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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Examiners' report – 6RSO3 Summer 2017

The final full sitting of 6RSO3 Developments showed clearly that centres and candidates have become very confident in their handling of teaching and learning the relevant material and tackling the demands of the examination. Standards were very high across all topic areas and it is hoped that centres can move forward with confidence to the new specification, knowing that all the good work done over the years on the legacy specification will continue to stand them in good stead. The majority of topics are still relevant and the resources used for the legacy specification are still invaluable.

The characteristics of a good examination essay remained the same: fluency, legibility, detail, scholarship, relevance, accuracy, depth and/or breadth and pertinence to the question set. These skills are entirely transferrable to the new specification.

The interest and engagement with which candidates have clearly worked over the life of this specification is a credit to them, their teachers and to the subject. We will look forward to seeing those few centres who are entering candidates next year and wish well all those for whom this was their last entry to the legacy specification.

Philosophy of Religion

Q1a

There were very few candidates that chose this question despite the popularity in the past of this topic. Of those candidates who did choose to answer it, most wrote about Dawkins, Marx and/or Freud and used the themes of agnosticism and atheism in their answers. There were some excellent examples where candidates obviously had a substantial knowledge of the critiques of religious belief and expertly tied them in to the requirements of the question, showing their considerable understanding. Some candidates who chose scepticism did this particularly well and their enjoyment and interest in the topic was abundantly clear. On the other hand, a small number of candidates appeared to answer this question in despair and failed to understand its requirements.

Q1b (Ontological Argument option)

This was by far the most popular question. There were some excellent scripts that had a strong focus on the strengths of the argument; essays focused for example, on the a priori nature of the argument and the definitions of God using good analysis with impressive subject knowledge. There were also many 'formulaic' responses that took little notice of the set question and, instead, worked through the key points from Anselm and Descartes, and sometimes also Malcolm and Platinga. These scripts tended to be shorter and were more descriptive rather than analytical. In AO2 the highest achieving scripts gave a full evaluation considering many facets from each side. The weaker performing candidates tended to focus on Gaunilo and

Anselm's counter argument rather than engaging with the views of Kant, Hume and Gasking.

Q1b (Religious Experience option)

It was surprising that there were so few candidates who opted to answer a question on religious experience, particularly since the question was so straightforward. Those that did choose this question often wrote to a high standard with excellent use of scholarship. Many candidates successfully grappled with the strengths of the argument and utilised a considerable amount of examples and evidence in their answer. There was still much to write in AO2 and there were many full evaluations that discussed whether the argument for the existence of God based on religious experience is convincing.

Q2a

Candidates showed no sign of being put off by the specific focus of this question which gave candidates the opportunity to engage with the subject knowledge and many did so with flair. Outstanding use of scholarship was noted in essays about both the relationship between mind and body, and personal identity. Candidates who selected this question were less formulaic in their answers and it was enjoyable to read and appreciate the links made by the candidates and appreciate their understanding of the topic. Part (b) was also well answered with considerable subject content included and it was clear that candidates had enjoyed the more open invitation offered by this part of the question.

Q2b

The most popular choices for this topic were analogy and logical positivism. Many scripts had good discussion of analogy of attribution and proportionality and candidates were also confident with explaining the shortfalls of univocal and equivocal language to speak of God. There was a sizeable group of scripts that gave a detailed analysis of 'meaning' in relation to religious language and these were, perhaps, the answers that typically contained the most content, candidates discussed the verification and falsification principles, myth, symbol and language games. Students seemed to relish the opportunity to answer a question that enabled them to bring in a wide range of knowledge from more than one area of religious language. It is worth noting that students had an in depth, and indeed impressive, knowledge of Language Truth and Logic, perhaps due to learning from 6RS04 1A.

Religious Ethics

Q3a

Virtue Ethics proved the more popular option with approximately 1/3 of candidates choosing Deontology and 2/3 choosing Virtue Ethics. Responses overall for this item were of a good standard and contained a broad range of information. High level responses to Virtue Ethics covered extensive content including often background to Aristotle's writing, some candidates with a very good knowledge of Plato and his relevance. These candidates understood the teleological nature of the theory and were able to explore the benefits of person-centred ethical theories. Key concepts of the theory including Eudaimonia, The Golden Mean, Virtues and Vices, and the Four Cardinal Virtues were explored in depth and with reference to their relative strengths. Often these candidates explored modern work on Virtue Ethics by Anscombe and MacIntyre.

High level responses to Deontology focussed on Kant although some also considered Divine Command ethics. These candidates were able to cover the theory in depth whilst drawing out key strengths such as how the categorical imperative can be used to ensure modern day human rights. Candidates of all levels were able to identify at least the categorical imperative and the principle of universalisability. Nearly all identified duty as the only correct motivation.

Strong responses to (ii) were able to address the chosen theory's ability to perform in the modern world. Weaknesses identified for Virtue Ethics included the inability to identify the Golden Mean, and a lack of direct moral instruction. Candidates undertook an exploration of Anscombe's modern VE and were able to analyse the effectiveness of these proposed developments. For Deontology there was a tendency to oversimplify the weaknesses of rule-based ethical decision making, but most candidates were able to identify problems with conflicting imperatives and solutions for this primarily W.D. Ross.

Q3b

Responses to this question were of consistently good quality. All candidates managed to identify Aquinas as the key proponent of the theory and the five primary precepts. The majority of candidates also referred to Aristotle, high level candidates assessing the links between them in detail. The fullest responses explored the four laws, telos, the primary and secondary precepts, interior and exterior acts, real and apparent goods. In the second part higher level candidates were able to effectively critique NML using scholars including Hume and Moore, covering Hume's Fork, the 'is-ought' gap and the naturalistic fallacy. Weaker candidates identified problems for atheists, critiqued unchanging morality with regards to homosexuality, and the fundamental flaws of the primary precepts.

Q4a

A wide range of material was used for this question, with some very good responses. Candidates often chose to begin with reference to Plato and his idea of social order, and discussed the ideas of social contract, and equality as a vehicle for ensuring justice. Some candidates identified issues of fairness in gaining true equality.

With regard to law some candidates successfully used Aquinas, Aristotle and Kant, and discussed different types of law-giving including the benefits of categorical imperatives. Higher level candidates included criticisms of different types of law including conflicting duties and naturalistic fallacy. Most candidates framed punishment as the consequence of law breaking and the delivery of justice. Candidates considered different types of punishment, with a cluster choosing to make a feature of capital punishment.

Responses to (ii) were on the whole weak, with many candidates who produced a successful part one response struggling with the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity. Higher scoring candidates were able to focus their responses on ethical theories that demonstrated objective and subjective points of view (choosing deontological and consequence-based theories respectively) and applied them to law formulation and punishment.

Some candidates highlighted the contribution of the categorical imperative to human rights and critiqued its lack of cultural relativism with examples such as the Inuit custom of sending elders to die. There were some interesting discussions about original sin and whether any law set by man can be trusted.

Candidates felt more at home discussing objectivity and subjectivity in relation to punishment. Higher scoring candidates were able to draw out the benefits of having objective laws but a more flexible punishment system, and the overall contribution this can make to feelings of justice and fairness in society i.e. when circumstances such as mental health are seen to be taken into account during sentencing.

Q4b

Responses to this question were generally accomplished. Higher level candidates covered in depth the naturalistic fallacy, Hume's fork, the 'is-ought' gap. They also understood well the role of the logical positivists and the verification principle, and analysed Ayer's emotivism and Moore's intuitionism. Answers contained criticisms/support from MacIntyre, Ross, Anscombe and Singer.

Responses to (ii) primarily focussed on how even though ethical language cannot be proved factual this does not mean it lacks meaning. The majority of candidates chose to explore Intuitionism as the primary way ethical language can be understood 'good is like the colour yellow' and also used emotivism. The explorations of emotivism were stronger this year than they have been previously, with candidates seeming to have a good

understanding of how it provides a solution to Ayer's own criticism of ethical language.

Buddhism

Q 5a

Many candidates displayed good practice in terms of using biographical material about Ashoka in order to present a context to his emphasis on social principles. There was a good level of understanding of the Rock Edicts in relation to the question. Key scholars such as Gombrich and Harvey were used, coupled with references to Dharma and ahimsa. Part (ii) contained a range of views arguing for and against the claim that Ashoka's influence was, without doubt, good.

Q5b

For a number of years only a small number of candidates answered questions on Pure Land Buddhism and Zen. This year a considerable number selected this question and in many cases they answered with impressive success. Candidates analysed the key terms in the question such as 'salvation', 'grace', 'faith' and Amida. Candidates combined breadth of material with attention to detail. Part (ii) was especially good on the contrasts between tariki and jiriki, drawing on important figures and movements across both Pure Land and Zen.

Q6a

Part (i) showed evidence of a detailed understanding of relevant parts of the *Questions of King Milinda*. Part (ii) provided candidates with an opportunity to probe and think about a range of Buddhist issues about nirvana.

Q6b

Questions about the Bodhisattva tend to be popular and this year was no exception. There was a commendable breadth of material with effective use of detail. In part (ii) some candidates made good use of the Lotus Sutra and the implications for some distinctive features of beliefs about the Bodhisattva.

Christianity

Q7a

This question was fairly popular, and answers included a good survey of stages of development that were carefully crafted and the best responses were very detailed revealing a good grasp of the material. For (ii) the best responses explained very well the significance of this movement in terms of progress and development made and an assessment of difficulties or challenges still to face/work to overcome. A pleasing standard overall.

Q7)

There was a good mix of both options – Liberation Theology was done particularly well by most candidates with a good range of detail regarding development and contribution in the light of particular figures or practices and candidates revealed a good knowledge and understanding of this area with comprehensive answers. The Bonhoeffer question was also done pretty well with a good survey of his teachings, it was easier to slip into a biography here but most candidates managed to avoid this. There was good assessment of the contribution of Bonhoeffer/Liberation theology in (ii) although perhaps the Liberation theology responses were more comprehensive in this aspect.

Q8a

There were far few response to this question but some good detailed outlines of key modern teachings regarding the Trinity including primarily Barth, Rahner and Macquarrie. Candidates handled this material well. For (ii) there was good discussion on the problematic nature of these teachings in the context of having a relationship with God, of the work of salvation and of the notions of suffering in some responses.

Q8b

This was the least popular question with only a handful of responses, some answers were broader than Christianity and seemed to be a response to Q2 in Philosophy of Religion Mostly though the material was handled well and credit was given to all relevant material. Part (ii) saw a thoughtful response about the significance for Christians in terms of post mortem reality and implications for moral behaviour in life.

Hinduism

Q9a

Successful candidates focused on the tensions in the modern development of Hinduism between two figures, compared to those who simply contrasted the two selected figures. Similarly, the better answers concentrated on the implications for sanatana dharma compared to those who wrote about the influences of these figures.

Q9b

There were not as many answers on Gandhi compared to previous years. The better quality answers in part (i) weighed up the evidence between Western materialism and spiritual values with regard to Gandhi's aims. Part (ii) answers were successful provided candidates constructed an argument.

Q10a

Only a few candidates answered this question. The better answers drew upon relevant parts of the set texts with an intelligent selection of examples of key ideas.

Q10b

Candidates scoring at the lower levels presented narrative accounts of the Bhagavad Gita, whereas those at the higher levels analysed emphases, showing their significance. Part (ii) attracted good quality answers with debates about e.g. death and war and notions of 'doing one's duty'.

Islam

Q11a

This was much more focused on the question this year. Most candidates selected relevant material rather than telling us all they knew, and both parts of the prompt were generally covered. At L4 the relevance was generally spelt out more explicitly. In part (ii) weaker answers gave more of a description of differences between Sunnis and Shiites, whilst stronger ones correctly identified philosophical issues arising with the Mutazilla, but even the best struggled with the historical political dimension to this key doctrinal difference emerging between the Sunni and the Shia. The strongest responses did draw out the significance of the early history with the debate on the nature of leadership, democratic versus charismatic, that was there embryonically from the start, and developed into a rift. The very best scripts, perhaps quoting scholarship, attempted to show how other aspects of belief may have evolved out of the growing political disagreement over leadership.

Q11b

Though still fewer than 11a, many more attempted this in this session. There were some impressive studies on Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan: all fascinating choices, and often done rather well. Most candidates were careful to balance both the historical and religious aspects, either separately, or organically. Occasionally candidates might dwell on one issue a bit too much, which, though often done well, limited the range of issues covered. On the other hand, candidates were careful to make sure the politics was relevant, with some very apt exploration of the link between western interference, and resurgent wahabi, salafist Islamism. Part (ii) was generally done well enough. Points were well developed and explained, although there was some repetition of material in part ii, here. The best ones had part ii in mind before cracking into part i, to avoid repetition. There were a few excellent discussions here, one really excellent, on how Islamic was the Islamic state anyway.

Q12a)

This question was not so popular, though again much more than last year. It also was not done terribly well, with notable exceptions. Lower levels were general descriptions of the Qu'ranic teachings, with some confusion of belief and practice, and little, if any focus on the set text.

At L3 and higher the selection of topics was more explicitly 'beliefs', and there was more reference to Surah 2. The top ones generally selected the safest topics from the conventional 6 beliefs, such as Tawhid, Risalah, and Akhirah. Not many succeeded consistently rooting the discussion in Surah two, however. Some did this well enough for one or two of the topics, but typically floundered a bit on the third. The very best ones obviously were the ones most rooted in the text, with occasional confident quotation, either to back up points made, or else with the significance of the text drawn out.

Part (ii) was possibly the least well answered on the paper. For example, at L1 we had a few 'These are core beliefs so not much difference' type answers. Some L2s might show awareness of diversity but tangentially through say discussing Madhabs, and try to relate that to the question, but since this is Shariah no one really got far with this. L3 and higher needed to show awareness of different understandings related to the part one discussion. Some candidates did note that since these beliefs were so at the heart of Islamic belief, variations, though apparently minor could hold huge significance for believers. Very few developed this though.

Q12b

This year's responses were much more focused on the question than last year's with most candidates hitting L3 or higher on this. There were some excellent discussions here on the whole with many selecting material relevant to mysticism. Part (ii) was also generally good though some lower ones missed the nuance of 'way of life' implying some emphasis on practices. Most however, did pick up on this, and gave a good coverage of standard Sunni type critiques of Sufi Islam, along with the issue of whether or not Sufism is really Islam. The best scripts often also showed some awareness of a Sufi perspective on these criticisms. However, these often came across as somewhat apologetic, and few really gave a really confident Sufi response.

Judaism – insufficient responses to warrant a report

Sikhism

Q 15a

i) The Namdhari and Nirankari movements were selected and beliefs and practices were explained. Candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge of these groups and this could have been enhanced by carefully planning their answers with a close focus on the question.

ii) As with most answers this section proved the most difficult and answers would have been better with more careful evaluation/expansion of the points made.

Q15b

This was the more popular question Candidates answered well and their full answers related closely to the question as they analysed the impact of non-Sikh cultures on Sikh beliefs, values and practices. Though generally competent and clear, section (ii) required more evaluation of points made relating to the view that language and assimilation had significantly affected the Sikh sense of identity.

Q16a

i) The few Candidates who answered this presented an explanation of the concept of miri-piri in relation to Sikh individuals and movements.

ii) This part was the weakest. Careful planning and explanation was required to evaluate the claim that 'the concept of miri-piri implies that Sikhs should not be pacifists'.

16b)

i) Exploring the core themes of the Japji was the most popular question and candidates demonstrated good, sound knowledge of these themes.

ii) Some Candidates needed to use greater evaluation and debate when considering the extent to which Japji summarises the main themes of Sikh Spirituality.

New Testament

Q17a

Candidate's responses to the Lucan material were good overall with students showing evidence they had learnt the material well. The best responses in Luke made broad and judicious use of scholarly opinion, used key terms like eschatology and salvation history as well as displaying knowledge of the Jewish background to the teachings of Jesus. The strongest answers on the Prologue reflected a confident understanding and

deployment of terms like Logos, children of God, light and dark along with replacement theology.

Fewer candidates over did the 'scholars' contribution' to the theme as in previous years and showed more knowledge of the Fourth Gospel and of Jesus himself. The best candidates knew the textual sources well and deployed them appropriately. Weaker candidates couldn't make the connection between the key concepts they had outline from the Prologue in part i to the rest of the Gospel.. Very few candidates considered how the teaching impacted on the early church (Luke) or how it helped readers avoid the mistakes of some of the characters in the gospel (John).

Q17b

Candidates generally gave full and well ordered account here for both John and Luke. The depth of Lucan answers was somewhat less than for John. Candidates were able to demonstrate greater knowledge and depth of ideas and technical vocabulary in relation to John than Luke where the tone of answers was lighter. Some candidates found difficulty getting out of level two since they didn't move from narrative description to a statement of theological principle. Again the better candidates had the wording of the question clearly in focus throughout their answers. For level 4 candidates needed to demonstrate a wide knowledge of the Gospel material expressed in relation to the text, to scholars and to background material. Knowledge of the texts was sometimes lacking. For AO2 quite a number of candidates here lacked the skill of 'evaluation' and 'weighing up' one view over against another. They were too often content to 'list' the options. The vast majority of candidates however did reach level three. For both level three and four a balanced conclusion, reflecting a weighing up of the evidence and based on their own opinion or on that of scholars was required but not always present.

Q18a

Most candidates score well here whether using Lucan or Johannine material. They knew political aspects well especially details about Pilate's role in Jesus' death. Better candidates noted that some religious leaders actually supported Jesus e.g. Nicodemus. Candidates showed good knowledge of the Old Testament background in answering this question. Very few candidates were able to express a view as to the theological implications of why Jesus had to die. Most candidates could give at least a simple outline of Pilate's actions and motives in dealing with Jesus. The best candidates were able to 'consider critically' the various options and come to a reasoned conclusion for themselves. Most candidates made good use of the texts but surprisingly not many made much of Pilate's three declarations of innocence. Rivkin was quoted or cited by the stronger candidates and this would have helped weaker candidates to get a better mark. Some of the weaker responses cited or quoted Rivkin but didn't develop their use of him and add any depth.

Q18b

Candidates did explore the religious themes of the resurrection but often developed relatively minor or tangential themes and missed the opportunity to develop how the resurrection was related to vindicating who Jesus was as Son of God and Messiah etc. Most candidates knew the details of the crucifixion well. Candidates displayed an impressive knowledge of the Old Testament background to the crucifixion and to its symbolism. Not many candidates reflected knowledge and understanding of the historical details surrounding the crucifixion with, for example, few candidates referring to women at the foot of the cross or of the spear thrust into Jesus' side. Candidates did however find it a challenge to show exactly how the resurrection narrative built on that of the crucifixion.

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