

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE

Unit **G582**: Religious Ethics

Mark Scheme for June 2011

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- 1 **'Ethical statements are no more than expressions of emotion.'** Discuss. [35]

AO1

Candidates will most likely begin by explaining the views of Ayer and the ideas of emotivism, which considers that ethical statements convey certain attitudes but do not tell someone how to live a moral life. Candidates may discuss the idea that ethical statements may depend on the person's upbringing, attitudes and feelings, but that Ayer argues that while ethical statements do not have any factual content they still have meaning. They may refer to the work of the logical positivists. Some candidates may refer to the work of David Hume.

Candidates may also discuss the ideas of Stevenson who considered ethical statements to be both descriptive and emotive – ethical statements are based on people's fundamental beliefs.

They may also discuss an intuitionist approach, looking at the ideas of Moore, Pritchard and Ross. Candidates may consider the approach of ethical naturalism that says that ethical statements are about facts which can be proved by looking at evidence, for example murder ends a life and causes suffering to the victim's family so murder is wrong.

AO2

Candidates may analyse the views of different scholars on this question and how they would explain ethical statements. They may assess the view that ethical statements are the result of using our reason not simply emotional responses.

They may analyse whether ethical statements can be simply described as subjective or objective, and whether one person's opinions may be considered any better than another's. They may also discuss whether an intuitionist approach simply means that ethical statements come from social conditioning and are no more reliable than ethical statements that come from our feelings.

They may wish to compare ethical statements with other forms of language.

- 2 **Critically assess the view that we are not responsible for our evil actions.** [35]

AO1

Candidates may discuss the different forms of determinism: hard, soft and libertarianism. They may consider the views such as those of Darrow: we are the products of our upbringing and environment and so are not responsible; Honderich: as everything is physically determined there is no choice and so no personal responsibility; and Hospers: there is always something that compels us to any action, in defence of the statement. Candidates might also consider opposing views such as those of Jean Paul Satre.

They may also discuss biological and psychological determinism, explaining that we are either the product of our genes or our social conditioning.

Some candidates may consider that our sense of responsibility for our actions is merely an illusion and that we do not really make free choices.

Some candidates might consider theological determinism such as Calvinism and predestination whereby God alone decides who will receive the grace that leads to

salvation. They may discuss other religious teachings on free will such as those of Boethius or Aquinas.

Other candidates may consider the role of conscience in ethical decision making, and whether it is totally free, subject to outside influences, or just seems to be free.

AO2

Candidates could consider the implications for ethics if we are really free, and if we are not free. They may assess the view that all our evil actions as well as our good ones are the results of previous, possibly determined causes.

They may also interpret the question to ask whether we are only personally responsible for our evil actions and whether we do good actions by the grace of God, using the ideas of Augustine.

Responses could consider the implications of the above statement in terms of human accountability and responsibility. Candidates may consider the impact on our system of reward and punishment if we lack free will.

3 To what extent is Virtue Ethics helpful when making decisions about extramarital sex? [35]

AO1

Candidates may explain the different nature of Virtue Ethics compared with other ethical theories. They may explain Virtue Ethics from Aristotle and more modern interpretations. They may say that it looks at moral choices such as extramarital sex from the standpoint of the individual and his or her personal qualities and values.

Responses may also consider the role of practising the virtues and whether developing moral virtues throughout life would help a person make a decision about extramarital sex. They may also discuss following the example of virtuous people.

Candidates may discuss whether extramarital sex would make a person more virtuous and discuss the values involved. They may also discuss whether extramarital sex would make a person less virtuous and discuss the ideas of what a virtuous person would habitually do.

They may discuss the views of more modern scholars such as Hursthouse who says that Virtue Ethics will show how a virtuous person would think in a moral dilemma, and Slote who considers the virtue of care. Candidates might then consider how their views might be applied to extramarital sex.

AO2

Candidates may claim that Virtue Ethics is useful as it concentrates on personal values/skills and care for others. They may claim that Virtue Ethics is useful as it concentrates on the values of the individual involved and his/her situation, thus also considering community values. Some candidates may discuss the fact that Virtue Ethics can be considered useful as it is a relativistic theory.

Responses may discuss that extramarital sex would make a person less virtuous as those involved do not consider the virtues of commitment, honesty, or loyalty, for instance.

Alternatively they may argue that another ethical theory such as Natural Law is more useful as it gives clearer instructions about which actions are good and which are not.

- 4 Assess the claim that secular approaches to environmental issues are of more help than religious ones. [35]**

AO1

Candidates could explain secular approaches to the environment which began with the work of Rachel Carson. They may include different approaches of Utilitarianism, deep ecology such as the views of Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess, conservation or shallow ecology, and the Gaia hypothesis.

These could be contrasted with a religious approach, perhaps in terms of Biblical teaching, using Genesis 1-3 and some Psalms to show the views of dominion and stewardship and how these can lead to conflicting approaches. They may also discuss the ideas of Francis of Assisi which give intrinsic value to the natural world.

Candidates may also examine an ethical theory which may be seen as essentially religious, such as Aquinas' Natural Law.

This could be applied to environmental issues such as pollution, deforestation, ozone, global warming, or animals.

AO2

Candidates should consider whether secular or religious approaches are the best way of dealing with the environment or not.

They might wish to look at whether religious ethics may not be a good approach because of the different interpretations of religious texts.

They might discuss how religious ethics have led to a misuse of the environment. They may introduce ideas that other ethical theories, such as Bentham's Utilitarianism, might be potentially harmful to the environment as they only consider the greater good of humans, and contrast this with the approach of Singer.

The arguments from religious ethics could be assessed in relation to deep ecology and the Gaia hypothesis.

Candidates may decide that it does not matter which approach is followed so long as the environment is protected.

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