



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Religious Studies 4050

Unit 7: Philosophy of Religion

405007

Report on the Examination

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Unit 7: Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

Students on the whole responded to the paper very well. There were many insightful answers, indicating that students were comfortable with the material in the examination. There were few blank spaces on the question paper and not many answers that were totally wrong. Students must be reminded that the papers are scanned before they are marked. Therefore, it is important, that all relevant material for an answer is legible and visible to the marker. If a student does not have enough space to complete an answer or needs to correct a wrong answer, they must use separate sheets of paper that can be attached, rather than trying to squeeze information into areas that might not be scanned. The blank pages at the back of the examination booklet should only be used for the answer to Part B. Some handwriting was very difficult to read and, while examiners will do all in their power to ensure all correct answers are credited, sometimes the student makes this job very difficult.

This year students handled the AO2 questions really well, if anything overall better than they handled the AO1 questions. However, some of the AO2 answers were very formulaic and this limited the chances of getting the highest marks. Students should be discouraged from any format that is simply a glorified list of arguments for and against. The weakest students might need this support, but for the higher marks, an answer needs an element of genuine reasoned consideration. Some included evaluation in some of the AO1 questions. There are certain AO1 questions (like A1(a)) that might allow for an element of both sides of an argument, but when this happens, there is no requirement for the material to be evaluated, merely presented. Students need to be reminded that the evaluation questions, whether they are 3 mark or 6 mark questions, have a very obvious format that should automatically guide them into the right approach to the answer.

Part A

Question A1: The Existence of God

(a) Most of the students handled this question well and scored highly. The really good answers included reference to the unprovable nature of God. Many good responses showed how there were difficulties on both sides of the argument, with no definite proof either way. Other answers that also gained full marks tended to focus on the negative sides of arguments, like the problems raised by the existence of evil and suffering. It was perfectly acceptable for a student to focus on one issue and develop that, rather than give a variety of approaches.

(b) Most students presented good summaries of one of Thomas Aquinas' cosmological arguments. No credit was given to anybody who dealt with the design argument. When students failed to gain full marks, it tended to be because they focused on just one of the approaches, so they failed to show that the cause, motion etc could not go back to infinity or else there would be nothing now, therefore there had to be a first cause or motion.

(c) Many of the students wrote extensively in answer to this question, with many including their own position in their responses, whether as atheists, theists or agnostics. The bulk of the answers included reference to people being given free will and having the right to take their time over making any decision. Some students found it difficult to give a counter-argument to this and simply made reference to believers or atheists wanting the undecided to join them. This type of response was creditable. The really good answer brought in the unprovable nature of God and the reflection that perhaps agnosticism is the only honest approach. The counter to this was that faith goes beyond proof, so people should be willing to make a faith commitment of some kind.

Question A2: Revelation

(a) While there were many good answers to this question, a number of students did not make the links explicit so failed to get full marks. For example, many referred to telling things about an artist through his painting, but they did not show how this applied to God. It was surprising the number that failed to state that God created nature. Maybe they thought that implying it was sufficient. Unfortunately, examiners can only mark what is in the written answer, not what might be in the mind of the student. Those who referred to seeing God through human actions did not get any credit.

(b) This question was well answered by nearly all the students. Getting to know someone by talking and listening to them was the valid starting point for most of the answers.

(c) This was probably one of the best answered questions on the whole paper. Students were able to rehearse the arguments for and against religious revelations well, with many using good examples including Mother Julian of Norwich and Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha). Some students got bogged down dealing with revelation through nature and other people, which, while valid to some extent, was far more difficult to evaluate than dealing with visions and dreams. It is better if students do not use near-death experiences in this context as that material fits in better with the issue of life after death.

Question A3: The Characteristics of God

(a) Many students found this a difficult question. While some credit could be given for comments that referred to God's all-loving and all-forgiving nature, only a few focused on the idea of the God who is aware of human weakness and empathises or "suffers with" humanity. "All-compassionate" is a term on the specification so students should be aware that it may to appear on the exam paper.

(b) Most students answered this question well, often going beyond what is required for a 2 mark answer. The main weakness appeared in those who only described why God was called "Father" or why that term was not desirable, failing to bring in material that included the idea of calling God "parent".

(c) Answers for this question could deal with either God as immanent or as transcendent as the negative in the evaluation statement opened up both possibilities. There were quite a number of students who did not understand the term "immanent" and tried to answer about God being personal, which is not quite the same idea, though some credit could be given where the ideas overlap. Really good answers brought in the fact that God can be both immanent and transcendent, showing they appreciated the nature of religious language when used about the characteristics of God.

(d) The best answers really grappled with the ideas contained in the Hindu Trimurti, the Christian idea of Trinity and the Jewish and Muslim idea of the absolute uniqueness of God. A number of students confused the Muslim 99 names of Allah with different forms for God, which was unacceptable. Weaker responses confused the forms of God with the characteristics like all-loving, all-powerful etc. Examiners tried to credit relevant points of overlap, but students should be aware of the arguments about God in one or many forms.

Question A4: The Problem with Evil

(a) Very few students gained less than full marks on this question. Some of the explanations of the difference between natural and moral evil were clumsy, often using the term “natural” in their explanations. However, the fact that students were allowed to use examples enabled them to show that they understood what they were talking about so could be fully credited.

(b) Some students wrote about how believers can come to the aid of those affected by natural evil, supporting the work of charity organisations etc. However, they did not link this to helping the believer to become a better person, as the question required, so they often failed to gain full marks. Good answers brought in links with the Irenaen theodicy of soul-making or the use of free will in a world where things can and do go wrong. Some students took the opposite stance, that natural disasters can make people question or reject their faith, which was a perfectly acceptable response.

(c) While most students had some idea that believers claim that humans have free will as a God-given right, many limited themselves to that point, saying that humans could do what they want, which includes hurting others. Only the best brought out the idea that God cannot interfere in the world if it means limiting human free will, now that he has given it. A number of students limited their answer to the fall of Adam and Eve, ignoring the fact that free will is a constant presence.

(d) While most students had some idea of karma as the law of consequences, many explanations were very superficial. It was surprising how many failed to bring in the idea of karma affecting the next reincarnation. Some answers merely stated what karma was and ignored the part of the question about how karma explains why there is evil in the world. There were some students who stated that karma applies to western as well as eastern religions, which shows a misunderstanding of the idea.

Part B

Question B5: Science and Religion

(a) Most students mentioned the Big Bang as an explanation for the origin of the universe, but their knowledge stopped at that point. Very few students were able to give a decent explanation of the idea of the singularity being too dense and too hot, exploding, rapidly leading to the creation of hydrogen and helium as the temperatures fell which led to the creation of other elements and gradually to the formation of stars and planets over a 15 billion year period. Those who tried to give an explanation of the Steady State theory fared even worse. No credit could be given for answers that dealt with the formation of the earth or for the idea of evolution. Detailed scientific knowledge is not required, but an outline knowledge of the Big Bang, as above, is necessary for understanding this topic.

(b) Most students limited themselves to the seven-day story of creation, which was perfectly acceptable, though there would have been more material available if they had included Genesis 2 or a creation story from another world religion. The most common comparison made was between the Genesis 1 story, particularly the literalist approach, and current scientific thinking. Those students who made reference to symbolic understandings of the religious creation stories were able to develop their arguments much more fully.

(c)(i) Most students had a very limited understanding of the Darwinian evolutionary theory. Most referred to the words “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest” without giving any details of these ideas. Weaker answers simply referred to humans evolving from apes, which was barely enough to merit a single mark. The important word in the question was “explain” which most students failed to do.

(c)(ii) Most students used a literalist approach to Genesis 1 to answer this question, which was perfectly acceptable. Those who dealt with the concepts of the unerring word of God and God’s perfection as displayed in his unchanging creation managed to handle this question well.

(d) There were many strong answers to this question. The responses to this question made most use of Biblical and other religious quotes to support the students’ arguments. It was good to see genuine thought processes at work, with students comparing a religious viewpoint with the consequences of taking a purely evolutionary response to the development of humanity. Even when students did not have a personal religious position, most were able to justify their own attitude either of humans just being a lucky freak of evolution that will eventually die out or being the most important aspect of creation. Some also brought in the idea of humans having the effect of a virus on creation.

Question B6: The Afterlife

(a)(i) Students found this question on resurrection very difficult, even though they only had to explain on what grounds people believed in resurrection, not what resurrection means. Apart from referring to Jesus having been raised from the dead, most had very little to say. Too many of them said that somebody recovering from a near fatal accident or operation was resurrection. Unfortunately, some students referred to the rising of Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter as proof of resurrection, which led them onto misunderstanding the recovery from near-death situations. Since both Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter later died, it might be better to see these as cases of restoration to life rather than resurrection. Very few students made reference to Biblical or Quranic teachings or to the effect that belief in a heavenly afterlife has on the understanding of this life and its problems.

(a)(ii) Students did a little better with reincarnation, as most of them were able to refer to coming back to an earthly existence. Many also linked up the idea of the effects of karma on the next reincarnation. Only a few made reference to the cyclical nature of the idea of reincarnation or what is needed to escape reincarnation, all of which is acceptable material in this question.

(b) Most students who chose to do Question 6 managed to produce good answers to this part. There were many responses that took the line of not having to be religious to be good and that both resurrection and reincarnation should reward good acts. Many also brought in the idea of the forgiveness of God for non-religious people as long as they had been focused on doing good in their lives. Some students even referred to the parable of the Sheep and the Goats in this context.

(c) Those who were able to give some details from an account of a near-death experience scored well on this question. However, the majority of those who attempted the question gave very superficial answers. There were a notable number of students who referred to near-misses in car accidents and the like, showing that they had misunderstood the term.

(d). Most students gave a basic religious versus atheistic response to this question, but did not develop either side fully. Some seemed to think that resurrection meant that life was over, so this limited their ability to compare ideas. Some students who “thought outside the box” got credit for referring to possible life elsewhere and our inability to say what happens after death.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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