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Examiners' Report

June 2010

GCE Religious Studies 6RS04 1A

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Introduction

This was the first year of this examination 6RS04 1A. The Legacy Spec paper 6584 1A had the same content as 6RS04 1A but this new exam has a different mark allocation between the two assessment objectives. Legacy had 25/15 whereas 6RS04 has 30/20 for AO1 and AO2. There are differences in the level descriptors, for example AO1 having 5 levels in this new paper compared to 4 in the Legacy Spec.

It is of paramount importance for candidates to examine the passage on the exam paper. Candidates must relate what they have learned and apply it to the extract and not treat it in a cursory fashion nor ignore the selected text. Examiners are fully aware that there are very 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 that were not linked to the question. This is not a recommended strategy.

Assessment Objectives: the examination is divided into two parts. AO1 is part (a) worth 30marks and AO2 in part (b) worth 20 marks. This division is on the paper 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. A few spent a disproportionate amount of time on AO1 at the expense of AO2 and vice versa. 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 the implications aspect of part (b). Candidates who adopt this holistic technique take a risk. In no way whatsoever do examiners penalise candidates who run together AO1 and AO2, though candidates may penalise themselves with partial answers.

AO1:

There was evidence of sound subject knowledge with a thorough exposition of the passage. Some candidates examined the passage in the question paper and then illustrated key ideas by the way they navigated their way through the whole passage of the anthology. This enabled candidates to incorporate various scholars referenced in the whole article as a means of a more detailed analysis of the passage itself and to show an understanding of the context of the passage in relation to Donovan's leading viewpoints.

A number of candidates had a strong working knowledge of the other two anthologies and were able to link these in their answers.

At the lower levels candidates presented a more descriptive and basic account of the passage akin to a simple comprehension test. Some outlined the rest of Donovan's article but with insufficient attention to the passage on the question paper. This may have displayed their knowledge of the anthology but not an understanding of the selected passage. Some candidates used the argument for existence of God based on religious experience at the expense of a more detailed analysis of the passage itself. Others wrote a generalised account of religious experience using material on William James for example but with no mention Donovan at all. This approach could have been made to good use provided it was focused on the key ideas in this passage.

AO2:

The better quality answers were those that expressed view points with confidence and authority, supported by reason and evidence. Some candidates outlined their own views and were able to ally or contrast them with various scholars they had examined in their other units. Good quality work in the implications in part (b) consisted of academically rigorous approaches with pertinent examples. In particular candidates made effective use of their other units in the implications sections of AO2 such as material on religious experience and religious language in 6RS03. This was effective in the sense that candidates based their material on the Donovan passage and illustrated this by reference to these linked topics. Some candidates debated Donovan's ideas about 'knowledge' and notions about 'having no doubts' and made interesting observations with a priori reasoning found in the ontological argument. In a similar manner some of Donovan's points relate to religious language claims and there was reasonable use made of A J Ayer and verification together with a range of relevant ideas in Westphal's article. Once again the important point is the way this illustrative material was used as a means of exemplifying the text. A further valuable connection was made with ethics and notions of Intuitionism and intelligent use of G E Moore. In addition, some candidates placed this passage in a broader perspective so as to debate implications from history, politics and contemporary issues.

At the lower levels for AO2:

One of the tasks in part (b) is the question: 'Do you agree with the idea(s) expressed?' Some candidates adopted a fairly narrow view of what Donovan was arguing and by so doing over simplified the thrust of his reasoning. With this in mind it would have been prudent for candidates to be aware of the key strands of Donovan's thinking in his overall thesis as seen in the anthology itself. Some candidates presented partial answers in relation to AO2. For example some expressed opinions giving their views on the extract but did not write possible implications. Candidates wrote answers on the likes of A J Ayer and verification without locating this material in the Donovan source.

Question 1

This is an example of good practice in presenting an introduction to part (a)

(a) In Peter Donovan's essay "Can we know God by experience?" he examines and explores the idea that we can have a direct, intuitive awareness - or knowledge - of God. He makes a distinction between the idea of "feeling certain", and "being right", and explores the possible dichotomy between intuitive feelings, and those which correspond to a reality. The trouble with intuition about God compared to other intuitions is that ~~that feeling~~ ^{that feeling} has nothing we can ~~later~~ ^{our feeling} check ~~our feelings~~ ^{ourselves} of certainty against, other than our feelings. Donovan concludes by saying that we can bridge the two polarised views of ~~the~~ ~~two~~ knowledge from intuition, and knowledge from reason. The problems arise when we try and take intuition as knowledge in itself, as it is self-certifying.

In this passage, Donovan presents several ideas. Firstly, a distinction between ~~the~~ the "argument" from religious experience, and other classical arguments for God's existence. Secondly, why it is a "risky business" to "claim to know" and "act as if one knows for sure", and thirdly, examines the lack of doubt that some believers have about their sense of certainty about God, hinting at the interplay between faith and reason.



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Examiners' Comments

The candidate displays a proficiency in the use of key terms and is able to focus on key ideas in a crisp manner.



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Examiner Tip

In the second paragraph the candidate sets out a three fold division of the material. This helps to highlight the important emphases and serves as a useful structure for the remaining part of this answer.

This is the second paragraph of the candidate's answer in part (a).

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Examiner Comments

This represents a way in which a candidate presents an exposition of the first paragraph from the passage. The candidate keeps quite close to the text and picks out the main ideas.

In the first paragraph of this extract Donovan raises the issue of arguing from religious experience, from the view of believers and people who claim to have had these religious experiences. Donovan is claiming that if you know he is real yourself, then what is the point of arguing for his existence? Here Donovan brings up what he had explored earlier in his article in the 'feeling certain and being right' section where Donovan claims there are two types of certainty; rational (actually knowing its true) and psychological certainty (the feeling that its true). He moves on in the paragraph of this extract to reference William James and his 'varieties of religious experience' which he researched. Donovan concludes this paragraph by claiming that we must take seriously this 'sense of knowing' that people intuitively feel when they claim to have a religious experience. Donovan is

saying that it shouldn't be overlooked.

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Examiner Tip

The candidate makes effective use of the whole anthology by concise reference to different types of certainty. There is reference to William James in relation to the expression 'varieties of religious experience'. The candidate controls this material very well and at this stage does not embark upon a lot of detail about James.

At the beginning of their answer the candidate has a heading 'a + b' and this represents a holistic answer.



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Examiner Comments

As with a number of candidates who combine parts (a) with (b) there is a danger of a partial answer to part (b). The candidate in the early part of their answer deploys material from a range of relevant units and sources. However, across the whole essay there is little explicit reference to the implications requirement of AO2. Here, in the concluding section, there is potentially useful material such as implications arising from Logical Positivists. However, this by itself is too limited as a good response to the demands of AO2.

So then the issue which Donovan seeks to resolve ~~is~~ moves away from if we can know God, to if we can say we know God. The fault lies in the inability to express convincingly one's beliefs. For Logical Positivists this renders any statements regarding the subject meaningless as they are not ~~withstand~~ empirically verifiable. Even for A. J. Ayer who extends the verification principle into strong verification (as above) and weak verification, the statements ~~is~~ still lack meaning as we cannot even comprehend the circumstances under

which we may carry out empirical testing.

In all Donovan's issue fails to be resolved. ^{or} While it may be possible for individuals to know God by experience, such knowledge cannot meaningfully be expressed as truth or shared by others.



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Examiner Tip

Candidates must think carefully about running the two assessment objectives together. In the right hands this type of approach could be successful. It is however risky because in practice too many candidates present only partial answers to part (b).

This is an example of exposition for part (a) which sometimes works and sometimes could be improved.

There are four types of religious experiences: mystical, where someone has a sense of union with the divine; Prayer, where God comes to us through meditation and personal reflection. A Conversion religious experience is when an experience changes your life for the better and a mediated experience is where God comes to us through nature (finite things). Finite means limited. In the Ontological argument Anselm argues that 'God is the greatest being that can be conceived'. However God is infinite, so he must exist in reality.

Hume argues that propositions dealing with existence can be true or false; they are synthetic propositions. This relates to this passage as intuition from a believer's view is a form of knowledge and a sense of knowing God, however from the view of someone who hasn't had a religious intuition, they say an intuition can't be checked therefore how can they believe.

Ayer in his Religious Language essay says that God communicates to us through the natural world, 'so when it thunders 'Jehovah is angry.' This view can be supported by a believer who has had a mediated experience, it can also be supported by the 'burning bush'.

Flew says that a religious experience will be shaped by what the person having the experience believes in. For example, a Hindu will have

an experience of Krishna and a Christian will have an experience of Jesus.

Freud argues that ~~see~~ a person may feel lonely and relate to God as a Father figure, therefore God's reality is in existence for that person.



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Examiner Comments

It may be useful in part (a) to analyse the material by links with related ideas. At one stage the candidate makes good use of ideas about intuition as a form of knowledge. However, there is much in this extract that is not explicitly tied to the passage itself. For example the passing reference to the Ontological argument, A.J. Ayer, Flew and Freud. These ideas and scholars could be relevant but the candidate does not make the links explicit.



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Examiner Tip

Try to ensure that illustrative material is managed in such a way as to clarify ideas in the passage and this linkage is made as explicit as possible.

This is a lengthy extract. It shows an effective way in which a student structures their material for A02

b) I agree with the ideas expressed by Donovan, because I feel that intuitive knowledge of God is not the most reliable ~~from~~ way of arguing in favour for the existence of God, however we should not completely reject the argument for the existence of God. I agree with the anti-realist stance that Donovan takes on the argument for religious experience as they can still provide meaning to the believer.

An important implication for religion is that if people can no longer claim knowledge from religious experiences, then the argument from religious experience is severely weakened. If our intuition is the only possible way in which we can experience God and if our intuition is no longer reliable then the argument for religion from religious experience is severely weakened. If this is the case, then ~~the~~ ~~principles of~~ ~~credibility and testimony~~ would no longer then people would no longer be convinced by the argument from religious experience and people may begin to lose faith. People would reinterpret religious experiences as an 'insight into one's own mind' and they would be reduced to psychological feelings.

Another implication for religion would be that most people would take an anti-realist stance on religious experiences. Although intuition may not be reliable, religious experiences can provide meaning to the believer and so still play a significant part in the lives of believers. Although, the argument may no longer be convincing to non-believers, the believers can still take meaning from them. This idea fits well with Wittgenstein's view.

believed that religious language is meaningful to a community of believers in a particular way of life. If religious experiences are meaningful to religious believers, then they are significant and play a big role in the believer's life. I feel this is a positive implication for religion, as it still provides meaning to the believer.

Moreover, a third implication for religion could be that agnosticism is the only satisfactory position to take. Donovan does not conclude that God does not exist, nor does he conclude that God exists and so ~~there~~ it is not really possible to know. If people could no longer know for certain that God exists through use of intuition then they are forced into taking an agnostic stance on religion and this may result in faith being lost and believers may not continue to believe.

A major implication for human experience is that moral authority claimed through moral truths gained through revelatory experiences would no longer be meaningful. Religious believers ~~would~~ ^{who} claim moral facts through private subjective experiences with God would no longer be able to claim these facts. This would result in moral systems such as divine command ethics being diminished and would question the ~~basis~~ ^{views} of particular religious groups such as the westward church's views on homosexuality. This would result in many not knowing where to find morality if ethical systems such as divine command ethics lose meaning. In addition to this, people would no longer be able to claim they ~~know~~ 'just know' genocide is wrong because there is no objective basis upon which this intuition is true or false. Donovan would then accept the fact -

value distinction, that moral truths cannot be derived from facts. This would have severe implications for ~~religion~~ human experience because people would no longer be able to claim that 'it is wrong to murder' and may lead to moral anarchy.

A second implication for human experience is that believers may begin to lose faith if they begin to question the reliability of their intuition. If people are accused of being ignorant to criticisms and arrogant in the way they hold their ~~values~~ beliefs, people may no longer want to have faith and may question their faith. On the other hand, it may lead people to be more critical of their beliefs so that they don't believe everything they hear. This may be a positive implication as people would be able to falsify their beliefs and think realistically about the beliefs they hold.

In conclusion, I feel that the passage has provided both positive and negative implications for religion and human experience. I feel that Donovan is sensible and pragmatic in the approach he takes towards intuition and religious experience and that people may be more accepting of critics to their beliefs. However, I feel that if people could no longer claim moral facts from values then there would be complete freedom for all to act in the way they wish.



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Examiner Comments

This represents high quality work in relation to the implications required in AO2. The candidate has a clear focus on the implications for understanding religion and secondly for understanding human experience. There is clear evidence of structured, analytical reasoning leading to a coherent conclusion.



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Examiner Tip

This is a very high quality answer in relation to the implications requirements of AO2. In addition, the candidate could have expanded a little the opening paragraph dealing with the issue of whether or not they agreed with the ideas.

Congratulations should be given to a significant number of candidates who presented good quality work. They displayed the results of thorough study coupled with efficient examination techniques. They presented a scholarly understanding of the passage and related themes and managed the material so as to answer the whole question in a well-structured manner. Some candidates may improve their standards by providing an explicit examination of the passage in part (a) and evaluative material that addresses the full demands in part (b).

Grade boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw mark boundary	50	43	38	33	28	24	20	16	0
Uniform mark scale boundary	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	0

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