

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE Religious Studies 6RS02

Paper 1E

Study of the Old Testament/Jewish
Bible

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AREA 1E Old Testament

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Investigations Paper continues to draw from an inspiring range of topics within a wide range of varied academic fields. The high standard of work evidenced in June 2013 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a very high level of independent student enquiry which clearly showed their engagement with their area of investigation. Their knowledge of a particular academic field 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 (or vice versa) and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. This practice does not always work to the best effect as the candidate might end up answering neither question as fully as possible. Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer or if no box was ticked at all. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. 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 there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer and also to the question that is intended to focus the 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 good essays showed command over the material; such command makes for high outcomes and rewards the amount of hard work done by the candidate.

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. There was evidence of rote learned answers using the same structure and material inclusive of quotes; whilst much information was relevant to the topic and consequently was awarded in terms of AO1, there was a significant lack of engagement with the specific demands of the question and consequently marks for AO2 were low, with only generic evaluation provided. This approach is contrasted with another form where candidates were trained to answer the question; arguably, this is evidence of good practice but at the lower end some candidates thought it was sufficient to simply use the question stimulus at the end of each paragraph. The best answers were those which were guided by the statement as opposed to simply '*tagging it on*' to content that they were already anticipating to write about. A balanced approach to the question that meets the highest levels of achievement according to both assessment objectives is obviously desirable and the generic question accommodates many possible routes to success whereby any valid approach to the question was credited.

Specific Comments - Area 1E - The Study of the Old Testament/Jewish Bible

It would be good to see more entries for this paper as the Old Testament had the fewest candidates of all the options. It is evident that candidates engage enthusiastically with this unit as there were some very insightful and detailed studies.

Question 1 - Religion and Science

The potential of this topic is not really explored by many candidates; there were very few answers to this question. Candidates appear to fear discussing with confidence how the study of the interface between religion and science might have real relevance for the study of the Old Testament. There is scope for examining the historical interaction between religion and science by focussing on the dialogue between Christianity and the natural sciences. The Old Testament provides rich material for the application of natural science, for example, in the creation narratives, miracles or prophecy. Very few candidates addressed, for example, how the Christian doctrine of creation could be explored by examining scientific explanations for the origins of the universe. The best candidates were able to discuss the creation and evolution debate in detail; other candidates extrapolated a relationship between the design argument and the Old Testament. Origins of the universe in the Old Testament were contrasted by some candidates against scientific discovery. The focus of the question was missed by a few who were unable to comment on the claim the religion and science start from different positions. The best answers adapted their material to the question, or set up their approach clearly with reference to the question. In the best essays the issues were firmly located within contemporary scholarship from within the religion and science debate and coupled with appropriate knowledge of Old Testament scholarship.

Weaker candidates generally struggled to relate issues within the religion and science debate to a study of the Old Testament. Some candidates were rather one-sided in their approach to the religion and science debate and opportunities to refer to the Old Testament narratives were generally missed. Scholarship in the Old Testament is extensive and is best deployed with the relevant textual extract from which the theological issues emerge; good candidates had no difficulty handling their material with this point in mind.

Question 2 - The Nature of God

This question was very well done. Candidates offered a range of convincing views about the nature of God that were coupled with solid exegesis of the biblical text and appropriate scholarship. Candidates answered this question with a high level of insight and were well equipped to examine the many valid interpretations of God whilst backing up their views with a wide range of contrasting biblical quotations, both from the Law and the Prophets. The various attributes of God were understood in detail and discussed through the use of scholarly opinion backed up by the Prophets and the Psalms.

Evaluation was interesting and varied in approach, from the evangelistic notions of God's embracing agape love, through pre-destination, heaven and hell to philosophical notions of free will and epistemic distance.

In the mid-range, there was much evidence of Dawkins' analysis of the psychotic nature of God at the expense of reference to classical Old Testament scholarship. Dawkins was too often quoted as an Old Testament scholar whilst negative issues about God were discussed in a polarised fashion. More scholarly analysis would have added a qualitatively academic edge to the discussion.

At the lower end of achievement candidates concentrated on re-telling Bible stories with little scholarly analysis; or alternatively candidates in this range had little knowledge of the Old Testament.

Question 3 - Job and the Problem of Evil and Suffering

By far, this question was the most popular with most candidates handling it really well. Candidates were able to examine the Book of Job skilfully, with clarity and coherence; candidates discussed its relationship to the problem of evil and suffering by comparative analysis of textual narratives in the Book of Job and from elsewhere in the Old Testament, most notably the Genesis myths. The best candidates had secure knowledge of the Book of Job and scholarship specific to the Book of Job such as C.S.Rodd. They were also familiar with a range of other well known Old Testament scholars. Candidates really did explore issues deeply within this question, and most answers were full of scholarship, good learning and interesting evaluation.

Many candidates examined solutions to the problem of evil, particularly the Augustinian and Irenaean Theodicies, but not so many used this material effectively to comment on the Book of Job. Some weaker candidates re-told the Job narratives and then wrote about philosophical notions, but were unable to relate the two in a very meaningful way. Some candidates tended to concentrate on the philosophical arguments concerning suffering and tended to use Job as an example (or an after-thought) – this results in some uneven answers. This question demands detailed knowledge of the Book of Job and achievement is directly related to a working knowledge of this material. It is insufficient to present an outline of the problem of evil if this is not applied directly to the Book of Job.

The essay shows secure knowledge of the Book of Job and appropriate Old Testament scholarship that was fluently deployed throughout the essay. Useful reference was made to Rawls theory of justice to emphasis a point that was well made. The candidate writes clearly and concisely throughout and covers a very good range of material in the essay. Scholarship is integrated into the line of argument and the essay finishes with continued clear reference to the Book of Job and relevant scholarship.

The Book of Job aims to solve the problem of suffering and explain the existence of evil. The Book of Job can be found in the Bible which it itself holds many contradictory explanations for the problem of evil and suffering. Bart D Ehrman argued that many special revelations of numerous explanations for suffering yet fail to come to a conclusive decision as to which works best. Which on a superficial level could mean there really is no irrefutable explanation, so Job's attempt is frivolous.

Job represents the innocent's who suffer and as suffering is universal and indiscriminate each human being will have experienced some ~~form~~^{form} of suffering so Job's story is highly relevant even today. It attempts to answer the problem of evil through numerous theories yet comes to a final conclusion that our perspective does not able us to understand and comprehend suffering however some may argue this view point is there to hide the fact, there is no justification to evil. If proven right however, and answers solution it is a successful ^{attempt}.

In order to understand whether Job is a good attempt at solving the problem, we must explore both the theories given and what the ultimate aim is. In order to understand the problem of evil, we must first clarify what is meant by justice as we can only decide whether we can justify evil if we know what it means.

John Rawls in 'A Theory of Justice' explained that it meant "fairness". However this is too broad of a definition to use alone. John Stuart Mill was a believer in consequentialism and argued things were just or fair based on what has the best result of consequence. Plato in 'The Republic' argued on from this that there must be an ultimate justice which every society can base its own justice system on. So consistent values embedded in different cultures all over the world like 'do not kill' or 'do not steal' come from this ultimate justice; which many believe to be God.

Now we understand a little better what justice is, we must address the problem of evil and suffering. David Hume said "If God is able to do something about the problem of evil and suffering, yet chooses

not to, then God is malevolent. If God cannot do anything about the problem of evil and suffering, then God is impotent". This view was only furthered by Mackie's Inconsistent Trilemma which explained how evil and an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God cannot co-exist but appear to do. ^{No one can question suffering with 7% of world population murdered and 6% raped every year} For this reason, the problem arises, and many choose to reject the classical conceptions of God (omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, immutability etc) and why others choose to reject God altogether. However, some like in the Book of Job choose to try to solve this problem, rather than dismiss God.

It is clear within the first few verses in the Book of Job that Job suffers as a test of faith. Satan goes to God and convinces him that Job's faith is contingent on God's protection - "Hast thou not put a fence around him" and that when God tests Job's faith, he will not remain faithful - "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face". It is this barrier and God's certainty in Job's faith that is the cause of Job's pain. This answers the problem but, now one must wonder whether it can be justified for if not it would appear irrelevant and make ^{a poor} ~~the~~ attempt.

It would seem to many that it would be fair to test ones faith as how can God (or we ourselves) know the extent and strength of our faith if it has not been pressurized or tested?

However, the first flaw is that this scene took place in heaven and therefore is transcendent to us, as we have no empirical basis for it. Moreover, one must also question why Satan would be allowed to enter into heaven let alone gain Gods trust? Regardless of this, there are some flaws in logic too, because how can an Omniscient Being justify suffering as a test. Surely an all-knowing creature would have no purpose for testing as He would already know the outcome before it had commenced. Therefore suffering must be futile.

Not only this, but how can one then explain or ~~also~~ justify the suffering of people not being tested. For instance, Satans first test inflicted mental suffering from the loss of his children and livestock etc. But how can we justify the death of Jabs children in order to test Jabs faith. Surely if we were to test ones faith through suffering the only way to uphold ones omnibenevolence is by only allowing those tested to suffer?

The Book of Job then moves on to the idea of temporal retribution. When Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar visit him they tell him he must have sinned and to stop his suffering he must repent for "who ever perished that was innocent". This was furthered by Plato in "the Apology" when he stated "no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death". It is also supported by many of the other major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam through karma. But most significantly many people would agree, it is a view we are taught from very early ages when learning wrong from right, that if we do some thing wrong we are punished.

However this does have its flaws. Job argued he had not sinned and therefore it couldn't be retribution. Which even God confirmed previously when he referred to Job as a "blameless and upright man". So if the innocents suffer, how can one possibly believe in temporal retribution, because people suffer undeservingly.

Not only that but if God was prepared to intervene to punish those who do wrong, where is the line drawn for punishment. Why do some people go

through life unpunished (for instance Jack the Ripper) while others suffer such extreme pain with no apparent sin (like the Jews in the Holocaust). Surely if God is prepared to intervene to punish innocent people, it would make more sense if he intervened in order to prevent evil in the first place.

John Hick said "a universe in which sin is precisely cancelled out by retribution, is no less good than a universe which neither sin nor punishment exist".

To some extent this must be perfectly true as, if sin was precisely cancelled out by punishment, we would not sin purely to avoid it. Therefore, in order for people to be truly free, there must be an epistemic distance, so that his presence is unclear. Hick furthered this when he noted that "for a person to exercise some ^{measure} of genuine freedom, the creature must be brought into existence, not in the immediate divine presence, but at a distance from God".

Therefore while Job's suggestion that evil exists in order to test one's faith was proven unlikely and now one must conclude that temporal retribution is too improbable, the Book does infer something. If

Temporal retribution is unlikely because an epistemic distance is essential in order to allow His creation to remain free. Then one can only conclude the solution is not retribution but freedom.

While the free will defence does not appear in the Book of Job, it does seem to hold some bit of an assumed presence. However, if the free will defence can be proven most probable, then one must conclude the Book of Job to be a failure at solving the problem although it is a good attempt.

Many philosophers like St. Augustine of Hippo and Alvin Plantinga were strong believers in the argument and explained that it like so. God created the angels and man kind with free will. It was their misuse of free will that brought about evil and therefore God cannot be blamed. So the argument essentially gets rid of the problem of evil and suffering by the fact that God didn't create evil, but once it was made he couldn't destroy it as that would destroy our freedom which is more important.

However some people disagree with this final statement. Dostoyevsky in 'The Brothers Karamazov'

argued against free will, for he believed that the suffering of innocents was too high of a price to pay. He said that we should not have to "share responsibility for all [our] fathers' crimes" and that we should not have to know a world where evil and suffering exist. Dostoyevsky believed that between evil and freedom, we would be better off with no freedom. It was his belief that even now humans are too weak to truly be free and wish to conform to societies demands. Therefore not only does it ~~to~~ destroy the free will argument if we aren't truly free, but it also means that evil exists and if God intervened to destroy it, it wouldn't affect our freedom as we do not have any.

While some believed freedom was more important than suffering and therefore rejected Dostoyevsky other philosophers raised problematic points. René Descartes and Flew and Mackie, argued that God's omnipotence was not restricted and therefore he would be able to do even the logically impossible. If this were the case however, that would mean man kind could be free agents, while being determined at the same time. Therefore the only way for suffering to come about, is if God wanted it to. Therefore in order for the free will defence

to work considering Dostoyevsky's point and Descartes is if man kind are truly free, evil is a better option than no freedom and if Gods omnipotence is limited. While these conditions reduce the arguments likelyhood, the next argument proves it to be less than appealing.

Augustine and Plantinga argue God cannot be blamed, yet surely this is not the case. As an omniscient creator, God would have known both the angels and mankind would fall, yet before he created them did nothing to prevent it. Therefore if he knew we would fall and create suffering, yet created us anyway he must share the responsibility for evil's creation. Hick argued this well in 'Evil and the God of love' when he stated "the idea of an upqualified good creature ~~sinning~~^{committing} sin is self contradictory and unintelligable"... "if they do sin, one can only infer, they were not made flawless - in which case their maker much share the responsibility for their fall".

So if God can be proven to have created evil, the free will defence fails as its whole purpose is to prove He didn't. Therefore the free will defence seems to be a weak argument and its absence

Within the book of Job only strengthens the Book's solution by not including a unsatisfactory one.

In the concluding verses of the Book of Job, God comes down to Job and gives him the answer he has been waiting for - albeit a rather insufficient one. God told Job that humans can not understand why they must suffer as it is incomprehensible to them. This makes sense from the perspective that justification for something can exist, regardless of whether it is known or understood by us.

Yet it makes one question whether it be an excuse for the fact God cannot justify evil's existence. His way of explaining himself focused primarily on the wonders and intricacy of his creation which does not address his justification at all.

Regardless of this, after having explored most palpable options for the existence of evil and suffering and come up with an insufficient justification. I can only conclude that the decision in Job's final chapter seems to be the most convincing. For if the justification were to be as one previously suggested, as shown in this essay, humans are unable to see or understand its necessity.

Therefore whether it be that explored previously ~~the~~ or not, the problem cannot be sufficiently answered. Therefore I agree with the statement above that Job is a good attempt at a solution to suffering because it explores numerous ideas in order to prove the final conclusion. Which despite its contradictory messages, seems to be the best solution possible.

Advice for candidates:

- Do not ignore the question; manage your material to focus on the demands of the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Demonstrate how well you understand the topic by your selection of material.
- Do not forget to comment on your material. Show that you have thought about your research.
- Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.
- Comment on alternative views if you know them.
- Express your viewpoint clearly with academic humility.
- Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation.
- Do not spend too long writing out your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.
- Spell key terms and key scholars correctly.

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