

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/02 Summer 2023 series

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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.

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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%).

The responses to the questions on this year's paper saw a full range of ability. There were some excellent responses to each of the questions which showed in-depth knowledge of the key ideas and developed arguments forming a judgement on the issue raised by the question. There were also some very weak responses, perhaps slightly more than in recent years.

The analysis and evaluation presented by candidates seemed a little stronger than in previous sessions with many candidates outlining a thesis/judgement in the introduction and considering the arguments raised throughout. Weaker responses did not always show intent and tended to juxtapose ideas rather than genuinely evaluate or assess. Stating an opposing idea or contrasting to a different theory took the place of clear and developed evaluation in less successful responses.

Assessment for learning



While 60% of the marks are for AO2, it is important that candidates do not neglect AO1. Candidates can successfully incorporate AO1 by providing a section of explanation or by integrating it into evaluative paragraphs.

Although many candidates showed good knowledge and understanding, the AO1 was weaker than the AO2 for a significant number of candidates. Candidates on occasions moved straight to assessment without outlining the idea to be assessed or wrote generally about the topic without specific focus on the question. This was particularly evident in Question 2. Related to this, there was at times a lack of nuance and sophistication in the approach to ethical theories: situation ethics is more than just doing the most loving thing; Kantian ethics is more than just following rules and doing one's duty. There was also a more noticeable confusion and conflation of ideas/terminology between the ethical theories so that otherwise clear explanations of ideas sometimes contained an aspect of a different theory.

OCR support



The forthcoming glossaries of key words for each unit of the specification may help candidates to clarify the meaning of key terms and which topic they relate to. These could be turned into flash cards by students.

Candidates seemed keener than in previous years to make synoptic links between topics and ideas. This worked well at times; for example, a number of candidates made excellent use of business ethics examples on Question 4, and Augustine worked well in Question 3. On other occasions the addition of various named scholars served to cause confusion or move away from the focus of the question and it felt that some candidates were trying too hard to force in extra named thinkers.

An increased number of candidates had handwriting which was very difficult to read. While every effort is made to read all material, candidates can do themselves a disservice as the examiner has to make their judgement based on the material that is legible. Candidates would also do well to keep in mind that if extra material comes to mind during the examination and is written elsewhere then it should be made abundantly clear where that material is and the question to which it applies. Some candidates' responses particularly on typed scripts were very long and in some cases the result was a loss of focus on the specific question asked.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wrote specific responses to the question - as asked on the paper • produced essays where an argument was developed throughout, this was often (but not always) established in the introduction • showed clear and in-depth knowledge of the key ideas referenced in the question – for instance by being aware of the subtleties of different ethical theories • showed very good selection and application of the material. This was often about what was left out as much as what was put in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • included a significant amount of generic material that they had learned rather than focusing on the question • produced minimal explanations of key ideas or assumed understanding of these before moving on to AO2 • conflated various aspects of different ethical theories together and/or confused key terms • made unsuccessful attempts at synopticity which resulted in a loss of focus on the precise question.

Question 1*

1* 'In situation ethics, moral decision-making is entirely individualistic and subjective.' Discuss. [40]

This question produced a range of responses. In terms of AO1, most candidates were able to show a general understanding of situation ethics in terms of it being all about applying the principle of agape in each and every situation. Better responses were often able to supplement this by an understanding of Fletcher's six propositions and four working principles. Definitions and interpretations of the working principles and propositions sometimes differed but were usually broadly in line with what Fletcher intended. Some responses were quite list-like – the candidates had remembered the four working principles/six propositions but could not elaborate on them or link them to the question.

In terms of the argument presented, the wording of the question proved to be challenging to some candidates who did not appear to understand the terms "subjective and individualistic". This resulted in unfocused responses on the general strengths and weaknesses of situation ethics and whether or not it was a useful theory. Better responses formed an argument as to whether situation ethics was individualistic and subjective and also considered whether this was a good or bad thing. At times, the working principles and the six propositions were deployed, for instance in arguing that the subjective aspects (personalism and relativism) formed a contrast with the objective truth of agape. A range of scholarly views were given including Augustine, Barclay, Pope Pius XII, and MacQuarrie and there were some useful references to Jesus on love and breaking sabbath law and other biblical examples. Use of Fletcher's own examples – typically Mrs Bergmeier- was also common.

Where candidates struggled, this tended to be a result of having very limited understanding of the theory beyond agape, which was sometimes confused with a more generalised idea of love such as romantic love. At times, situation ethics was significantly conflated with utilitarianism. A few candidates managed to write lengthy essays without any reference to love/agape.

Misconception



Some candidates argued that adultery was acceptable if people were 'in love', or that genocide could be loving on a certain point of view. This suggests that the nature of agape as a distinctive Christian idea of love was not understood.

Exemplar 1

1	<p>Situation Ethics is an ethical theory outlined by Fletcher, where a moral right is determined by it being considered the most loving act. (in regards to agape love). His theory relies on his four working principles, and six prepositions, and it aims to put the person at the centre, above rules. While Situation ethics is not a legalistic theory and therefore subjective, it is not antinominalistic as Nietzsche would have insisted for, but rather the grey area inbetween (situationism), though it is not entirely individualistic as it relies on selflessness and and humans are much more complex with most situations entailing the more than one person.</p>
	<p>Fletcher's synderesis rule is to "do good and avoid evil" and he argues it was instilled in us by God. In this way, his theory can be argued to be objective as the synderesis was given to us by God, and so it is therefore undoubtable. However, the notion of 'good' itself is subjective, everyone has different opinions of good and evil, and it can never be entirely black and white. These abstract notions of good and evil are attempted to be explained by Fletcher, with good being the most loving act. But this poses another problem, as <u>love itself is subjective</u>. For example, some mentally-ill serial killers may genuinely believe that what they are</p>

The example here was not uncommon as candidates commonly conflated ethical theories. In Exemplar 1, the idea of synderesis 'do good and avoid evil' from Natural Law has found its way into an otherwise clear explanation of situation ethics.

Question 2*

2* Critically assess the importance of sanctity of life in decisions about euthanasia.

[40]

This question required candidates to present knowledge and understanding along with analysis and evaluation of the concept of sanctity of life and the process of euthanasia. While there were some very good and excellent responses, a significant number of responses were not focused consistently on the sanctity of life throughout their responses and focused on the general issues of euthanasia. These responses which showed a lack of focus on the precise question caused issues. They tended to rush through the sanctity of life to then talk about quality of life which tended to dominate responses. In these cases, there seemed to be stronger knowledge (breadth and depth) of quality of life rather than sanctity of life. There was lots of reference to Singer and Mill's views on quality of life. The success of such an approach depended on whether the candidate could link back and use this to assess sanctity of life or whether it was just left as an alternative idea.

Better responses gave a clear explanation of the religious account of sanctity of life and types of euthanasia with a focus on being made in God's image and having intrinsic value rather than extrinsic value/ do not kill/ God having a purpose. This was developed through scripture, accurate use of Natural Law and in a few cases reference to church teachings, such as the Catechism. While most responses focused on the religious approach, there was a good distinction drawn between strong and weak sanctity of life in some responses. Other answers did not locate the sanctity of life principle within its proper context, citing it as derivative of Natural Law (or assuming they are one and the same thing) rather than a more widely held concept in the Christian tradition.

Some candidates – perhaps having in mind a pre-prepared essay plan – approached the essay via the theories of Natural Law and situation ethics which were held to support sanctity of life and quality of life respectively. It was not always possible for candidates taking this approach to persuade examiners that they were addressing the precise question.

A number of responses made use of case studies including some very recent examples as well as the ones found in textbooks. These are helpful when used to support and illustrate the argument, but on other occasions lengthy case studies as an alternative to providing argument made for a less successful response.

Assessment for learning



While there is nothing wrong with bringing in other concepts to help assess the importance of an idea such as sanctity of life, it is essential that evaluation is brought back to the central idea of the question.

Question 3*

3* Evaluate the view that utilitarianism provides the best approach to sexual ethics.

[40]

This question could be approached in a variety of valid ways so long as the argument presented was in relation to whether utilitarianism was the best approach. Some candidates opted to focus on one main issue such as homosexuality through several ethical theories whereas others opted to explore several different issues but by comparing utilitarianism to one other theory.

Good knowledge and understanding of the different forms of utilitarianism such as Bentham, Mill and Singer was in evidence in many responses. There was some good application of the theories to specific cases of sexual ethics. For example, Mill's liberty and harm principle to counteract the criticisms of Bentham as allowing "the tyranny of the majority". Some candidates showed awareness of Bentham's and Mill's roles in their time and how their views on homosexuality along with the Hart-Devlin debate brought about the legalisation of homosexuality. Some candidates linked act and rule utilitarianism to Bentham and Mill respectively, even if sometimes these theories were misattributed. However, a number of candidates wrote essays in which it was clear that they had a very limited understanding of this ethical approach beyond it being about the greatest pleasure for the greatest number. When applied to an issue such as homosexuality this meant that candidates tended to state that whether it would be permitted would depend on what the majority wanted, which very much oversimplifies the theory.

Candidates were able to deploy good arguments exploring the difference between Bentham and Mill and used Mill's harm principle particularly well in looking at the issue of homosexuality. Some of the stronger responses also noted the progressive nature of the theory and growing secularisation to support their arguments. Candidates cited the tyranny of the majority to criticise Bentham's utilitarianism which again Mill's version could address. The use of 'gang rape' to support this point sometimes wrongly implied that Bentham would permit this.

In terms of other theories, Natural Law and Kant were often cited as theories that were weaker than utilitarianism, even if the former was sometimes over simplified. A number of candidates opted to conclude that situation ethics presented the best approach because it was "all about doing the most loving thing". While this might be a useful conclusion, the simplistic understanding of situation ethics did not help in supporting the arguments.

Some candidates opted to address the question by providing a generic notion of utilitarianism applied to detailed scenarios from sexual ethics. These lengthy hypothetical narratives sometimes took over and meant that the argument took a back seat. Stronger responses were able to apply detailed knowledge of utilitarian theories supported by briefly stated examples from sexual ethics.

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

	under the hedonic calculus calculus.
	However, Mill attempts to overcome these criticisms with his adapted form of 'rule utilitarianism'. Rule utilitarianism is based on the idea that society should be governed by general rules which tend to lead to the greatest good for the greatest number; this could be seen as a convincing adaptation since harmful acts such as sexual violence would not be permitted ^{not be permitted} under this principle.
	Secondly, Mill responds to the issue of the tyranny of the majority through his proposition of the 'Harm Principle', whereby he he argues that all citizens should be free to act as they wish with so long as they do not harm another. This is a convincing idea as it allows for maximum liberty (thus still permitted ^{permitted} permitting homosexuality or premarital sex between consenting ^{consenting} adults), whilst still protecting the minority and preventing exploitation.
	However, where Mill fails is through his attempt to respond to criticisms of utilitarianism as a "swine ethic". Mill proposes the notion of "higher" and "lower" pleasures, whereby the former refers to more fulfilling sources of happiness whilst the latter refers to physical pleasures such as food and sex. Whilst this idea has some appeal in theory, in practice it

Unlike some other responses, this candidate understands different versions of utilitarianism and uses them to advance an argument. In Exemplar 2, Mill is used to counter some (but not all) of the potential deficiencies in Bentham.

Question 4*

4* 'Kant's categorical imperative is very helpful in moral decision-making.' Discuss.

[40]

There was no evidence seen by examiners that candidates had been thrown by or even noticed the typo in the question. There were some very good responses to this question.

Candidates generally showed good understanding of the wider context of Kant's theory including good will and duty before focusing on the Categorical Imperative. The first two formulations were typically well understood. Some candidates went into great detail showing the distinction between contradiction in conception and contradiction in will, as well as perfect and imperfect duties. The 3rd Formulation (Kingdom of Ends) was not covered as regularly and was on occasions misunderstood: several candidates conflating the idea with summum bonum or Kingdom of God. Some candidates seemed confused by the idea of formulations, instead saying that there are three different categorical imperatives, although this did not substantially affect the response.

Weaker responses were limited by an understanding of Kant simply being about following rules and doing one's duty. Some candidates were able to list the formulations of the Categorical Imperative, but were not able to show any development or understanding.

In general, practical criticism of the Categorical Imperatives were displayed by candidates as opposed to logical or philosophical criticisms. Candidates preferred to illustrate its impracticality in everyday life rather than expose the possible logical fallacies of the Categorical Imperative. There was reference to Kant's issue of conflicting duties: the soldier's choice to go to war or stay at home to look after sick mother, and the observation that the Categorical Imperative can be applied to anything if worded skilfully. More general evaluation featured good use of Augustine/Barth on the limits of human reason, Hume, and Ross' prima facie duties. A number of candidates referred to the example of whether to lie to a potential axe murderer, however this sometimes led to unfocused lengthy narrative

Some candidates – perhaps hoping for a question on business ethics - used case studies such as Rana Plaza to illustrate the importance of treating people as ends. This was generally done well and was well integrated into the argument usually in support of the second formulation.

Some responses attempted to assess Kant by providing a different ethical theory as a comparison but typically this was not tied in and resulted in a loss of focus.

Exemplar 3

from them. Thirdly there is the kingdom of ends which is what we want after we die from doing our duty & acting out of goodwill. However, this can be argued to not be helpful when making moral decisions as it seems similar to heaven and may be referencing God is a theory that is supposed to be more ~~of a~~ secular ~~theory~~. It is unclear

Exemplar 3 shows that The Kingdom of Ends was not as well understood as the first two formulations. It was not unusual to see conflation with the three postulates/Kingdom of God.

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