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# **Examiners' Report**

## **Principal Examiner Feedback**

**Summer 2017**

Pearson Edexcel GCE

In Religious Studies (6RS02)

Paper 1B Investigations – The Study of Philosophy  
of Religion

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## **Area 1B The Study of Philosophy of Religion**

### **Introduction**

#### GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2017 examination season heralded the end of an era and the final entry stands as a testimony to the historic high level of engagement with selected studies drawn from a very wide range of academic fields. Over the life of this specification there has been consistent evidence of superb research on topics that are clearly of great interest to candidates. This legacy of academic achievement has been inspirational for examiners whose privilege it is to see what can be achieved by our candidates. The new specification will obviously provide a different assessment experience and centres will find that their excellent resources can be integrated into future schemes of work.

The high standard of work evidenced in June 2017 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a very high level of independent enquiry which clearly demonstrated what their chosen area of investigation had meant to them as a learning experience. Candidates showcased their knowledge of a particular academic field in the way they identified a line of enquiry, clearly expressed their view, analysed key concepts and deployed evidence with coherent understanding of their task whilst fluently evaluating a wide range of source material that they had at their disposal. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Candidates were mostly 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. At this stage in the life of the specification it is difficult to find new things to report because, in the main, centres possess a very high degree of expertise and this is clearly evidenced in the work that is produced on the day of the examination.

Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. 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. Many candidates had clearly learned much in the process and their overall grasp of the issues involved and command over their material was highly commendable.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. These candidates were insecure with their management of material and did not know how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. 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. This approach is contrasted with excellent praxis whereby 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 anticipated content. 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.

The excellent work of centres and candidates in 6RS02 bears testimony to the academic potential of candidates that is a joy to behold when it is fully realised.

### **Specific Comments – Area 1B – The Study of Philosophy of Religion**

#### **Question 1 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE; MEDITATION**

There has been a consistent improvement in the quality of answers to this question over the years and 2017 has to be a vintage year for excellence. The majority of candidates produced thoughtful and authoritative essays which demonstrated comprehensive understanding of key ideas that were discussed critically with confidence and authority. This question gave candidates the opportunity to really demonstrate the breadth and depth of their knowledge and understanding of the Philosophy of Religion in the context of the question (i.e. religious experience and claims about God and/or human nature. Most candidates grouped philosophers together in terms of their particular perspective/time period/field (e.g. existentialist, Greek, Scientific). Other candidates began with one or two core philosophers from a particular perspective and then made reference to other philosophers whose understanding of the topic supported this particular perspective thus presenting a broad spectrum of opinion on understanding God and/or the holy. This latter approach allowed candidates more scope to explore the issue from different perspectives. Candidates who presented the work of Otto on 'the idea of the holy' were able to better understand the nature and debate of the emotional and intuitive experience of God and/or the holy. This made for an interesting essay which allowed scope for the candidates to engage with the 'ideas' in order to develop and present 'their own opinion' on the matter at an emotional and intuitive or applicable and experiential level in addition to presenting an intellectual analysis.

Evaluation was evident through direct exposition of and critically appraising particular philosophical standpoints, mostly through the citing of a number of philosophers and their relevant ideas. This was good to see as it demonstrated a sound understanding of how a number of ideas and

perspectives intersect around a particular philosophical issue. The best answers related their study of the varieties of religious experience to understanding the mysterious nature of 'the holy'. These responses tended to be quite open minded and even handed in their assessment – to address both the advantages of religious experience and its problems. Material from a wide range of scholarship was integrated 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 supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument. It was refreshing to read a variety of answers which explored the topic in original ways.

It is clear that many centres have chosen the topics very carefully indeed and so there appears to be more clearly bright candidates taking on more demanding topics which offer a genuine challenge and which has led to some very thoughtful and probing work. 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. Candidates are often very well prepared and some have researched their subjects very thoroughly. Overall the majority of candidates were well prepared for this question and had no difficulty in responding to it.

Nonetheless, the point remains that the most able candidates produced original arguments and wrote in a fluent and interesting way with consistent reference to the question. In some cases analysis and evaluation of ideas was exceptional or very good (as in the majority of cases), whereas some merely listed the opposing/numerous views. There were still a very high number of responses that made a serious attempt to answer the question. The best answers considered the question against the background of the scholarship they had engaged with. These candidates assessed the persuasiveness of their argument in relation to the range of scholarship deployed and many answers were very well done. Exceptional responses tended to respond to the question more directly, thus recognising the opportunity offered by a deconstruction/discussion of the question.

## Question 2

### Question 2 MIND AND BODY

This question continues to attract outstanding scholarly responses and was very well done by able candidates who were effective at analysing the question and discussing the relevance of their research in this context. 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 as to how these theories might then play out in relation to the question. It was very pleasing to read the high proportion of scripts which handled the material from key scholars in a balanced and critical way. The majority of scripts discussed the various viewpoints of dualists, monists and materialists very effectively. 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.

### Question 3

#### Question 3 A STUDY OF ONE/MORE PHILOSOPHERS OF RELIGION

As always, this question attracted a large variety of answers, including some truly outstanding responses to the question. Candidates routinely demonstrated a very accurate, comprehensive and often sophisticated understanding of the key ideas of a scholar with really good accounts of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kierkegaard, Nagel, Nietzsche, Leibniz, Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, 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 any useful insights 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 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. This question asks candidates to respond using one or more philosophers they have investigated. Although positive marking was employed in all cases, candidates who were able to introduce more than one philosopher into their answer warranted a higher mark.

## Paper Summary

### Key Points to Remember

- Do not ignore the question.
- 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.
- Well 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.

