A-LEVEL
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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

Question 01.1

There were many precise and detailed answers to this question. The hallmark of a successful answer was, as always, relevance. Some, however, gave long and intricate introductions to the concept of miracle, most of which were not relevant to the question. Whatever answers the question directly can be included; that which does not should be omitted.

For Hume, most students gave his secondary arguments against miracles (that they are the product of ignorance/barbaric stupidity and the like). Very few used Hume's main inductive argument that miracles by definition must be the most improbable of all events, so the likelihood that the witnesses were lying or mistaken must always be greater than that a miracle has occurred.

For Wiles, most gave a good account of his anti-realist position that the interventionist approach to miracles must be rejected, otherwise the problem of evil cannot be solved. Most therefore took the view, that Wiles' view of a God who could intervene with a miracle to save and help a tiny minority of people, but who did not intervene to save the millions who died in the Holocaust, would be an evil monster. Less effective responses often retold Holland's story of the child on the railway line, attributing it to Wiles.

Question 01.2

Answers to this question often ran into four or more pages, and displayed detailed knowledge of theories of life after death. Where this material was evaluative, answers frequently reached Level 5. Where answers simply regurgitated what the theories say about life after death, these were confined to the lower levels. Good use was made of arguments concerning resurrection of the body, analysing scriptural accounts of the resurrection of Jesus; also evaluating Hick's claim that such accounts will be verified eschatologically. The most popular conclusion was that the possibility of uploading minds onto some form of computer platform offers a realistic chance of life after death, although some pointed out that reconciling such ideas with religious claims is not straightforward.

As a key message this year, material which does not answer the question should be omitted. Some wasted a lot of time detailing what they knew about the different theories without analysing them or reaching a conclusion.

Question 02.1

This question was generally done well. Most examined visions (corporeal, imaginative and intellectual), numinous experiences and mystical experiences, and many answers were into Levels 4 and 5.

The accounts of visions suffered, sometimes, from confusing the different kinds. Likewise, some used words such as 'numinous', 'ineffable' and the like, without appearing to know exactly what they mean. Many referred to William James' criteria for identifying a religious experience as 'true' (ie if it was passive, ineffable, noetic and transitory), but not infrequently were confused about the meaning of each term.

Many realised that it would be within the remit of the question ('different understandings') to give negative accounts, eg that religious experiences are perhaps the result of drugs, or are related to temporal lobe epilepsy. Some referred also to accounts of how such experiences might be verified

(eg through Swinburne's Principles of Testimony and Credulity) or else falsified (eg through neuroscience/Persinger's Helmet).

Question 02.2

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. Some identified Process theodicy as some kind of free will defence'.

This is not to say that the question was poorly answered: the range of marks was comparatively even, with the majority falling within Levels 3, 4 and 5, and it was clear that teachers had guided students through what Process theodicy really says. The most succinct accounts covered most of the important points, eg:

- there was no creation 'out of nothing'. The material universe existed as primeval chaos, with God existing 'panentheistically' as its soul. Evil is the product of chaos
- such a God co-exists with evil, so cannot intervene to remove evil from the universe
- God therefore is not omnipotent, so cannot remove evil
- God's creative activity is limited to persuasion – the attempt to persuade matter into the forms he wants. This takes a long time (billions of years), and God cannot know whether the attempt to control evil will succeed: the greater the order in the universe, the greater is its ability to resist him. The human race is an example of such resistance.

Students then used this schema to 'solve' the problem of evil. God is all-loving and all-knowing, but is not all powerful, so cannot control evil. Some argued that this solution was satisfactory, because in particular it explains why God cannot rid the universe of natural evil. Moreover a panentheistic God also experiences suffering, so is 'the fellow-sufferer who understands' (Whitehead). Most went on to reject this, concluding that a God who cannot control evil is not the God of traditional theism, so is not worth worshipping. Moreover, if victory over evil is not assured, why did God take the risk? These and other arguments were used to good effect, and often formed the basis of a sustained and successful evaluation.

Less effective responses often ignored the question rubric. The question asks students to evaluate the suggestion that 'Process theodicy solves the problem of evil'. The wording here is specific, and does not invite students to evade the question by writing alternative essays about other theodicies (usually Plantinga, Mackie and Hick).

Question 03.1

As with Question 01.1, it was clear that students had been guided well in the technique of answering an AO1 question succinctly. Bentham was thus accurately portrayed as a Utilitarian consequentialist who focused on maximising pain over pleasure in a particular situation; whereas Kant was billed as a deontologist focused on universalisable maxims and the good will. For Bentham, many explained clearly how the hedonic calculus quantifies pleasure. For Kant, most focused on the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative. Some then went on to apply these ideas to specific moral situations (not least that of the inquiring axe-murderer), contrasting Kant's focus on duty with Bentham's preference to produce the greatest happiness for all concerned in the situation. A significant proportion of students achieved Level 5 for this question.

Question 03.2

Some students demonstrated outstanding comprehension of the technical language of meta ethics. Many pointed out that the claim in the question would be supported by both ethical naturalists and non-naturalists, and then proceeded to test out both approaches. With ethical naturalism, most attacked this with Hume's 'is-ought gap', which basically points out that we cannot draw valid conclusions about the way things should be from the way things are: so we cannot go from 'pleasure is good' to 'we ought to seek pleasure'. Most argued that this argument destroys ethical naturalism: we cannot go from facts about the world to moral conclusions. Others rejected Hume's argument with a neo-naturalist approach, where the claim that 'preserving the entire environment is good' is followed by the factual claim that 'we therefore ought to preserve it' (otherwise everything dies, ourselves included).

For non-naturalism, most explained Moore's intuitionism, that we intuitively know moral facts in the same way as we can point to (but cannot describe) yellow. This was rejected by almost all students on the grounds that people have conflicting intuitions about all things, including morality, so intuitions cannot be facts.

Many discussed divine command theory, which claims that God is omnipotent, so all commands from God (such as those in scripture) must be factual. Nearly all rejected this, referring to the Euthyphro Dilemma.

Arguments such as these were discussed in a number of different ways. Some focused on Utilitarianism, and concluded that a focus on pleasure cannot be factual, because there are all sorts of pleasures which people consider to be immoral. Similar comments were made about the status of love in Situation Ethics: love means different things to different people, so a focus on love cannot be factual either. Some used Ayer's Emotivism to argue that by definition, moral values cannot be about facts, because all moral statements are non-cognitive: they are merely statements of emotion.

In short, this question brought out a range of evaluative skills. Conclusions were, appropriately, very varied. The generally agreed conclusion was that all moral judgements are factual to those who make them.

Question 04.1

Nearly all students found this question accessible. The range of ideas was impressive, and was generally split between explanations of the conscience from psychology and sociology and those from religious ideas. Religious understandings were generally more detailed and accurate than those from psychology/sociology, although some confused Augustine with Aquinas, and although there was frequent mention of Newman's 'Illative sense', very few explained what that meant.

Some students gave comparatively short answers to Question 04.1, limiting their performance thereby, but then wrote in considerable detail for Question 04.2, showing that they had no shortage of knowledge concerning differing ideas about the conscience. Since each question is assessed independently of others, this meant that some restricted their achievement on 04.1 unnecessarily.

Question 04.2

This question produced a wide range of responses. The key word was 'value', which sometimes got lost in material which was really a continuation of answers to 04.1. Responses included:

- 'value' in the case of religious definitions was primarily considered to be a question of whether or not God exists, although a few made the point that irrespective of the possibility of God's existence, the religious conscience can have value as a guide to life. The general consensus was that so many atrocities have been committed in the name of God that it is hard to judge between value and disvalue. Some suggested that it is impossible to know when people are telling the truth about following their conscience, which makes the question of value unknowable for religious claims
- with Freud, some argued that his account of conscience in terms of guilt is of little value, since (for example) some people are made to feel guilty about their sexual orientation, which is likely to be a matter of biology and genetics rather than ethics.
- some argued that social understandings of the conscience are valuable because they tend to bring societies together under a set of shared ideals. Others argued the exact reverse, that (considering human history) a shared understanding of values is just as likely to be destructive as constructive.

Conclusions often took the line that there is clearly no agreed definition of the conscience, so there can hardly be any meaningful agreement about its value. One interesting approach was to argue that conscience is simply a personal or shared approach to moral behaviour, so is simply the expression of personal or group preferences. On the whole, this question attracted a variety of interesting and well-informed answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.