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Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/01 Summer 2024 series

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 1 series overview

The Philosophy of Religion paper assesses AO1 knowledge and understanding (40% of the marks available) and AO2 analysis and evaluation (60% of marks).

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• embedded the evaluation throughout the essay, using the material as a vehicle for discussion • focused directly on the question rather than more general issues raised by the topic • often outlined what was going to be argued at the beginning of the essay with a hypothesis and reasons, and developed this through the essay • carefully selected relevant material rather than all material around the topic.	• wrote everything they knew from a section of the specification without tailoring it to the question being asked • presented a confusion of philosophical ideas • evaluated by juxtaposition of different views, rather than developed reasons why one was stronger or weaker.

General comments

Most candidates were able to write three full-length essays without much difficulty. Sometimes timing or knowledge issues were evident as a few candidates only answered one or two questions instead of three. An absence of planning at the start of essays was noticeable- some responses would have benefitted from this prior to writing. Pre-prepared responses were less successful as they largely ignored the question.

Overall summary

It was interesting to note how many responses adopted the approach of stating a thesis in the introduction and then following this through in the body of the essay leading to the conclusion. In many cases this was successful in accessing higher levels.

In terms of question accessibility, there appeared to be no issues. However, some candidates did tend to focus on words in the question such as 'religious experience', 'Plato', 'religious language', 'cosmological argument' and wrote an "all and everything I know about this topic" response. This type of response often limited itself by not answering the question set precisely throughout.

While there is no such thing as one 'form' of a model essay which leads to the highest levels of the 'good', responses which were argument-led and which had the 'however' understanding to hand with each approach appeared to fare better.

The questions overall required specific knowledge and understanding of scholarly views/academic approaches, and responses fared less well when this was confused, conflated or convoluted.

Question 1*

1* 'Examples of mystical experiences should be considered valid religious experiences.' Discuss.

[40]

This question was generally answered quite well and many responses understood what mystical experiences were. Most candidates used William James' four criteria; less successful responses just outlined these whereas more successful responses were able to apply them to mystical experiences. However, there was often scope for a discussion on James' underlying approach or his idea of the 'fruits' of the experience. There was often a lack of specific examples of mystical experiences included, which hindered access to higher marks as students couldn't show they knew precisely what a mystical experience was compared to other types of religious experience.

More successful responses gave both theoretical support as well as examples of mystical experience, most commonly St Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich or St Paul's conversion experience and stated why they should be considered as mystical experiences. Top band responses normally included relevant details rather than generic interpretations, for example St Teresa of Avila was sometimes referred to as having a sexual encounter, rather than this being a reading of her experience. Less successful responses tended to focus on the topic of religious experience as a whole and were unable to differentiate between the types of experience. Little distinction was made along the lines of specifying the unifying nature of mystical experience. Some candidates didn't use any examples to help develop their responses as fully as they could have, and this impacted their progression up the levels of response.

There was a fair amount of comparison with conversion and corporate (mostly the Toronto Blessing) to a very mixed extent. When done well these comparisons looked at the different qualities of these experiences and how that might add to validity. For example, that conversion experiences tended to produce observable aspects and a change in beliefs, whereas mystical experiences happened to someone already in that religion. Many included reference to Swinburne's principle of credulity and testimony with less successful responses simply stating that people tell the truth so they should be believed. More successful responses offered clearer analysis of this and how it related to the validity of accounts. Many referred to Freud's and Feuerbach's views, but there were some tangential psychological explanations without focus on the question. More successful responses were able to show whether the psychological, physiological and scientific challenges were more coherent or not, and give reasons as to why. Less successful responses did not focus on the term 'valid' and therefore provided rather general accounts that listed types of religious experience without analysis or really answering the question.

> **Misconception**
>
> **?** Not all religious experiences are mystical experiences. The specification covers corporate and conversion experiences but this does not make these mystical in nature. James' did **not** comment on the Toronto Blessings or corporate religious experiences.

Exemplar 1

> When examining the validity of religious experience we must consider william James characteristics. These include; noetic quality, ineffable transient and passive qualities. Mystic religious experiences fit the criteria, however although, whether this criteria itself is reliable in valid, is debateable.

Exemplar 1 shows a common feature of some of Question 1 responses. Candidates would often simply list William James' marks of mystical experience rather than developing them with explanation or specific examples of his understanding. This would often limit the AO1 marks as the responses did not provide enough demonstrate of knowledge and understanding of mystical experience.

Assessment for learning

William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is available as a free PDF. You can use the 'ctrl' + 'f' function in the PDF to find specific parts of the text to be used as gobbets or to find sections quickly. The section on the four marks of mystical experience is short, clear and accessible in this way.

Question 2*

2* 'Aquinas successfully demonstrates that religious language should be understood in terms of analogy.' Discuss. **[40]**

This was a popular question with a range of responses and a full spread of marks. Some candidates were unable to explain analogy of attribution and proportion with any depth of understanding, less successful responses did not move beyond explaining the notion of analogy in general terms. There was some confusion of the terms apophatic and cataphatic, and not all candidates grasped that Aquinas is considered to fall under the cataphatic way. However, most candidates realised that the theory attempted to give a positive account of religious language, but many just contrasted this general approach with the *via negativa*. Occasionally there was confused use of the terms univocal and equivocal. The best responses often began with an analysis of how Aquinas steered a middle path between these two understandings. Some candidates were hindered by not really understanding the problem that was being addressed within religious language.

Top band responses drilled down into the analogy of attribution and proportion and provided a detailed account using examples. Most notably the health of the bull can be indicated by its urine due to the causal connection between the two. Baron von Hügel's (repeated by Hick) faithful dog and faithful friend comparison was also often used successfully. Lower band responses gave a vague account of analogy without really explaining the two types of analogy used. These tended to become a recount of all the different approaches to religious language and therefore steered away from the question. Some confused Aquinas' archer analogy within his fifth way with his account of religious language.

Many responses were rather general with comparisons of analogy from other scholarly views within the religious language unit. This meant that lots of knowledge was being included that was not always creditable. Lots of juxtaposition of analogy with Tillich on symbols was found, with very little explanation about why this connection was being made. The strongest responses were the ones focused on the question, with some higher-level responses bringing in relevant synoptic links on ideas such as attributes of God and the problem of evil. Most referred to the issue of anthropomorphism with some of the more successful continuing to use Ramsey and his qualifiers to develop the issues raised. The strongest responses were the ones focused on the question, while many others referred to other ways of talking about God in their responses without linking to Aquinas' analogy and why they were more successful. Marks were fairly given when responses used the alternative approaches evaluatively. Less successful responses were characterised by a desire to write down everything known by the candidate about the topic in general without focusing on the question precisely.

Exemplar 2

Aquinas proposed analogy to ensure people knew that when we speak of God we know we are not speaking litterally with human connotations. For example, when believers say God is listning, they know that God is not literally lothing as he does not have ears. He attempts to produce a theory that is a middle path between univocal and equivocal language, that he rejects. He proposes the analogy of attribution to show how just as a bull is better represented in itself than its wine, God is represented better in

2 himself but we can still obtain knowledge of him from our language world just as we still can grasp elements of the bull from its wine. The analogy of proportion ensures human inderstand that, as we are created as "the image of God", "in his likeness, although we have similar qualities to him we attain them in lesser amounts.

Aquinas's approach successfully ensures God is not anthropomorphized and while also ensuring people can learn from language used and claims can be made about God to further understanding.

This extract shows control of the material and a depth of understanding. This opening section highlights the key knowledge. This is built upon throughout the essay as it is expanded and utilised for analysis. This is an excellent was to build an argument and develop an essay. Less successful responses would do little more than mention analogy of proportion or attribution without returning to explore its significance.

Question 3*

3*   Critically assess Plato's analogy of the cave as an explanation of reality.   **[40]**

There were some excellent responses on Plato's analogy of the cave, linking his theory to his general metaphysics and ontology. Most responses understood how Plato, through his analogy, was seeking to illustrate how for most people their perception of what is real is far removed from true reality. Sometimes candidates did not outline the analogy but just went straight into a discussion of the notion of forms. Sometimes knowledge of the analogy of the cave was implicit and came out in little bits during discussion of the forms or in the evaluation section. More could have been made of the specific details of each part of the analogy, for example, the difficult path to enlightenment or the puppeteers possibly being a reference to Athenian politics. Most candidates realised that reality for Plato was perhaps paradoxically the intelligible world known through reason but did not expand sufficiently.

Lower marked responses tended to give descriptive essays outlining the cave, with a significant minority reading as a story. Some candidates showed a lack of understanding of how the illustration is meant to show that for most people their perception of reality is far removed from true reality. Unfortunately, some candidates focused only on the forms rather than any discussion of the cave and how the analogy related to the underpinning theory. More successful responses unpacked the symbolism in the analogy in detail, and explicitly linked this to Plato's understanding of the material world and insistence on the use of reason. These candidates were able to show what Plato was trying to achieve philosophically with his account. Some candidates were able to link the cave to Plato's other analogies and similes, such as the divided line and the Sun, and tie this into the cave exposition.

Some responses read more as a contrast between rationalism versus empiricism without mentioning the cave at all. It appeared difficult for some candidates to judge how much of Aristotle's ideas to include to discuss the question, this knowledge could be well explained but sometimes not creditable. The most successful responses were able to bring in Aristotle's epistemological method not simply as a juxtaposition of theories. There were often general criticisms of any sort of non-empirical epistemology, whereas more successful responses were able to develop the notion that our senses tend to be reliable and have furthered scientific advancement and humanity as a species. Occasionally engagement with arguments such as the 'third man' or reductio ad absurdum critiques of the forms was found. More successful responses were able to analyse whether this common view that our material perceptions are not sufficient to describe all of reality is successful or not, which was underpinned by a clear line of reasoning.

Misconception

?   Reasoning is a form of proof. Many responses asserted that Plato's theory has no proof, while failing to understand that his reasoning constitutes his proof. Given Plato's distrust of matter as inherently evil in our pursuit of true knowledge, we should not be surprised by his rejection of the empirical method.

Question 4*

4* To what extent is the cosmological argument a sufficient explanation for the existence of God?

[40]

This was probably the clearest and best answered of the questions – this question allowed a fair range of AO1 to be included which was clearly related to the question. This was a popular question, and there were some very good responses, but some responses focused on the design argument and the ontological argument rather than the question being asked and obviously this impacted the marks awarded. Nonetheless, many candidates were able to write convincingly about Aquinas' three accounts of the argument as well as other versions such as the Kalam form and the Copleston/Russell debate. It was common to read very good explanations of the first three of Aquinas's ways. Occasionally there was an unclear use of the archer and arrow analogy from the fifth way. The link to Aristotle was not made as often as might be expected, hence there was little reference to motion as from states of potentiality to actuality. This sometimes meant that candidates got confused between motion and causation.

Many candidates were able to identify the three focuses of the arguments, but less successful responses just read as a descriptive list. Where responses did not progress up the levels, it was normally due to a lack of distinction between the different forms of the argument, or they mischaracterised and confused the first three ways with teleological arguments. Often these responses became a list of arguments for God's existence in general. More successful responses developed Aquinas' ideas in more detail, for instance the link to Aristotle and referenced motion as the change from states of potentiality to actuality. Answers that fell into the top bands tended to fully explain the differences between the three forms and showed clarity in examples to explain these.

Many included details about Hume's criticisms, particularly the fallacy of composition, with the more successful responses going beyond mere description of his views. Many candidates tended to state criticisms of scholars rather than use them as part of a holistic argument of their own. The most successful responses focused on the discriminator 'sufficient' and focused on the question. Superfluous reference to Darwin's theory of evolution and Dawkins were made. Again, some candidates offered little more than just juxtaposition here, stating 'however others believe the Big Bang made the universe' without offering any further unpacking as to why this was a more compelling view. Some candidates also focused too much on contrasting with the teleological and/or ontological arguments and why they were more sufficient explanations for the existence of God. Erudite responses were able to bring in other arguments such as the ontological in a manner that fuelled the debate rather than making it appear incoherent. Some references to Leibniz were made, but the principle of sufficient reason was not always explained in detail. There was some reference to the Russell-Copleston debate, but this tended to be reduced to the universe being a 'brute fact' rather than focusing on contingency requiring a necessary being. Less successful responses lacked detail as referred to above, such that it was harder to make evaluative points precisely. For example, it is hard to make an analysis of whether infinite regress is possible if its importance has not been demonstrated previously.

Misconception

? Not all *a posteriori* arguments are cosmological. It is important to know the bullet points of the specification in order to identify the relevant information for the question set. Sometimes focusing on the specific area of the question is enough rather than attempting to bring in multiple concepts which can dilute the response made.

Exemplar 3

> Aquinas' First way is o the Unmoved mover. Everything in the universe moves From potentiality to actuality, towards it's final cause, but this requires another mover to facillitate the change. But that mover also changed so requires itself something else to move it, and continuing backwards. However Aquinas argues there cannot be an infinite regress of things moving other things orelse the last thing or object would never move, but it does, suggesting there is a break in the chain, a special case of an Unmoved mover, God.

This short exemplar is indicative of the most successful responses for Question 4. Notice how the response takes the time to develop each step methodically, moving from one point to the next sequentially. In subsequent paragraphs the response analyses the reasoning by highlighting the fallacies used, questioning the assumptions made in Aquinas' work.

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