

Examiners' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2013

Edexcel GCE – Religious Studies
Unit 2: Investigations – The Study of
Philosophy of Religion

6RS02/1B

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Unit 2: Religious Studies - The Study of Philosophy of Religion

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Investigations Paper of January 2013 demonstrated a very high level of independent student enquiry. The engagement that candidates had with their area of investigation was evidenced in the way they independently used and evaluated a wide range of source material. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres chose to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. Candidates were very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that Centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. It is important to stress again that the 'Investigations' unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve students as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning. Questions were designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and all valid answers were considered.

Whilst most centres had entered their candidates for the correct option there were still a few entries for particular areas of study where consideration regarding entry for a different area of study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which area of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper. There was evidence of candidates choosing a different question on the paper to the question they had clearly prepared for before the examination. In some of these cases the candidate was using material suitable for Question 1 to answer Question 3 and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively. Centres should ensure that candidates are entered for the option that matches their area of study and that candidates are clear about which question they have been prepared for on the paper.

Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Importantly, in the exam itself there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer. Each question consistently referred to the assessment objectives with the trigger word 'Examine' for AO1 and 'Comment on' for AO2. These dictated the structure of the question and helped candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations. The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' will always appear in the question to ensure that the generic question can be answered with material from any appropriate investigation. The mark scheme itself is generic to all questions but the answer itself is not necessarily generic as candidates are expected to use their material to answer the question. The purpose of the

question is to challenge candidates to adapt their material so that at the highest levels they may demonstrate a coherent understanding of the task, based on the selection of their material. Widely deployed evidence/arguments/sources were evident in well-structured responses to the task whereby a clearly expressed viewpoint was supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument. There was skilful deployment of religious language in many answers and the fluency of the essay showed command over the material.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. In preparation for this examination some candidates may find it useful to write up their investigation under exam-timed conditions to a variety of different possible questions. They might build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of material such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. However, success can be undermined by writing up a rote-learned answer which was not adapted to the question set, or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied.

Specific Comments – Paper 1B – The Study of Philosophy of Religion

6RS02_1B_Q01 – Religious Experience; Meditation

The majority of essays were well structured, relevant and well written. There was clear evidence of subject knowledge and most candidates were able to use this knowledge to discuss the question in relation to their topic. Of the broad range of interesting, well-researched responses: the best responses had a good range of scholarship which integrated material into a coherent response rather than just re-telling a range of views/theories/life/work within the chosen investigation. There were some outstanding essays where the candidates had a coherent understanding of the task and responded skilfully to the question with a clearly expressed viewpoint that was supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument.

Overall, candidates were well prepared for this question and had no difficulty in responding to it. However, there were some candidates who had more difficulty in manipulating their material. Whilst they still produced essays of merit, there was evidence of a formulaic style of answers by some candidates who apparently relied on the same source(s); these responses focused on types of religious experience and their outlines of scholars remained descriptive and thus A02 achievement was undermined. Better responses ventured towards a wider range of sources deploying a wide range of scholars, ideas and traditions. The psychology of religion material has increased in popularity and this material was well handled. Many candidates drew on Dawkins with the better candidates doing so with authority. James, Persinger and Swinburne have been studied by many candidates and there were several cases of Dawkins being used uncritically regardless of whether the candidate agreed or disagreed with his views. In such cases the essays can be a little one sided and weaker responses lacked balance and had little appreciation of the conflict and debate within the area of study.

The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' led to responses ranging from general statements with little or no reference to a particular topic, to some very precise analyses of particular ideas and scholars. Some candidates covered a lot of topics, often in a rather shallow way, providing a general narrative account of views of religious experience. Of the weaker scripts it was common to see accounts of miracles and a discussion of Hume interpreted by the candidate as an account and discussion of a religious experience. Some candidates gave a good outline of the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience and considered its strengths and weaknesses; such essays gained some credit, but these candidates struggled to relate their responses closely to the question set. Candidates must be reminded that the demands of this paper are different to the demands of 6RS03. That said, there were a much higher number of responses that made a serious attempt to answer the question. The best answers considered the question and thoroughly discussed the view that religious experience is in the mind and supported this with evidence of the scholarship they had researched. These candidates assessed the persuasiveness of their argument in relation to the range of scholarship deployed and many answers were very well done.

6RS02_1B_Q02 –Mind and Body

This question attracted a large number of outstanding scholarly responses and was very well done by the majority of candidates who were effective at analysing the question and discussing the relevance of their research in this context. A popular approach for this question focused on a systematic account of various positions in the mind/body debate, covering monism, materialism, behaviourism, dualism etc. These topics are generally very well understood, but some candidates disadvantaged themselves by not relating these positions to particular scholars or to the question. The best answers systematically examined forms of monism and dualism and tackled issues of interaction. Some candidates discussed Life after Death as more of a case study rather than teasing out how these theories might play out in relation to the question.

The question invited some very thorough responses from many candidates offering a technically competent, detailed, analysis of dualism and monism accompanied by an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses that was skilfully targeted at the question. There was evidence, however, of good candidates who did not do justice to their A01 material in their evaluation because they were less confident about discussing the question. It is encouraging to see such a wide range of scholars included in responses and generally there were few weak answers in this Area of Study; weaker candidates included rote learned material which did not answer the question set and were defined by a simplistic approach and difficulty in manipulating the material. Weaker candidates confined their response to describing accounts of Near Death Experiences and Out of the Body Experiences whilst stronger responses were fluent in their handling of a wide range of scholarship in their discussions of Descartes, Plato, Aristotle and Ryle with the best of them focusing effectively on Greek philosophy particularly well.

6RS02_1B_Q03 – A Study of one or more Philosophers of Religion

This question attracted a large variety of answers with really good accounts of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kierkegaard, Nagel, Nietzsche, Leibniz, Bonheoffer, Marx and Sartre. One of the most popular combinations was Kierkegaard and Sartre. The obvious enthusiasm so many candidates had for the area of study was clearly conveyed by very mature essays in which the significant features of the work of philosopher/philosophers within the philosophy of religion was discussed. The best answers referred to a range of ideas or works by the chosen philosopher and put them in the correct context of their time or the impact on subsequent thought which made for interesting, thoughtful and scholarly analysis of their ideas. Good quality answers focused on an interesting range of philosophers with many candidates choosing to compare and contrast two different philosophers; thus allowing for easier AO2 comment on the insight into religion and/or God that might be derived from any the study of the philosophy of religion. Candidates were well versed with the significant features of the work of the philosopher(s) they had studied and most gave an accurate analysis of the of the philosopher(s) they had investigated. The best answers referred to a range of ideas or works by the chosen philosopher and placed them in the correct context of their time whilst assessing the features of their work with great ease.

There was evidence of a variety of quality of response. Weaker candidates simply offered a biographical account of the scholar in question without paying attention to the demands of the question. In these cases the candidate ignored the question and sometimes appeared to be answering a different question. Some candidates discussed both Sartre and Kierkegaard and did less well because of time constraints; they just did not cover the material they clearly had intended to cover. In this range not many answers included much by way of comment from scholars on the views of their philosophers, and although this was not a requirement it did enhance the answers of candidates who were able to do it.

Some candidates chose one idea/argument from their philosopher and did a strengths or weaknesses analysis of that view; whilst this was not necessarily a bad approach it was most often done at a simple level and not fully focused on the question in terms of concluding about the significant features of their philosopher(s) within the philosophy of religion. There was also evidence of whole centres following the same structure for a pre-prepared answer that was not subsequently manipulated by candidates to answer the question. Some candidates tended to argue from the outset for the existence of God rather than answering the question; this was especially apparent in responses that focused on Aquinas or Paley. A few problems persist with candidates answering an apparently different question without paying due attention to the question on the paper. It is expected that pre-prepared material addresses the question on the paper. Some candidates who had clearly studied material directly related to Q1 on Religious Experience attempted this question. Whilst there is nothing to prohibit this, candidates might limit achievement if they attempt a question for a different topic to the topic they had been prepared; especially if they are not explicitly answering the task set by the question.

Advice for Candidates

- Please directly address the question being asked.
- A generic question is not best answered with a generic answer. The question is made up of two parts. The question itself and the generic phrase 'Examine and comment with reference to the topic you have investigated.' Answer the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Thoughtfully deployed material will show how well you understand your topic and how you are using your material to answer the question.
- Do not forget to comment on your material in relation to the question.
- Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.
- Comment on alternative views if you know them.
- Express your viewpoint clearly.
- Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation.
- Do not spend too much time on your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.
- Write legibly.

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