



Examiners' Report June 2011

GCE Religious Studies 6RS04 1A

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Introduction

Congratulations are due to many candidates who achieved success in their thorough understanding of the selected passage and for their commendable examination techniques. It is essential for candidates to examine the passage on the exam paper. Candidates must relate what they have learned and apply it to this extract. Examiners know there are many ways of examining a passage and there is no preferred method. What is essential is an explicit focus on the text, whatever method is used to examine it. There was evidence of some candidates inserting several paragraphs of material not linked to the question.

The division on the paper into the two assessment objectives is intended to assist candidates to structure their answers and to enable them to make sensible use of their time in the allocation of material. In most cases candidates had the required examination technique to make effective use of their material. There is no necessary requirement to follow the structured division as seen in the question. However, for candidates creating a holistic answer, there is a tendency to pay inadequate attention to AO2, especially in relation to the implications aspect of part (b).

Question 1

Assessment Objective 1

Candidates were generally able to balance both parts of the answer appropriately. Fewer candidates attempted to combine parts (a) and (b) following the comments about this made in last year's Report. Approaches to an examination of the text were varied and examiners at the standardisation meetings had been alerted to the legitimacy and credit-worthiness of a range of methods of examining the passage. Some candidates chose to use the extract as a launch pad in order to review the whole of Westphals' article. Provided adequate attention was given to displaying an understanding of the extract, this broader perspective was entirely legitimate.

However, some candidates seemed to have prepared a generic response to Westphal that provided only incidental information on the extract itself. For example by having insufficient focus on the ideas associated with suspicion of religion in comparison to scepticism.

Some candidates produced excellent work. These presented a good range of wider reading and were able to contextualise the article with good philosophical understanding and evidence of a critical study of the passage. Some made links with the other texts. Some candidates displayed sound understanding of the extract but also the whole of Westphal's article that was used to unpack the details and the broader connotations of the extract. Some candidates tended to focus on Kant and Hume which is entirely appropriate for this passage. For example, understanding the importance of Hume in the passage and then analysed some key features of 'instrumental religion'. In addition, some presented informed analysis of a range of scholars such as Aquinas, Durkheim, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Schleiermacher. Dawkins featured heavily and this was fully legitimate. Many had a good knowledge of Kierkegaard and this material was used impressively. It can be noted that it is not essential to examine or analyse this range of philosophers. Where candidates are familiar with this information, it is creditable when it is used intelligently. It was most pleasing to note that a substantial number of candidates made intelligent use of connections with their other studies, most notably critiques of religion.

However, some candidates were not sure who wrote the passage, even though it was fully referenced on the exam paper. Sometimes candidates wrote more on Ayer and Donovan than on the text in the paper from Westphal. Some candidates presented a simple comprehension exercise of the passage with no evidence of further study. Others spent too much time on arguments for the existence of God, religious experience and religious language at the expense of a focus on the text itself. All of these topics are worthwhile to explore but not when it becomes a substitute for answering the specific passage. The work of candidates producing answers at the lower standard was disorganised with little evidence of understanding the major issues in the passage.

Some candidates wrote generalised accounts of Westphal. This resulted in a lack of engagement with the passage itself and hence these answers did not have the flair of candidates with better exam techniques.

Assessment Objective 2

On the whole, answers were well structured, following a clear framework of arguments and then implications, drawing on related areas of philosophical study.

Implications were worked out in relation to specific groups such as theist, atheist and agnostic with reference to specific scholars such as Ayer and Wittgenstein. The best responses gave philosophical implications and effective academic examples for understanding religion and human experience. Many candidates used their reading and knowledge of a range of scholars to construct arguments in a coherent manner. Some used

their scholarly perspective to critique their own arguments.

Candidates in the middle range generally had a less precise grasp of the meaning of the text and the direction of Westphal's argument. In general they had not worked out the scholarly implications beyond giving a series of unsubstantiated views. Less successful candidates presented only partial answers relating either to opinion or implications but not both.

The final part of this report considers three exemplars from candidates' work. The first examines good practice in Assessment Objective 1 (AO1) and the second looks at good practice in Assessment Objective 2 (AO2). The final example looks at some ways in which a candidate's performance in AO2 may be improved.

This extract includes all of a candidate's answer to part (a). It exemplifies a number of good practices in relation to AO1.

Plan:

Introduction.

Paragraph One ... More specifically in this article.

Paragraph Two ... Motives for religion (Freud / Marx)

Paragraph Three ... Explain Kant's ideas.

Paragraph Four ... Suspicion / Scepticism.

1a) This extract is taken from M. Westphal's article, 'The Emergence of Modern Philosophy'. In the article Westphal examines a period of roughly ~~2000~~ five hundred years, from the Enlightenment to the present day, and the shift in this period from philosophical theology to the philosophy of religion. To do this Westphal studies the work of a range of philosophers from Hegel to Nietzsche. Westphal concludes that we must change the way in which we talk about God.

More specifically, in this extract Westphal examines the work of David Hume. Both Hume and Kant were

integral to the move away from philosophical theology, meaning philosophising about God not religion. In this extract Westphal is describing Hume's approach which was 'very different to that of Kant and his followers.'

Earlier in the article Westphal outlines the definition of the 'kernel' and the 'husk'. This analogy is to represent God as the kernel and religion / scripture / religious leaders as the disposable 'husk'. This becomes key in this passage as Westphal describes Hume attacking the kernel and not, as Kant had previously, the husk.

~~The work of Kant~~ The second part of the extract outlines Hume's approach to attacking the kernel. Hume argued that religion was merely a 'flattery of the Gods' and therefore rejects the essence of religion.

The work of Kant was revolutionary in the shift from philosophical theology to the philosophy of religion. ~~the~~ The essence of his argument was that the only purpose religion had was

to ensure everyone led a moral life. For Kant ~~for Kant~~ this was the most important part of religion, and not 'performing religious rituals'. Kant outlined the idea of church visible / church invisible. He argued that the church visible, being scripture and religious leaders was superfluous. Kant argued that, the church invisible, meaning living a moral life, was the most important aspect. This idea would be rejected by a philosopher such as Hegel, mentioned earlier in Westphal's article. Hegel believed that God was a personal being and rejected the move away from God and towards religion. This idea might be supported by Martin Buber, who also argued that God was personal. Buber argues that we aim to form I-thou relationships with God which are to ~~form~~ ~~relationship~~ gain companionship and love, not I-it relationships which are impersonal and aim to gain empirically verifiable knowledge. These ideas would be rejected by Hume in this passage. Hume has reduced religion to a 'flattery of the Gods'

not a personal relationship as Hegel and Buber would suggest.

The ideas of 'suspicion' and 'scepticism' in this extract are key. Suspicion questions the proof of God. For example, a suspicious enquiry might be one about how some

attempt to prove God through nature and the world around us. An example of suspicion might be offered through Richard Dawkins when he argues that DNA and natural selection gives the appearance of design in the world but this is misleading. This proposition would question the basis of religious belief on the order and regularity of the universe.

On the other hand, scepticism attempts to question the basis and the motives of religion. An example ^{of this} can be seen through Hume in this passage. However, another example can be seen through the work of Freud and his oedipus complex. Freud questions the origin of religion by arguing that it is a man made outlet for guilt. The oedipus complex says that we are in love with our mothers and therefore

want to kill our fathers. When we kill our fathers we are overwhelmed with guilt and therefore religion is an outlet for this guilt. This is not a well supported argument but it has the same intention as Hume in that they both aim to analyse the source of religion and why humans have a psychological need to worship a supreme being. Where ~~the~~ Westphal outlines Hume's argument saying that religion is 'grounded in selfish hopes and fears'

'Freud would argue' that religion is grounded in the guilt we feel.

Another motive behind religion is explored by Karl Marx. Marx argued that religion was, 'the opiate of the masses'. Marx argues that religion is based in class distinction. He believed that religion was the method ~~on~~ where by the ruling classes can suppress the rights and protests of the 'masses' through threats of hell in the afterlife. Although Hume might not agree that religion is man made, the philosophies

are similar in that they both try to address the motive behind religion.

Overall, this extract outlines a number of arguments which are key throughout the article. The ideas of Kernal and Husk and of suspicion and scepticism are vital for Westphal to reach the conclusion which he does.



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Examiner Comments

The candidate starts by presenting a brief overview of the whole source and then quickly focuses on the selected passage. This is a commendable introduction to an answer on this paper.

This answer clarifies key expressions such as 'kernal' and 'husk' which are important in this source. In addition there is a good level of understanding of 'suspicion' and 'scepticism'.

The exposition of various philosophical thinkers is clear and directly relevant to this passage, as seen in the material on Kant.

The candidate amplifies the material by reference to related work in other units such as Freud and Marx in 6RS03 under the theme of critiques of religion.

The AO1 content includes scholarly controversies as seen in the contrasts between Kant and Hegel.



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Examiner Tip

There is one key point to bear in mind with this paper. It is essential to adapt material to the selected passage. This candidate quickly concentrates on the passage. It is a full answer using a wide range of material and all of it throughout is related in an explicit way to the selected passage.

This extract includes all of a candidate's answer to part (b). Although quite brief, it considers the various demands of AO2.

b) I definitely agree with the idea of Hume and the need to ask for ~~evidence~~ ~~for or against religious beliefs~~. "What motives underlie religious beliefs and practices?" There have been too many problems, I think, in the history of religion to not doubt its continuation. Most religions are based on the principle of being a good person and this is usually justified by a life after death. In Christianity, Heaven is gained, in Hinduism a good reincarnation. The way I see it, humans use religion as a means to get their wishes rather than a means in end of itself, which many may claim.

Skepticism seems ~~to~~ though worthwhile in order to ~~show~~ demonstrate the weaknesses of certain beliefs, ultimately worthless.

Anthony Flew's falsification principle demonstrates this as he drew on John Wisdom's 'The Parable of the Gardeners'. In this, two men fight over the belief over the presence of a gardener or not. In the end neither is able to disprove the other as both are able to bring forth their own arguments, like a believer. This can be seen in the Ontological argument as Anselm defines God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" and therefore exists as if he didn't something would be greater. Gaunilo argued against this saying that "just because I can imagine a perfect island it doesn't make it exist". Which Anselm come back at saying this idea only relates to contingent things, which God is not. There seems to be little point in being sceptical over a persons beliefs because they are just that, their belief. It is near impossible to change someones faith with reason since they will already have structured their own reasoning

for why they belief. Better to be suspicious over any account for the general concept of religion in the world which a ~~person~~ believer may not be aware of themselves, "the pious soul cannot acknowledge that it has reduced the sacred to nothing but a means to it's own ends"

The implications for following such an attitude though appear to be very extreme if it is adopted as true. It seems all religion should be abolished as it is grounded on lies as people are in it for their own gains and not the teaching they speak of. Religious believers may be considered as immoral people because of their selfishness. From Nietzsche's belief, all people should follow is science. If Hume's belief is true of being in debt is true then there is no afterlife with a God of any form, so "flattering the God" in order to gain their reward after death is a waste of time. This implies that many believers have had meaningless lives as they have spent it worshipping a non-existent object.

The seriousness of the implications, probably for the best, is however not apparent in the world. That is because of it being based on a persons belief. There is no way to know the truth behind someones belief because it is subjective and ~~based on~~ cannot be determined through factual knowledge. Kierkegaard said that religious belief is "a leap of faith" and there is no objective way of reaching God. Therefore a persons belief cannot be singularised and described as something else because they, and only they, have made that decision to believe.

Although I believe that religion centers around fear and hope,

doing good or evil and being rewarded or punish (which I think determines someones religious behaviour), I understand that there is no way of knowing this for certain, so religion should, and has not, been abolished because through all the "dissatisfaction" that has grown from it, morality, which Kant values, also seems to have stemmed from it, such as Christian charities and those who claim to work for God, like Mother Theresa.

Schelling's view that religion is a subjective feeling might be a better belief to follow and that we should practice this belief by experiencing his form of God (which is that God is everything, he is you, he is me, he is the pen I write with) merely by

giving. We do not need to believe a certain way by reducing "the sacred to nothing but a means to its own end" as we, following Schleiermachers view, are already with God and need no reward. This seems to be the ultimate moral way of worshipping religion, which Kant attempted to reach, as it involves equal giving, nobody is in it for their own self-gain. Conclusively, it appears, the notions ~~are~~ that underlie religious beliefs are apparent and should be questioned if one is being preached to by a person who wants to be rewarded by "flattering of the gods". This is shown through the work of Jehovah's Witnesses who believe they will only get to Heaven if they are able to convert seven people. Instead of following structured religion, a greater understanding of religion and human experience may come from intuitively ~~knowing~~ sensing a Greater Being, as and not by developing a persons practices by accusing believes

of "self-deception" by means of "self-interest".



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Examiner Comments

The candidate clearly agrees with Hume's point about the importance of suspicion over and against scepticism. This is done by reference to debates about Wisom's parable of the gardener and the differences between Anselm and Gaunilo. The candidate refers this to the passage concerning suspicion about the motives underlying religious beliefs and practices. The candidate considers various implications for understanding religion and human experience and this includes material from Kierkegaard and Schleiermacher.



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Examiner Tip

It is very important for successful candidates to make explicit reference to the various demands of AO2:
do you agree with the idea(s) expressed and justify your point of view
discuss its implications for understanding religion and human experience.

This extract consists of the whole of a response to part (b). The tips will indicate how this may be improved.

b.

I believe it is important to keep God and religion closely discussed as its traditions are part of our world's history. Even though I support the use of reasoning I believe God has an important role to play for believers, easing suffering and fear. However, I also support some of the Enlightenment era's ideas of an inoffensive universal religion, this is because as globalisation happens cultures are becoming closer and this causes some tension when different beliefs mix, such as the ~~neg~~ rejection of western ways in middle Eastern countries. ~~and~~ The implications of such views of a universal religion could be quite grand though.

If we understand religion through the universal ~~inoffensiveness~~ way we lose a lot of tradition and there would be large amounts of social change, possibly inciting a state of anomie which old religion could help with.

Publications of scriptures such as the Bible or Koran would hold little meaning as these 'stories' would be part of the disposable husk of religion.

However during these times after modernity, ~~sometimes~~ thought by some to be 'post modernity', times, a religion inoffensive to modernity as suggested, would help to solve disputes between science and religion. Enlightenment thinkers merge together science and religion to create a belief that God started the world but it is controlled by science, that he cannot interfere with, God will only be involved again at the end. Science and religion have had notable disagreements ~~in modern~~ especially shown in the media, in school teaching in America. The right wing conservatives like to keep religion

present and some fundamentalists would rather children were taught ^{about} the creation rather than evolution and Darwins theory.

Sticking to strong beliefs about God would have implications for the further development of our world. Ethical/moral issues surrounding some testing would have far more significance and therefore some breakthroughs may not be founded.

~~Individuals beliefs may~~

The implications of the sacred in reality being reduced to a 'means to an ends' would take a lot of meaning out of ~~some~~ religion for individuals and society.

Taking God out of religion as suggested about the philosophy of religion, would take the heart out of religion. It is centred on God and therefore hard to separate. There are however ~~exams~~ examples of religion with different views of God or that have no view of God. Buddhism would not be very affected by the removal of a transient God from discussion.



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Examiner Comments

There is very little attention to an evaluation of the selected passage.

The response mentions a range of issues such as universal religion; the publication of scriptures, and science and religion. However, the response does not ensure these are focused on implications arising from the passage.

There is a lack of coherence in the structure of this answer and this is typified by the use of short paragraphs that appear to have little connection with each other.



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Examiner Tip

In order to achieve success, it is important within AO2 to make it explicit that the issues and controversies considered are linked to the passage itself.

Candidates should show evidence of structured planning. For example one of the features of AO2 level 3 is an attempt to offer a simple critical assessment of the views expressed in the passage and level 4 refers to a 'coherent discussion'. A critical assessment and coherent discussion are best served by a clear and purposeful structure in answers.

One immediate way of improving this standard of work is by improving paragraphing techniques in order to avoid short paragraphs of a sentence or so long which appear to have no link with each other.

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