



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

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 evident again this year. The paper was accessible to most students and even weaker students were able to gain a reasonable number of marks. The most popular questions were 1, 3, 4 and 5.

Schools and colleges have prepared students well for evaluation questions. The three-mark questions were again very well done, with well-developed reasons, or several brief reasons being offered in support of the student's opinion on one or both sides of the issue. Many more able students wrote comprehensively, in greater depth and in more detail than the three marks required. This may have cost them in terms of time to complete the paper. The six-mark questions were notably improved in that most recognised that two points of view on an issue were required, although some forgot to include a religious perspective, particularly in questions 15 and 20. Again this year, some very good students did not reach the highest levels 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 students 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.

Again this year some students took the emphasis on evaluation into AO1 questions, expressing their opinions or giving two sides to every question asked, to the detriment of their marks.

Many students continue to infringe the paper's rubric by answering more than the required four questions, usually not very well. The four highest scores are counted, but schools and colleges should advise students 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.

Schools and colleges 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 students. It enables technical terms, or more challenging parts of the specification to be examined appropriately and provides students 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

In 01 most students were able to outline the design argument for God's existence using Paley's watch, Newton's thumb or Tennant's anthropic principle. Some lost credit because they missed out a step in the argument or neglected to provide any specific examples of design in the universe that showed its complexity or intricacy. Some students described the first cause argument but substituted the word 'design' for 'cause' throughout. This gained no credit. General arguments that the world is designed were accepted but usually students were unable to gain more than two marks using this approach as answers became repetitious.

Most students were able in 02 to say that the design of the world was flawed by natural disasters, evil and suffering. An explanation including examples gained three marks. Unfortunately a number of students outlined the opposing arguments as well which gained no credit.

In 03, most debated whether or not miracles were reliable as evidence for God's existence, some incorporating Hume's arguments.

04 required an explanation of **one** example of religious experience. Most students could name one, but explanations were less well done. Coming as it did after a question about miracles, a miracle was a popular example given. Some gave more than one example, so only the best explanation was accepted. Many wrote far more than was necessary for two marks, but those who wrote briefly about Saul's vision or Moses and the burning bush achieved full marks.

Part 05 was particularly testing. Responses were generally better than last year. The best responses came from those who argued that people's inbuilt moral sense comes from a source outside themselves, proving the existence of a higher authority, i.e. God who guides the conscience assisted by religious teachings and scriptures. On the other hand, it was argued that morality comes not from God but from one's parents and upbringing in society. It is a product of evolution that ensures cooperation, hence survival, and the fact that there is no shared morality (some do not feel guilt, societies have different moral codes) weighs against the argument. Unfortunately many students made one or two of these points and then digressed into arguments about free will, suffering and evil and questioning whether or not God should allow people to do wrong. This often led them away from the focus of the question. As pointed out last year, the fact that people do wrong does not disprove an inbuilt moral sense as people can go against their conscience; it does not mean that they do not have one. There is a subtlety of language here that sometimes confuses some students. Having 'morality' does not mean the same as 'being good' (despite the common use of 'moral' to mean the opposite of 'immoral', in other words, good).

Question 2 Revelation

A minority of students chose this question.

The quality of answers to 06 varied. Students often answered 'why' God is revealed in worship rather than 'how'. Many restricted their examples to God answering one's prayers. The best responses came from those who discussed the revelation of God through charismatic or sacramental worship or meditation. Those who did not refer to worship and talked about revelation through nature gained few marks.

The term 'immanent' in 07 was either explained well or not at all.

In 08 the best answers acknowledged that God was beyond human understanding but that people can get to know God through various examples of revelation. Weaker answers concentrated on God's personal appearance, saying that, since no one has seen God, people cannot know what he looks like.

In 09 most students were able to gain higher levels by telling the story of Saul or Cat Stevens and describing how their experiences changed their lives. An example was not required, but those who used one found it easier to gain marks.

In 10 students who knew the difference between general and special revelation were able to discuss the relative merits (and drawbacks) of each. Unfortunately there persists a common error that the distinction between them is that special revelation is to one individual and general revelation is to a group. This is incorrect. While it is true to say that general revelation is open to all, so more people have access to such experience, it is not true to say simply that one is to an individual and one to a group. Students need to understand that these terms have a technical meaning that must be learned. A number of less able students described general and special revelations but neglected to give reasons for one being better than the other. Many just argued that special revelation was special and general was general.

Question 3 The Problems of Evil and Suffering

Part 1 was done well. All were able to say evil was the opposite of good and most could either give an example or develop the definition in some way to gain 2 marks.

In 12, students who argued that since God created everything, God was responsible for evil, or alternatively that humans are responsible for evil owing to free will, gained full marks. However some verged into question 14 by digressing into an argument about why evil should not be allowed in the world and discussed the inconsistent triad and defences of God.

In 13 'karma' was not always described in the context of Hinduism, but in a general way: 'what goes around comes around'. Some confused it with yin and yang. Others thought it was revenge or the Christian notion of punishment for sin. Many failed to say how it explains suffering. Those students who did know the term and could explain that suffering results from actions in a previous life usually gained the full three marks.

In 14, most students knew why suffering makes people doubt God and gave the inconsistent triad. Those who unpacked the terms 'omniscient', 'omnibenevolent', and 'omnipotent' and gave a clear explanation of why each made people question God's love, power and knowledge obtained full marks. Those students who scored less well often made a brief comment about the inconsistent triad and then went on to defend God- not the question's focus. This was another instance of students giving two sides to every question, whether they are evaluation questions or not.

The main difficulty with part 15 was the failure to refer to religious arguments in the answer. Many students could present ways in which suffering might strengthen or weaken people, but did not relate their comments to religion. The best answers used the story of Job as an illustration of someone whose suffering strengthened his relationship with God. Others turned the question into one about suffering proving that God does not exist.

Question 4 Immortality

In part 16 most students gained two marks for knowing that resurrection was rising from the dead and that Jesus was said to have done so. The best answers also referred to beliefs about the resurrection of the body, judgement, heaven and hell. There was some confusion between the terms 'resurrection', 'reincarnation' and 'rebirth'. A number of students thought they were interchangeable and merely meant 'life after death.'

A difficulty arose in part 17 that some students interpreted the religious idea of 'rising from the dead' as merely meaning resuscitation. Many cited the recent case of the footballer Fabrice Muamba who was resuscitated after a heart attack. This was not the focus of the question and lost students marks.

Part 18 required an explanation of arguments for and against reincarnation. The intention of the question was to elicit arguments about whether or not such a belief is justified or has evidence to support it, not whether or not people might like to be reincarnated. Unfortunately some students offered attitudes rather than arguments for or against it. The best responses came from those who explained what reincarnation involved, gave support for it in terms of instances of people remembering past lives, and suggested problems with it, for example whether living in a new body is the same person or not, whether the soul exists, why the population is increasing, etc.

In 19 most students knew the meaning of 'channelling' – talking to the dead through a medium- but some failed to expand on the simple definition to gain both marks.

Part 20 was quite well done but it was difficult for students to include religious arguments, so some leniency was afforded them. As long as the response talked about life after death or visions of heaven or meeting God, it was able to gain more than Level 3. Some students thought Near Death Experiences were 'close shaves' when people nearly died, and not the out of body experiences that usually are thought to provide evidence for the afterlife. Some turned the question into 'Do NDEs happen?' rather than addressing whether they are good evidence for beliefs in immortality. An acceptable 'other view' was that other evidence for immortality was more persuasive, i.e. religious beliefs, scriptures, ghosts or channelling.

Question 5 Miracles

Part 21 was well answered by nearly all students.

Part 22 gave rise to an interesting interpretation. 'Give an account of' means 'tell the story' in this examination. Many students could identify a miracle but then sought to explain why it was considered a miracle instead of giving the details of the incident. They seemed to be interpreting 'give an account of' as 'justify'. This was accepted as a legitimate interpretation of the question and credited as development. Many described historical examples such as the angels of Mons and the miracle of stairwell B on 9/11 or miracles of Guru Nanak, Moses, Krishna's escape as a baby, and various miracles of Jesus. The recent case of Fabrice Muamba was cited as a miracle and was accepted, if there was some suggestion that prayer, or religious faith played a part in his recovery; otherwise there was little to suggest it was a miracle in a religious sense.

Part 23 tended to centre around whether miracles were truly God's work or whether humans could perform them or they were just luck or coincidence. The best answers referred to God's power and transcendence versus natural occurrences that could not yet be explained.

Some students misread part 24 and thought it meant **why** religious believers think miracles tell people something about God, not **what** they teach about God. Despite this most could gain at least two marks by referring to God's power and benevolence. Many students utilised the terms in the inconsistent triad to good effect here.

Part 25 allowed those students who knew Hume's arguments to shine. Even those who did not know Hume argued successfully that miracles can or cannot happen.

Question 6 Science and Religion

Part 26 was not well answered over all. Many students did not know that the Cosmological Revolution referred to scientific developments in the 16th century that led to a changing world view and division between religious and scientific thinking. Many mistakenly thought it was about evolution or the Big Bang theory.

Those who knew what the Cosmological Revolution was also did well on part 27. Those who did not know sometimes scored marks by talking in general terms about the conflict between scientific findings with church ideas.

In 28, most argued that God will no longer be needed if science discovers everything about life and the universe, but they also thought this unlikely as science poses new questions as soon as one is answered. Many argued thoughtfully that God would still be needed for the comfort, hope and spiritual strength humans need.

In 29 the Genesis 1 creation story was well known and many gained high levels. Those who gave the creation of Adam and Eve were also credited (but not including the Fall).

Part 30 was well done by most students as they argued that God can be the cause of evolution and the Big Bang, that the creation accounts in scriptures can be interpreted in a non-literal way, and that many scientists are religious and accept both. Creationism was discussed as an example of a movement that would not accept the scientific accounts of the origins of the universe. The best answers picked out details from the accounts, e.g. the timescale in Genesis versus the scientific view, creation of humans from dust and a rib versus evolution, etc. The main weakness here was that some digressed into a general argument between science and religion without talking about the accounts themselves.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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