



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (5061/6061)

Unit RS11 Studies in the Philosophy of Religion

Report on the Examination

June examination - 2007 series

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RS11 *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*

General comments

There were many excellent scripts with well-informed answers that drew on scholarly opinion and focused on the question set. The most common weaknesses were in the answers to the 'assess' questions in which many candidates simply repeated criticisms that others have made of the point of view being assessed, without any attempt at analysis or comment. This lack of dialogue limited the marks that could be awarded. Candidates should also ensure that their scripts are legible; this was not always the case.

Question 1

The specific demands of part (a) were neglected by some candidates. They responded with very well informed, but over-long, summaries of both arguments but left the examiner to work out the differences between them. On a number of these scripts the second question was either rushed or not completed and candidates need to be aware of the importance of time management in the examination. The best answers ran a commentary on the types of argument and illustrated these with examples.

Some candidates had little to say about 'faith does not need proof'. The best answers had specific ideas about the meaning of 'faith' and 'proof' and suggested, for example, that faith is possible only when there is no proof, or that faith is an attitude of trust and not simply an intellectual assent to an idea. Some answers were very short and candidates should remember that there are ten marks allocated to the 'explain' part of such questions. There was a pleasing variety of responses to the 'assess' element of this question but, often, candidates rehearsed common critiques without explanation or comment so that they read like a list. There was little debate or assessment in such answers. In contrast, there were some excellent and focused responses which used scholarly opinion to back up their points.

Question 2

The strongest answers to this question focused precisely on its demands. The Augustinian theodicy was generally well known but candidates often gave more than was required rather than focusing on the **origin** and **nature** of evil. Process thought was generally handled less well, and some confused it with the Irenaean theodicy or simply did not attempt this part of the question – even when they were able to refer to process thought in part (b). This suggested that they did not check that they had completed all of part (a) before moving on, and that they did not leave themselves enough time to check through their answers at the end of the examination.

The first element of part (b) was answered very well by many candidates but there were two common errors. Firstly, candidates stated ideas without explaining them, for example that omnipotence, benevolence and evil were 'an inconsistent triad' and, secondly, candidates did not offer a full enough answer for ten marks. There was also a tendency for candidates to offer a variety of presentations of the logical problem of evil which all effectively said the same thing in different ways. This was unnecessary and was often at the expense of a clear explanation of the evidential problem or any other version of the argument that there was simply too much suffering within the world to make belief in an all-powerful, all-loving God reasonable.

There were excellent answers to the 'assess' part of the question but some candidates wasted time by repeating the key points of the theodicies instead of commenting on their relative

strengths and weaknesses. Where criticisms were simply listed and not evaluate only limited credit could be given and, in many cases, better use could have been made of scholarly opinion.

Question 3

The best answers drew on a wide range of both scholarly opinion (often James, Stace and Otto), and examples in answering this question, but a disappointing number of candidates seemed only to be aware of James, and some treated 'mystical experience' as identical to 'religious experience' and wrote general answers. A small number of candidates wrote about Near Death Experiences as a type of mystical experience; the two should be kept distinct. A small number of candidates confused mystical and miracle, and there were few, if any, relevant points in such answers.

Part (b) focused on the difficulty of describing mystical experiences and the consequent difficulty of judging them. Most candidates spotted the link between the two parts. In the first part of the question, less able candidates tended to state that the experiences were ineffable (following James) but could go no further. The debate usually focused on the subjectivity of such experiences and the fact that judging them often had to depend on the limited descriptions people were able to offer and were, therefore, likely to be difficult. Some usefully considered how the mystics themselves could judge their own experience. Good use was made of Swinburne's principles of credulity and testimony and there was clear awareness of the supposed similarities between mystical experiences and a variety of medical and psychological conditions.