



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

40554 Religious Philosophy and Ultimate Questions
Report on the Examination

4055
June 2016

Version: 1.0

Further copies of this Report are available from aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2016 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

40554 Religious Philosophy and Ultimate Questions

General comments

The standard of work produced for this examination was again very high. Schools and colleges are preparing students very well, both in terms of course content and in addressing the style of questions asked. Again this year the full range of ability was present, but the trend towards higher ability students being entered for this paper continued. The paper was accessible to most students and even weaker students were able to gain a reasonable number of marks.

The most popular questions were 1, 3, 4, and either 5 or 6. This year's combination of marks for AO1 questions (1, 3, 5) was used very successfully. More able students could demonstrate the depth and breadth of their knowledge and understanding over five marks and students of all abilities were able to score well on the one and three mark questions.

The First Cause argument for the existence of God was very well known, but some students were not so clear about the argument from morality or from religious experience. The problem of evil and suffering was used well, but karma was not so well understood as an explanation for suffering. Hume's arguments against miracles were well rehearsed by the more able students but not well known by others. Some students are still confusing the Cosmological Revolution with the cosmological argument for God's existence.

The three-mark evaluation questions were again very well done, with well-developed reasons, or several brief reasons being offered in support of the student's opinion on one or both sides of the issue. The six-mark evaluation questions were a little more challenging for students. The statements needed careful reading, and some were tempted to digress from the issue being examined or to fail to include religious arguments, for example in Questions 15 and 20.

A particular difficulty this year was the tendency of students to give both sides of every issue and offer their own opinions in the AO1 questions which were not evaluation questions. For example, when asked to give the argument for the existence of God from religious experience, many spent time offering reasons why they thought religious experiences were untrustworthy evidence for God. Similarly in other five mark questions, the 'other side' was given which gained no credit and actually took time away from developing the relevant answers to the questions. Students are obviously well-drilled in presenting two sides for evaluation, but they need to understand that credit will not be given for this in AO1 answers. Another noticeable tendency was the increasing use of 'there is no proof / scientific evidence for...' in answer to every question. While it gained some credit, more detailed, specific arguments that address the particular question asked are necessary to gain the higher levels.

Many students do not use capital letters for some proper names such as 'God' and 'Bible' or at the start of sentences. Specialist terms were commonly misspelled such as 'atheist', 'benevolent', 'omnipotent' and 'omniscient'.

Question 1 – The Existence of God

01 The majority of students were able to identify Bob as the theist, although many wasted time explaining their choice.

02 Those who knew the argument from morality achieved full marks by saying that everyone was born with an inbuilt sense of right and wrong; that this sense of morality or conscience must have come from a higher authority or source outside of humanity, namely God; therefore God exists. Those who lost marks missed out part of the logical argument. Others wrote different arguments, eg the design argument, or misread 'morality' for 'mortality' and discussed life after death.

03 This was very well done with many gaining full marks. Some students outlined the First Cause argument well and argued that it did prove God's existence. Many others gave two sided responses which, while not required, gave more opportunity for gaining all three marks, eg they agreed that everything has a cause, therefore the universe has a cause: God, but then argued that the First Cause argument contradicted itself (what caused God?) and that the Big Bang was the cause of the universe, not God.

04 The best answers first explained what the argument from religious experience was, eg the fact that many people claim to have personal experience of God suggests that God exists. They then went on to describe examples of religious experience, some in greater detail than others. Some lost marks by listing various religious experiences without developing them, and others by describing a number of experiences without explaining the argument for the existence of God that these experiences support. Many wasted energy on explaining the arguments **against** religious experiences. This was not required by the question and served to limit marks because students had not developed their previous remarks sufficiently before launching into the other side of the issue.

05 This question proved challenging for many. Some concentrated on whether or not atheists would be able to convince religious believers to abandon their faith without actually discussing atheist arguments. Others, by contrast, outlined atheist arguments without saying whether a theist would find these convincing. Some students described personal experiences that might lead a believer to doubt God, like the loss of a loved one or unanswered prayer without discussing the arguments an atheist could put to such a person, for example the problem of suffering. Some psychological reasons were acceptable – the faith, trust and loyalty of the believer which goes beyond reasoning and 'arguments' but there needed to be a discussion of the arguments atheists use to contradict belief in God or, conversely, the arguments believers use to support faith such as design, first cause, religious experience, etc. Many seemed to equate atheism with science, and they limited their answers to scientific theories such as the Big Bang and evolution. These then wrongly argued that non-literal interpreters of the Bible could be easily convinced by these scientific arguments against God, but this was not credited because many believers accept both science and God.

Question 2 – Revelation

This question had fewer respondents, but some very good answers were seen from schools and colleges that had chosen this topic for study.

06 Communicating with God, developing a personal relationship, encouraging believers to feel God's love and care were good reasons given in support of the statement. The idea that prayer was a waste of time, prayers go unanswered and people are just talking to themselves were arguments given against the statement. Some validly argued that other ways of knowing God were better, eg reading the scriptures, as these describe God's works and will for humankind more clearly than prayer. Some were able to combine both sides and easily gained three marks. Some students lost marks because they interpreted the question as one about God's existence rather than knowledge about God, ie prayer is the best way to know that God exists rather than know God.

07 This question was well done with the most common answer, 'powerful'.

08 This topic was very well known and many gained all three marks. Some students are still making the error that special revelation is to one person and general revelation is to a group. Others lost a mark by mixing the two up but were credited for what they clearly knew was the distinction between them.

09 Students successfully gave a range of ways that revelations might affect the lives of believers, eg convert to a religion, strengthen faith, consolidate understanding, begin a religion or completely change someone's lifestyle. The best answers gave some developed examples, eg Saul on the Damascus road, Yusuf Islam, Nicky Cruz, and other less well-known people whose lives had changed through a revelation of God. Again this question seemed to elicit arguments on the other side of the issue, eg that revelations were illusions. This tended to lose students marks through insufficient development of the relevant answer.

10 This was a challenging question. Its target was to encourage discussion of alternative explanations for revelations, eg illness, wishful thinking, personal interpretation, fraud, etc. Most analysed the truth or otherwise of special revelations and used the example of Ellen G. White. Some mistakenly described her as having a mental illness which is not an accurate description of epilepsy. Very few seemed to choose scriptural revelations such as the Qur'an or Torah that are generally accepted as not the result of drugs or the desire for fame or money.

Question 3 – The Problems of Evil and Suffering

11 Natural suffering was well explained by means of an example.

12 The best answers explained the problem of suffering in relation to God's omnipotence, benevolence and omniscience and developed the argument with examples. God's justice and existence were also called into question. Most could gain three marks for discussing omnipotence, benevolence and omniscience briefly in relation to the existence of suffering. Some tried to put the other side, that suffering was part of God's plan and set to test faith, but this was not required by the question so did not gain credit.

13 This question was well done. Most did not believe there was any evidence for the existence of a devil and attributed evil to free will, upbringing, peer pressure and psychological reasons such as a traumatic childhood. Islamic beliefs about Shaytan and the role of the devil in the Adam and Eve story were well explained in support of the statement, but many then concluded that it was human responsibility at fault.

14 The best answers explained karma as a law of cause and effect or 'actions have consequences', and then explained how suffering in the present could be a result of bad karma caused by evil actions in a previous life. Those who lost marks here did so because they described karma well enough but failed to say how it is used to explain suffering. Others failed to locate karma in Eastern religions' beliefs about samsara and its effect on future lives. These students seemed to think karma was simply revenge and used the example of Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden.

15 A common error in this question was to fail to include religious arguments or beliefs in the answer. Students could debate whether or not suffering made people stronger or weaker but if they did not say something about how it could strengthen or weaken faith or one's relationship with God, or include Job or Muslim beliefs about suffering as a test of faith in Allah, they were limited to Level 3. Others failed to gain the highest levels by digressing into arguments about why suffering occurs or whether or not suffering was fair.

Question 4 – Immortality

16 Most students could define immortality as living on after death.

17 Some lost a mark here because they explained religious views of immortality but failed to say why a legacy did not make someone immortal, or conversely they explained what a legacy was and how it could fade, but failed to contrast it with a religious view of immortality. The best answers did both.

18 This question proved challenging for some who did not read the question carefully enough. The target was to elicit knowledge and understanding of arguments against the religious beliefs about immortality, namely resurrection, reincarnation and/or rebirth. The main arguments against these religious beliefs centred around lack of proof for a soul, lack of evidence for the existence of heaven and hell, difficulties around resurrection of the body when the body decays or is cremated, difficulties concerning memories of past lives to support belief in reincarnation, whether rebirth in a new body is actually the same person, etc. Some lost marks by giving arguments against ghosts, channelling and near death experiences which are not religious beliefs about immortality. Others merely provided very general comments against immortality without focussing on religious beliefs. Again in this question some tried to put forward arguments in favour of immortality but these were not credited.

19 In answers to this question, most students thought ghosts were not real, could be easily faked by modern technology or be tricks of the light or hallucinations so were not good evidence for souls. On the other side, students said that many sightings were unlikely all fakes, ghosts could go through walls suggesting a resurrection of the body in spiritual form and were believed to have not yet broken their connection with the world, such as the idea in Chinese Buddhism of 'hungry ghosts' that await reincarnation.

20 The best answers were from those who discussed the phenomena associated with Near Death Experiences, linked them to religious ideas about the afterlife and then gave alternative explanations of these experiences, such as oxygen deprivation, medication, wishful thinking and the fact that the person is not really dead. Marks were lost by those students who thought that a Near Death Experience was merely a close shave – nearly dying but luckily being saved. They failed to discuss any phenomena associated with NDEs that could suggest a life after death, eg the tunnel of light or heavenly imagery, deceased relatives that would inhabit an afterlife or out of body experiences that could suggest a soul. Some students failed to include any religious elements in their answers so were limited to Level 3.

Question 5 – Miracles

21 Most answers gained a mark for saying the landslide was not against the laws of nature or could have been misinterpreted.

22 This question required a well-developed account of a religious miracle. Students who gave Biblical examples of miracles did better than those who described other religious miracles such as the visions of Bernadette. Many lost marks by not giving enough details of the miracle itself and instead trying to justify why it was a miracle. This was not required by the question. Schools and colleges should advise students to read the question carefully, concentrate on describing the miraculous event itself. The miracle needed to be a religious one. For example, the fact that someone was diagnosed with a disease and then was cured was not accepted unless the student described how prayer, faith or a supernatural event had played a part in the cure.

23 This was well done by many, although again some wasted time on giving opposing viewpoints that were not required. Reasons for belief in miracles centred on scriptures, founders of religions, personal experience or belief in others' experiences, and the verification of miracles at Lourdes by the Catholic Church.

24 Those who agreed that humans could perform miracles cited miracles performed by doctors, the ability of those who have reached a high state of spiritual enlightenment to levitate, walk on hot coals, etc, and events that people do not yet understand but were not caused by God. Others argued that only humans working on behalf of God could perform miracles, that only God is able to break the laws of nature as God is omnipotent and transcendent, and that some events had no scientific explanation so had to be supernatural.

25 This question targeted whether or not Hume's arguments against miracles were correct, eg bias on the part of those claiming miracles, never enough evidence to deny the laws of nature, the idea that claimants are uneducated so gullible, and religions depending on miracles which contradict each other. Those who knew Hume were able to discuss his arguments and put the opposing views, eg that miracles are rare occurrences therefore there will never be as many witnesses to them as to the laws of nature, that educated people have recorded miracles, that religions do not depend on them as proofs and are not in competition over miracles, and that religions treat miracles with caution, thoroughly investigating them. Some lost marks because they argued generally against miracles without referring to any of Hume's criticisms, so were capped at Level 3. Others cited 'not enough witnesses' without linking this to the idea that the laws of nature have been observed for hundreds of years. Some erroneously thought witnesses were drunk or on drugs, arguments that students may have learned to contradict special revelations or religious experiences but which do not form part of Hume's arguments against miracles.

Question 6 – Science and Religion

26 Most gained a mark for saying James was the person giving an example of a religious truth.

27 Those who knew what the Cosmological Revolution discovered successfully gained full marks. Some students outlined the discoveries without saying why they challenged religious beliefs. Others thought it was about the Big Bang or evolution challenging religion. A number said that the Church had lied to people; they seemed not to understand that these were commonly held beliefs at the time that new scientific findings challenged and were not deliberate lies.

28 This question targeted a topic in the specification that had not been examined before: design versus evolution. Some lost marks because they did not refer to design. They were able to explain what evolution was, but did not always connect it to ideas about design. Many digressed into how evolution disproved the Genesis creation story. The best answers were from those who said that evolution did not require design by God because it was the result of random chance through natural selection, that apparent order in nature had an evolutionary purpose, that humans were not created in their final form but developed gradually, nor were humans unique creations, made in the image of God, as humans had come from apes. On the other side, some argued that God could have used evolution to design life on earth, everything in nature was fit for purpose as the design argument suggests, and the order of creation in Genesis matches the order of evolution supporting belief in design by God.

29 This question required reasons why believers accept both scientific and religious explanations for the origins of the universe. The best answers considered non-literal interpretations of creation stories in various religions, the fact that many religions accept scientific findings as supporting their beliefs and the idea that God could have caused the Big Bang. Some lost marks for concentrating on evolution, when the question was about the origins of the universe, not the development of life on earth.

30 Some students confined their remarks to a consideration of how science has disproved religious beliefs and neglected to say why it was more important than religion for the world today. Some failed to see the distinction between 'importance *for* the world' and 'importance *in* the world'. Therefore the argument was reduced to one about the relative popularity of science over religion, and while this was accepted to an extent, the argument needed to go further to evaluate the relative importance of each for modern life. The best answers highlighted scientific contributions to technological advances and medicine, the merits of scientific truth over religious truth, its openness to change and its 'up-to-date' modernity. Religion by contrast was considered old-fashioned and dependent on unproven 'truths'. On the other hand, religion provides purpose, meaning, comfort, hope, moral guidance and explanations for the 'why' questions. Many refreshingly argued that both were important and necessary for life in the modern world.

Spelling Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)

An extra four marks were available for SPaG. Up to four marks were awarded for each of the six mark AO2 questions and the best mark given was then counted. More students are now writing in paragraphs and the standard for SPaG was generally good this year. As last year, several students were unable to correctly spell important technical terms including the different faiths and in particular Buddhism or Buddhists.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)