



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

Religious Studies A (4050)

Unit 7: Philosophy of Religion

405007

Report on the Examination

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Unit 7: Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

Candidates generally worked hard on this paper and produced some very pleasing material. Some of the answers seen were so thorough that they could have been written by A-level candidates. Some candidates showed great insight in the topics under consideration and were able to support personal opinions with very mature reflections. While there were some candidates who struggled to express themselves clearly on philosophical issues, it was often obvious that they had some understanding of what they wanted to say and were simply searching for the best means of putting it into English. Most candidates showed interest in the material and were able to make links between different parts of the specification, using information covered under one topic area to make a relevant point in answering a question from elsewhere in the specification.

It would be a good thing for teachers to stress to candidates that questions are set in such a way as to avoid too much overlap of material within a question. If a candidate is using the same points in response to two parts of a question, the chances are that the candidate has missed the central issue being examined in at least one of the part-questions. This applies especially in Part B, where the four questions are set on related topics rather than a repetition of the same topic.

In evaluation questions it is essential that candidates cover different points of view in their answers. There were some candidates who gave detailed accounts of three or four valid approaches to one side of the argument but who failed to look at the other side of the argument at all. Despite the depth, insight and accuracy of their answers, these candidates could not gain more than 4 out of the 6 marks available for these questions. Candidates also need to take into account the number of marks available for a particular question. This is reflected in the space available for answers to Part A questions. Candidates who write an excessive amount when there are only 2 marks available are wasting their time and risk running out of time to answer the higher mark questions effectively in Part B. Time management is an essential skill, especially for this paper, where candidates often like to express their own thoughts quite forcefully.

Part A

Question A1 The Existence of God

Part (a) was answered very well by the vast majority of the candidates. Most were able to give detailed accounts of the argument, especially of Paley's watch. Some candidates gave explanations of both Aquinas' and Paley's arguments, which was unnecessary. The only reason both illustrations were given was because there is no requirement to study a particular form of the design argument; by including both illustrations it was hoped that all candidates would be able to relate to at least one form of the argument. A reasonable number of the candidates gave the impression that they saw the arguments as proving that God was the maker/designer, rather than that the argument was used to prove that God himself exists. As there were only 4 marks available and the candidates were able to present the form of the arguments clearly, they were not penalised. However, if a similar question were to be set as a 6-mark question, those who did not clearly link the argument with the existence of God would not gain full marks.

Part (b) was a 2-mark question which simply asked for the way a religious experience could show that God existed. Some candidates wrote mini-philosophical essays, including noetic experiences. While very impressive, these answers went far beyond what was required or what could be credited.

Part (c) elicited some excellent responses, with many candidates including reference to the fact that faith goes beyond proof. The weakness in some responses was an inability to present some form of different viewpoint such as the need for faith to be shown to be at least based on reason. There were some candidates who dealt with the question, ‘God cannot be proven’; these failed to gain full marks as they did not use the material they had available to address the question set.

Question A2 The Afterlife

Most candidates had some understanding of out of body experiences in part (a), but a surprising number thought they were ‘outer body experiences’. Those candidates who referred to near-death experiences were credited fully as there is no expectation at this level that candidates distinguish between the two types of experience.

Many candidates use relevant, standard material for their answers to part (b), including references to scriptures and details of reported cases of evidence for reincarnated individuals. A brief explanation of the evidence was needed, not a simple statement of what the evidence was. There were some candidates who simply gave an explanation of resurrection and reincarnation. These answers could not be credited.

Very few candidates failed to gain full marks in part (c). The main reasons for failure was that the candidate simply referred to the way the idea of heaven is used by some people to refer to a very good earthly experience, without reference to the afterlife. In part (d) many candidates found it difficult to examine the evidence for or against reincarnation, and some simply explained what reincarnation is, which could not be credited. A simple presentation of evidence would not score highly. Some evaluation of the validity/non-validity of the evidence was needed for full marks.

Question A3 Revelation and Enlightenment

Most candidates answered part (a)(i) well, with many referring to the passage, ‘man was made in the image of God,’ and showing how this meant that man reflects God’s qualities. Part (a)(ii) was a single mark question that required no explanation. Those who simply stated ‘nature’ were awarded the mark, as were those who gave examples of nature. Nothing that referred exclusively to specific revelation was credited.

Most candidates handled part (b) well, usually producing a series of relevant reasons that could suggest that the experience was not of divine origin. The better answers explained one or two of these rather than simply listing all possible reasons.

The top marks for part (c) demanded the higher level thinking skills, but less able candidates were able to score the lower marks simply by referring to visions that might only affect one person. Many candidates used examples to reinforce their points. Common examples included the vision at Lourdes which has led to many people using this site as a place of pilgrimage; Pharaohs’ dreams as interpreted by Joseph and how it affected the Jewish people; and Saul’s vision on the road to Damascus that proved a turning point in the development of the early Christian Church.

Question A4 Science and Religion

Part (a) produced many excellent answers, showing that candidates’ RE lessons had reinforced their science lessons. The most common weakness was a failure to refer to, or to show clear understanding of, the concepts of survival of the fittest and natural selection.

In part (b) some candidates failed to recognise what was meant by a religious story of creation. Pandora’s box is not a religious story and the Fall of Adam and Eve is not a creation story, so neither of these could be credited. There were only 3 marks available for this question so candidates were instructed not to retell the story they had selected. The

central points of the story were credited. Some candidates went far beyond the actual story and referred to philosophical concepts such as God being omniscient. As most stories chosen were not pieces of philosophy and the candidates had extrapolated from the story rather than produced material that was an integral part of the story, this type of answer could not be credited.

Some candidates went off on the wrong tack with part (c) and answered it as another question on the proofs of the existence of God. Good candidates looked at how the theory of evolution might appear to be a threat to the creative role of God and brought in alternative explanations. Some candidates showed misunderstanding of the Intelligent Design approach but were often able to use this material to present an alternative point of view.

Part B

Question B5 The Problem of Evil

Part (a) was well answered by the majority of candidates. Most chose to represent the Fall of Adam and Eve. For 6 marks quite a lot of accurate detail is needed, at least about the meaning of the story, if not all the details of its content. Many candidates failed to present the types of suffering that followed from the disobedience. The question was about the origin of evil, so any idea or story that dealt with a later example such as the story of Job could not be credited.

The most common weakness in part (b) was that many candidates could present some idea of the inconsistent triad but failed to show how it implied that God does not exist. There were many excellent answers that included reference to the gift of free will that required the existence of God.

There were many possible approaches to this part (c). Practical responses as well as emotional ones were credited. Some candidates presented a whole series of answers that were left undeveloped. As only two responses had been asked for, only two could be credited. Some candidates stated clearly what the responses might be but failed to explain how they might help or work in the chosen context. Candidates need to be more aware of what is required by the command 'explain'.

There were many detailed answers to part (d), often using real cases to support the arguments. There was a notable number of candidates who failed to include any religious dimension, apparently presuming that simply mentioning 'free will' counted as a religious response; this is not the case. A number of good candidates failed to present any argument that could be used to support the notion that suffering is always a bad thing. Candidates must not presume that the examiner will read into the answer points that have not been explicitly stated.

Question B6 The Characteristics of God

Many candidates gave basic information about their chosen words in part (a), with few candidates choosing to write about truth. The question only asked for the positive aspects of using the words about God, so no credit was given for references to the negative aspects of these words; this material properly belongs in the next question. There was little reference to the idea of God as King of Heaven.

While some of the more able candidates were able to give excellent answers to part (b), referring to the weaknesses of the words examined in part (a), many candidates simply repeated information that they had already presented in part (a). They overlooked the important word 'prefer' and did not bring in the contrast between these words and other words that have been used about God, particularly those that had a sex/gender dimension.

Part (c) was probably the worst answered question on the paper. Many candidates did not understand the concept of God as personal, and a large number of those who attempted this question tried to compare God for the individual and for the group. Very few candidates brought in the dimension of transcendence, but those who referred to this aspect of God found that the rest of the answer flowed very easily.

Many candidates brought in the concept of free will in answer to part (d); there was no problem of overlap here as candidates had to choose either to answer this question or B5. The best answers referred to the idea that God is all-knowing but that he freely chooses to limit or not to use this knowledge so that humans can be free. Some candidates brought in the question of whether the future is there to be known even by God.

This year's paper demonstrated that candidates of all abilities are able to tackle philosophical concepts with at least some maturity and depth of thought. The more able candidates seem to relish the challenge of answering all questions in depth; obviously class discussions and debates have had a major influence on the thinking of these candidates.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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