it violates the means-end condition of the principle: that a bad act cannot be used to bring about a good effect. Most did, however, make the reasonable point that double effect seems to be counter-intuitive in some cases: for

example it appears to prohibit lying in order to save life, and thereby hits the same impractical brick wall as Kantian ethics.

Question 3 *Religious views of the created world*

05 Weaker answers tended simply to recite one or other of the creation narratives, which ignored the trigger word in the question: Explain. Most, however, did explain the narratives in detail, dealing with the various implications of the text for human moral behaviour. For the Judaeo-Christian tradition, students referred to the implications of the supposed creation from nothing, the 'perfection' of creation, the creation of humans in a position of environmental stewardship, humans being created in the image of God, and so on.

06 Answers to this question were sometimes polarised between the simplistic and the superb. The simplistic variety suggested either that human treatment of animals is abysmal or that humans are so God-like that they can do what they like with creation. The superb variety came in various formats, one of which was that all scripture needs to be interpreted, and that interpretation is an ongoing process that can never be set in stone, so there is an obvious difference in the way in which earlier cultures dealt with and viewed the non-human world and the way in which modern societies need to operate. Evolutionary biology and ecology indicate the need to abandon anthropocentric ideas about the world in favour of an ethic that sustains the whole of creation. Some comments were very astute indeed, for example: 'The religious *narratives* do not undervalue the status of the non-human world: religious *people* do'.

Question 4 *Environment, both local and worldwide*

07 Some dealt only with the *why*, and others dealt only with the *how*. Quite a few forgot to include reference to religious views. Some talked earnestly about Kant and Utilitarianism as religious theories of ethics. The *how* element was dealt with very thoroughly, with the best answers referring to a range of environmental initiatives, from the domestic to the multi-national. For the *why*, many students commented succinctly that unless preservation is put at the head of the human agenda, there will not be an environment left to preserve.

08 Weaker answers tended to miss the point of the question, and talked about how everybody can help the environment by walking instead of riding, switching off lights, using less water when cleaning their teeth, and so on. Some expected a question on whether or not people should be compelled to preserve the environment, and wrote their answers to that question anyway. Others completely ignored the words "as a whole", which made for some very strange interpretations. Those who complied with the requirements of the question did good things, suggesting, for example, that such an agenda was beyond the range of most individuals, but they could perhaps influence democratic governments (through the ballot box) to see the importance of holistic environmental approaches. Most were concerned and angry at the lack of international cooperation.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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