

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/02 Summer 2023 series

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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 responses 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.

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Paper 2 series overview

This is a written paper which assesses AO1 and AO2.

For the most part, candidates were well prepared for the examination with no errors in understanding the rubric, such as attempting all three questions. The majority of candidates responded to Questions 1 and 3. Question 2 was less popular, perhaps because of the specific wording of the question. There was still the problem of legibility for some candidates. This may be due to having little practice in actually writing essays by hand. Also there is a real tendency to follow a website/teacher provided generic essay plan and this leads to less variety of writing and use of responses.

However, overall candidates appeared to have been well prepared for the demands of the examination, understanding what they needed to do and attempting to do so to the best of their ability.

| Candidates who did well on this paper generally: | Candidates who did less well on this paper generally: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focused on the actual wording of the question and the terminology used such as the word 'agape' in Question 1 • showed both depth and breadth of knowledge • used other thinkers to support their arguments • were able to assess both strengths and weaknesses to give a balanced argument. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addressed the general concept rather than the specific wording of the question • gave very brief responses with very little argument • wrote unplanned and muddled responses, even though the knowledge was accurate. |

Question 1*

In all your responses, you should:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of ethical thought and teaching
- analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and/or belief (in an ethical context), including their significance, influence and study.

1* 'In situation ethics, applying agape (love) is unhelpful when making moral decisions.' Discuss.

[30]

Question 1* This was the most popular question answered this year and was usually paired with Question 3. The clarity of the question made it highly accessible to all candidates.

Many candidates seemed particularly well prepared for this question, producing excellent responses that were highly detailed in the specifics of agape within situation ethics. Candidates were, therefore, able to assess both strengths and weakness of this approach to arrive at logical and justified responses as to whether agape is helpful or not in making moral decisions.

Those candidates who achieved the highest responses were able to demonstrate significant depth and breadth of understanding with specific use being made of the six principles of agape developed by Fletcher, which were then often reinforced with the four working propositions of pragmatism, personalism, positivism and relativism. Their effectiveness was demonstrated either by using Fletcher's own examples or by reference to unique case studies. Assessment from academic sources was often highly effective in these cases with a variety of thinkers being used to both argue for and against the statement, although there was significant use made of Peter and Charlotte Vardy by a large number of candidates.

At the other end of the scale, there were some candidates who showed very little understanding of agape at all, or who attempted to turn the essay into a 'these other systems are better' style of analysis with significant percentages of their writing being focused on Kant or natural law theory instead of on situation ethics and agape. Some candidates felt that it was sufficient demonstration of agape simply to present the Mrs Bergmeier case study with little to no explanation or support. Often the analysis presented by these candidates was superficial with little support from specific thinkers and instead making broad and sweeping statements which were very generalised in nature.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should practice planning and writing essays to make sure that they address the specific wording of the question. Use of terminology and supporting their responses by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of theories will give candidates a balanced argument.

Exemplar 1

Another argument which goes against the statement is that agape gives us a clear set of rules to follow in the situation and tells us what we should aim to get from the situation. It tells us that in every situation we should do the most loving thing ~~can~~ ^{because} Jesus taught us to love one another and another ~~quote~~ quote is "love not 7 times but 77 times" and this shows us how Jesus taught us to love one another a lot and it also fits into

how Jesus died for us on the cross as that was the most loving thing ~~to~~ to do - he died for us as it would rid us of our sins (bring about the most love). The whole theory of situation ethics is all about agape love and how it is intrinsically good which is one of the 6 propositions "only love is intrinsically good" ~~and~~ and so ~~this~~ tells us how agape is never flawed and it is always the right thing to do in any situation since it is never wrong. However, you could argue that when making moral decisions, you shouldn't use your emotions because they are subjective but you should use reason since all us humans have it and so if we use it we can all come to the same conclusion. This argument is countered again by the fact that if we were meant to use our reason, then why did God give us emotions to use and again this links to how Jesus taught us to use our love and shows how agape is very helpful in moral decision making.

Exemplar 1 shows that the candidate is not only aware of Fletcher's propositions, but also the basis of agape in the teaching of Jesus. The argument is expanded in the following paragraph and leads neatly to the conclusion.

Question 2*

2* Assess the view that the four tiers of law are essential in understanding natural law.

[30]

This question, while still frequently answered, was less popular among candidates this year than Questions 1 or 3. This may be due to the specific focus in the question on the four tiers of law presented by Aquinas as part of natural law theory.

Many candidates who chose to respond to this question were able to show a good level of knowledge of the role and function of the concept of the four tiers of law in the development of natural law theory and then progress their argument effectively from this point, frequently using the primary precepts and secondary precepts as the basis of their responses, but with some also making use of other principles such as double effect. Where candidates had this clear understanding of the four tiers and their differences between each level, effective analysis was common and arguments were clear in their development.

However, a number of candidates had only a superficial understanding of the four tiers of law. Some responses were less well developed and suffered from a generalised and often brief single paragraph explanation of the four tiers with no real development or analysis before going into an unfocused discussion of natural law theory in moral decision making. There was also a tendency for candidates to conflate Eternal Law with Divine Law or to completely misunderstand what is meant by Eternal Law. Often, less effective responses were not tied to the specific question and so only partially answered the question, even though the candidates may have had some understanding of the four tiers of law.

Exemplar 2

Karl Barth rejects natural law theory as a whole as he believes it puts too much emphasis on reason which he believed is corrupted by the fall. Sigmund Freud argues there is no universal orientation do good its just implanted during our upbringing. G.E Moore also argues against Natural Law with his naturalistic fallacy - we can't derive an ought from an is - just because we have sexual organs this doesn't mean we should reproduce.

The Doctrine of double effect argues that an action that is wrong is always wrong but an action that is good or neutral but has an unintended evil side-effect is sometimes permissible. For example a woman who has to undergo cancer treatment but is pregnant meaning she has to have an abortion is permissible because in the course of trying to save a life an unintended side-effect is ending the baby's. There are also certain conditions that should be assessed such as the proportionality condition - is the unintended side-effect bigger than the action? if so then it would not be permissible.

The part of the response shown in Exemplar 2 has some knowledge but it is not used or linked to the question in any way. The paragraph on double effect is also superfluous as it adds nothing to the response.

Question 3*

3* 'Voluntary euthanasia should be recognised as always morally acceptable.' Discuss.

[30]

This was a very popular question this year. This may be because of the open nature of the question which encouraged candidates to employ their whole range of ethical knowledge, while the focus on voluntary euthanasia was clear and easily accessible for all candidates.

The vast majority of candidates were clear on what was meant by voluntary euthanasia and were able to illustrate the issue with reference to case studies such as Terry Schiavo, Dianne Pretty and Daniel James. Some reference was also made to Tony Bland as an alternative case.

Effective responses were able to build their arguments around specific ethical theories and explore how these would analyse and conclude on the issue before creating their final conclusions. This was often done in a good level of depth with students making recourse to Fletcher's situation ethics and natural law theory, but also incorporating utilitarian principles most commonly in the form of Mill and Bentham. Some reference was made to the thinking of Peter Singer, but this was found less commonly. Many responses had a focus on autonomy as the basis of the argument and this was often used effectively.

As is often experienced with this style of question, some candidates reverted to more of a GCSE style response which tended to be less effective, although there was often good biblical support made to sanctity of life versus quality-of-life arguments, some of which showed effective analysis and evaluation in themselves to a high quality of response. More skilful responses showed a diversity of content and responses, discussing whether it should always be recognised as morally acceptable or whether there were situations where it should not be morally acceptable.

Exemplar 3

Fletcher's situation ethics is in favour of euthanasia because what it says is that in a situation the greatest thing to do is to bring about the most agape love and so if the patient has requested for them to be killed then that will bring about the greatest ~~agape~~ amount of agape. Richard Dawkins argues ~~ag~~ for the statement too as he thinks that we should listen to the patient's choice if they want to undergo euthanasia and we can also use the quality of life argument to agree with this. The quality of life argument looks at the state that the patient is in, both their mental and physical state and so if this person is in a bad state then they should be allowed to undergo euthanasia e.g. a person suffering from arthritis has too much pain in their joints and as a result can't even move their hands around anymore may be considered to have a bad Q.O.L because they are unable

perform normal day to day activities. Situation ethics is pragmatic and flexible so it can be applied to euthanasia since it would attempt to get the most amount of agree and that would be by letting the patient be euthanised since they have asked for it. Situation ethics is also personalist so it will put the patient first before anything else and prioritise their wellbeing. However, there are some flaws with this view because sometimes the person who has requested to be euthanised is not in the right state of mind and so as a result they won't be fit to make ~~such~~ such a big decision by themselves e.g. a 20 year old woman in Switzerland had requested and undergone euthanasia because she was depressed. This shows how if you ~~allow~~ ^{allow} ~~have~~ voluntary euthanasia, many young people will take their lives over issues which aren't even major. However, ~~not~~ all people are autonomous beings and so have a choice over what happens to them and so we should respect their decision which shows how voluntary euthanasia is morally acceptable.

Exemplar 3 shows different support for autonomy to back up the candidate's response. The section on Dawkins is particularly well done.

Exemplar 4

However, critics argue that ~~the~~ this could lead to a slippery slope. By breaching one moral law ~~&~~ by giving euthanasia, this could result in other moral laws being broken and eventually everyone would begin committing immoral acts. It ~~is~~ would also mean that children would be allowed and those with mental illness would be allowed euthanasia, like in Belgium infant euthanasia was legalised in 2005. Fletcher would respond saying that euthanasia should only be given in extreme cases as therapy and other ways should be trialed first. This ~~is~~ allow ~~&~~ Allowing voluntary euthanasia could also result in older people feeling pressure to ~~&~~ consent to euthanasia to increase space/opportunities for others in hospitals and hospices. These are weaker arguments as ~~there would be need to be other~~ just because others may take advantage of euthanasia, if it relieves ~~the~~ ~~major~~ suffering and pain they have a right to receive it.

Exemplar 4 gave 'slippery slope' as an example of when voluntary euthanasia should not always be morally acceptable, such as allowing voluntary euthanasia for children. However, other sections of the argument are not well developed, leading overall to Level 4.

Other responses lacked significant ethical substance and did not progress their arguments beyond a superficial exploration of euthanasia itself; these did not progress to the higher levels of marking available due to the lack of specific ethical content although the writing itself was often compelling. Additionally, some candidates did not focus on the 'always' part of the question and so gave more generic responses as to whether euthanasia is morally acceptable.

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