



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (8RS0)
Paper 2

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There were slightly more entries this year than in 2023, and candidate answers were sufficient to give a clear impression of how this subject is being processed by the candidates, what they enjoy and do well under examination conditions, and what they find more challenging. Overall, candidates managed their time to enable them to finish the paper and there were few significant gaps in knowledge, so most were able to attempt all the questions.

Question One

Candidates were largely able to write competently about Utilitarianism, with the best essays including a range of technical language, an understanding of the context in which the theory emerged and knowledge of difference applications of Utilitarianism, such as preference, negative, rule and act. Weaker answers referred only to a limited number of key principles, such as the Hedonic Calculus and the Principle of Utility or made heavy weather of using anachronistic or trivial examples. Bentham was the most referenced scholar, closely followed by Mill, whilst stronger answers were able to include reference to other thinkers such as Peter Singer or G E Moore.

Question Two

The majority of candidates were aware of the concept of pacifism, although the understanding of the extent the ideology varied. The strongest candidates were able to reference different types of pacifism and offer some textual, historical and scholarly support to the discussion. Weaker answers offered little more than a shopping list of two or three versions of pacifism or drew on simplistic arguments for and against the approach, without supporting argument. Some candidates chose to reference Jesus, Martin Luther King or Ghandi as pacifists, drawing on their knowledge from the other areas of the specification, which was a justifiable approach.

Question Three

Candidates were generally confident in identifying the religious environmental positions of dominion and stewardship and were able to show an awareness of their relative strengths and offer counter arguments. Weaker answers were brief and superficial in their response, whilst stronger answers offered some comparison with alternative approaches such as Deep Ecology or the Gaia Hypothesis and how they could be compatible with a religious understanding of environmental responsibility. Some answers made interesting links to the Anthropic Principle and philosophical beliefs about creation.

Question Four

- (a) Most answers showed a good knowledge of Natural Moral Law and were able to explain key principles such as primary and secondary precepts, interior and exterior acts, virtues, and the application of biblical principles. Shorter answers which were limited in scope failed to gain the full range of marks, as did those which relied on a few simplistic case studies.
- (b) The strongest answers were able to explore the characteristics of Natural Moral Law in some depth and showed insight into the problems of applying the theory in the modern world. However, many answers were short, suggesting that timing was an issue at this end of the exam, and showed an over reliance on repeating material from part (a).

Summary

- Topics were generally familiar to candidates and all invited scholarship, textual reference and understanding to be credited. Stronger answers included all of these tools.
- Some candidates were very simplistic in their responses and more in-depth analysis of the topics would enable more candidates to access the top range of the marks available.