



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

A LEVEL (NEW) RELIGIOUS STUDIES

AUTUMN 2020

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Please note there will be no report for the following Component 1 options due to the low entry numbers and lack of script evidence:

Option A (A Study of Christianity)

Option B (A Study of Islam)

Option D (A Study of Buddhism)

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL

Autumn 2020

COMPONENT 2: A STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

General Comments

This paper had a very small number of candidates. There was a limited range of marks owing in part to:

- (a) Candidates having limited knowledge/understanding of the areas covered by the questions
- (b) Some candidates misreading the questions
- (c) Some candidates writing very little for part (b) questions
- (d) Q1a required consideration of two scholars (e.g. Aquinas and Paley), but some candidates provided accurate explanations for only one of the named scholars and not for the other
- (e) Some candidates introduced AO2 evaluation into their response to part (a) questions which test AO1 skills.

In Section A, all candidates attempted Q1 with varying degrees of success. No candidates attempted Q2.

In Section B, the most popular question was Q5 where there were good examples of full knowledge and critical evaluation skills. Attempts at the other questions were sometimes hampered by candidates' lack of detailed knowledge and understanding – this was particularly the case with Q3.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q1a Examine the teleological arguments for the existence of God as presented by Aquinas and Paley. [AO1 20]

Most candidates knew of Aquinas' and Paley's arguments about the existence of God.

Features of stronger responses:

- full understanding of the question particularly with regard to 'teleological arguments'
- sound knowledge of Aquinas and Paley which was summarised coherently
- well-balanced between the two scholars.

Features of weaker responses:

- confusion over the term 'teleological'
- whilst Paley was covered very generally, the teleological argument of Aquinas was not.

Q1b 'Teleological arguments for God's existence are still persuasive in the 21st century.'

Evaluate this view.

[AO2 30]

Candidates were able to make some reference to scholars.

Features of stronger responses:

- variety of scholars were noted including Darwin, Dawkins, Tennant
- use of technical vocabulary e.g. qua regularity/qua design, aesthetic/anthropic principles
- sustained discussion of contrasting views leading to a personal conclusion.

Features of weaker responses:

- confusion over the term 'teleological' made the response a generic one regarding God's existence
- limited range of scholars noted in the response
- less detailed responses to (b) than to (a).

Q2a. Explain how ontological arguments may be challenged with reference to Gaunilo and Kant.

[AO1 20]

This question was not attempted by any candidates.

Q2b 'A priori arguments can never prove God's existence.'
Evaluate this view.

[AO2 30]

This question was not attempted by any candidates.

Q3a. Examine the four characteristics of mystical experience as presented by William James.

[AO1 20]

Features of weaker responses:

- lack of knowledge regarding what was meant by 'mystical experience'
- characteristics named were those of religious experience e.g. visions/miracles/prayers.

Q3b. 'Mystical experiences are not adequately defined by James' four characteristics.'
Evaluate this view.

[AO2 30]

Features of weaker responses:

- very brief responses given
- attempts to answer the question were limited.

Q4a. Explain how religious language can be understood as a language game.
[AO1 20]

Candidates were able to make some reference to Wittgenstein and the concept of language games.

Features of stronger responses:

- good use of exemplars to explain the concept of language game
- demonstrated the ability to explain the concept of language game
- attempted to explain the concept of language through the context of other approaches.

Features of weaker responses:

- although basic evidence of knowledge/understanding was there, development of the material was lacking
- too much focus on the idea of 'game' without a philosophical understanding of religious language
- very short responses.

Q4b. 'The strengths of language games outweigh the weaknesses.'
Evaluate this view. [AO1 30]

Candidates were able to make some reference to philosophical approaches such as Logical Positivism.

Features of stronger responses:

- well balanced responses which were more than the 'for/against/evaluative conclusion' approach, but included evaluation throughout
- longer responses which were able to sustain an argument
- creative and imaginative examples to highlight strengths and weaknesses.

Features of weaker responses:

- very brief responses which were thus not able to develop an argument
- approaching the question by looking at why language game theory is useful rather than attempting a discussion of strengths and weaknesses
- lack of examples to illustrate the point being made.

Q5a. Explain the different understandings of miracles given by Holland and Swinburne.
[AO1 20]

Candidates were able to show a sound understanding of definitions of miracles.

Features of stronger responses:

- sound knowledge of both Holland and Swinburne
- demonstrated the ability to explain their approaches in a coherent fashion
- focused on the 'different understandings' rather than on miracles in general.

Features of weaker responses:

- much more clarity regarding Holland rather than Swinburne
- very limited responses.

Q5b. 'Different definitions of miracles are contradictory.'
Evaluate this view.

[AO1 30]

Candidates were able to make reference to a number of different views regarding miracles.

Features of stronger responses:

- focus on the wording of the question as to 'different definitions'
- reference to scholars Holland/Swinburne/Hume and Aquinas
- consideration of what 'contradictory' meant and whether the definitions had or did not have anything in common.

Features of weaker responses:

- focus more on whether miracles can happen in the modern age
- driven by sometimes vague examples of miracles and whether the evidence for them is compelling
- a convoluted essay structure where much of what was written was unnecessary.

Summary of key points

When attempting a question, attention candidates should pay attention to what is required by the question e.g. Q1. Aquinas **and** Paley.

Reading the question carefully and perhaps highlighting/underlining the command and what the question is asking for would help candidates to plan their response accordingly.

Remember that Part (a) of questions are testing the skills of knowledge and understanding and **not** those of analysis and evaluation.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES
GCE A LEVEL
Autumn 2020
COMPONENT 3: A STUDY OF RELIGION AND ETHICS

General Comments

This paper had a very small number of candidates, yet still produced a range of marks. Most candidates followed the rubric for all the questions and balanced their time well, giving more time to part (b) than part (a) response.

Section A of the paper was generally accessible with a slight preference for Q2 the application of Act Utilitarianism to the issue of animal experimentation for medical research. Candidates generally seemed to understand what was required by the questions although many struggled to be systematic in their presentation of any of the specific features of the ethical theories in their application to the moral dilemmas. In particular, not all candidates who answered Q2 were able to give examples of the weighing up of different situations with the use of the hedonic calculus.

Section B of the paper showed a preference for Q3 and there was little take up for the Q4 on Ethical Egoism. Candidates should take care to ensure they know the difference between Calvin and Augustine. Q4 the Ethical Egoism question was a fairly accessible question and had some high scoring responses. Those who answered Q5 on Aquinas, did well when they were able to identify that this question was focused on a particular aspect of the specification.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q1a Apply Situation Ethics to the issue of polyamorous relationships. [AO1 20]

This was the least popular question on the first section. Most candidates were able to show an understanding of what situation ethics involves and were able to correctly define polyamorous relationships. The difficulty for some, was the putting of this theory into practice in different situations.

A feature of stronger responses:

- made use of Fletcher's 10 principles to show that there may be different outcomes or judgements made depending on the situation.

Features of weaker responses:

- confused Situation Ethics with Utilitarianism
- offered lengthy definitions of Situation Ethics and polyamory without going into the application of the principles of the theory.

Q1b 'Situation Ethics can only lead to immoral behaviour.'
Evaluate this view.

[AO2 30]

A feature of stronger responses:

- weighed up what Situation Ethics allowed and the intentions behind them.

A feature of weaker responses:

- lost sight of the question and got mixed up in lots of different examples of how Situation Ethics could be applied.

Q2a Apply Act Utilitarianism to the issue of animal experimentation for medical research.

[AO1 20]

This was the most popular question in Section A. Candidates generally knew that Act Utilitarianism involved assessing each situation, although not all of them were able to show that this meant that it would be difficult to make a general ruling about the issue of animal experimentation. Many candidates were able to speak very generally about causing harm or bringing happiness, but few made use of the specifics of the hedonic calculus.

A feature of stronger responses:

- made use of the hedonic calculus and showed understanding that the outcome may vary, there are no rules to be made.

Features of weaker responses:

- muddled Act and Rule Utilitarianism or failed to distinguish between them
- offered lengthy definitions of Utilitarianism without going into the application.

Q2b 'Utilitarianism is an effective way to make moral decisions in the 21st century'
Evaluate this view.

[AO2 30]

A feature of stronger responses:

- understood that 'effective' may mean useful for making good moral decisions.

A feature of weaker responses:

- gave examples of Utilitarianism being effective or ineffective, but were unable to say why this was the case.

Q3a Explain religious concept of predestination with reference to St. Augustine and John Calvin. [AO1 20]

This was the most popular question in Section B. Many candidates struggled to identify the specific differences between Augustine and Calvin, instead either muddling the two or presenting them as broadly saying the same thing.

A feature of stronger responses:

- covered all aspects of the question and understood the difference between Calvin and Augustine.

A feature of weaker responses:

- muddled Calvin and Augustine.

Q3b 'All human life is predestined by God.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]

A feature of stronger responses:

- were able to show what problems would occur with the theistic understanding of God if God were to have predestined us or allowed us to be free.

A feature of weaker responses:

- did not understand the difference between predestination and determinism.

Q4a Explain Ethical Egoism with reference to Max Stirner. [AO1 20]

This was not a popular question from the options in this section of the paper. However, it was accessible as most candidates were able to understand the requirements of the question and some did very well, knowing what Ethical Egoism is and could describe Stirner's approach.

A feature of stronger responses:

- were able to give a detailed account of Stirner and use subject specific terminology.

A feature of weaker responses:

- gave a generalised response and were unable to go into the specific details of the theory.

Q4b 'Following Ethical Egoism inevitably leads to moral evil.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]

A feature of stronger responses:

- were able to offer a range of arguments from more than one point of view and weigh up their effectiveness.

A feature of weaker responses:

- did not have a clear understanding of Ethical Egoism as an ethical theory and so found it difficult to consider the consequences of following it.

Q5a Examine the role of goods, acts and virtues in Aquinas' Natural Law.

[AO1 20]

In the question, 'goods' were not specified as real and apparent, although a good knowledge of the specification meant that many correctly understood the question this way. Some candidates saw 'goods' as the primary precepts and since this is not wrong, they are 'goods', these candidates were awarded accordingly.

A feature of stronger responses:

- gave examples of real and apparent goods, interior and exterior acts and virtues for Aquinas.

A feature of weaker responses:

- only gave a general impression of the three areas of the question and were unable to explain or define the terms.

Q5b 'Absolutist theories such as Natural law have no place in 21st Century moral decision making.'

Evaluate this view.

[AO2 30]

Candidates understood this question to include reference to Divine Command Theory and this was relevant and awardable.

A feature of stronger responses:

- were able to consider what particular problems are faced by people in the 21st Century that Aquinas' Natural Law was not designed to tackle.

A feature of weaker responses:

- were muddled and generalised.

Summary of key points

- 'Apply' questions need candidates to practically show the working out process that would be required to put an ethical theory into practice
- Strong AO2 responses weigh up the arguments for and against the statement in the question and consider why some arguments work better than others
- When candidates address questions that refer to contemporary society or the 21st Century, they should consider what specific ethical issues we face today that might be different from when the ethical theory was first formed (e.g. new medical treatments that involve experimenting on embryos, weapons of mass destruction, computer hacking) as none of these were possibilities when Natural Law was formulated
- Examples are important, but they should demonstrate a point, candidates should try to avoid listing so many examples, that it leaves them with no time to cover the material required by the question.



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