



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Religious Studies (4051/4052)
Full or Short Course
Specification A

Unit 7 Philosophy of Religion (405007)

Report on the Examination
2010 examination - June series

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Unit 7 Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

The examiners were delighted by the overall high quality of the answers provided by the candidates. Many candidates showed an ability to think deeply about the issues. Often there was a personal involvement in the thought process, with few candidates simply repeating parrot-fashion ideas picked up in class or from a textbook. This engagement enabled the candidates to score well on the AO2 questions, as they were able to present differing points of view in a thoughtful way. Even when the candidates were not able or willing to express a definitive personal opinion, they clearly understood the central points of the issues and acknowledged the difficulties in the topic. Many candidates were able to present their thoughts in very clear, concise language that enabled them to get full marks for many questions. However, even the candidates who did not find it easy to express their ideas succinctly or clearly were able to pick up marks on each question as they explained a thought in simple but correct terms. The examiners enjoyed marking the work of less able candidates who tried hard and who succeeded in presenting philosophical answers at a lower level. There was good evidence shown throughout the paper that this examination and the topics involved are accessible to pupils of all abilities.

It is recommended that teachers look at this year's Mark Scheme to see what answers the examiners were expecting the candidates to produce. However, many candidates produced valid answers that addressed the questions in ways that the examiners had not expected. Full credit was given to the candidates where this was the case. The Mark Scheme is only a guideline, not a straightjacket. The only inflexible parts of the Mark Scheme are the Levels of Response grids, and even these acknowledge the fact that candidates might fulfil the criteria in many different ways. It is in the nature of philosophy that ideas cross-fertilise, and many candidates showed this by using material from different sections of the specification in their answers. Candidates should, however, be warned that there is a limit to how much credit can be given to an approach that is only tangential to the topic without any of the more usual ideas being referred to. For example, in answers to Question A4(c) about the Big Bang being the only acceptable explanation to the origin of the universe, there were some candidates who used only the cosmological argument for the existence of God. While there can be some overlap here, it is not major, so these candidates prevented themselves from gaining the higher level marks.

Question A1 *The Characteristics of God*

Many candidates were able to link their answer to part (a) with the stimulus, though that was not essential. Most made reference to the different qualities that could be associated best with God through using different forms. Most candidates were able to show an understanding of the nature of God as One even within the Hindu tradition. There were, however, some candidates who knew this material but dealt with this question as an evaluation and brought in irrelevant material about why seeing God in many forms was wrong. Candidates must be guided to answer the set AO1 question, especially as there are so many evaluation questions that allow them to bring in any relevant material.

In part (b) many candidates were able to develop the points they made in the first answer. There were a good number of answers to this question awarded full marks, showing that the candidates were comfortable both with the material and with the methodology of answering the shorter evaluation questions. However, it is worth stressing to candidates that there is no need to present more than one view in three mark evaluation questions (though it is perfectly acceptable to present a second point of view). Some candidates went well beyond the amount of writing needed to gain three marks, sometimes penalising themselves later as they ran out of time. Candidates should use the space provided in the paper as a guide to how much they need to write to gain full marks for a question.

Part (c) saw the weakest answers on the paper. Most candidates either gained full marks or nothing. There are some words that are an integral part of the vocabulary for each section and these need to be known by candidates as they can be asked to explain the meaning of a word. Guessing will rarely allow candidates to succeed with this type of question.

Part (d) again examined the meaning of a phrase. However, this time it was easier for the candidates to make a guess. Unfortunately, many candidates tried to explain 'all-merciful' by using the word 'mercy'. This type of answer did not gain any credit as candidates do not show they understand what a word means by using that word or one of its derivatives. All candidates need to be aware of this pit-fall, as it is likely to happen with quite a number of terms used in this specification.

The second three mark evaluation, part (d) was well answered by the majority of candidates. The examiners were expecting answers that dealt with the arguments about inclusive language. However, the bulk of the responses dealt with the idea of God as parent or father, some bringing in the inclusiveness of parent as an after-thought. All of these answers were credited as they were valid approaches to the question.

Question 2 *Revelation and Enlightenment*

Part (a) produced a good range of answers, with most candidates showing some awareness of what the issue was. The main weakness in the answers was a failure to give some indication of what an illusion was. Many candidates gave some alternative explanation of where revelations might come from if not from God but failed to make the final step to show that these 'revelations' might not be real and so these candidates failed to get full marks.

Part (b) also produced a good range of answers with most candidates showing some awareness of how people refer to God 'speaking' without them actually hearing a voice. Some candidates gave a solid response to this question, enough to gain two marks, but they failed to develop an idea that they obviously were aware of. It is worth teachers stressing to candidates that a three mark answer could either include three simple points or a development of one of the points made.

Part (c) was intended to be answered in the context of revelation with some overlap with the problem of evil. Some candidates gained credit for including the teleological approach in their answer, without the emphasis on proving God's existence. The best answers made the contrast between the beauty and harmony of creation and the questions raised by natural evils. This question produced the best answers overall for the six mark evaluations and showed that candidates felt comfortable being allowed to discuss topics that had fairly wide ramifications.

Question 3 *The Problem of Evil*

Part (a) was centred on moral evil and the bulk of the candidates included relevant material about evil raising questions about God's loving, powerful nature. Unfortunately, some candidates focused on the answers to the problems of evil, especially the free-will defence, which showed a lot of good knowledge but which was inappropriate in answer to the question set. Candidates who dealt with natural evil with no material that could apply to moral evil penalised themselves.

Part (b) was a simple two mark question about the meaning of natural evil. Many candidates gained a mark by giving a valid example of natural evil. Some found it difficult to get away from the word 'natural' but their answers were clear enough to allow them to be given credit. However, candidates should be encouraged to learn a simple definition that avoids the word 'nature' and 'natural' to ensure that they can easily gain marks for this type of question.

Part (c) was set to allow the candidates to make any reference to a theodicy that they had learned, e.g. the need for natural evil to allow for free will, the vale of soul-making, etc. Credit was given to those answers that included the idea of creation being affected by human sin or the idea of Iblis. Good answers not only presented what the comparative ideas were but also tried to make some statement of how valid the different answers were. The examiners are always mindful that they are dealing with GCSE candidates, so the depth of comment does not have to be great, but it is to the candidates' benefit if it is there.

Question A4 *Science and Religion*

Few candidates simply related a creation story, though there were a few who ignored the rubric and failed to show what the story they told showed about the importance of humans, so they failed to gain any marks. Most candidates presented ideas from the Judaeo-Christian creation stories of human beings in the likeness of God, given dominion over the animals, given free will etc. A simple reference to the story being referred to was sufficient. General statements without any connection to a creation story could not be rewarded.

In part (b) candidates were clear about the fundamentalist (literalist) idea about the sacred text being the word of God so evolution not being acceptable. For the two marks, there had to be an explanation of why the idea of evolution was not acceptable, not simply a statement of the fact. There were some candidates who did not understand the concept of 'fundamentalist'.

Part (c) was set to allow the candidates to examine the comparative acceptability of the Big Bang theory and other theories, whether scientific (e.g. the Steady State theory) or religious (e.g. creation stories). However, for the higher levels there had to be some religious content even if the candidate rejected the religious viewpoint. Some candidates penalised themselves by bringing in the cosmological and teleological argument for the existence of God. These ideas were only partly relevant so some credit could be given if the candidate expressed ideas coherently.

Question B5 *The Existence of God*

Many candidates who chose this option showed some good understanding of the cosmological argument in part (a). The major weakness in the answers was that candidates tended to refer to (and sometimes even limit their answers to) the Big Bang theory, stating that Thomas Aquinas knew about this theory. What some candidates tended to do was to use the argument to explain the cause of the universe rather than showing how the existence of universe could be used to prove the existence of God. Teachers would help candidates by stressing this aspect of the argument more. Very few candidates confused the First Cause argument with the design argument. Some candidates gave a full explanation of one of the first three of Aquinas' Five Ways. Others gave a reasonable account of all three ways. Both of these approaches could gain full marks.

Part (b) tended to be less well done than the other parts of this question. Some candidates gave very thin answers that did not really show any understanding of an argument against the existence of God so had no material to support their answers. Candidates were free to choose whether to focus on a particular argument against the existence of God, e.g. the psychological or social arguments (references to Freud and Marx helped some candidates but were not essential), or to deal with the arguments based on the existence of evil, the imperfections of the creator of this world, etc. Those candidates who focused on a particular approach produced really impressive arguments.

Most candidates gained the first three marks on part (c) by giving an accurate description of what each of the three terms meant. However, only a few went beyond this to give some indication of how the basic attitudes to God of these three groups affected other beliefs or actions. It was possible for candidates who gave a slight development of all three terms to gain full marks.

Part (d) examined the nature of faith, which is on the specification. Those candidates who focused on the nature of faith as going beyond proof managed to score well, especially if they included some idea relating to the human desire to have some type of proof. There were some very good approaches to this question, but equally some candidates did not understand the issue. Some candidates misunderstood the question and argued that believers needed to give proof of their belief; this gained no credit.

Question B6 *The Afterlife*

Most candidates were able to give clear indications of the nature of reincarnation in part (a), making reference to the Hindu tradition and the role of karma. However, very few candidates answered well on resurrection. Too many answers implied that it referred to resuscitation, with a number making links to Lazarus being raised by Jesus. A few good candidates made reference to the individual being raised up to eternal life in heaven/paradise though most candidates managed to gain credit for referring to the individual's life continuing.

Many candidates were able to handle part (b) well. Most made reference to the teachings of religion about the issue, with some drawing a contrast with those religions that believed in reincarnation, accepting that Nirvana was different from the idea of heaven. Challenges to the idea of heaven or paradise came from the lack of proof, and some questioned the nature of a God who makes people suffer on earth before they reach the perfect state. Candidates were not confused by the use of both the words 'heaven' and 'paradise', which are needed since there are differences in the religious understanding of the two terms.

Part (c) tended to produce vague generalisations. Candidates would have benefited from giving some practical examples to support their comments. Sometimes explanations can be best made through examples, especially for six mark AO1 questions.

Most candidates were happy with the technical idea of a near-death experience in part (d), though some confused it with being in a life-threatening situation. The biggest weakness in answers to this question was that candidates failed to bring in any religious dimension. No matter how good the answer is, if there is no religious content in an evaluation answer, it cannot be awarded more than three marks. The question explicitly reminded the candidates to refer to religious ideas, so those who failed to do so had not fully answered the question.