
A-LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES

7062/1 Philosophy of Religion and Ethics
Report on the Examination

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General Comments:

As with previous series the paper this year drew a wide range of marks from students, ranging from full marks to zero. However, unlike previous years, the Summer 2023 series saw a considerable rise in non-attempted questions, notably, but not exclusively, questions 1.2 and 4.1. Other general observations from examiners were:

- There were several descriptive or narrative responses to AO1 questions which did not engage fully with the trigger word 'examine' in the stem of the question.
- A lack of focus on what the question actually asked or a misreading by students of the specific demands of the question, particularly when questions had more than one focus (for example Question 1.1).

Specific Questions:**Section A: Philosophy of religion.****1.1 Examine how Process Theodicy influences responses to the problem of evil and suffering.**

Whilst there were some excellent and well-focused responses in evidence, a considerable number of students appeared to misread the question and failed to tackle how Process Theodicy influences responses to evil and suffering. These students wrote about how Process Theodicy deals with the problem of evil and suffering in general terms, and missed the key focus of the question asked.

The concept of Process Theodicy was generally understood by all, but as in 2019, there were a range of popular misconceptions about Process Theodicy referenced. Some identified it with deism, others with theism or pantheism. Others suggested that Process theologians believe that God is all-powerful but not all-loving, and some identified Process theodicy as a kind of 'free will defence'.

The greatest problem students had with this question was not the lack of knowledge about Process Theodicy, but the lack of focus on how it influences responses towards evil and suffering. This was the hallmark of all but the very best answers. At the lower end of the spectrum, the weakest students wrote in very general terms about how various other theodicies responded to the problem of evil and suffering, or else chose to not attempt the question at all.

1.2 'Swinburne's principles of testimony and credulity can verify religious experiences.' Evaluate this claim.

This question drew a very wide range of responses from students. Examiners saw some excellent responses that were tightly focussed on the demands of the question. Typically, such answers were able to provide clear knowledge and understanding of both Swinburne's principles and constructed a perceptive evaluation of how these principles might be used to verify religious experiences. These answers easily fulfilled the descriptors for the top AO2 level of response and were awarded accordingly.

However, many responses wrote in very general terms and failed to demonstrate any clear understanding of either principle, or else attempted to combine the two principles into one principle. There was a cap in place within the mark scheme for a maximum of Level 3 if

only one aspect was covered. To go beyond this, both principles needed to be addressed. The question demanded that the focus of the evaluation centred on Swinburne's principles of testimony and credulity specifically, rather than a general response about the verification of religious experiences. The wording here is specific, and does not invite students to evade the question by writing alternative essays about other forms of verification, or falsification. This question proved difficult for those students who were not familiar with, or understood, Swinburne's principles. As noted above, this was one of the questions which drew a high proportion of non-attempted responses.

2.1 Examine Hick's argument that religious language is meaningful because it will be verified eschatologically.

For some students, this proved to be a very straightforward question. There were many clear and accurate examinations of Hick's argument and how it could be applied and accepted, or indeed rejected, by believers in relation to the meaningfulness of religious language. Students who understood Hick's argument and wrote answers that focused on the demands of the question had no problem in accessing the top levels of response.

Weaker answers typically had a very narrative approach and many tended to merely retell some version of the parable of the Celestial City, rather than examining how Hick uses it to illustrate his argument that religious language can be seen as meaningful. The key to successfully answering this question was to provide an accurate and clear examination of the indicated topic in relation to how Hick addressed the criticisms of religious language made by the verification principle, rather than on a narrative description of the parable.

2.2 'Miracles can happen' Evaluate this claim.

This AO2 question drew a wide range of responses. Most students recognised that this question required a range of views to be considered, both realist and anti-realist. The more perceptive students also noted that, within those broad views, the specific arguments of various scholars needed to be recalled accurately, discussed, critically analysed, and evaluated. Those who managed to do this had no trouble in accessing upper Level 4 or Level 5. In terms of students accessing top level scores on AO2 questions, this question produced the highest overall percentage of students on the whole paper.

All but the weakest answers were able to show a reasonable understanding of Hume's main argument and realist approach to miracles, and why and how this argument could be used to substantiate the view that miracles were unlikely to happen. The weakest focused solely on the fact that accounts of miracles originated from 'ignorant and barbarous nations' and therefore could not happen. Less well executed, however, was reference to a realist argument as to why miracles might happen.

This side of the realist argument was often simply illustrated by a variety of narratives pertaining to a variety of contemporary occurrences, healings at Lourdes, survival of plane crashes or exploding churches, and argued simply that because they had occurred this proved miracles can happen, without any further evaluation or analysis. A minority of students made accurate reference to miracles in religious texts, and could use them accurately in their evaluations.

Many understood and could write meaningfully about Wile's anti-realist approach and why he rejected a realist understanding of miracles. Stronger students could argue and evaluate his views accurately and perceptively in a wider context of his understanding of God and the problem of evil. Similarly, accurate reference was made to the anti-realist

understandings of Tillich and Holland. However, the weakest answers were again typified by a very narrative and descriptive approach towards an anti-realist understanding, often offering little more than various inventive versions and interpretations of Tillich's illustration of the boy on the railway line.

Section B: Ethics and religion.

3.1. Examine the approach taken to moral decision making by Aristotelian Virtue Ethics. You must illustrate your answer with reference to the issue of abortion.

This question was accessible to most students. There were some excellent responses which covered both aspects of the question in detail, and revealed that students had a thorough understanding of the approach taken by Aristotle's Virtue Ethics to making moral decisions and could discuss how virtue ethics might be applied to the issue of abortion. Several top-level answers quoted Aristotle directly and used these quotes to good effect to substantiate their answers. Other top-level answers demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of other arguments which were Aristotelian in a wider sense, eg arguments of Hursthouse.

One key failing amongst otherwise strong answers about the approach taken by Virtue Ethics was to omit any clear or direct reference to the issue of abortion, as demanded by the question. There was a cap in the mark scheme which limited answers that did not address *both* issues to a maximum of Level 3.

Weaker responses often confused the application of Virtue Ethics with the application of Situation Ethics to the issue of abortion. They wrote about doing the most loving thing in the situation of abortion.

3.2 'Situation ethics cannot solve the moral issue of "designer" babies.' Evaluate this claim.

The successful answers remained tightly focussed on the demands of the question, and provided a clear and detailed evaluation of the application of Situation Ethics to the issue of "designer babies." As always, the key to success to answering questions was relevance. Several responses gave long and general summaries of the general application of Situation Ethics to a variety of issues without referring specifically to the issue of "designer babies" raised in the question.

Others wrote only briefly about Situation Ethics application to the issue and agreed with the statement, but then went into detailed description of how other ethical systems, eg Natural Moral Law, would argue against the statement. They ignored the alternative side of the argument from the perspective of Situation Ethics. These answers were only creditable to a point.

A further issue in several answers was the lack of accurate understanding of what is meant by the term "designer babies." The weakest responses either wrote, at length, about "designer babies" being a type of fertility treatment or else invented bizarre and unrealistic scenarios.

However, there were some very well focussed and nuanced responses about the application of Situation Ethics to the issue raised. These discussed both sides of the argument from the perspective of Situation Ethics, and arrived at a clear and supported

evaluation. It was accurate knowledge and understanding of the issue raised, and evidence of a clear and tight focus on the demands of the question, which were the hallmarks of the top-level answers.

4.1 Examine Libertarianism and Compatibilism.

This question drew, by a large margin, the most non-attempted responses.

Of the answers given, those which engaged with the trigger word ‘examine’ were the ones who attained the upper levels of response and scored the highest marks. There were several excellent and full examinations of both issues evident in many answers, with good development of each, and clear reference to scholarly views often supported by accurate quotations.

In other answers there was clear evidence of students playing to their strengths, both aspects were covered, but one was examined in more detail than the other, usually compatibilism. Such answers were still able to gain the highest AO1 level. Weaker students often wrote brief and descriptive answers rather than providing an examination of each issue.

4.2 The religious conscience offers the best guide to moral decision making. Evaluate this claim.

This question produced many good answers. Those who wrote successful answers engaged with the word ‘religious’ in the statement, weaker answers tended to ignore the word and merely wrote about conscience in general terms. It was clear from many of the responses seen by examiners that, overall, students had a good understanding of the term religious conscience. However, there was often some confusion between the views of Augustine and Aquinas.

There was clear evidence of debate about religious conscience being the ‘best guide’ in comparison to psychological or sociological explanations of conscience and whether or not, in contemporary society, the idea of religious conscience had a continuing value in the making of moral decisions.

This question was accessible to all but the weakest of students. There was a higher percentage of top-level answers, L4 and L5, and these demonstrated perceptive discussion of the differing views of various scholars coupled with clear evidence of critical analysis. There were very few general or limited responses in comparison with other AO2 questions on this paper.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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