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# A-LEVEL

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

7062/1 – Philosophy of religion and ethics  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

There are four key messages:

- Students were presented with an examination in which AO2 counted for 60% of the marks. On the whole, students responded well to AO2 questions, with many giving focused responses to the issues raised, with perceptive discussion and analysis of different views.
- Students were also presented with an examination which required them to respond to eight questions in three hours, and most managed to respond evenly to all questions. Where there were gaps, these were usually brought about by insufficient knowledge and understanding of particular questions. Time management was generally good.
- A few papers were barely legible. This was an issue across the complete ability range.
- Many students were clearly well prepared for the new A-level and some scripts were of uniformly outstanding quality. However, some students did not refer to relevant material to support their views.

## Section A Philosophy of Religion

### Question 1

#### Part 01.1

This was answered very well by most students, and attracted the highest percentage of maximums (ie Level 5, 10) of the four AO1 questions. Reference to Hick's concept of an epistemic distance between God and humanity was generally articulate, using his argument that free will is possible only in a world that is ambiguous in relation to its knowledge of God. The 'influences' part of the question produced some interesting negatives as well as positives. For example, some suggested that Hick's weak explanations of natural evil and of animal suffering can cause some people to reject his entire theodicy.

The strongest answers gave impressive summaries of Hick's main points. Weaker answers sometimes talked about Hick's concept of eschatological verification and his Parable of the Celestial City, without giving any explanation showing how these ideas might relate to his theodicy. Some unfortunately confused Hick's theodicy with that of Augustine.

#### Part 01.2

There was a wide range of responses to this question. Weaker answers simply gave an account of Anselm's ontological argument, Gaunilo's 'perfect lost island' rejection, Anselm's response that God alone exists necessarily, and Kant's objection that existence is not a predicate. In other words, Anselm's argument was juxtaposed with those of Gaunilo and Kant. Some responses talked about the status of the argument as analytic / a priori / deductive, but without explaining what these words meant. Where these ideas were put together clearly, answers could reach Level 3 of the mark scheme for a general response to the question.

The responses which reached Levels 4 and 5 often focused on the key concept in the question: that of ‘proof’, and discussed issues such as:

- whether or not the existence of God can be known through a deductive proof, which is a proof only if the premises are sound;
- whether God’s existence can rather be known inductively, as with the design argument;
- whether Barth’s claim that the argument is faith-based affects the issue of proof;
- whether Plantinga’s modal ontological argument is a proof, or a disproof.

Whether responses drew on this approach or others, they reached Levels 4 or 5 because they were relevant, critical, referred to different scholars, and were properly evaluative.

## **Question 2**

### **Part 02.1**

This question produced the weakest of the four AO1 responses. Some responses demonstrated a lot of knowledge about symbol but little about analogy, or vice versa.

For symbolic language, most used Tillich’s account: that God is ‘Being-Itself’ (and not ‘a being’ among many), and that language about God examines the question of what it means to exist. Such language is non-cognitive. For Tillich, religious language is rooted in the language of religious experience: symbols point to a reality beyond themselves, and are self-transcending. For analogy most referred to Aquinas’ cognitive account of the analogies of attribution and proportionality.

The strongest responses referred to subject-specific language and achieved Level 5 by providing an articulate account of the meaning of both sentences in the question. Weaker responses either dealt with only one of the two terms, or did not focus upon examining the meaning. With analogy, some remembered Paley’s analogical design argument, and wrote about that, invariably without explaining the nature of analogical language.

### **Part 02.2**

This question produced some excellent responses from students who knew the verification principle and knew how it challenges the *meaningfulness* of religious language.

The strongest answers gave detailed analysis, pointing out, for example, that Ayer’s criterion of meaningfulness excluded art, poetry, music, ethics, and much of history, none of these being either logically true or verifiable through sense experience. Religious language was just one more thought system to tar with the same brush. Ayer also assumed that religious language claims to be uniformly cognitive/factual, whereas for many, religious truth claims are non-cognitive and deeply meaningful. In that respect, responses referred to scholars who hold that religious language is both non-cognitive and deeply meaningful. Examples included: Tillich and symbol, Hare’s concept of *bliks*; also, Wittgenstein’s dictum that the meaning of a word is its use in language: religious language is deeply meaningful for those who use the religious language game.

Some made good use of Hick’s principle that religious language is after all cognitive, verifiable in principle through eschatological verification. This principle appears to fail, since if there is no afterlife in which the truths of religion are verified, then nobody will be able to falsify Hick’s claims. This point brought many students to the falsification principle, which was often not well presented. The weakest responses often spent much time detailing the ‘Parable of the Gardener’, but showed little

understanding of how to use it to answer the question. As a footnote, some ended up describing Ayer's alleged near-death experience, which was not relevant to the question.

## **Section B Ethics and Religion**

### **Question 3**

#### **Part 03.1**

This question was done well by most students. There were some excellent summaries of the virtue ethics approach, focusing mainly on Aristotle, with occasional reference to modern exponents of the theory. Many said that Aristotle opposes being truthful to being boastful or indulging in mock-modesty. Several scenarios were discussed, particularly the case where telling a lie saves someone's life, contrasting this with those who lie for their own benefit, for example in business affairs. Most argued that the virtue of courage would often be needed in order to tell the truth / to admit a fault, for example.

Weaker responses tended to refer exclusively to Kant's case of the mad axe-murderer, pointing out that virtue theory solved the problem which Kantian deontology could not.

#### **Part 03.2**

A number of students seemed to struggle with this question. Stronger responses often began by saying that whereas virtue ethics aims to make virtuous behaviour habitual, habit is not the same as providing guidance. There are no rules as such, so virtue ethics might be seen as ineffective in solving ethical dilemmas. Some students suggested that it is difficult in particular to apply the theory to issues such as cloning and embryo research, where the long-term implications are not yet fully known, so what would count as a virtuous approach is a matter of debate. Against such considerations, some argued that virtues are synergistic – mutually reinforcing – and where they are practised from the beginning of a person's mental development, this can make the need for on-the-spot decisions redundant, because the virtuous person will know what to do. In discussing the key word, 'clear', some responses suggested that some ethical theories do offer clear guidance, but clarity itself might be of little value: for example Kant was very clear about not telling lies, but that would be of little help to individuals wishing to lie in life-threatening situations.

Weaker responses tended to ignore the word 'clear', and instead simply listed what was 'good' about virtue theory. They also tended to make long comparisons with other theories, usually utilitarianism, natural moral law, divine command theory and situation ethics, to an extent that some essays ceased to be about virtue ethics. Equally, there were some long and involved discussions of what virtue ethicists might or might not do in cases of abortion and/or euthanasia which was not relevant.

### **Question 4**

#### **Part 04.1**

There were mixed responses to this question. Divine Command Theory (DCT) was generally done well. Stronger responses stuck to the wording of the question ("the meaning of right and wrong in"), explaining, for example, that the DCT is cognitivist – 'good' is a factual property in which 'right' is

what God commands and ‘wrong’ is what God forbids. Weaker responses often gave an extended treatment of the Euthyphro Dilemma, with little or no attempt to make this relevant to the question.

For Intuitionism, stronger responses generally identified this as a cognitive view, and explained it primarily through G.E. Moore’s account of ethical non-naturalism: that there are fundamental moral truths that cannot be defined by reference to anything except other moral truths. This was often backed up by W.D. Ross’s account of *prima facie* duties, primarily because this appeals to an intuitionist ranking of such duties depending on the situation. Weaker responses usually talked at length about the conscience.

#### **Part 04.2**

This question brought out some unexpected answers. All valid interpretations of a question are creditworthy. For example:

- Some took the question as being an accusation that humanity is by nature morally irresponsible. This was supported by an appeal to examples of collective and individual human immorality, particularly in politics, war and sexual ethics.
- A few referred to ethical subjectivism and cultural relativism / conventionalism, arguing that these approaches to morality lead to the tolerance of unethical practices. Some suggested that without accepting some form of moral absolutism or moral objectivism, there can be no moral progress.

The most common approach was to refer to the debate between libertarians, determinists and compatibilists as to whether or not humans have the freedom of the will required for moral responsibility and the maintenance of law and order. A wide range of theories was considered. Most referred to causal / theological / psychological determinism, and most concluded that some form of determinism was probably true, thus absolving humanity from moral responsibility. Libertarians generally accepted that their ‘feeling’ of having free will was a sufficient proof of their having it. Quite a number scorned compatibilism, perhaps because they wanted to use the excellent quotations from William James and from Kant, that the theory is a ‘quagmire of evasion’ and a ‘wretched subterfuge’.

#### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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