



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (8RS0)
Paper 1

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Introduction

This year offered some very good responses across all the questions but there were also some areas that might be improved upon.

The easiest way for candidates to improve is to remember to answer the question set, and not a question they would prefer, or feel more knowledgeable about.

Some candidates may have misread the question but simple tips such as underlining or circling key words should help them engage with what exactly is being asked.

A sizeable number of candidates appear to have struggled with their timing this year; candidates should be mindful of the number of marks available and try to plan their time accordingly. It is important that candidates have a time management plan for this paper, and remain focused on adhering to that plan, in order to ensure they are able to demonstrate their range of knowledge and understanding along with powers of analysis across the full breadth of the paper.

Responses to Q1 (8 marks) were often long, taking the full page available and even needing an extra page whilst responses to Q4(b), the final (20 mark) question, were often stilted and possibly cut short.

The trigger words for each question should remind candidates of the weighting of AO1 and AO2 marks and successful candidates applied this to their answers.

Q01 Explore key ideas about the Ontological Argument. (8)

It is always great to see that many candidates were able to grapple with a topic such as the ontological argument so effectively. Some good answers offered the ideas of Anselm then moved on to Gaunilo and Descartes and then often also mentioned the ideas of Kant, Plantinga and Malcolm.

Many candidates accurately used terms such as *reductio ad absurdum*, predicate and necessary being.

Weaker responses tended to be brief and lacking detail; some candidates erroneously focused on the argument being inductive, *a posteriori* and synthetic! Other weak responses spent too much time on irrelevant detail which was a shame as sharper focus on the question could have led to higher marks.

Surprisingly, some responses revealed candidates were confused between the Ontological and Cosmological arguments.

Q02 Assess the view that because the world appears to be designed, God must therefore exist. (9)

Candidates appeared to enjoy the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of this area of the specification.

Many candidates were aware that the majority of the marks were being awarded for AO2, and there were many who outlined material on why the world appears to be designed briefly, and then systematically assessed the impact of this material on the argument that 'God must therefore exist', with some clear and excellent critical assessment. Some did this through pointing out perceived flaws in the Design Argument. The most common being the presence of evil and suffering. Excellent responses also employed a conclusion that drew their assessment together.

In weaker responses, most candidates could identify that world appeared to be designed by outlining aspects of the design argument itself and lost focus on the 'God must therefore exist' aspect of the question.

Some very weak scripts simply described Paley's watch analogy!

Q03 Assess the view that conversion experiences do not prove the existence of God. (9)

This question saw very many good, secure and detailed responses with a wide range of material offered. There was some excellent use of scholarship in the best answers and many answers revealed candidates' detailed knowledge including assessment of the ideas of scholars such as William James, Swinburne, Persinger and Freud etc.

Good responses focused on both the failures in that conversion experiences do not prove the existence of God (hallucinations etc), and in assessment that conversion experiences can prove the existence of God (eg Nicky Cruz etc) of conversion experiences. The strongest answers were not merely descriptive but offered engaged assessment throughout. Students assessed each of the reasons, gave examples, counter arguments and made judgements.

Weaker responses just gave a short account of some conversion experiences that did not prove the existence of God, or simply presented the content of a chosen conversion experience with little or no assessment of whether its proof supported (or not, as the case may be) an argument for the existence of God.

Q04(a) Explore the key features of different types of evil and suffering. (8)

This required an exploration of types of evil and suffering, however many candidates presented solutions to the problem of evil and suffering and consequently they were not addressing the question. It is vital to write an answer to the question on the paper, not simply present knowledge of something related to the topic in the question.

This is an 'explore' question requiring only AO1 material. Candidates who launched into an assessment of key features were penalising themselves by not presenting strictly AO1 material.

The best answers offered material about moral and non-moral (natural) types of evil and suffering – some of the weaker answers relied on a simple description of some examples of evil and suffering.

Weaker responses also focused on one type of suffering (usually moral) and presented a partial response; or wrote a couple of sentences only on moral and natural suffering.

Q04(b) Analyse the claim that the vale of soul making theodicy solves the problem of suffering. (20)

It is always pleasing to see that, although barely a year has passed since these candidates were sitting GCSE exams, they are able to grapple with a topic such as the 'vale of soul making theodicy' so effectively. Answers usually started by discussing the ideas of Irenaeus and moving on to Hick's development of this including the view that suffering is essential for soul making, because it is only through suffering that qualities such as courage, trust and tolerance have an opportunity to emerge. Top answers identified that while Hick's solution explained suffering, it fails as a theodicy to justify the extent and severity of suffering in the world, including natural suffering.

Weaker responses presented simple outlines of the theodicy with little analysis. Some became confused and wrote about Augustine's theodicy whilst some continued their discussion from part 4a and offered more on the issue of types of evil and suffering!

Summary

Based on the performance on this paper candidates should:

- Apply material carefully to the question and avoid anecdote or re-telling incidents
- Balance time in an answer that includes AO2 marks between content and assessment/analysis to avoid lengthy narrative before AO2 marks can be accessed
- Continue to learn key terms to be able to use them confidently without confusion
- Practice identifying exactly what a question is asking for to avoid presenting material that will not be able to earn marks
- Develop skills to present a line of argument, such as after presenting strengths or weaknesses, offer conclusion and verdicts on the success or otherwise of these rather than simply presenting them as a point of view

