

**A LEVEL**

**Examiners' report**

# **RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

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**H573**

For first teaching in 2016

**H573/02 Summer 2022 series**

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
Paper 2 series overview .....	4
Question 1* .....	5
Question 2* .....	7
Question 3* .....	8
Question 4* .....	10

## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

### Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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## Paper 2 series overview

The Religion and Ethics paper introduces candidates to a range of both religious and secular ethical theories as well as looking at some key debates within the field. The paper assesses knowledge and understanding (40%) and analysis and evaluation (60%).

Many candidates had clearly prepared thoroughly for the examination with the vast majority being able to write three essays of at least reasonable length.

Subject knowledge was generally good although there seemed to be slightly more misattribution of theories, e.g. Kant and Natural Law, and issues of chronology, e.g., Hume responded to Moore. While candidates are not penalised for this, this was often accompanied by muddled understanding of the theories and ideas being articulated.

### Assessment for learning



It is worth spending time helping candidates to get the basics right in terms of who said what and where thinkers come chronologically. These are often foundations on which higher level understanding can be built.

While many candidates showed good examination technique, there were others whose essay writing was unstructured which may be the result of a lack of practice or the stress of the occasion. This sometimes revealed itself in very long introductions to essays, moving from idea to idea in a way that was not easy to follow or by repeating ideas from earlier in the essay. There was a tendency for some candidates to be overly focused on AO1 – explaining what the different ideas were – at the expense of AO2 – analysing and evaluating ideas.

Examiners also found that the quality of handwriting was more of an issue in this session. This is significant as an examiner has to make judgements based on what they are able to read.

### Assessment for learning



It is important that candidates get a number of opportunities to write essays in timed conditions including practice of 2-hour exams. This enables technique to be practised as well as handwriting issues to be identified.

#### Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:

- wrote specific responses to the question as asked on the paper
- produced essays where an argument was developed throughout
- used the introduction to briefly show the direction of the essay and the conclusion to round off their argument
- showed very good selection and application of the material. This was often about what was left out as much as what was put in.

#### Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:

- attempted to add in generic material that they had learned rather than focus on the question
- focused responses more on addressing AO1 – what ideas they wished to explain – rather than evaluating those ideas
- wrote overly long introductions describing at length what they were going to do – at times this meant they ran out of time to actually do it.

## Question 1\*

- 1\* 'The religious concept of sanctity of life is not relevant with regard to euthanasia.'  
Discuss.

[40]

This was the most popular question on the paper but was not always answered well. A large number of candidates seemed to adopt a very similar structure where sanctity of life and quality of life were covered in equal measure. The extent to which this genuinely addressed the question varied but it was successful to a degree in most cases. Where candidates seemed to stick rigidly to a possibly pre-prepared essay, they struggled to make sections on Acts and Omissions and double effect relevant.

Some candidates had a less developed understanding of sanctity of life which had some of the features of a GCSE-type description with a biblical quote stated but not developed. More successful responses were often able to focus on the idea of intrinsic value of life or explore the difference between strong and weak sanctity of life, which often produced excellent responses. Other candidates who had picked up on the word religion in the question were able to support sanctity of life concepts with clear reference to theological sources and examine the relevance of these in a modern secular society. There was often good discussion of the place of religion in society and consideration of whether it had the right to prescribe on moral issues.

A number of candidates were keen to use the ethical theories associating sanctity of life with Natural Law theory and the opposing quality of life argument with either Fletcher and/or Singer. In these cases, some candidates were able to produce very convincing responses by exploring the concepts of sanctity and quality through the different systems and specific elements which they could link in; however, other candidates fell into simply writing about Natural Law and situation ethics, thereby turning the response into more of a comparison between the two systems and their application to euthanasia rather than actually answering the set question.

There was great use made of the increasing secularisation of the country as an opposing concept to the use of sanctity of life, as well as issues around personhood, autonomy and suffering while reference was often made to Fletcher, Singer, Glover and Kuhse as the main thinkers involved in the argument. Better responses were able to make good use of case studies to illustrate sections of their response. While many used the now traditional cases of Tony Bland, Diane Pretty, Daniel James and Tony Nicklinson, other candidates were able to reference more recent cases including that of Archie Battersbee. However, case studies could also be poorly used in less successful responses where the case studies, described at length, became the main focus without really developing the ethical implications.

### Misconception



Candidates can oversimplify: Natural Law is religious so believes the ten commandments: 'do not kill' whereas situation ethics rejects religion and supports quality of life. Both theories are more subtle than this. For instance, the use of Divine Law is only one aspect of Natural Law.

## Exemplar 1

Religious arguments such as the sanctity of life argument are reinforced through biblical teachings such as natural law <sup>as put down by Aquinas</sup> which states that God the creator can only minus life as if we commit suicide, we break the commitment to God and disobey the primary precepts of an orderly society. However, in cases such as Diane Pretty, who battled ~~her~~ with motor neurone syndrome, the quality of life was unbearable and therefore wanted to actively euthanise herself with the help of her husband, something that since the 1961 suicide act, has been illegal. In regards to sanctity of life, I argue that no omnibenevolent God can allow his children to

This was typical of a number of Level 3-4 responses where explanation of sanctity of life conflated biblical material and Natural Law. Neither is really developed as the candidate moves on to quality of life

## Question 2\*

2\* Assess the view that good, bad, right and wrong are meaningless ethical terms.

[40]

The responses to this question were typically good and as ever the better responses focused on the specific question which was around 'meaninglessness'. While most candidates used the three Meta Ethical theories identified in the specification and considered how each addressed the issue of meaning, some candidates were confident enough to focus their response entirely on emotivism and considered the arguments for and against this particular theory. These responses often scored very high marks.

As well as some slight confusions over what was or was not meaningful, the key issue in this question that limited the higher levels for candidates was the reliance on what seemed like pre-prepared responses. These tended to start at naturalism, raise objections leading to intuitionism before finally covering emotivism. Sometimes candidates made genuine attempts to tie back to the question but on other occasions, examiners were given a sentence at the end of a section which stated unconvincingly that this theory did or did not show language as meaningless.

The knowledge of the three Meta Ethical theories was generally good. Many candidates showed a good grasp of naturalism, intuitionism and emotivism in context. Thus, these were able to focus on the whole issue of language and, in particular, on emotivism and meaning. More successful responses were very clear on the theory of emotivism developing the verification principle and sometimes including Stevenson as well as Ayer. A small number of candidates addressed the question through prescriptivism or Mackie's error theory and although these theories are not listed on the specification, the candidates clearly knew these ideas well and were rewarded appropriately.

In terms of the arguments deployed, candidates tended to have reasonable knowledge of key criticisms like the naturalistic fallacy, the issue of differing intuitions and the problems of moral relativism. However, some candidates did not seem to fully understand the naturalistic fallacy and the open question argument – these were sometimes mentioned rather than incorporated meaningfully into an argument. The argument that moral discourse becomes pointless under emotivism as it is reduced to boos and cheers was often put but not always explored. Some candidates made good use of the ideas of moral relativism, including some Sociological perspectives to illustrate their responses.

### Assessment for learning



Candidates tend to understand the AO1 on Meta Ethics but are less secure on the arguments for and against each theory so it may be worth spending more time on these

### Question 3\*

- 3\* 'Choices about sexual behaviour should only follow the approach of utilitarian ethics.'  
Discuss.

[40]

The responses to this question were quite varied in terms of their standard; there was a general feeling that this question was not always answered as well as it could have been.

Candidates often approached the question by contrasting utilitarianism with other theories which were held to be better or worse in terms of their approach to sexual ethics. For some this involved splitting the essay into three sections, premarital sex, extramarital sex and homosexuality, and coming to a judgement after each section. While this was done reasonably well by some candidates who were able to keep focus on utilitarianism, other responses lost focus with candidates spending too much time discussing other theories. In some cases a paragraph or so was given to utilitarianism and the rest of the essay was spent elsewhere.

The understanding of utilitarianism was often disappointing. In the less successful responses, utilitarianism was reduced to the greatest good for the greatest number or there was a statement about increasing pleasure with no real development. Some candidates conflated Bentham and Mill – and on occasions conflated both with Fletcher's situation ethics. The application to sexual ethics was also imprecise with candidates often unaware that utilitarianism requires consideration of long-term consequences. Better responses were able to make some distinction between different types of utilitarianism – in particular Mill's non-harm principle which was used well. They were also able to draw on specific application such as Bentham's support for homosexuality and Mills' views on contraception. There was at times conflation between the various aspects of Mills' thought with Rule Utilitarianism, higher and lower pleasures and non-harm treated as essentially the same thing.

In terms of the arguments presented, most candidates focused on the fact that utilitarianism is not religious and is modern – these points were not always fully explored. There was some good use of the idea of tyranny of the majority as well as the potential for some versions of utilitarianism to justify rape or paedophilia. Better responses were able to discuss ideas such as consent, autonomy and how the application of utilitarianism might affect sexual activity in the wider context of relationships. However, some of the arguments were not as successful as they could have been as what was being supported or criticised was a caricature of utilitarianism rather than the theory itself.

#### Assessment for learning



Candidates will have covered ethical theories such as utilitarianism in some detail earlier in the course but sometimes struggle to apply them to issues later on. It may be worth building in time to do retrieval and consolidation of ethical theories later in the course.



## Exemplar 2

3	<p>Utilitarian ethics is all about the most pleasurable thing for the most amount of people, it had two key thinkers, <del>the</del> Bentham and Mill, who decided the world shouldn't be based on laws but what is the most pleasurable thing.</p>
	<p>Choices of sexual behavior when following the approach of utilitarian ethics is strong, firstly this is due to the ethical theory having no absolute rules on what is right or wrong, this means that it allows for discussion regarding homosexuality and pre-marital sex. As society has gone forward there has been a change in what is right and what's not.</p>
	<p>one of these things being homosexuality and the laws around it. By following the utilitarian approach it is clear that by allowing homosexuality it will most wholly cause the most amount of pleasure for the most people. This is a strong way to make choices on sexual behavior as it shows what is socially accepted and can help with conflicting moral decisions. It could also be seen as the best way to base sexual behavior off as it allows for discussion and has no fixed rules and therefore can adapt to new situations.</p>
	<p>However, utilitarians would argue that if your partner had dementia and could</p>

This was typical of some of the mid-range responses to this question. Although the candidate is aware of the progressive nature of utilitarianism, the understanding and application of utilitarianism is not unfocused and is reduced to a majority vote.

## Question 4\*

- 4\* Critically compare the views of Aquinas and Freud on the conscience and its role in moral decision-making.

[40]

Candidates found this question quite challenging as it required both a comparison between the two thinkers and a focus on the role of conscience in moral decision-making. As a consequence, some candidates did not address one or both of these things. Some responses described the theories of Aquinas and Freud in isolation at first before then comparing and possibly identifying some evaluation. More successful responses compared the theories as they went along, evaluating at various points the aspects compared so far. E.g., guilt, unconscious versus reason, religious versus psychological/scientific.

The knowledge and understanding of the two thinkers was generally good. On Aquinas, there was explanation of ratio, synderesis, conscientia and vincible and invincible ignorance. With Freud, there was explanation of the id, ego and super ego, Oedipus/Electra complex, Primal Horde and his research. Some candidates were unclear on the role of the different aspects of conscience in Aquinas or confused the aspects of personality in Freud. A small number of candidates wrongly suggested that Aquinas saw conscience as the voice of God. In some essays, although AO1 was good, this was at the expense of AO2 as candidates wrote lengthy descriptions of Freud's five stages of psychosexual development or lengthy anecdotes to illustrate the distinction between vincible and invincible ignorance.

In terms of the argument, there were good criticisms raised of each individual thinker's ideas even if these did not help the comparison. Issues around the limits of human reason for Aquinas and the problems of limited evidence and falsifiability for Freud were well put. Comparison focused on the use or lack of reason, the role of upbringing, the role of guilt and the role of God in each thinker's ideas. Those that were able to link these to moral decision-making – sometimes using examples – gained higher marks. Other candidates who were not really as focused on the question simply added the phrase 'in moral decision-making' to some of their paragraphs.

The inclusion of extra thinkers to either support or refute the work of the original thinkers including Piaget, Kohlberg, Augustine, Butler and Newman was helpful at times. However, in some cases this was simply just the addition of another thinker with no links made to the question or the focus on Aquinas and Freud. Using material well is more important than including scholars just for the sake of it.

### Assessment for learning



'Compare' and 'Critically compare' are command words that are sometimes used. For candidates to achieve the higher levels, the comparison needs to be explicit rather than a juxtaposition of two thinkers/ideas. It may be worth practising a question with this command word so that candidates are familiar with it.

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