

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2010 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334). Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX

Unit 4 Religious Philosophy and Ultimate Questions

General Comments

The full range of ability was evident in this first year of the new examination. The paper was accessible to most candidates and even less able candidates were able to gain a reasonable number of marks.

The emphasis on evaluation allowed candidates to show that they had considered a range of religious and philosophical questions and could support their views with reasoned argument. While the three-mark evaluation questions were very well done, the six-mark questions posed a greater challenge. Candidates successfully argued on two sides of a question, but did not sufficiently develop their arguments to gain six marks. 'Informed insights' (at Levels 5 and 6) implies that a reference to religion must be more than a generalised statement.

It is also important to note that evaluation skills are being tested in these questions, not merely the ability to learn the positions taken by atheists, agnostics, theists, and particular groups of believers. Some answers lacked any evaluation by the candidate, but were instead a list of what different groups of people might think, many of whom agreed with each other. Weaker candidates did not address the stimulus statement. This occurred more frequently in the three-mark evaluations where candidates said what they thought in general about a topic rather than argue about the point being made.

Question 1 *The Existence of God*

- 01 Most candidates knew that an atheist does not believe in God so would provide alternative non-religious explanations of the experience described in the stimulus.
- 02 Most were able to argue that religious experiences may prove that God exists to those who experience them but are not necessarily convincing to others. With a little development of these points candidates could gain the three marks.
- 03 The best responses explained the First Cause argument in a logical way. Some jumped straight to the conclusion that God was the First Cause of the universe or missed out a logical step in the argument and lost marks. Others clearly did not know the argument and instead gave the argument from design or the creation story in Genesis.
- 04 Those who did not know the First Cause argument found it difficult to argue against it in 04. The best responses in 04 were those that argued that if everything has a cause, then God too must have a cause, the universe itself could be eternal and the big bang caused the universe not God. Some put forward general arguments against God's existence or the problems of suffering and evil, which are problems for a designer of the universe rather than a First Cause.
- 05 Many candidates used the design argument which they knew very well and then outlined its limitations: flaws in nature, apparent design through evolution and the lack of proof that God was the designer. This approach allowed them to reach the higher levels of response. Others merely discussed whether or not God created the world without mentioning design. Some credit was given but levels were limited as the stimulus was not addressed. Some candidates strayed from the issue by discussing a flaw in Paley's argument, that a stone is part of nature so should not be dismissed as lacking design. It

was clear that students had been taught this criticism of Paley, but their responses did not show clear relevance to the question.

Question 2 *Revelation*

- 06 Most candidates spoke of the beauty and complexity of the natural world that inspires awe and wonder at its creation. Some talked about Moses and the burning bush, a specific revelation of God through nature.
- 07 Many listed qualities of God such as omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence that could be found in scripture. Others merely described the contents of scriptures without addressing what could be learned about God from these. The best answers combined these approaches. Those who outlined God's qualities but gave examples of how they were shown in scriptures through God's actions or commandments achieved the highest levels, but unfortunately these were rare.
- 08 A number of candidates omitted this question. Some did not make it clear in their responses that they knew the difference between a person's conscience and their mind or imagination. The best responses used the argument from morality for God's existence and spoke of conscience as the voice of God, or alternatively said that other ways of knowing God were better and elaborated on these. Some argued successfully that conscience does not prevent people from doing wrong; people have free will, so conscience could make people question God's power or control.
- 09 Most candidates knew the meaning of omnipotence and could expand on it in terms of God's almighty power.
- 10 Some candidates were confused about what 'God making himself known today' meant. The best answers argued that there were more revelations of God in the past as evidenced in scriptures, but that today people are more sceptical or less religious. Also God makes himself known to people through prayer, worship and in the lives of people like Mother Teresa. Those who argued that God was not making himself known by not stopping suffering and evil were credited, although this was not strictly on the target of the question.

Question 3 *The Problems of Evil and Suffering*

- 11 Most candidates scored well on this question.
- 12 Responses to 12 varied in quality. The question sought practical responses of believers to suffering, for example works of charity and prayer for oneself and others who were suffering. Attitudes towards suffering were also accepted as a response and many successfully said that suffering was part of God's plan, a test of faith and something that could encourage people to change their lives for the better or appreciate the blessings they had already received. Some merely described (sometimes listed), rather than explained, what religious believers might do, so their answers were not sufficiently developed for Levels 3 and 4.
- 13 Many candidates were able to tackle this question by questioning God's love in the face of suffering, but at the same time recognising that much suffering is caused by humans not

God. Less able candidates merely repeated the statement as their opinion without supporting it with reasons. Unsupported opinions gain no credit.

- 14 Most candidates gained two marks by mentioning two sources of evil, or by explaining one of them in some detail. Pandora's Box was not credited. Candidates are expected to study evil in the context of the six major world religions.
- 15 Successful answers contained reference to free will and the fact that as long as human beings are free to choose evil, it will continue, yet on the other hand free will also means people could choose to be good if they lived by the teachings of their religion. Unfortunately many were so pessimistic that they failed to consider another point of view. They could not foresee any circumstances in which evil would cease to exist. Better responses mentioned that for religious believers this will be the case in the Kingdom of God, or when people reach nibbana / moksha / mukti / heaven / paradise.

Question 4 *Immortality*

- 16 Most candidates knew two different ways that humans could be immortal, for example as a memory of others, a legacy, heaven, reincarnation or resurrection.
- 17 Some candidates ignored the words in the question 'found in scripture (holy books)' and wrote about evidence for immortality in general. If the ideas could be found in scriptures they were credited, but the best responses were those that described Christian accounts of Jesus' death, resurrection, appearances to the disciples and ascension, Muslim teachings about interrogation by angels, barzakh and the Day of Judgement, and Hindu teachings about samsara and reincarnation.
- 18 Many argued that at the moment of death nothing happens, brain activity ceases, there is no proof that anyone has a soul and there is no God to which a soul could return. Others argued in support of the statement using religious beliefs. Those who argued both points of view easily picked up the available three marks.
- 19 Most candidates could at least respond 'People say there is no life after death because they do not believe in it.' This was accepted for one mark. Most found it easy to talk about lack of proof, atheism, scientific evidence of the body decaying and materialist arguments. Some candidates were tempted to put in opposing views here as if it were an evaluation question. This approach gained them no further credit.
- 20 A number of candidates did not refer specifically enough to religious arguments in their answer, limiting the levels of response. Most could gain three or four marks by arguing about the relative veracity of sightings of ghosts which if true indicated that people's souls lived on in some way. Some referred to claims by mediums that the dead can be contacted, but fewer candidates seemed to realise that many religions are suspicious of mediums and the occult, and in the case of Jesus' appearances after his resurrection, the gospels stress that Jesus was not a ghost. The subject matter did generate lively discussion even among the less able candidates.

Question 5 *Miracles*

- 21 Candidates interpreted this question in a variety of ways: why people believe in miracles at all, and why they believe God as opposed to humans performs them. Anything that

sensibly answered the question was credited, but two reasons were needed to gain two marks rather than one developed reason.

- 22 Those who knew a miracle from the Bible gained full credit if they described it in sufficient detail. Others also did well by describing Muhammad's reception of the Qur'an, the Buddha's taming of an elephant, miracles at Lourdes and statues of Ganesha drinking milk. Those who described the miracle of Stairwell B were not credited as this was not a miracle from scripture or a religious tradition. Knowledge of scriptural miracles was not always secure with many candidates only having a slender grasp of details.
- 23 Most were able to argue that depending on one's definition of a 'miracle', humans, for example, doctors, can perform miracles on a daily basis, however only a transcendent deity could perform miracles that break the laws of nature and cannot be explained by science. Some mentioned the miracle of childbirth, which was accepted. Some thought the question asked whether humans could experience miracles, rather than perform them, so lost marks.
- 24 Knowledge and understanding of the philosophical problems miracles raise for believers in God were not evident in many candidates' responses. Successful responses came from those who said that miracles raise questions about God's justice and love if he only helps some people not others. Why would God ignore the deaths of millions to save one person, and why, having created the laws of nature, would God break them? Weaker candidates merely thought up some problems miracles might cause in general, for example too many miracles might occur or a person might not like the miracle. These were not credited.
- 25 Candidates again struggled to include specific religious arguments which could secure them the higher levels. The best candidates discussed the definition of a miracle, as some miracles would be possible if defined as an amazing event, rather than as a transgression of the laws of nature. Hume's argument was evident in some very good responses. Less able candidates confined their remarks to whether they had personally witnessed a miracle or not and rehearsed the general arguments about lack of evidence, proof, and reliability of witnesses.

Question 6 *Science and Religion*

- 26 Most knew that the Big Bang theory involved an explosion but there was a wide variety of interpretations about what actually exploded (rocks, meteors, planets). Very few mentioned a singularity that expanded with the speed and force of an explosion after which planets and stars were formed when the matter sent out by the explosion cooled down.
- 27 The most popular religious creation story was that of Genesis 1, sometimes combined with Genesis 2. Many had sound knowledge and understanding of the story, gaining at least level three.
- 28 Many candidates could argue that God could have caused the Big Bang and as long as creation stories are not taken literally, it was possible to believe both in God and the Big Bang. Alternatively, atheists would not accept both nor would literalists. Some candidates lost marks by arguing that the Big Bang created the universe but God created or designed the earth. This was not accepted as God would not be God if the cause of the Big Bang was something other than God.

- 29 Most candidates could at least say that religious people had long believed the earth was the centre of the universe as this was the understanding of the church based on the Bible, and that this scientific discovery of a solar-centred universe challenged their beliefs. However, many did not address the crux of the challenge to belief, i.e. that humans were no longer at the centre of God's creation so lost importance as God's special creation and that Galileo's discovery that the movement of the planets was natural challenged God's power and control. Some misread the question and merely explained why the earth was the centre of the universe from a scientific point of view. A number of candidates left the question blank.
- 30 Many candidates said that scientific truth has more evidence as it is based on repeated testing and experiment whereas religious truth cannot be proved and is subjective. Some saw the worth of religious truth in giving purpose in life and guiding people in moral behaviour. The best responses talked about the different questions asked by science and religion and saw the importance of both while acknowledging the debate between the two in the modern era.