



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

Religious Studies B (4055)

**Unit 4: Religious Philosophy and 40554
Ultimate Questions**

Report on the Examination

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Unit 4: Religious Philosophy and Ultimate Questions

General Comments

The full range of ability was again evident in this second year of the examination. The paper was accessible to most candidates and even weaker 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. However, some candidates took this emphasis on evaluation into AO1 questions, expressing their opinions or giving two sides to every question asked, to the detriment of their marks.

The three-mark evaluation questions were again very well done. Full marks could be obtained by offering a well-developed reason for the candidate's opinion, or several brief reasons on one or both sides of the issue. Candidates who may find it difficult to write a sustained argument could be encouraged to consider both sides, since one reason for each viewpoint would gain them at least two of the three marks.

Centres had prepared candidates well for the six-mark questions. There was a noted improvement over last year with candidates offering quite substantial arguments on two sides of an issue, including examples of points made and 'informed insights' about religion (for Levels 5 and 6). Some very good candidates lost marks because their answers were not coherently argued. They knew the positions taken by atheists, agnostics, theists, and particular groups of believers, but listed these without using them in an argument for or against the stimulus statement. It is important to remind candidates that evaluation skills are being tested in these questions, so that subject knowledge needs to be used in support of the argument, not in place of it.

There were a number of rubric infringements this year. Some candidates answered all six questions, usually not very well. The four questions that scored highest were counted, but centres should advise candidates to choose the four topics about which they know the most and concentrate on those. This would allow them to gain a higher overall score by writing more thoughtfully and in more detail instead of wasting time trying to answer every question.

Centres should be aware that whole questions on topics will consist of four or five parts, making up a total of 18 marks, 9 marks for AO1 and 9 for AO2. There will always be two AO2 questions, one a 3-mark question and the other a 6-mark question. Marks for individual questions for AO1 may differ from year to year, but, for each whole question, there will always be two or three questions for AO1, totalling 9 marks. Therefore any combination is possible, e.g. 2, 3, 4, or 1, 3, 5, or 3, 3, 3 etc. Whichever combination is chosen will apply to all whole questions on the paper. This enables examiners to examine the AO1 assessment objective in relation to the specification in the most appropriate way, depending on the content being examined from year to year. This is fairer to candidates. It enables technical terms, or more challenging parts of the specification to be examined appropriately and provides candidates with opportunities to write at greater length on issues where there is a greater body of knowledge or explanation available.

Question 1 The Existence of God

Questions 01 and 02 were answered well by candidates who had studied the argument from morality and the objections to it. It appeared that many candidates had not studied this argument so did not attempt an answer or tried to write about other arguments for God's existence which they knew. A few confused 'morality' with 'immortality'. Those who said that people have an inbuilt moral sense, that this comes from a source outside themselves and that this proves the existence of a higher authority, i.e. God, gained full marks in 01. In 02, a number of candidates mistakenly offered the fact that people sin as an objection to the morality argument. However, wrongdoing does not disprove an inbuilt moral sense as people can go against their conscience; it does not mean that they do not have one. Credit was given to those who said that people had different moral codes, or that not everyone felt guilty, that morality comes from society not God, or is a product of evolution as cooperation helps people survive.

In 03 most candidates were able to evaluate the argument from religious experience by concentrating on why religious experience could be trusted or not. Fewer referred directly to the idea that God must exist because so many people had experienced him. Question 04 was well done by most candidates who knew many reasons why some people do not believe in God. Most chose the challenge of science, the fact of evil and suffering, and personal reasons such as unanswered prayers, upbringing, or lack of religious experience. In 05 marks were lost by those candidates who did not know the First Cause argument and concentrated on design or general arguments against God. Some credit was given but many responses wandered too far away from the stimulus to gain the higher levels.

Question 2 Revelation

Most candidates gained both marks in 06 for saying that prayer is communicating with God and a means of bringing about a close personal relationship with him. In 07 while many gained full marks for definitions of general and special revelation with examples of each, a number of candidates lost marks for giving an incorrect distinction between them. They mistakenly thought that general revelation was to a group of people, and special revelation was to a single person. While it is true that general revelation is open to everyone (so in a sense a large group), it is not true that special revelation only happens to individuals, as evidenced in the Toronto blessing. Question 08 proved to be a good means of differentiation. Weaker candidates did not understand that having many religions with different ideas of God and ways of living might suggest to some that the revelations on which they were based could not all be true.

In 09, most candidates who knew the story of Paul on the Damascus road could gain full marks. The selection of scriptural story was the key here. Those who chose Moses and the burning bush or Angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary did not know enough details of the stories to gain 4 marks. Non-scriptural stories of Davey Falcus or Bernadette of Lourdes were not accepted, nor were more than one example of special revelation (a rubric infringement on this question). Credit was given in 10 for arguments that all revelations are subjective, difficult to prove and the result of drugs, hallucinations, mental illness and the like, and on the other hand general revelations were not illusions, revelations could change lives, and the sheer number of revelations meant that not all could be illusory.

Question 3 The Problems of Evil and Suffering

Responses to 11 varied. Some knew that describing evil as a ‘psychological phenomenon’ referred to mental reasons for a person’s bad behaviour, mainly influenced by upbringing, childhood abuse, or other societal factors. Others did not understand the term, and merely said that it means it is ‘psychological’. Candidates should be reminded that technical terms need to be explained in a way that allows the examiner to see that the candidate understands. Question 12 required knowledge of religious teachings about the origins of evil. Many could give detailed accounts of the Fall in Genesis, and the best accounts included the banishing of Lucifer from heaven and the concepts of free will and original sin. Others added Buddhist ideas about craving, selfishness and the three poisons as the source of all evil and discussed the law of kamma. Those who lost marks here told stories about evil that were not related to its origins, for example, Job or Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness. In 13 most candidates could gain at least two marks for arguing that people have free will and so a devil does not make people do bad things. Those who lost marks here did not understand the phrase ‘a personal being (devil)’ and thought that blaming people for wrong doing was not very nice.

Question 14 was not well done over all because many candidates answered **why** religious believers should help people who are suffering, rather than **how** they might help them. Three marks were easily gained by those who read the question correctly as there were many practical ways of helping, either individually or through organisations that help the poor. Too many otherwise able candidates explained why believers should help others or gave lectures on why the suffering was deserved instead of indicating practical help. Many candidates were able to tackle 15 by questioning whether a loving God would have a plan for people that included suffering. Many defended God’s plan as unknowable, but pointed out the positive benefits of some suffering as a test of faith, teaching a lesson, bringing people closer to God or even exerting justice as punishment for sin. On the other hand free will, natural suffering and God’s transcendence were cited to defend God from the charge that his plan for humankind is cruel. Some successfully argued that suffering was just part of life, and explained karma as a reason for people’s suffering based on their own actions. This was a question in which a number of candidates merely listed everything they had learned about suffering without using their knowledge in argument, or indeed, on the correct side of the argument.

Question 4 Immortality

In 16, most candidates gained two marks for knowing that a legacy was a way of being remembered after death through one’s achievements, e.g. William Shakespeare who was pictured on the paper. Question 17 was well done as most could argue that immortality meant life after death, but a legacy was not really the same thing and might fade or be destroyed over time. In 18 most could give channelling, near death experiences, ghosts and scriptural accounts as evidence for an afterlife. Level 4 could be achieved in a variety of ways. Some chose one of these pieces of evidence and went into detail, others chose two and developed each, others mentioned all four. Religious beliefs in reincarnation, rebirth and resurrection were accepted even though strictly speaking these are not ‘evidence’ in one sense, but they are reasons why some people believe there is a life after death. Question 19 was not well known. Those who were familiar with the term ‘dualism’ could gain at least two marks for saying that humans have two basic natures, physical and spiritual. At death the body dies but the soul lives on. The third mark could be obtained by developing these points, for example by saying that the soul is linked to the body while alive but separates at death or by giving the example of belief in reincarnation. Most tackled 20 by arguing that the soul cannot be seen, is not physical, has not been observed in space, is a metaphor for personality, so does not exist, but on the other hand it is the essence of the person that lives

on after death, without it belief in an afterlife is futile, and so many religions apart from Buddhism believe in its existence as the part of God in each person that it must exist. A common error throughout this question was attributing belief in a soul and reincarnation to Buddhism.

Question 5 Miracles

Most answered 21 by saying that since such events were impossible, there must be alternative explanations, e.g. wishful thinking, absorbent stone, resin leaking in the wood, desire to make a shrine famous, etc. Many also mentioned that these instances lacked an important aspect of a miracle, that it should help people or have a good outcome. In 22 most could explain why religious people were inclined to believe that miracles could occur, whether for personal reasons, trust in scriptural accounts or belief that God's power and love is revealed in these events. Some answered why miracles do not happen, or gave reasons why people believed in miracles but then wrote why they were wrong to do so. This was a three mark question but not an evaluation question, so candidates wasted precious time writing counter arguments when they were asked only for reasons for belief in miracles. Question 23 was a good differentiator. A number of candidates did not understand the question's import: whether belief in miracles is necessary for religious faith. Some very good answers considered both sides: that while faith is more about belief in God and living a moral life, so miracles should not be necessary for a believer, nevertheless miracles confirm believers' faith, are the basis for some religions (e.g. Christianity is based on the resurrection of Jesus) and are present in scriptures which believers should trust.

Those who knew Hume's arguments against miracles answered 24 with ease by discussing the difficulty of finding evidence that the laws of nature have been broken, the unreliability of witnesses to miracles (uneducated, gullible, lacking in scientific knowledge, biased etc.), the fact that religions depend on miracles to claim truth but they cannot all be right, and the fact that Hume himself had never experienced one. Marks were more limited for those who gave general objections to miracles without evident knowledge of Hume. Most candidates could argue in 25 that God appears unfair when he chooses certain individuals to help while ignoring others, and that an almighty, all-loving God should prevent suffering in the first place or at least help larger numbers of people rather than performing trivial acts like making statues drink milk. On the other hand people should not question God's justice or reasons for helping one person rather than another. God was not being unfair, he was showing his love and care, strengthening the faith of many and giving hope to all.

Question 6 Science and Religion

Question 26 was not well answered overall. More able candidates gained two marks easily by saying that science asks 'how' and religion asks 'why'. Others said that science deals with the study of the laws of nature whereas religion looks for purpose and meaning in life. However, many lost marks by arguing that 'science says the Big Bang caused the universe and religion says God created the world in seven days.' This response is giving two different answers to the same question about the origins of the universe, rather than explaining how science and religion answer different questions. Just because the answers are different doesn't mean the questions are necessarily so. Others talked about different methodologies: 'science has facts to back it up, and religion is just people's opinions.' This may be some candidates' perceptions of the difference between science and religion, but it does not explain the different questions each asks.

In 27 most could guess the difference between 'absolute truth' and 'evolving, changing truth' and give an example of at least one of them. Weaker candidates did not understand that absolute truth is more like 'there are no square circles' than merely truth that has a lot of

evidence to back it up. There is a lot of evidence for the Big Bang but it is not an example of absolute truth because new evidence may come to light as science progresses. Others used examples that merely clouded the issue even though their definitions were correct. ‘The sky is blue’ was cited as an absolute truth, yet it is something that changes from day to day and varies in the eye of the beholder. Some erroneously thought that evolving, changing truth was that which no one could decide upon, missing the point that new discoveries might alter the way in which certain things are interpreted. In 28 most thought that religion and science would never agree about the origins of the universe. Others argued convincingly that many scientists are religious believers and accept the truth of both science and religion, particularly if they do not take creation stories literally. Fewer seemed to realise that science does not conflict with the teachings of many religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism) and is actually seen as supporting faith.

There were some excellent answers to 29 that explained in detail the aspects of Darwinian evolution that conflicted with the religious beliefs of the day, e.g. creation in God’s image rather than from apes, superiority of man over animals rather than part of the animal kingdom, humans created perfect on the 6th day of creation rather than slowly evolving, creation in seven days rather than billions of years, design by God rather than random chance based on natural selection, the environment made for humans rather than humans adapting to the environment, the challenge to the authority of the church, the challenge to other parts of scripture if the creation stories were not ‘true’, etc. Some took two of these elements and developed them well, gaining Level 4. Those who lost credit here failed to be specific about the challenge made by evolutionary theory and confined their remarks to general statements that science had more evidence and facts to back it up compared to the Biblical accounts, so people started to change their views. In 30, weaker candidates overlooked ‘creation stories’ and merely talked about whether or not religion had a place in the modern world. Better responses involved a discussion of whether or not such stories were interpreted literally, conflicting with scientific discoveries, or non-literally as inspirational stories containing religious truth. Some felt that their historical, traditional aspect required them to be preserved, and others thought they should be abandoned for scientific explanations. Few candidates discussed the creation stories as myths. Many tried unsuccessfully to defend them by saying that science might eventually prove them right.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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