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# **GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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## **RELIGIOUS STUDIES A LEVEL**

**SUMMER 2023**

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:  
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### **Annual Statistical Report**

The annual Statistical Report (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

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## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

#### COMPONENT 1A: A STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY

##### General Comments

The most popular question in Section A was Q1 (attempt% 82.5%). The most popular question in Section B was Q5 (attempt% 50.7%). Overall the paper was accessible to candidates. Candidates were confident in their understanding of the rubric for AO1 and AO2. Candidates answered a broad range of questions and there were some really outstanding responses with relevant synoptic links being made and a variety of scholars, drawn from across the specification, were referred to. This ensured that candidates demonstrated breadth and depth in their answers. Whilst it is evident that centres are helping candidates to connect their knowledge across the components, demonstrating synopticity, it's important that candidates look for natural connections rather than forced ones.

Candidates frequently referred to scripture in their responses, allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of Christianity. Q1 on the dangers of wealth, elicited the most frequent and accurate use of sacred texts.

In evaluation, it was helpful when candidates stated their intended line of argument at the beginning and in their conclusion of their answers. Candidates who made it explicit whether their essay was going to be in favour of or against the statement provided clearer arguments. Additionally, it was helpful when candidates included evaluation summaries at the end of each point to connect to the question and make insightful observations.

##### Comments on individual questions/sections

###### Section A

**Q.1 (a) Examine Christian teaching about the dangers of wealth. [AO1 20]**

###### **Features of stronger responses:**

- included accurate and thorough use of key passages of Scripture to explain the danger this elicited.
- made the connection between the dangers of wealth and the rationale for living a life of asceticism.
- referred to stewardship of money, the Christian tradition of tithing and charitable giving as a means of avoiding the dangers of accumulating too much wealth.
- made links with the lifestyle choices that Jesus made, his lifestyle as an itinerant, and his preferential option for the poor.
- demonstrated natural synoptic links with other scholars. For example, J.D. Crossan's view of the historical Jesus as a 'Mediterranean Jewish Peasant' and a social revolutionary.
- made some interesting synoptic link with Moltmann and the 'suffering God' of how God through the incarnation intended to suffer within poverty to teach of the danger of wealth.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made some reference to scripture, but did not develop and explain how the scriptural passage explicitly teaches about the dangers of wealth.
- demonstrated inaccuracy and /or confusion. For example, the metaphorical analogy of the 'camel and the eye of the needle' was often quoted incorrectly and not explained clearly. The same applied to 'the love of money being the root of all evil.' Many candidates misquoted and stated, 'money is the root of all evil.' This meant that the focus of the response was inaccurate.
- started well by linking the answer to 'dangers' of wealth, but struggled to maintain this connection when addressing asceticism and stewardship.

**(b) 'Wealth should always be seen by Christians as a sign of God's blessing.'**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- used examples of televangelists and/or megachurches from the Prosperity Gospel that sees wealth as a blessing and were able to refer to appropriate biblical passages to illustrate its teaching.
- considered the transactional nature of prosperity gospel and whether or not this undermines faith. (i.e., if I pray only because I want materialistic gains, then surely this undermines the intention of my prayer?)
- demonstrated perception in evaluating the difference between material vs spiritual wealth and could apply this question to the wider world issues of poverty and the responsibility of the wealthy.
- made insightful synoptic connections with Liberation Theology and J.D. Crossan's view of Jesus as a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant respectively.
- demonstrated a balanced evaluation and analysis of the blessings gained through an ascetic lifestyle, with examples, and a lifestyle which has been blessed by wealth as championed by the prosperity gospel.
- referred to scholars such as C.L. Blomberg and J. D. Crossan making effective synoptic links. For example, with Crossan's description of Jesus as a Mediterranean peasant and with Liberation Theology, particularly the focus on orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, also the nature of the early church as in Acts where 'all things were held in common'.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- lacked focus on the question. For example, using scripture to explain about the attitudes towards wealth in Christianity but failed to analyse and evaluate whether wealth can be seen as a blessing from God.
- were too general or vague and presented discussions about the importance of charity in Christianity, rather than focusing specifically on wealth as a blessing.
- supported arguments with generalisations (e.g., the Catholic Church is corrupt because it is wealthy) rather than critically appraising the issues that they raised in light of the question.
- tended to have a low level of accuracy when attempting to address the question. Some candidates were able to talk about the dangers of wealth but struggled to give a confident critique of the Prosperity Gospel.

**Q.2 (a) Examine John Hick's contribution to the debate about Christian inclusivism. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated clear and confident explanations of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism
- referred to Hick's works with accurate explanations and good understanding/application of: Hick's analogies of the prism; the Copernican revolution; the Ultimate reality; the Hindu/Buddhist parable of 'the blind men and the elephant'; and, Kant's Phenomena and Noumena and how this relates to religious experience.
- placed Hick's universal pluralism within the context of Christian inclusivism and referred to Hick's rejection of Rahner's inclusivistic approach.
- confidently discussed the concept of 'anonymous Christians' that Rahner puts forward ensuring that Hick's disagreement with this was evident in their answer.
- demonstrated excellent understanding of Hick's views on Jesus as possessing a high degree of God-consciousness within the context of pluralism and referred to the impact of Hick's religious experiences on his theology.
- outlined Hick's understanding of moving from a Christocentric, Ecclesiocentric view to a to a theocentric one arguing that religious belief is more dependent on birthplace than truth.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- tended to have low level of accuracy when attempting to address the question.
- explained Rahner's basic approach of inclusivism, without reference to Hick's contribution
- provided a limited understanding of inclusivism and generally conflated Rahner's inclusivism and Hick's pluralism rather than explaining distinct views
- failed to include technical language and the analogies of Hick. They focused too much on the debate around Hick rather than referring specifically to Hick
- a few addressed the question in a limited way and examined Hick's immediate criticism to inclusivism without extending it to his own contribution (pluralism).
- wrote at length about Rahner and wrote only a very short amount on Hick which limited their answers.

**(b) 'The Christian Bible promotes exclusivism rather than inclusivism. Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses**

- included excellent use of Old Testament scripture and referred to the Abrahamic covenant to support exclusivism
- made perceptive links between exclusivism and the Lutheran concept of 'Sola fide' and Calvin's understanding predestination
- included the distinction between Old Testament and New Testament views, linking this to the teaching of Jesus.
- considered the impact of both exclusivism and inclusivism on Christianity as a whole.

- added depth to the discussion by including reference to Biblical passages that promoted both inclusivism and exclusivism.
- used John 14:16 (“I am the Way...”) but a small number of innovative responses argued that this may only show that Jesus had to die to save everyone in the world from sin, rather than everyone needing to believe in Christianity.
- referred to the covenantal relationship in the Old Testament being the source of the idea of exclusivism but that this would be better suited for Jews to argue rather than Christians.
- Used the Hick vs Rahner debate well
- commented on different ways of understanding or interpreting scripture including fundamental and liberal interpretations.
- included reference to Vatican II and the changing views of the Catholic church, referencing the work of Karl Rahner and his concept of anonymous Christians.

#### **Features of weaker responses:**

- focused on whether Christianity in general promoted inclusivism or exclusivism and there was little or no focus on Biblical passages that promoted inclusivism or exclusivism.
- interpreted inclusivism as meaning that the Church is inclusive of people of different races; people with disabilities, etc.
- merely explained the views on inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism rather than engaging in detailed debate.
- focused too much on the value of other faiths and lost sight of the fact that the question is focusing on Christianity.
- focused heavily on how exclusivism goes against the nature of God but did not reference any specific scriptural text.

## **Section B**

### **Q.3 (a) Explain Luther’s arguments for ‘justification by faith alone’.**

**[AO1 20]**

#### **Features of stronger responses**

- succinctly described Luther’s background to explain the formation of his theories and referred to scriptures that inspired Luther’s understanding of faith versus works e.g. Romans 1:17/Ephesians 2 and the implication for Sola Fide, relating this to Sola Scriptura.
- referred to the Roman Catholic sale of indulgences appropriately and applied this succinctly to Luther’s argument for justification by faith alone rejecting the authority of the Church.
- included Luther’s rejection of the Book of James and his reference to the book of James as an ‘epistle of straw’
- demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the historical context in which Luther’s views developed, including reference to the Council of Trent and how decisions made here were opposed by Luther.
- included accurate and detailed explanations of Justification by faith and justification by works. Explanations included accurate understandings of doctrine of atonement.

### **Features of weaker responses**

- provided a descriptive biography of Luther's life, but failed to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the historical context in which Luther's views developed.
- provided detailed descriptions of the Roman Catholic Church's selling of indulgences at length without making relevant connections to how this influenced Luther's personal stance.
- tended to include personal experiences of Luther but not much more.
- lacked reference to specific biblical passages such as Romans 1:17 that Luther used to support his theological views.
- did use Scripture, but with very limited explanation. For example, Ephesians was referenced often by candidates, but did not explain how this shaped Luther's attitude towards justification by faith alone
- failed to address the reasons for Luther's rejection of passages that emphasised justification by works e.g. the letter of James.

**(b) 'Faith on its own cannot lead to salvation.'**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

### **Features of stronger responses:**

- Demonstrated a good understanding of the debate and were able to explain in depth Luther's argument on 'sola fide' and the understanding that works flow naturally from faith but have no value for justification.
- explored the textual references and used the Council of Trent to argue that both faith and works are needed.
- presented thorough and sustained arguments using a range of perspectives to evaluate thoroughly, with accurate references to E. P. Sanders and covenantal nomism and how this contributes to our understanding of Paul's epistles.
- provided excellent use of Bible references to counter Luther's arguments such as the passage from James 2:26 and other evidence in the Bible that indicates works are necessary, such as 'The Great Commission' given in Matthew 28:16.
- included relevant epistles from St Paul and James as well as other New Testament references.
- drew on wider knowledge from other themes making some pleasing and insightful synoptic links to add depth to their response.

### **Features of weaker responses:**

- were often due to lack of understanding of justification and the difference between justification by faith and by works. As a result, arguments were sometimes vague and not fully answering the question.
- failed to focus on the issue of salvation and gave a more general 'for and against' Luther response.
- presented arguments were often inconsistent, lacked reference to scripture or other effective evidence to support views given.
- tended to have some knowledge that was credit worthy, but they struggled to make a correlation between faith in Christ and salvation.
- failed to refer to scholarly works or schools of thought, such as that given by E.P. Sanders.

- Q.4 (a) Explain how the New Testament community of believers serves as a role model for churches today. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- included a range of features of the New Testament communities and explained accurately and in detail how they are implemented by contemporary churches.
- included examples of contemporary practices and made explicit links with Acts 2. Some candidates commented on the context of Acts and the unique nature of the early church in Jerusalem.
- were able to give specific examples of how the Christian church today is modelled on the early church in Acts. Some candidates made synoptic links to the early kerygmata and also linking to the didache today, highlighting common teachings for both the early church and for the church today.
- some included a broad coverage of the specification content such as Apostle's teaching, Fellowship, 'All things in common', prayer and breaking bread, explaining clearly how these are seen in the contemporary church for example celebration of the Eucharist, charity work, tithing, fellowship and prayer, evangelism and mission
- referred to scholars and schools of thought included C.H. Dodd and Liberation Theology's emphasis on the importance of 'praxis'.
- some insightful responses referred to the Charismatic Movement and drew a comparison between this and the wonders and sign performed by the community of believers.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were able to describe the features of the early church but failed to make the direct links with the contemporary Christian churches.
- tended to be limited in the extent of their answers only mentioning some features and made looser links to contemporary church practices
- gave very few examples of how believers in the early church lived and worshipped, often only fellowship and breaking bread were referred to. Some merely explained the life of the community of believers, rather than explaining how they are a model to the contemporary church.
- failed to understand the question and did not focus on the community of believers, and instead spoke in general terms about the role of the community church in society today.
- failed to identify biblical passages Acts 2: 42-47 and quotes that explained the practices of the New Testament community of believers.

- (b) 'Providing religious teaching should be the main focus of any church.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- argued for the importance of religious teachings but demonstrated that these need to be implemented by service, prayer, charity, etc.



- were able to provide clear examples to illustrate the teaching role of the church as well as the importance of providing Christians with other aspects of Christian service.
- were able to provide clear and detailed examples of these other important features such as fellowship, support and opportunities for worship and sacraments.
- made synoptic links to other areas on the specification to emphasise the importance of these other aspects e.g. the importance of baptism and eucharist.
- excellent discussion and exemplification of the need for the teaching of dogma to ensure consistency and faithfulness to the original scriptures.
- included perceptive analysis of ways that outdated interpretations of the Biblical teachings could alienate modern society and damage the aim of the New Testament community which is to expand the church
- made perceptive links to the problems being tackled by the World Council of Churches in trying to reunite divided denominations using a new focus on orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy.
- aligned the importance of religious teaching in underpinning a sense of identity, with the Church of England used as an example (e.g., Anglican teachings support a national sense of identity).
- explored in detail why religious teaching is important, referring to biblical passages (Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:6; Mark 12:30-31 etc.)
- synoptic links with topics such as justification by faith, Liberation Theology, Secularism, Science, Feminist Theology, Ecumenism, agape and Joseph Fletcher.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- completely discarded the importance of religious teachings in favour of service and support to less privileged communities.
- were unable to expand on the importance of teaching and did not provide any specific examples. Others struggled to provide other roles that are important to the church or were unable to expand on, or exemplify, any work that is important to the church.
- wrote at length about the importance of charity work in churches today but gave no reference to the importance of teaching.
- tended to be descriptive rather than evaluative. Candidates described various functions of the church without critically evaluating whether or not these functions were more or less important than religious teaching.
- failed to make any synoptic links and often ran out of ideas, leading to rather short, general and limited responses.
- referred to teachings such as 'love thy neighbour' but relied on general and basic understandings.

**Q.5. (a) Examine the arguments presented by Augustine and Zwingli in favour of infant baptism. [AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- included highly accurate and detailed understandings of both Augustine and Zwingli.
- referred to the scriptural basis for their arguments and explanations of Augustine's views and moved beyond the basic explanation of his views on original sin e.g. as a safeguard against hell.

- included clear, accurate and succinct explanations about the place of God's grace in Augustinian theology and the fact that his theology about infant baptism stemmed from apostolic tradition e.g. Acts and whole household baptism was referred to.
- were able to explain that baptism was seen by Augustine as the washing away of Original Sin, and an imparting of God's grace through the sacrament.
- referred to Zwingli's rejection of baptism as a washing away of Original Sin and his understanding of baptism as a sign of the new covenant.
- Some candidates were able to place Zwingli's views within the context of the Reformation and his rejection of the church's authority to remove sins, shifting views about the role of the church.
- used correct and effective use of key terms such as 'Ingrafted', 'Sign and seal' 'Covenant'. Additionally, accurate explanations of the symbolic relationship between Jewish circumcision and infant baptism were given.

#### **Features of weaker responses:**

- did not explain fully both Augustine and Zwingli's response to baptism.
- tended to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of Augustine and explained very little or sometimes nothing at all on Zwingli, therefore only partially answering the demands of the question.
- included no or little understanding of Zwingli, often confusing Zwingli's views with those of Karl Barth, and explained at length why Zwingli supported adult/ believer's baptism.
- failed to provide more detailed understanding of Augustine's arguments for infant baptism beyond his belief in the need to cleanse one of original sin.
- Some candidates gave basic explanation of Augustine's view of baptism as a sacrament and very little else.
- demonstrated knowledge and understanding that both Augustine and Zwingli agreed with infant baptism but were unable to adequately distinguish between them, sometimes conflating the two - some candidates would state that they both had the same view on infant baptism.
- gave lengthy explanations of what Original Sin is by re-telling the story of the 'Fall'

**(b) 'Baptism is merely a symbolic act, nothing else.'**  
**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

#### **Features of stronger responses**

- adequately distinguished between sacramental and symbolic views and were able to present arguments in favour of and against both.
- argued that despite being symbolic baptism still holds value - chose to incorporate a discussion of the word 'merely' in their answer - because it seals faith and is a sign of commitment to Christian life.
- referred to a range of scholars, including Augustine, Zwingli and Barth enabling them to add breadth and depth to their answers.
- included synoptic links, in particular the Philosophy component on the understanding of 'symbolic' within the context of Religious Language and the significance of the use of symbols to convey deep meaning.

- explored a variety of views of baptism and were able to make comparisons as well as demonstrate the contrasts between the different understandings of baptism.
- explored the link between salvation and baptism, particularly Augustine's views on the washing away of Original Sin and whether baptism was necessary for salvation.
- were able to give a superb and relevant exploration of the power of symbols in Christianity as a development of baptismal symbolism.
- often referred to modern day examples of how baptism may be understood by Christians today. For example, whether people do believe they have been cleansed of sin or is it more a celebration by Christian families with their newborn infants.
- overly focused on arguments for infant and adult baptism and thus failed to address the specific question.
- struggled to accurately evaluate to what extent the different understandings of baptism were merely symbolic and discussed symbolic baptism very freely and vaguely without knowledge of the specific context of the debate
- gave weaker responses tended to show some confusion between scholars. For example, some candidates would combine Zwingli, Augustine and Barth when discussing that baptism is a symbolic act.
- confused the theological understanding of sacrament and symbol
- some candidates attempted to make synoptic links, evaluating symbolic language, with little success.
- some described Believer's baptism at length with little reference to its symbolism
- had a very limited knowledge and understanding of what symbolic meant, therefore they could not answer the question. Others failed to explain in detail what baptism symbolises and its significance for Christians.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- overly focused on arguments for infant and adult baptism and thus failed to address the specific question.
- struggled to accurately evaluate to what extent the different understandings of baptism were merely symbolic and discussed symbolic baptism very freely and vaguely without knowledge of the specific context of the debate
- gave weaker responses tended to show some confusion between scholars. For example, some candidates would combine Zwingli, Augustine and Barth when discussing that baptism is a symbolic act.
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- some candidates attempted to make synoptic links, evaluating symbolic language, with little success.
- some described Believer's baptism at length with little reference to its symbolism
- had a very limited knowledge and understanding of what symbolic meant, therefore they could not answer the question. Others failed to explain in detail what baptism symbolises and its significance for Christians.

## Summary of key points

- Overall, candidate responses were clear, consistent and addressed the demands of the question. Most candidates had clear and confident understanding of the rubric so very few examples of AO2 in part A.
- Centres should remind candidates to carefully answer the question that is set. Their responses should be focused on what is being examined and not what they would have liked to have seen on the paper.
- Were able to confidently make synoptic links. Ensure that candidates do not force the link but make them where they naturally occur.
- Included reference to sources of wisdom and authority as well as schools of thought, represented by different scholars.
- Candidates should clearly number each question and each part of the question. This is especially important if they answer out of numerical order.
- In AO2 part (b) questions candidates need to ensure that they focus on the specific question set and analyse and evaluate in the light of that.
- Candidates should decide on lines of argument and make judgements regularly, addressing the question that is set. It is helpful to come to meaningful conclusions with judgements made in light of the question set.
- Centres should continue to check the legibility of the candidates when writing under pressure. If handwriting is illegible, ensure that word processing becomes a normal way of working for the candidate so that they can be given a laptop in the examination and not be disadvantaged.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**GCE A LEVEL**  
**Summer 2023**  
**COMPONENT 1B: A STUDY OF ISLAM**

**General Comments**

The most popular question in Section A was Q1 (attempt% 63.6%). The most popular question in Section B was Q3 (attempt% 73.4%). All of the questions were chosen and answered by some candidates to a good standard. Candidates showed knowledge in all areas, a credit to themselves and their teachers in ensuring they had covered all aspects of the syllabus in teaching and learning. Candidates did well in this examination series, showing evidence that they had worked hard to overcome the covid years and achieve good standards in their assessments. The full ability range was viewed in the responses given. Many candidates gave detailed answers, showing breadth or depth of knowledge and understanding and making purposeful argument

The strongest responses clearly focused on the exact wording of the question, especially the key words in the statements for b) parts. Every word is there for a reason and candidates should ensure they respond to the exact words given. Each point or paragraph should refer back to the key word or words, to enable an effective argument to be developed. Confident, critical conclusions may then be made consistent with the line of argument taken. The strongest responses did this, sometimes referring to scholarly opinion and giving relevant quotations to support the argument made.

Candidates might improve their work further through sharper focus on the particular question wording. Note that the skills of knowledge and understanding details are the focus for AO1 questions, part a), whereas AO2 part (b) questions assess the skills of analysis and evaluation. Some candidates wrote mostly AO1 information for both, which did not gain them as many marks for part (b).

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 (a) Examine Muslim views on scientific theories about the origins of the universe. [AO1 20]**

Most candidates knew something about different scientific theories, and mentioned Big Bang, oscillating earth and steady state theory. Most referred to ways in which Muslims views might agree or disagree but some gave very little on this, concentrating instead on the scientific theory. Better responses included more than one Islamic view, such as those who saw compatibility and those who saw incompatibility with Islam. Some referred to scholars such as Ibn Arabi or more modern commentators such as Haroon Yaha and their views, making very strong responses.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- concentrated on Muslim views about the scientific theories more than the theories themselves.
- included the views of named scholars or scholarly opinion.
- recognised a variety of different Muslim opinions.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote less on Muslim views and more on scientific theories.
- assumed a single Muslim view, rather than recognising more than one perspective.
- gave a brief overview, rather than looking at in depth – which the command word examine requires.

**(b) 'Islam and science are entirely compatible.'****Evaluate this view.****[AO2 30]**

This was a popular question. Most candidates knew something about different scientific theories, and mentioned Big Bang, oscillating earth and steady state theory. Most referred to ways in which Muslims views might agree or disagree but some gave very little on this, concentrating instead on the scientific theory. Better responses included more than one Islamic view, such as those who saw compatibility and those who saw incompatibility with Islam. Some referred to scholars such as Ibn Arabi or more modern commentators such as Haroon Yaha and their views, making very strong responses.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- concentrated on Muslim views about the scientific theories more than the theories themselves.
- included the views of named scholars or scholarly opinion.
- recognised a variety of different Muslim opinions.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- wrote less on Muslim views and more on scientific theories.
- assumed a single Muslim view, rather than recognising more than one perspective.
- gave a brief overview, rather than looking at in depth – which the command word examine requires.

**Q.2 (a) Explain the concept of a state governed according to Islamic principles.**  
**[AO1 20]**

Answers tended to give some depth or breadth and made reasonable attempts. However, few got to grips with the crux of the topic. The best answers point out that Muhammad's examples, the sunnah, include all aspects of life and are a source of wisdom and authority for Muslims. That includes his leadership of Madinah. From this came the concept of a state governed according to Islamic principles. The faith itself if meant to be based on the awareness of God in everything, so that logically includes a political state. Nevertheless, modern day states are a context far removed from Madinah so the concept is based on principles, which might include mercy and compassion, as applied in the modern day.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- considered the Madinah state and ways in which it might be regarded as a model.
- defined what Islamic principles might mean in a broad sense.
- clearly understood and expressed the idea of a concept of an Islamic state.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- took a limited view of the scope of the question, referring to punishment and the death penalty and little else.
- described a modern-day state such as Saudi Arabia without linking it to the idea of a concept.
- did not give any depth into different aspects of an Islamic state.

- (b) **‘The ideal form of government for Muslims is a democracy.’  
Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

There was a wide range of responses to this statement. Some of the best explained how democracy might be traced to the consultations made by Muhammad, an ideal model for Muslims. However, no specific model for government was recommended by him, leaving none as ‘ideal’. Discussions then turned to which forms of government might best apply Islamic principles. A few candidates noted Shi’a Iran, whose rulers might claim a theocracy or religious based government was ideal, with some room for consultation. Other perspectives might be taken from Saudi Arabia or democratic Turkey or Indonesia. This statement might be answered in different ways and stronger responses made confident, critical arguments responding to the statement.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to shura, consultation, under Muhammad and the first four Caliphs.
- grappled with the term ‘ideal’ and discussed whether there was such a concept of an Islamic state.
- showed understanding of different perspectives.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- assumed that democracy was ideal, but did not offer much evidence to back this up.
- mentioned two or more viewpoints but did not come to a conclusion.
- did not focus on the word ‘ideal’, instead assuming democracy was good.

## **Section B**

- Q.3 (a) Explain the roles of Malaikah (angels) with reference to Akhirah (the Day of Final Judgement).**

**[AO1 20]**

This was by far the most popular question in Section B and many candidates wrote detailed answers to this part. General roles of angels were relevant, but reference to the Day of Final Judgement was required for a good answer, and most candidates did so with varying degrees of detail.

Most candidates named Jibril, Mikail and Israfil and gave details of their roles; they also referred in various ways to the recording angels. Some referred to Iblis as a fallen angel but others discounted this interpretation.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- included reference to the Day of Final Judgement in detail, with named angels and their roles.
- explained the role of angels within the context of Islamic beliefs.
- understood the significance of angels as servants of God and messengers who had no free will to disobey.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote in general about the roles of angels without naming any or giving any roles.
- were unclear about the Day of Final Judgement.
- described the roles without explaining why they were important within the overall context of Islamic beliefs.

**(b) 'It is not essential to believe in the concept of Malaikah (angels) in Islam.'**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

Many candidates argued that it was important to believe in angels but fewer grappled specifically with the implications of the word 'essential' in the statement. Many made the point that angels delivered holy books and therefore attested to their divine origin, convincing people of monotheism and thereby underpinning this preeminent belief. In that way angels could be seen as essential. But as they are not named in the statement of faith others argued that the defining point of being a Muslim did not necessarily include this belief. These added up to strong discussions made in the best responses.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to and responded to the word 'essential' in the statement.
- discussed this in context of overall Islamic beliefs and how far angels contributed to each one.
- compared the belief in the oneness of God to angels and considered if one was dependent on the other or not.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote that angels were important, but did not acknowledge other views.
- did not draw out the links between the different Islamic beliefs.
- repeated aspects of the roles of angels rather than considering the concept in general.

**Q.4 (a) Compare the views of Sheikh Ahmad Ash-Sharabasi and James Rachels about the death penalty.**

**[AO1 20]**

Few chose this question but those who did made reasonable responses. Sheikh Sharabasi supports the death penalty due to, in his opinion, it's authority through the sources of Shari'a, the Qur'an and Sunnah of Muhammad. This gives it a divine authority.



To some extent he felt that it was also practical in deterring crime and so appropriate for society, but this is not a defining part of his argument. By contrast, Rachels applies Utilitarian principles. Some candidates mistook this as support for the death penalty, which is not quite accurate, however they did gain credit for acknowledging that Rachels accepted an argument could be made for the death penalty, if it resulted in good of most people in society overall.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly and accurately defined the views of both scholars.
- drew out the finer points of their opinions rather than just simply for or against.
- wrote a clear conclusion drawing together the comparisons.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were unclear about the views of James Rachels, or didn't refer to them.
- wrote in general about the death penalty and Islam.
- stated the views of the scholars separately, but did not draw out comparisons.

- (b) 'Islamic ethical teachings are very effective as a guide for Muslims.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

This statement enabled candidates to draw in wider aspects of Islamic ethical teachings, not just the death penalty, although the death penalty was one relevant topic which might be discussed here. Most candidates did continue their reference to the death penalty, but those who only referred to it lacked breadth in their responses. The key focus was on effectiveness, not what the teachings were, although these could be referred to in the answer. Good responses clearly gave an overall evaluation in terms of effectiveness for Muslims and society at the end. Some pointed out the significance and wrote that following divinely derived teachings was an end in itself for Muslims, whether or not they were effective, as they were all part of God's plan.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to a range of different ethical teachings.
- referred to examples, issues and context to help judge effectiveness.
- gave a clear assessment of effectiveness at the end.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- referred to the death penalty but no other ethical teachings, so gave narrow answers.
- did not give any specific examples with which to judge effectiveness.
- wrote about whether teachings were good or bad, not whether they were effective.

- Q.5 (a) Examine how Muslims today might follow the five categories of ethical action. [AO1 20]**

This was well answered. Most candidates defined the key words exactly and precisely. They knew the right terminology and could give relevant examples of each category, achieving detailed and comprehensive responses.

Some chose to group the categories into those allowed and others disallowed, which was acceptable as a way of organising the response. A broad range of examples made for a strong response

**Features of stronger responses:**

- accurately defined the five categories.
- used specific terminology with precision and clear understanding.
- gave a broad range of examples, achieving breadth and depth in the response.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- referred to allowed and forbidden but did not give further elaboration of categories.
- gave very limited examples, often only food or dress.
- listed various actions which might be considered for each category without explanation.

**(b) 'The five categories of ethical action are clear and easy to apply today.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

As an AO2 question, this question required moving beyond just repeating AO1 information. and not all candidates realised this. Centres should continue to support candidates to ensure they match the correct skills to the assessment objective being tested. Strong responses considered what might make ethical action categories clear and easy to apply, and drew in matters of interpretation and how different scholars might make them easy to apply through ijtiḥad opinions.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focused on the words clear and easy.
- assessed specific examples with clear and easy in mind, referring to these words beside each example.
- included a range of views and interpretations.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided largely knowledge-based answers without assessing the key words in the statement.
- assumed Muslims had a single opinion that yes, they were clear and easy.
- gave examples, but not a conclusion as to whether this made the categories clear and easy or not.

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates performed well, and were a credit to themselves and their centres, having shown they had recovered well from the disruption caused by the Covid years.
- Candidates should ensure they focus on the relevant assessment objective (AO) when answering.
- Each word in statements is there for a reason. When discussing and raising points or in each paragraph, reference should be made to how these relate to the key word/s.

- The strongest responses included supporting information such as reference to scholars and different perspectives, whereas weaker answers took a simple view and assumed there was a single Islamic perspective.
- All questions were answered to varying degrees with a good degree of knowledge and understanding shown, demonstrating the syllabus had been covered well by candidates and centres.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

#### COMPONENT 1C: A STUDY OF JUDAISM

##### General Comments

The most popular question in Section A was Q2 (attempt% 58.7%). The most popular question in Section B was Q3 (attempt% 50.6%). It is evident from candidates' responses that all questions were accessible and covered the full range of responses. Moreover, there were a number of excellent scripts that demonstrated thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief in AO1, as well as confident critical and perceptive analysis of the issues at AO2. Indeed, in some cases, AO2 responses were stronger than those given in answer to the AO1 part of the question, which shows that many candidates have developed successful analytical and evaluative skills

It was noticeable that many candidates had engaged fully with the topics which featured in this year's examination paper, with many being able to cite relevant up to date issues within Judaism in their answers, particularly within AO2 responses. Such independence of thought, and the ability to apply contemporary issues to the statement under discussion made for very satisfying reading. Whilst this was especially apparent in the higher band AO2 responses where candidates argued their points fluently, supported by extensive detailed reasoning, it was also evident within some responses from lower bands albeit without the accompanying depth of reasoning and evidence. Such additions brought a freshness to the responses, and evidence of a greater depth of understanding in relation to the issues under discussion.

With regard to AO1 part (a) questions where answers were not as strong, candidates had generally failed to respond to the particular focus of the question. Where answers were weaker in response to AO2 part (b) questions it was evident that candidates had either misunderstood the statement or had offered no more than a basic justification for the views given, relying instead on using phrases such as 'this is a strong point' or 'this is a weak point', but without any significant accompanying analysis or evaluation of the issue.

##### Comments on individual questions/sections

**Q.1 (a) Examine attitudes found in the Pittsburgh Platform towards liberationist thought (concern for the poor) and Tikkun Olam (repair of the world). [Ao1 20]**

##### **Features of stronger responses:**

- gave a full and accurate response to both elements as required by the question.
- maintained a focus on the Pittsburgh Platform and its emphasis on social action and social justice as a cornerstone of Reform Judaism.
- made good use of evidence and examples relating to the Jewish concept of tzedakah such as giving of money to charity on a regular basis as a means by which to redress the balance between those who are fortunate and those who are not.

- examined the concept of gemilut hasadim in relation to liberationist thought and Tikkun Olam.
- cited relevant examples from Jewish scripture e.g. Proverbs 31:9; Leviticus 19:9 as well as from Midrash.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote extensively about the Pittsburgh Platform in its entirety, thus losing the focus of the question.
- merely examined the historical development of Reform Judaism.
- were only able to discuss one of the two elements of the question.

**(b) 'No Jewish response to pluralism has been effective.'**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- used examples from the covenants made with Adam and Noah as evidence to suggest that Judaism does not hold the singular position in God's relationship with humanity.
- analysed the differing views within a variety of Jewish denominations in relation to the statement.
- used relevant examples from Reform Judaism, for example, to show that its response might indeed be considered to be effective.
- showed an understanding that attitudes are changing even within the Orthodox tradition.

**Features of weaker responses**

- did not understand the concept of 'pluralism'.
- confused pluralism with assimilation, thereby losing the focus for discussion.
- confused the different approaches to pluralism from within Orthodox, Reform and Ultra-Orthodox groups.

**Q.2 (a) Examine two key theological responses to the Holocaust. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated an excellent, in-depth knowledge and understanding of either two named Holocaust theologians, or, in a minority of cases, two general Jewish theological responses that were successfully examined in detail.
- was able to highlight and accurately examine concepts such as "death of God"; "suffering servant"; "vicarious atonement"; "the hiding of the face"; the concept of freewill where relevant to the particular theologians under discussion.
- included a range of scholarly views in order to support the approaches of the named theologians.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- confused the theological responses.
- limited their response to a brief examination of a general response to the Holocaust, such as Mackie's Inconsistent Triad argument, which lacked sufficient depth and breadth.

- a minority entered merely into a narrative history of the Holocaust and its background.

**(b) 'No theological response to the Holocaust is legitimate.'**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- drew upon a wide range of arguments, e.g. the strengths and weaknesses of specific Holocaust theologians which were analysed and evaluated confidently and critically to good effect.
- made judgements regarding whether or not some responses were more successful than others.
- arguments such as Mackie's Inconsistent Triad were dissected and applied successfully to the debate.
- used the views of scholars in order to support the argument being made.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- lacked a clear understanding of responses to the Holocaust.
- repeated AO1 information from part (a) without sufficient analysis and evaluation.
- a minority of response slipped into a Christian debate about atonement, punishment for sins and the concept of Original Sin.

**Q.3 (a) Examine Jewish beliefs about humanity.**

**[AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated, through scriptural reference, Judaism's understanding of its relationship with God (Genesis 1:27).
- made accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary throughout: e.g. 'nefesh'; pikuach nefesh'; 'yetzer hara'; 'yetzer hatov'.
- considered relevant teachings from the Talmud, as well as examples from rabbinic tradition.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were confined to an examination of the creation of man and woman as found in the Book of Genesis.
- took on a Christian slant, diverging into a response concerning the concepts of Original Sin, atonement, and God's judgement.
- lost the focus of the question, and in some cases the response became a detailed discussion about the merits of embryo research as an example of pikuach nefesh.

**(b) 'The Shema is the most precise guide to Jewish belief and practice.'**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- successfully identified the nature of the Shema in reinforcing the covenant on a daily basis, and addressed whether or not it is that which makes it the most precise guide to Jewish belief and practice.
- made comparisons between the Shema and other sources of information within Judaism such as the Torah and Oral Torah, with the discussion centred upon the 'precision' of each in relation to each other.

- displayed a thorough understanding of the importance of the Shema within all branches of Judaism whilst acknowledging that its content is not always followed in the same precise way across all groups.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- lacked a basic understanding of the nature of the Shema.
- lost the focus of the question, with the response becoming a list of the strengths and weaknesses of the contents of the Shema with little relevant analysis or evaluation.
- in some cases the response became an answer to a completely different question: that of 'what is the most important thing in Judaism?'

**Q.4 (a) Explain the significance of the rituals that take place at Yom Kippur. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- each step of the festival was discussed in relation to its significance, drawing upon the wider themes of atonement, repentance and forgiveness.
- the services at the synagogue were named and their significance explained with thorough and accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary: e.g. 'Kol Nidrei'; 'Musaf'; 'Neilah'.
- a range of views of scholars were used accurately and effectively.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- tended to give a list of the main things that happen at Yom Kippur, but without explaining the significance of each ritual.
- presented information about Rosh Hashanah at the expense of explaining the significance of the rituals that take place at Yom Kippur.
- in a minority of cases, the rituals that were used and explained were not those that take place at Yom Kippur.

**(b) 'Regular acknowledgement of sins and penitence is not an admission of failure in spiritual development.' Evaluate this view with reference to Judaism. [AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- attention was drawn to the fact that the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are focussed on reflection about the deeds of the past year and allow for the opportunity to acknowledge sins and seek repentance.
- there was a consideration of what is meant by the word 'regular'.
- it was argued that regular acknowledgement of sins and penitence might in fact lead to greater spiritual development.
- some used the concept of tikkun olam within Hasidism to argue that the lack of expression of regret might be considered a failure in spiritual development.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- offered superficial arguments with little support in terms of reasoning, evidence examples or relevant quotations.
- presented a simplistic argument based upon the positives and negatives of acknowledging sins which lacked specific reference to Judaism.
- a minority offered a Christian response which was based upon sin and salvation.

**Q.5 (a) Compare the views of Bleich and Tendler in response to the ethical debate within Judaism about embryo research. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- showed an in-depth understanding of both Bleich and Tendler's differing responses to the ethical debate about embryo research.
- handled the scientific background information appropriately and concisely, without it overwhelming the response at the expense of discussing the views of Bleich and Tendler.
- referred to the debate surrounding ensoulment.
- utilised the concept of pikuach nefesh successfully.
- discussed aspects of Jewish law in relation to 'building a fence around the law' and Tendler's stance that a fence that causes pain and suffering is to be dismantled.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were only able to offer information about either Bleich or Tendler.
- wrote at some length about the scientific processes of IVF and stem-cell research, but did not relate those processes to the views of Bleich or Tendler in any significant detail.

**(b) 'Pikuach nefesh is totally compatible with embryo research.' Evaluate this view with reference to Judaism. [AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- candidates drew upon a wide range of arguments, which showed that extensive research had taken place concerning this issue.
- views of scholars were used extensively and successfully throughout.
- ethical and moral judgements were analysed and evaluated confidently and critically.
- considered the extent to which pikuach nefesh is compatible with embryo research.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made little reference to Jewish schools of thought.
- defined the concept of pikuach nefesh, but was unable to provide sufficient analytical and evaluative content to meet the demand of an AO2 question.
- lacked specific examples and evidence with the response limited to a brief list of 'strong' and 'weak' points.

**Summary of key points**

- It was evident in this year's cohort that candidates who have kept up to date with contemporary Jewish thought and issues, and who have been able to apply them accurately, were able to achieve marks within the higher bands.
- It was also evident this year that there has been less of a reliance on following a set framework in order to answer AO2 questions. Whilst a framework can be a useful aid for less confident candidates, it has been good to read responses which flow naturally from one point to another in order to craft extensive and relevant evaluative responses.



- The inclusion of accurate references to scholarly views, sacred texts and sources of wisdom where relevant has been a significant feature of many responses this year.
- Accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary continues to be a characteristic feature of stronger responses. This year however, it was evident that the inability to understand the meaning of specialist Jewish language and vocabulary such as 'Tikkun Olam'; 'pluralism'; 'Shema' and 'penitence', which were used in questions, prevented some candidates from achieving a higher mark. Maintaining and increasing knowledge of such terms should continue.
- Poor handwriting was evident in a number of scripts, and this presented a significant challenge to understanding. It is important that centres assess the handwriting of candidates prior to the examination period so that appropriate access arrangements can be made.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**GCE A LEVEL**  
**Summer 2023**  
**COMPONENT 1D: A STUDY OF BUDDHISM**

**General Comments**

The most popular question in Section A was Q1 (attempt% 78.6%). The most popular question in Section B was Q4 (attempt% 44.9%).

It was pleasing to note the level of synoptic links some candidates were able to make between different parts of the course in their responses and their familiarity with specialist language and vocabulary.

Most candidates did not appear to have an issue with timing for this examination. Perhaps some were less successful than others in Q4 (a) which required knowledge and understanding of more than one key Buddhist tradition in Japan.

Some candidates were particularly successful in demonstrating knowledge and understanding of scholars and schools of thought which helped support their responses in part (a) questions and which strengthened their analysis and evaluation in part (b) questions.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Q.1 (a) Examine the accounts of the conception and birth of the historical Buddha. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to refer to specific miraculous events along with their significance.
- demonstrated an understanding of the differences between biography/hagiography/
- connected key events to aspects of Buddhism in general e.g. birth under tree/s linked to the Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree.
- applied the approaches taken by different Buddhist schools of thought e.g. Theravada and Mahayana.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- examined the early life of the Buddha including the Four Sights which was not required.
- gave a purely descriptive account of the conception and birth.
- provided only general points as to whether the accounts were true or not.
- demonstrated little understanding of biography/hagiography.

- (b) **'The biography of the historical Buddha is not important for Buddhists today.'**  
**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided a range of Buddhist approaches e.g. secular/Theravada/Tibetan etc.
- kept a focus on the wording of the question as to the importance 'today' rather than general points as to its overall importance.
- compared and contrasted the importance of the biography of the historical Buddha to the importance of other aspects of Buddhist teaching.
- evaluated whether there was/could be biography of the historical Buddha given the complex combination of hagiography and myth in the sources.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- limited themselves by writing only about the conception and birth of the historical Buddha rather than including the Four Sights, Great Renunciation etc.
- made general points as to the accounts being 'made up' or 'difficult to understand' and therefore of little importance.
- gave an inconsistent line of argument with no clear opinion expressed on the importance of the biography of the historical Buddha.
- understood Buddhism as a monolithic school of thought rather than as being composed of different schools of Buddhism.

- Q.2 (a) Examine the work of Thich Nhat Hanh.**

**[AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- gave a clear overview of his background in terms of belonging to the Zen tradition and being born in Vietnam.
- examined his contribution to the field of Socially Engaged Buddhism.
- provided details of his approach to mindfulness meditation with reference to practices including walking and smiling.
- demonstrated ways in which he 'brought' Buddhism to the West through, for example, establishing Plum Village, publishing numerous books and being accessible to the media.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided basic biographical details limited to the Vietnam War and his friendship with Rev. Dr Martin Luther King.
- confined their examination of his work to brief comments on compassion and mindfulness meditation.
- provided little by way of exemplification to support their examination of his work.
- gave little information about key aspects of his work such as in the field of Socially Engaged Buddhism.

- (b) **‘There is nothing new or innovative in the type of Buddhism taught by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh.’**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to address the full scope of the question with reference to both the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh and to their type of Buddhism being new/innovative.
- used effective exemplification with both figures in terms of work with science, inter-faith dialogue, mindfulness etc.
- demonstrated understanding of connections with other aspects of the Buddha’s teaching – most notably ‘upaya’ and the Parable of the Raft.
- gave an opinion on how Buddhist or not the teachings of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh really are due to Western influence.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- tended to repeat the AO1 content from Q2.(a) and focus only on Thich Nhat Hanh in general terms.
- gave only a brief overview of one or two key concepts connected to the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh such as compassion or meditation.
- did not make links to other schools of Buddhism such as Theravada in order to support their evaluation.
- focused only on the type of Buddhism taught by the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh without reference as to whether it was new or innovative.

- Q.3 (a) Examine the concept of arhat (worthy one).**

**[AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided the wider context for the arhat with reference to the Theravada monastic sangha.
- showed understanding of the Four Stages of the Arhat Path with correct use and explanation of terminology.
- demonstrated an understanding of the arhat in terms of the example of the historical Buddha and the possibility of following the solitary path.
- understood the logistics of the arhat path in terms of being part of joining the monastic sangha, renouncing the Three Poisons, following the Patimokkha rules etc.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- Listed the Four Stages of the Arhat Path without commentary or explanation.
- Examined how a person became an arhat without providing the wider context of the ‘concept’ of the arhat as required by the question.
- Gave an evaluation of the arhat path as being better/worse than that of the bodhisattva.
- Demonstrated little knowledge of the context of the arhat as being part of the Theravada tradition.

- (b) **'In Buddhism the concept of bodhisattva is superior to that of arhat.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- questioned the question in terms of whether the concepts of bodhisattva or arhat should be compared as both represent different approaches in Buddhism.
- provided a clear context with exemplification of the arhat in Theravada and the bodhisattva in Mahayana.
- demonstrated familiarity with the stages of becoming a bodhisattva and how this compared to the stages of becoming an arhat.
- used examples from Buddhist sources of wisdom, for example the Parable of the Burning House, to justify evaluation of the superiority or otherwise of one of the two concepts.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- showed confusion over terminology with regard to bodhisattva and arhat and the schools of Buddhist thought with which they are associated.
- limited their responses to a discussion of the bodhisattva concept as being compassionate and the arhat concept as being selfish.
- demonstrated limited understanding of the background to the concept of bodhisattva and arhat in Buddhist texts such as the Lotus Sutra and the Pali Canon.
- lacked detail and/or exemplification to support their evaluation, e.g. references to named bodhisattvas such as Avalokitesvara, Manjushri etc.

- Q.4 (a) Examine the key Buddhist traditions in Japan.** [AO1 20]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- showed an understanding of the general background of Buddhist traditions in Japan as being part of Mahayana school of Buddhism.
- provided a historical and religious context for the arrival of the Buddhist traditions in Japan.
- made explicit reference to the age of mappo and the decline of the dhamma requiring new approaches.
- understood the full scope of the question and specification by making reference to the three Buddhist traditions: Zen, Pure Land and Nichiren.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- demonstrated a general understanding presented in brief form of the three traditions or kept their focus on just one tradition.
- lacked exemplification in terms of significant aspects of the key Buddhist traditions e.g. the Nembutsu in Pure Land Buddhism etc.
- showed confusion in attributing details and practices to the wrong tradition.
- did not locate the Buddhist traditions within Buddhism as a whole by way of context.

- (b) **‘Japanese Buddhist beliefs and practices are a unique form of Buddhism.’**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- compared specific beliefs and practices to what might be termed Buddhism as generally understood in the overall Theravada and Mahayana traditions.
- demonstrated good exemplification with beliefs and practices being compared and contrasted, e.g. chanting the daimoku and chanting mantras etc.
- explored the diversity of Buddhism(s) in responding to the question e.g. secular Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism.
- used the concept of Upaya (skilful means) successfully in evaluating the uniqueness or otherwise of Japanese Buddhist beliefs and practices.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- limited themselves to discussing only one Japanese Buddhist tradition and its beliefs and practices e.g. Zen
- tended to present simplistic ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ responses without analysis or evaluation.
- had insufficient knowledge of the different forms of Buddhist traditions which was needed in order to provide clear analysis and evaluation.
- stated what was done or believed in Japanese Buddhist traditions without a discussion of whether it might or might not be unique.

- Q.5 (a) Explain the use of mindfulness in health care, education and business.**

**[AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- addressed the full scope of the question with reference to the three areas named.
- provided exemplification in terms of named approaches e.g. MBSR (mindfulness based stress reduction) and MiSP (mindfulness in schools project).
- gave the background to the use of mindfulness with reference to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn etc.
- demonstrated an understanding of the context of mindfulness in terms of Buddhist meditation – one of the Three Trainings in the Eightfold Path.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- limited themselves by giving a broad overview of mindfulness without reference to the three areas named in the question.
- repeated the same point in general terms for each of the three areas e.g. mindfulness relieves stress in patients/students/employees.
- demonstrated little understanding of the background of mindfulness beyond it being part of meditation.
- provided little or no exemplification.

- (b) **‘The contemporary Mindfulness movement offers a very successful antidote to suffering.’**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to the Buddhist background in terms of suffering/dukkha and the Three Poisons and whether mindfulness could be an ‘antidote’.
- kept their focus on the phrase ‘a very successful antidote’ and were thus able to provide useful analysis and evaluation e.g. mindfulness might provide a temporary solution to suffering whilst not addressing the deeper issues.
- demonstrated awareness of key scholars such as Jon Kabat-Zinn and Slavoj Žižek in analysis and evaluation.
- explored the different types of suffering which might be addressed by the contemporary Mindfulness movement.

**Features of weaker responses**

- repeated AO1 material from part (a) with little development, evaluation or analysis.
- limited themselves to a discussion of whether mindfulness works or does not work in health care, education and business.
- demonstrated little by way of exemplification, scholars/schools of thought.
- presented little by way of a Buddhist context in terms of suffering/dukkha and how this might or might not be addressed by contemporary Mindfulness

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates would benefit from developing an understanding of the connections that can be made between each question asked and the various approaches found within Buddhism during the course they have studied.
- The questions asked often have a key term or phrase within them in order to help candidates in writing their responses. Candidates would therefore benefit from looking at past questions and seeing which prompt words are used and what phrases are used to encourage an apt display of knowledge and understanding alongside apt analysis and evaluation.
- Whilst there is a great deal of specialist language and vocabulary covered in the course, candidates would benefit from increasing their familiarity with these terms in order to show that they have a thorough and accurate understanding.
- Part (b) questions require candidates to provide analysis and evaluation of the issue raised. Candidates would benefit from being more confident in thinking through the issue and expressing a judgment which might question the question asked, support the statement made or oppose the statement made.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

#### COMPONENT 1E: A STUDY OF HINDUISM

The most popular question in Section A was Q1 (attempt% 56.1%). The most popular question in Section B was Q4 (attempt% 64.4%).

The paper seemed to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates resulting in a range of marks that reflected the varying standard of the responses. There were some excellent answers which showed thorough knowledge and understanding at AO1 and critical analysis and perceptive evaluation at AO2.

Overall there was evidence of improvement in the quality of candidate's answers in both Sections A and B, and all concerned should be commended for this. Areas which have improved over the past few years include structuring answers (use of introduction, paragraphs etc.); use of key words and connectives to link information, viewpoints, arguments; better understanding of what 'evaluate' entails; arguments and counter arguments carefully structured and less 'for' and 'against' type of evaluation.

However some candidates are simply not focusing on the question set and adopting a 'write all you know' approach. Whilst this approach will gain them some credit it will not enable them to attain the higher bands. Candidates should therefore be made aware that all the knowledge that they have at hand should be carefully selected when answering questions, and not attempt to fit everything they know into all their answers.

In the evaluation questions stronger candidates used their AO1 knowledge and understanding as examples and evidence in support of the arguments presented. Weaker candidates simply went off on a tangent and gave AO1 knowledge on topics that were loosely linked to the question set.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

**Q.1 (a) Examine the spiritual significance of the festival of Holi. [AO1 20]**

##### **Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated an excellent focus on the question with clear links made between practice of Holi/celebrations of Holi and their spiritual significance.
- examined how Holi inspires faith in God, helping Hindus advance on the spiritual path, creating a sense of belonging to the community, the virtues needed for the attainment of Moksha and the belief in good overcoming evil.
- demonstrated thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding evident throughout.

##### **Features of weaker responses:**

- provided limited, descriptive responses which described the practices without linking them to their spiritual significance – thus a failure to meet the demands of the question.
- demonstrated no real understanding of spiritual significance of Holi.



- (b) **‘Hindu festivals are only valuable as community occasions’**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided variety of arguments which addressed the question, including that festivals can be personal as well as community occasions because of their great spiritual significance.
- demonstrated strong evaluative judgements by using supporting evidence, reasoning and examples.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made a limited number of arguments with little attempt at analysis and evaluation.
- were descriptive listing the main features of Hindu festivals without reference to the context of the question.

- Q.2 (a) **Examine Hindu teaching about infertility.** [AO1 20]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of the issue and various teachings within Hinduism.
- focused on the question and balanced in their discussion on the positivity and negativity within Hindu views on infertility.
- made very good use of evidence and examples – reference to karmic influence, Ayurveda and dharma.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- focused entirely on IVF which can be valid as part of the answer.
- showed very little awareness of the conflict in views within Hinduism.
- Made very little reference made to specific teachings.

- (b) **‘IVF is totally compatible with Hindu teaching.’**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of what the process of IVF entails.
- focused on the question and evaluated whether it was totally, partially or not compatible at all with Hindu teaching.
- demonstrated awareness of the tension within Hinduism on the issue with reference to the principle of ahimsa.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- had no real knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the issue.
- were descriptive in nature rather than evaluative.
- provided very little in evidence to support the views given.

**Q.3 (a) Explain the role of the Vedas in Hindu daily life. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of the content of the Vedas.
- were able to refer the four Vedas and their different content and therefore their different use in daily life.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- on the whole had very little knowledge and understanding of the content or use of the Vedas.
- did not focus on the question set and made little reference to use in daily life.

**(b) 'Hindu texts are still relevant for Hindus in the modern world.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided clearly structured responses, where candidates provided a variety of arguments agreeing and disagreeing with the statement.
- referred to a wide range of Hindu texts referred to apart from Vedas and Ramayana.
- supported their arguments by clear reason and evidence and made frequent evaluative judgements on the strengths or weaknesses of the arguments presented.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- gave descriptive rather than evaluative in nature.
- did not focus on question set and provided very little in terms of supporting evidence.
- made no specific reference to Hindu texts.
- went off on a tangent to argue that other things are more relevant.

**Q.4 (a) Examine the Hindu moral principle of karma. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of the concept of karma.
- made detailed reference to different types of karma and the journey of the atman.
- focused on the question set and the influence of karma on morality.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- ignored the link to morality and gave a general answer on karma.
- were vague and confused on the three different types of karma.
- provided limited knowledge and understanding.

- (b) **‘Karma is the greatest influence on Hindu lifestyle.’  
Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided clearly structured arguments, with evaluative judgements made.
- supported the statement and included that the goal of a Hindu's life is to attain Moksha and gaining good karma is fundamentally important in fulfilling this goal. Karma will therefore influence all aspects of lifestyle.
- advocated for other influences being stronger such as personal relationship with God.
- supported their arguments with reasoning and evidence.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided a limited number of arguments made to address the question, with little attempt at analysis and evaluation.
- gave imbalanced answers which focused on everything in Hinduism being more of an influence than karma with very little support in terms of evidence or examples.

- Q.5 (a) Examine the challenges to Hinduism from secularisation. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- included an introduction which defined the meaning of ‘secularisation’.
- Identified a number of challenges posed to Hinduism through secularisation and discussed them in detail.
- referred to various Hindu approaches to secularisation including the views of Ram Mohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswati.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- demonstrated a limited understanding of the meaning of ‘secularisation’.
- listed perceived challenges without examining them in detail.
- did not focus on the question set and included a lot of irrelevant material.

- (b) **‘The only effective response to secularisation is the Hindutva response.’  
Evaluate this view with reference to Hinduism.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- included a brief introduction on the meaning of ‘secularisation’ which gave the answer a clear focus.
- demonstrated a good understanding of different responses to secularisation such as the Hindutva response, the orthodox response and the universalist response.
- were able to discuss the situation in India and the response of the BJP and also different responses in non-Hindu countries and communities.
- Provided a balanced evaluation of the effectiveness of different responses.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- lacked an understanding of the meaning of secularisation and the Hindutva response
- a tendency to describe rather than evaluate i.e. describing some of the actions of Hindu extremists in India rather than using the information at hand to facilitate their answer in a more evaluative context.
- Provided a basic or no conclusion.

**Summary of key points**

- Although the issue of handwriting was much better this year there were a few scripts that were illegible in parts and candidates lost valuable marks simply because the examiner could not read what had been written. It is imperative that centres ensure that candidates with handwriting difficulties are provided with a laptop.
- Focus on the question set and select information which is relevant to the issue being discussed.
- Part (b) questions are evaluation questions and whilst some AO1 content is expected the focus needs to be on creating evaluative arguments and judgements.
- Scholarly quotations need to be correct both in terms of wording and the scholar to whom they are attributed. They also need to be relevant to the question.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

#### COMPONENT 2: A STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The most popular question in Section A was Q1 (attempt% 75.5%). The most popular question in Section B was Q3 (attempt% 62.8%).

This year's paper appeared to be accessible for candidates. As in previous years there was evidence of generally sound levels of AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO2 analysis and evaluation. It was clear in many instances that candidates had been well-prepared for the examination.

Overall, there seemed to be less duplication of material in part (a) of responses through to part (b) and where there was such duplication it was used in a more evaluative fashion.

It was pleasing to note that a number of candidates were able to write very brief plans which enabled them to focus on the wording of the question and thus avoid writing about the general topic.

A clear characteristic of good responses was the candidate's ability to write a well-structured essay using paragraphs appropriately in covering each key point being made.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

**Q.1 (a) Explain what is meant by the problem of evil. [AO1 20]**

##### **Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly identified and explained the problem of evil from a variety of perspectives.
- explained, for example, the logical problem of evil, the evidential problem of evil, moral evil, natural evil etc.
- accurately gave the views of scholars such as Epicurus, Mackie, Rowe and Gregory Paul.
- used relevant exemplification such as the Inconsistent Triad, Paul's 'the Holocaust of Children' etc.

##### **Features of weaker responses**

- showed confusion regarding scholars, their views and the timeline.
- explained Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies in isolation without the context of the problem of evil.
- presented general views about the presence of evil in the world without linking this to the God of classical theism.
- gave cursory explanations of the views of one scholar or generalised explanations about scholars without detail.

- (b) 'Irenaean type theodicies are still credible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- analysed and evaluated what the term 'credible' in the question might mean and kept their focus on the phrase 'in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' throughout their response.
- considered the credibility of Irenaean type theodicies to different groups in society e.g. Christians, non-Christians, atheists.
- demonstrated clear understanding of Hick's presentation of evil as 'soul-making' and how this could be challenged by it being 'soul-breaking'.
- provided synoptic links by referencing the secularisation of society and its pluralist nature in terms of belief.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- presented in isolation an explanation of Irenaean type theodicies and contrasted them to Augustinian type theodicies.
- gave little or no recognition of the wording of the question regarding 'the 21<sup>st</sup> century'.
- gave strong unsupported assertions as to Irenaean type theodicies being irrelevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because of, for example, being nearly 2000 years old.
- lacked clear understanding of the nature of Irenaean type theodicies and often confused and conflated their explanations by bringing in Augustinian type theodicies.

- Q.2 (a) Explain Freud's arguments for religion being just a product of the human mind.** [AO1 20]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a detailed knowledge of Freud's arguments with reference to the Oedipus Complex, the Primal Horde theory, wish fulfilment and religion being seen as a neurosis.
- gave an overview of the context of Freud's arguments in terms of him being secular, atheistic and focused on the psychiatric conditions of patients.
- used plentiful exemplification in their responses including, for example, Freud's link between the sacrificial meal at the totem and Christian eucharistic services.
- Showed useful knowledge of Freud's published works such as 'Totem and Taboo' and 'The Future of an Illusion'.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- focused on Freud's approach to psychology in general.
- made reference to the id, ego and super-ego or Little Hans without reference to religion.
- used terms such as 'repression', 'guilt' and 'trauma' without linking them to religion being a product of the mind.
- presented responses which included personal positive or negative evaluation of Freud's overall approach to religion.

- (b) **‘Empirical approaches prove that Jung’s views on religion are wrong.’  
Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a clear understanding of what the question required in terms of ‘empirical approaches’ particularly with regard to the archetypes.
- showed knowledge of Jung’s empirical approach, his overall methodology and his generally positive approach to religion as helping a person achieve individuation.
- understood the nature of Jung’s archetypes and their connection with his views on religion.
- made connections with other parts of the course in discussing the possibility of verification or falsification with regard to Jung’s views.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- presented a detailed explanation of how and why Jung diverged in terms of his views from Freud.
- responded with a Jung versus Freud response in terms of their views on religion and made assertions as to which had greater strengths.
- lacked a clear understanding of the term ‘empirical’ and what it meant in the context of Jung’s views.
- focused on Jung’s archetypes and how they applied to religious belief without providing views on whether empirical approaches showed them to be wrong or right.

- Q.3 (a) **Explain Hume’s challenges to the cosmological and teleological arguments for God’s existence.** [AO1 20]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- identified the cosmological and teleological arguments as the context for Hume’s challenges.
- explained Hume’s challenges to both arguments using his exemplification or candidate’s own exemplification which adequately illustrated the challenges made.
- used relevant specialist language and vocabulary in context such as ‘Hume’s Fallacy of Composition’, ‘constant conjunction’, empiricist etc.
- provided the context whereby Hume’s challenges linked to challenging the existence of the God of classical theism.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- explained accurately and at length, but in isolation the cosmological and teleological arguments with reference to Aquinas.
- demonstrated little understanding of the timeline in terms of Hume and thus, for example, presented Hume as challenging Tennant, the Big Bang theory or disagreeing with Paley and the watch analogy - published in ‘Natural Theology’ some 20 years after Hume’s death.
- used the terms ‘fallacy of composition’ and ‘the problem of analogy’ but showed limited understanding of what these might mean.
- provided exemplification, which was not fully understood as in, for example, the number of shipwrights needed in the construction of a ship.

- (b) **‘Challenges to the cosmological and teleological arguments for God’s existence are very effective.’**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- showed understanding of the cosmological and teleological arguments for God’s existence.
- focused on the wording of the question as in ‘challenges’ being ‘very effective’ or not.
- presented a range of scholarly views/schools of thought and concepts such as Tennant, Darwin, Dawkins and the Big Bang theory.
- used exemplification and specialist language and vocabulary such as ‘qua purpose’ and ‘qua regularity’.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- demonstrated limited understanding of the terms ‘cosmological’ and ‘teleological’.
- confused the timeline and the validity of evaluation and analysis through reference to for example, Hume’s challenges to Tennant or the response of Aquinas to Dawkins and Darwin’s theory of natural selection and evolution.
- presented generalisations as to how scientific arguments challenges were very effective.
- evaluated and analysed the issue of God’s existence with little reference to the cosmological and teleological challenges.

- Q.4 (a) Examine religious experience with reference to conversion and visions.** [AO1 20]

**Features of stronger responses**

- provided a context for their explanation with an examination of what is meant by ‘religious experience’.
- presented a balanced response which made reference to both ‘conversions and visions’.
- gave relevant, accurate and apt exemplification of conversion and vision with reference to, for example, Cat Stevens/Yusuf Islam or St Bernadette of Lourdes.
- showed a detailed understanding of the terms conversion and visions by, for example, reference to St Paul and to sensory, dream-based and intellectual visions.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- explained the meaning of religious experience with partial reference to conversion and/or visions.
- demonstrated some knowledge of conversion and visions but provided either no or very limited exemplification to support their explanation.
- gave very descriptive responses as to conversion and visions with little examination or reference to religious experience as with, for example, St Paul.
- showed basic confusion as to what constituted conversion and what constituted vision.



- (b) 'Religious experience is the only influence on religious beliefs and practices.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** **[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a sound grasp of the question in terms of religious experience being 'the only' influence.
- showed an understanding of the breadth of what might be understood as 'religious experience' e.g. conversion, visions, miracles connected to the religion's founder.
- evaluated how strong religious experience might be for religious believers in influencing their beliefs and practices.
- analysed other influences such as religious texts, laws, traditions, familial and societal background etc. for example, the influence of the ummah in Islam.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- approached the response with detailed descriptions of particular religious experiences without due regard for the question asked as to influences of religious experience.
- struggled to present alternatives to religious experience which might be influential in terms of beliefs and practices.
- provided little by way of exemplification beyond re-stating points made in part (a).
- attempted to make vague and general connections to other parts of the course such as the verification principle, a Freudian understanding of religion, etc.

- Q.5 (a) Examine the concept of religious language as symbolic.** **[AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- Presented cogent and coherent accounts of the approaches taken by Randall and Tillich.
- Used exemplification appropriately and within context e.g. the symbolic nature of a country's flag.
- Demonstrated clear understanding of the context of religious language as symbolic within the overall debate on religious language.
- Made correct and appropriate use of specialist language and vocabulary e.g. cognitive vs non-cognitive

**Features of weaker responses:**

- Demonstrated little knowledge and/or understanding of the concept of religious language as being symbolic.
- Presented general responses without reference to scholars/schools of thought.
- Wrote about other aspects of religious language such as it being analogical or subject to verification or falsification.
- Showed limited understanding of what a symbol might be as opposed to a sign in the religious language debate.

**(b) 'Symbolic religious language is only meaningful to religious believers.'**  
**[AO1 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- grasped the key point of the question as to symbolic religious language being 'only' meaningful to religious believers.
- grappled successfully with the idea that non-religious people could also find symbolic language meaningful e.g. references to the Cross in Christianity.
- provided useful counter-arguments and points of discussion with, for example, reference to Wittgenstein's language games and the view that this confirmed that the meaningfulness of religious language was confined to religious practitioners.
- presented views that contradicted the statement such as, for example, the view that some symbols were only given clarity when seen through the ideas of a non-believer e.g. in Buddhism all the religious symbols connected to the Buddha could be seen through the perspective of secular Buddhism as sunyata (empty).

**Features of weaker responses:**

- displayed limited overall knowledge and understanding of religious language in general and of the concept of religious language as symbolic.
- provided a simplistic agreement with the statement that only religious believers understood religious language without attempting a counter-argument.
- choose one aspect of a religion whether it was a symbol or not and used that as the focus of their response e.g. salah (salat).
- gave 'model essays' on religious language and its meaningfulness with little reference to the question asked.

**Summary of key points**

- In preparing for the examination, planning and writing essays on topics such as religious language, theodicies, religious experience etc. is always helpful. However, candidates should avoid using these as model answers as it is always essential that the examination question asked is read carefully and that the response is written with the wording of the question as the focus.
- Candidates often have a wealth of knowledge and understanding alongside a sound grasp of issues for analysis and evaluation. It is important that with the amount that they know they are very selective in writing responses which focus on the question asked and which are to the point - particularly given the time constraints of the examination.
- Whilst dates of scholars or those involved in schools of thought are not expected or required, candidates would benefit from having at least an approximate idea of a timeline in order to avoid the confusion of, for example, suggesting that 12<sup>th</sup> century philosophers were alive at the same time as 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers and conducted lively discussion and debate with them.
- Wider reading around and on the topics in the specification is always helpful and candidates could be encouraged to undertake in the time available their own efforts at, for example, sampling the writings of philosophers at first hand rather than always through the lens of the textbook.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

#### COMPONENT 3: A STUDY OF RELIGION AND ETHICS

##### General Comments

The most popular question in Section A was Q1 (attempt% 67.7%). The most popular question in Section B was Q3 (attempt% 48.6%).

The Section A questions were comparable in structure and were clear for candidates to interpret. There was a clear desire from some candidates to write extended responses about Thomas Aquinas in part a rather than Finnis or Proportionalism, but candidates who did this were able to use their knowledge of Aquinas to help them evaluate the comparative effectiveness of different approaches to Natural Law in part (b).

In Section B, whilst the questions on Virtue Theory and Act Utilitarianism concerned first year material, they enabled candidates to explore the breadth of their knowledge and the part (b) responses enabled candidates to draw from a wide range of different first- and second-year material. Q5 was clear, but there was a tendency from several candidates to focus more on explaining different theories of predestination rather than the implications of hard / soft determinism on ideas about moral responsibility. There were two elements to this question and some candidates struggled to draw out both strands effectively; either explaining hard determinism without talking about implications or vice versa. Many found the part b to be more appealing as they could draw from a wider selection of materials to address the question.

It was noteworthy that many candidates chose a structure of writing that outlined what they would argue, argued it, and then summarised what they had argued in their part (b) responses. It is worth emphasising to candidates that any structure used should include an attempt to make evaluative judgments and to engage in critical analysis of the ideas that are raised.

There were still several scripts for which handwriting posed a significant barrier to awarding. Appropriate access arrangements need to be explored for these candidates. This may simply be asking candidates to write on alternate lines if their handwriting is too big, or to type if their handwriting is messy.

There was also still an issue regarding the labelling of answers. Answers should be labelled with the correct question number and question part to ensure that they are marked in the way candidates intended

##### Comments on individual questions/sections

**Q.1 (a) Explain John Finnis' development of Natural law. [AO1 20]**

##### **Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to demonstrate an understanding of Finnis' basic goods as something to be participated in by everyone.

- could identify the requirements of practical reasonableness as Finnis' method and were able to use these to demonstrate a worked example.
- could talk very effectively about the role of authority to coordinate participation in the goods for everyone.
- were able to clearly distinguish Finnis' Natural Law from a Utilitarian approach.
- addressed how Finnis addressed the Naturalistic Fallacy through his work.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- insisted on defining Finnis' Natural Law as meta ethical, yet still wrote about him in normative terms.
- still treated the goods as a calculus that could be weighed up, and some goods set aside.
- there was a tendency to list the seven goods or an approximation of the nine requirements without further explanation.
- confused Finnis with Proportionalism.
- used Finnis' name, but wrote about primary and secondary precepts.

**(b) 'Finnis' Natural Law is effective in dealing with ethical issues.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to begin by considering what an 'effective' ethical theory might look like as a way to then focus their response
- chose to demonstrate the effectiveness of Finnis' Natural Law by applying it to ethical issues to show that it could be used (or not) to conclude about moral behaviour.
- recognised Finnis' work in the context of jurisprudence and could talk about the issues with following an unjust legal system

**Features of weaker responses**

- focused their response so much on the application of Natural Law to the ethical problems, that they lost sight of the question
- saw 'effective' as meaning 'lets me do it' or 'confirms my pre-existent views' without acknowledging that stance. As a result, they demonstrated how Natural Law worked to make a decision, but then promptly claimed it is not effective, without justifying that conclusion.
- did not quite understand Finnis' idea about prioritising goods, claiming that one must weigh up every good in every act and achieve all seven in every act. Finnis argued that all seven were always equally important, but that some projects were focused on a particular good, without denying the goodness of the others.

**Q.2 (a) Examine Proportionalism as a development of Natural Law. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- took a tour through the important language and concepts mentioned on the specification and explained the Proportionalist ideas from this perspective
- showed an understanding of different Proportionalist approaches from different philosophers. Both approaches were equally valid

- demonstrated excellent understanding of how Proportionalism develops Aquinas' use of double effect to make it more consistent
- clearly understood that Proportionalism proposes the keeping of moral laws and the intrinsic goodness / evil in certain actions

**Features of weaker responses:**

- believed that Proportionalists did not believe that any act was intrinsically evil. This was an error
- wrongly confused or conflated Proportionalism with Situation Ethics, and chose to believe it was exclusively about love
- those who did not understand double effect, tended to struggle when giving examples about how Proportionalists might assess a moral decision
- were unclear about the role of ontic / premoral evil or the difference between this and moral evil

**(b) 'Proportionalism is not effective in dealing with ethical issues' Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

The part (b) was often stronger than the part (a) response as candidate could, so some extent, draw on a range of ideas for effective ways to deal with ethical issues to support their answers.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- most candidates chose to demonstrate the effectiveness of Proportionalist ideas of value and disvalue through worked examples from Capital Punishment or Immigration
- knew why the Catholic church had rejected Proportionalism and could discuss this
- understood that agape, or a good intention did not make an evil action good
- could link Proportionalist ideas to the apparent Proportionalist approach demonstrated by Christ
- understood that Proportionalism was an attempt to understand Aquinas more effectively rather than a rejection of Aquinas.

**Features of weaker responses**

- struggled with the use of double effect and of accurate understanding of the Catholic approach to abortion.
- failed to understand that immigration in general is not illegal and that no understanding of Natural Law from the specification is proposing that it should be.
- some wrote essays about the rights and wrong of immigration, abortion, euthanasia or capital punishment rather than essays about the effectiveness of Proportionalism.
- missed the opportunity to challenge Proportionalism with Roman Catholic thought.

**Q.3 (a) Explain Bentham's Act Utilitarianism. [AO1 20]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- knew what Utilitarianism is and were able to begin with the unpacking of key vocabulary surrounding this ethical theory

- outlined the Hedonic Calculus and then used it to demonstrate a brief example
- were able to emphasise the importance of weighing this up for each action and the quantitative approach that Bentham took.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- confused Bentham and Mill, or tried to write equally amounts about both scholars
- conflated Utilitarianism with Ethical Egoism and did not have a clear understanding of Bentham's role in trying to ensure social justice
- used Foot's Trolley Problem to exemplify Utilitarianism, but wrote about it at length, attributing it to Bentham himself.

**(b) 'Act Utilitarianism clearly promotes justice.'**  
**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- Some strong responses that understood that Rule Utilitarianism could be used to come to a different conclusion
- A few great responses using other ethical scholars to help to weigh up the question
- Some understood Bentham's role in law making and social justice and so were able to use this knowledge to help them to analyse the question
- Some understood or explored what 'justice' means so that their answers were clearly focused.

**Features of weaker responses**

- assumed that Mill's lower pleasures were somehow evil or to be avoided. Had no clear idea that lower pleasures are still potentially a good thing, but less desirable than higher pleasures.
- repeatedly using limited examples that were non-ethical such as eating cake, going to the movies or spending time with Mum to try and make an ethical point.
- tended to use arguments that could have been used against any ethical theory without recognising this fact
- concentrated on the strengths and weaknesses of Utilitarianism without a focus on the question.

**Q.4 (a) Explain Virtue Theory**

**[AO1 20]**

Some candidates chose to write about Virtues within Aquinas' Natural Law theory. Where this was done accurately and appropriately it was awarded positively.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- could tell the difference between Aristotle and Aquinas and were able to talk effectively about the idea of Virtue as a character-based Theory.
- gave examples of virtues and vices and understood that these were practiced from childhood and should become habit.
- good use of analogies like the wrestler or the harpist to show the need for adapting to circumstances or practicing deliberately.
- gave extensive responses that included mention of the different kinds of people or the importance of community or friendship within Virtue theory.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- did not appreciate that Virtue Theory is not simply about having a good intention behind one's actions.
- conflated the ideas of Jesus, Aquinas and Aristotle throughout their response.
- were unable to give details of the doctrine of the mean or examples of virtues and vices.
- held a simplistic understanding of Eudaimonia as only happiness which led into a confusion with hedonism and Utilitarianism.

- (b) **'Being a good person is more important than doing good actions.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- good use of other scholars to evaluate this idea. Elizabeth Anscombe and Martha Nussbaum were seen several times.
- considered the possibility that we learn by repeatedly doing – so action comes before character. Some use of Aristotle's swallow quote and exploration of it.
- referred to the importance of role models and a positive society
- were able to draw from their understanding of Component 1 and considered the response of the faith perspective that they have studied.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- did not know the specifics of Virtue Theory, they sometimes missed the point of the statement.
- struggled to identify which scholars or theorists would support the priority of good action or of good character.
- were repetitive where a candidate was unable to make more than one or two points in response to the question.
- went into long explanations of Egoism or Divine Command that drew them away from the question.

- Q.5 (a) Examine the implications of determinism for moral responsibility.**  
[AO1 20]

There was a general tendency from candidates to muddle predestination and determinism. These are dealt with clearly and separately on the specification and so this question was focused on determinism rather than predestination. Where candidates made this error but still spoke about implications, they were awarded appropriately.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to go through elements of hard and / or soft determinist theories and then show how these theories impacted whether or not a person can be praised or blamed for their actions.
- could demonstrate a range of possible ways in which moral responsibility might be affected, including consideration of punishment and reward, or formulating normative rules.
- were able to show how soft determinism might allow people an element of responsibility with the use of Hobbes or Ayer.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- gave lengthy explanations of predestination using Calvin or Augustine. This is not the area that the question was asking for.
- focused on one part of the question – either explaining determinism, or considering what moral responsibility is without reference to determinist theories.
- described examples in great detail without focusing on the question
- moved into evaluation of the arguments instead of focusing on the question.

**(b) 'Moral responsibility is nothing more than an illusion.'  
Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

In this question, it was less important that candidates stuck to discussing only determinist theories. They could draw from libertarianism, religious ideas about free will and predestination as well as determinism. The important element was addressing the issue of whether moral responsibility is illusory.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- used scholars and case studies to support arguments about whether it simply seems that we are morally responsible, when we are not really.
- acknowledged the implications of moral responsibility being an illusion.
- referred to challenges from Sartre used to demonstrate that humans have ultimate responsibility for all their actions and to deny this is to act in bad faith.
- considered a variety of forms of moral responsibility; legal, personal and religious.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- talked more about whether free will was an illusion rather than moral responsibility.
- demonstrated a significant lack of understanding of Soft Determinism, addressing it simplistically that we were partially responsible for all our actions.
- simply addressed strengths and weaknesses of hard determinism or the likelihood of an approach being correct rather than a close focus on the question.
- repeated AO1 content that had been seen in part (a).

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates should make sure that they read the question carefully and take care to answer the full question, rather than just one aspect of it or an aspect that they wanted to have been asked.
- Candidates must be cautious in regard to lengthy context setting that draws them away from answering the question or reduces the time in which they have to address the question specifically.
- Candidates handwriting should be clearly readable or access arrangements should be made to ensure that examiners can give them the marks they deserve.
- Candidates should label the questions clearly to ensure examiners understand where their responses begin and end.
- In part (b) questions, it is worth considering the meaning or implications of key words like 'justice' or 'effective' at the start of a response to help focus candidate answers more clearly on the question.





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