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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Paper 01 Religious Studies - Foundations

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6RS01 Summer 2017 Examiners' report

There were some excellent responses in this series, with most students taking this as a re-sit and there was evidence of fluent writing, attention to the question and depth of knowledge in many scripts. Weaker responses failed to tailor their knowledge to the specifics of the question, this was notable where ONE or TWO items were requested in questions as weaker responses did not follow this requirement.

This report focuses on the sections where there were candidate responses in a significant number.

Philosophy of Religion

Question 1

a) Design argument

This year questions on the Design argument were significantly more popular than questions on the Cosmological argument. Some students wrote some very good answers looking specifically at the notion of 'general pattern'. There were some outstanding answers showing real application to the question. Lots of answers showed great understanding and used a variety of examples. A few resorted to a set piece answer, which did not focus on the question and therefore tended to score lower marks.

b) Cosmological argument

Some students wrote very good Cosmological argument answers, focussing first on Leibniz's argument. There was a lot of careful examination of the implications of the question evident. Generally good answers, with some interesting takes on 'credible.' There were a couple of students who focused mostly on Leibniz and then struggled to go beyond that in their responses, these candidates struggled to say enough or address the question.

Question 2

a) Problem of suffering

This was a very popular question with many well-prepared students. Quite a number failed to read the question properly, but there were other excellent focussed answers. Most responses managed to give a good account, displaying good breadth or depth of knowledge. Some students took the opportunity to do it well, and developed their answers on what the problem was to compensate for a shorter explanation in only talking about one theodicy. Other students found it difficult to write enough for A01 and some students continued to write about two theodicies despite the question requiring only one. The clear majority of students though could write clearly about the problem of suffering and one theodicy in part i). In part ii) a significant minority of students struggled to evaluate – either the theodicy presented in i) or a second theodicy they presented instead. Either

approach was legitimate if there was evaluation and real AO2 in the response and this was an area that was less well managed.

b) Miracles

This was not a popular question although it did see some good responses. Some candidates could give two definitions and two reasons, but many did not discuss two for each. Candidates seemed to struggle with the part ii), tending to argue about whether miracles were believable or not, rather than answering the question of whether they lead to belief in a God worthy of respect and not many responses were able to sustain the focus in (ii).

Ethics

Question 3

a) Utilitarianism or Situation Ethics

Utilitarianism was substantially more popular than Situation Ethics. With Utilitarianism, most scripts focused on the versions proposed by Mill and Bentham; though quite a few included material on Preference Utilitarianism and Negative Utilitarianism. Some explored ideas by Moore that there are several intrinsic goods as well as 'happiness'. The better responses showed that candidates could select the important concepts of Utilitarianism and the weaker responses just wrote all they know about the theory whether it was important or not and did not unpack the implications of important concepts; for example, they simply said that the theory was teleological in character, but failed to explore what this meant. Better scripts explored that this meant that no action was good or bad; rightness of an action was determined solely by the consequences of the action.

For the AO2 this year it was pleasing to see how most candidates attempted to answer the question usually by including the wording of the question 'to what extent are these concepts undermined by its criticisms?' Some successfully used some weaknesses and explained why they detracted from the theory others just listed weaknesses. Some weaker answers gave detailed hypothetical examples. Others used ostensive examples that were apposite.

There were much fewer on Situation Ethics but the same can be said. It was generally well answered concentrating on agape. Use of the working principles were evident and well written. Most scripts could identify the 4 presuppositions on which Fletcher proposed his ethic, but the better scripts could unpack the significance of these for the ethic in practice. For example, some scripts explored the application of 'pragmatism' and explained that in practice this meant that the ideal solution was not on offer and that Situation Ethics requires that the assessment choose the 'lesser of two evils.' Some poorer responses concentrated on the idea of legalism and antinomianism thinking they were features of the theory and not understanding they were the ideas that Fletcher rejected. Most understood the idea that Situation

Ethics was consequentialist, there were a few candidates who believed it was also Deontological which would have been acceptable if they had explained their point about the only right action in itself being a loving action, this is then linked to loving outcomes. Again, there was well answered AO2 showing a genuine concern for the question.

In relation to AO2 both theories were criticised based on their teleological character: its unpredictability and its inability to consider special relationships in the calculations. Both were criticised for the ambiguity surrounding their intrinsic good, and that people may understand these terms in different ways. Some provided sophisticated arguments exploring these issues and often provided counter arguments to balance their discussion. Weaker scripts simply listed points with little or no discussion.

b) Religion and morality

There were only a few Religion and Morality and they were answered well showing an understanding of the Euthyphro dilemma and the problems of Biblical Morality. Better responses could unpack the argument and explore its sophistication, while weaker scripts provided little depth or insight. Candidates also used Dawkins to support the view that morality is independent of religion. His argument most often used was that religion encourages immoral behaviour and extremism. Some scripts used Russell effectively. In part ii) the strongest responses discussed a range of scholars to explore how this approach of morality being independent of religion might be undermined. They showed some understanding of how religion and morality were linked in this section but weaker responses relied on descriptive accounts while better answers were able analyse alternative views and present a coherent case.

Question 4

a) Pacifism

There were very few question 4 responses. It was pleasing to note this year that in i) candidates with just a few exceptions were prepared to answer with the important beliefs of pacifism and not turn it round to the more popular Just War Theory. Most candidates used Just War Theory to show how the idea of Pacifism is undermined in ii). Pacifism was explored through a range of approaches; such as absolute, active, relative, nuclear. Though some wanted to argue that Relative Pacifism is tantamount to the Just War Theory. The better responses focused on the *beliefs* associated with pacifism. They unpacked a range of beliefs including the Christian command to love your neighbour and 'thou shall not kill'. Some described how the beliefs could be categorised as deontological: 'killing is wrong in itself'; or the consequential: 'killing will lead to hatred and more killing'. Candidates often relayed how the approach had been used successfully by historical figures such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Some responses simply described the Just War Theory to answer part (ii). A popular argument was that pacifism is idealistic and would not have been

effective against someone such as Hitler. The degree to which the candidate was successful in this argument varied. Some were able to discuss this position and made reference to active pacifism and arguments from Gandhi on this point. Some simply said it would not have worked and the argument was taken no further.

b) Sexual Ethics

This was not a particularly popular question. The quality in answers has improved over the years and this year the question provided some good answers and most common was homosexuality followed by extra marital affairs. Most candidates realised that these were two dilemmas and could express clearly the problems they raised. There were the beginnings of some being able to show the confusion caused by religion but more could have used Natural Law and Situation Ethics to highlight the confusion. The best scripts were scholarly and referred to a range of arguments and ethical theories, including Aquinas, Natural Law, Situation Ethics; as well as Biblical passages. In part ii) the better responses could offer detailed analysis of their position. A common position was that Biblical teachings are often contradictory with themselves or with fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. Weaker responses often argued that religious beliefs are out of date and therefore no longer relevant, with little or no exploration of this argument.

Islam

There was considerable diversity in the standard of answers in this section. There were a few with full marks having shown work deserving of Level 4 in both A01 and A02 but also some examples of poor quality of work across the range of questions.

Some disappointing marks were the result of a considerable number of candidates not attempting the second part of questions chosen. This was particularly disappointing to note when candidates had gained high marks in the first part of the answer.

Q11b and 12a were not popular questions and were only answered by a very small number of candidates.

Question 11 a)

Those candidates achieving the higher level focused upon the demands of the question and relevant material was selected and used carefully. These candidates demonstrated an excellent knowledge and understanding of the diversity of religious traditions in pre-Islamic Arabia and Mohammad's distinctive contributions.

Candidates who were awarded marks in the lower levels often failed to relate their answers closely to the question but wrote all they knew about pre-Islamic Arabia. Some answers were brief and very generalised reflecting lack of knowledge and understanding. Too often the A02 was descriptive rather than analytical.

Question 12 b)

Those candidates achieving the higher level focused closely upon the demands of the question and carefully examined the importance of Shahada for prayer. These candidates used their material well and demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of the topic; ably discussing the significance of prayer for Muslims.

Too many candidates described the five pillars as if they were showing all they knew about the five pillars and failed to use appropriate material to answer the question asked. Some concentrated on the importance of shahada but failed to link it with its importance for prayer whilst others described the pillar of prayer rather than commenting on its significance for Muslims.

New Testament

Question 17 a)

For Luke the best answers covered the full range of teaching from the Gospel on the teaching on wealth and poverty. Answers drew on a wide range of ideas and examples, yet the answers were devoid of narrative. The difficulty of reconciling the love of money with discipleship was explored.

For John, the sayings were explored in terms of some aspects of their replacement theology, but more could have been made of the divine claims that can be found with them. Candidates are urged to cite Old Testament background where appropriate. The I Am claims are best understood for the nature of their divine claim, their replacement theology and their realised eschatology, yet not so many candidates explored these themes in part (ii) of their essay. Some good use was made of scholars.

Question 17 b)

Here a good understanding of the miracles was shown. The underlying messages of the incidents were well explored, but, as is so often the case, weaker candidates simply narrated. For part (ii) of the essay, whether from Luke or John, more could be made of the overarching significance of miracles/signs within the Gospel. For example, the challenge to the authorities, and the Christological impact that such teaching can have. It is worth noting here "not the most important". It can be argued that signs/miracles are of lesser importance to the Gospel writer compared, say to the teaching on the Passion which flows throughout each Gospel.

Question 18 a)

Somewhat surprisingly, here the candidates often failed to offer sufficient detail. The incidents involving women in the Fourth Gospel and the teaching on prayer and praise in Luke is quite specific. There can be little room here. It's either noted in detail or it's not, and it is here that some responses were thin. For example, very few candidates noted that the incident involving the woman caught in adultery is probably a later addition to the Gospel, and even when it was noted, very few candidates explored possible reasons why it was included. The message of the inclusivity of the Gospel therefore went with little mention.

Question 18 b)

The responses on discipleship were the best of the responses. Many were long, detailed and thorough. Good use was made of the key passages from the text and there was a useful juxtaposition of scholars' views in (ii). The role of John the Baptist as prophet/witness was well explored. The best answers from John showed a detailed knowledge of the five occasions when the Baptist is mentioned.

Given the success of the responses to this question, it is therefore surprising that responses on other topics (most notably the I AM's) made for less successful reading.

As has often been the case, many candidates scored high marks in this section and rightly so. Their essays made for most successful reading.

