



# **Examiners' Report**

## Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
In Religious Studies (6RS04)  
Paper 1A Implications – Philosophy of Religion

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## **2017 Report on 6RS04**

With some thoughts on the Anthology in the new Spec.

### **Introduction:**

There were a significant proportion of scripts that were truly excellent. Examiners had opportunities to read outstanding scripts showing independent thought. Credit should be given to candidates and their teachers who have prepared the thoroughly, fostered a love of the subject and nurtured degrees of insightfulness. Candidates used a variety of methods in their answers to these textual questions. Some concentrated almost entirely on the selected passage, analysing each part and referring to their wider knowledge. Others set the passage within the context of the overall article illustrating key points from the passage itself. Whatever method is used the fundamental requirement is an examination of the passage. These principles will apply to the anthology passages used in the new Spec in the compulsory questions taken from the Anthology. (See conclusion below for more on this topic of Anthologies in the new Spec.)

### **1A Philosophy of Religion**

It is a privilege to see how students are engaged with their studies. However, a few candidates choose to depart from the question and produce some bland responses. Some candidates may have had learned passages for the exam and re-produced a learned response for the whole essay which simply produced an account of Westphal's entire paper. Where candidates produced better answers these contained some or all of the following features:

AO1

- It was common to offer a fluent and broad account of the narrative outlined by Westphal and placed in context. Most candidates presented Westphal's intention as merely to provide a broad commentary about the change in approaches to philosophy whilst a small number of very able candidates asked questions about Westphal's intentions. Essentially, there were many candidates who took it as read that philosophy has changed and there are a few very significant figures in the history of philosophy who punctuate the narrative. There was a small but noticeable number of candidates who suggested that the philosophers were merely reflecting broader changes in society, politics and ideas and that the philosophers highlighted by Westphal were reflecting these broader changes. Overall candidates had a sound knowledge of Westphal's article and wrote about it confidently, although for some their presentation was at a descriptive level.
- Some candidates focused mainly on the development of ideas from scholasticism through to deism and beyond. Better scripts explored cultural change and most average and better scripts highlighted the transition from an age where intolerance was not uncommon to the Age of Reason which highlighted the notion of tolerance. Many candidates interpreted this in a rather simplistic way and the weakest scripts simply presented a polemic that religion is bad and a source of intolerance and the rejection of religion is therefore tolerant. Better scripts explored cultural change more carefully. Some scripts displayed an impressive understanding of the Enlightenment

and the best candidates had a complex and nuanced understanding of the Enlightenment. Some very good candidates wrote about the Enlightenment with authority, contrasting British, French, German and American developments in politics and social affairs.

- Other scripts took a broader view of Westphal's paper drawing on a plethora of scholarship, providing a commentary which moved through scholasticism and deism, to discuss the influence of Kant, Schleiermacher and on to Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Such scripts required careful management of content to prioritise a careful analysis of the passage. Where these scripts were good, they were very good and there was an excellent appreciation of the history of ideas. These scripts typically focused on Schleiermacher and many saw him as a significant figure who influenced future work from Kierkegaard, Bultmann and Tillich. Other and weaker candidates offered the narrative from scholasticism through to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but with little commentary or discussion based on the passage itself.
- Many candidates referred to 'kernel' and 'husk', but their responses were not always relevant to the question and/or the passage. However, the concepts were generally understood carefully and presented in an intelligent and thoughtful way. Some candidates discussed the kernel and husk as associated with reason and revelation, or deism and scholasticism, whilst other candidates explored a narrative where the definitions and relevance of both kernel and husk have changed over time.
- Candidates who were awarded marks at the lower levels had typically produced shorter responses and relied on retelling the set passage. Some had a weaker grasp of chronology mixing the era of deism as being post-Kantian. These seemed to reply more on their general knowledge rather than an intelligent understanding of the text.

## AO2

- In part (ii) of the exam the standards were very similar to those in part (i). Candidates are required to answer whether they agree with the ideas expressed. Some thought this meant they had to try and find negative points repeatedly but without a more nuanced discussion whereby they considered a variety of positions. The better-quality scripts incorporated scholarly opinion, debating and constructing standpoints and views.
- Some candidates wrote about the implications of Westphal's thinking in the context of the anthology and made comparisons to the writings of Donovan and Ayer. These responses were mixed and some were rather contrived. For example, some drew upon topics they more readily understood and made tenuous links with this passage. On the other hand, the better-quality answers seamlessly drew upon related topics in other units alongside wider areas of study. Many students drew upon current events and the political climate to breathe life into the implications from this passage. Unfortunately, some candidates omitted to refer to one or both of the implications. Part (ii) counts for 20 out of the 50 marks and a serious omission of essential parts of the question has serious consequences.
- The more popular implications included the relationship between scholasticism and deism; and philosophising about God compared to philosophy of religion.
- In part (ii) other candidates made strong comparisons between Westphal's paper and their wider studies in the subject. It was common for

candidates to locate Westphal's narrative within their own understanding of the history of ideas. Some regarded Westphal's method as an example of Wittgenstein's language games in operation. The quality of these scripts varied, but it certainly saw many candidates really getting to grips with the subject, constructing their own narrative and, at best, producing some superb discussions. It was common for candidates to see the implication of Westphal's paper for understanding religion and human experience as the gradual reduction in the peripherals of religion and for many the gradual erosion of religion itself. Such candidates incorporated ideas of Freud, Marx, Nietzsche and Dawkins to support their arguments. Other candidates argued that religion was still relevant, but different and used a variety of philosophers dealing with notions of religious experience or, alternatively, produced answers reflecting study of elements of the existential tradition, focusing on the likes of Kierkegaard, Tillich and Bultmann.