

**A LEVEL**

Examiners' report

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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**H573**

For first teaching in 2016

**H573/01 Autumn 2020 series**

## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.



Reports for the Autumn 2020 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate answers.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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## Paper 1 series overview

The Autumn series 2020 was an unusual series with a significantly lower number of entries than a traditional summer series and a non-standard cohort. Nevertheless, we saw a range of responses across all Levels of Response for both knowledge and understanding (AO1 – 40%) and analysis and evaluation (AO2 – 60%). There were some excellent responses to individual questions, but fewer managed to gain Level 6s consistently across all three of their chosen questions. Many had evidently learned a substantial amount of material from the specification but were less successful in evaluating and building an argument. This may be due to the disruption to learning in the classroom where discussion and essay skills would normally be honed and practised.

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focused more on the argument, so essays were AO2 driven throughout</li> <li>• assessed scholarly views by weighing up how and why each contributed to their line of argument</li> <li>• focused on the precise question.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listed different views with little justification</li> <li>• asserted a general criticism without explaining how or why it was relevant to this question</li> <li>• included more on the general topic rather than focusing on the specific aspect highlighted in the question.</li> </ul>

## Themes in candidate responses

There were several higher level responses that engaged with the question being asked and tailored their argument accordingly. Knowledge was selective and used to support a line of reasoning, showing confidence to bypass excess listing of facts. For example, conversions were explored and discussed rather than describing everything that William James said on the topic of religious experience.

The most successful responses also reflected on the arguments or scholarly views selected which helped to signpost their evaluation. For example, when strengths or weaknesses of a view were explained, before moving on, the candidate discussed the value of those points, weighing up how the critique affected their line of argument.

Many responses understood the connection between teleology and purpose.

Some responses tried to include too much knowledge and were not selective enough in their choice of material. This left less time to fully develop analysis and evaluation. Often, such responses achieved a higher level for AO1 than for AO2.

Some responses appeared to lack understanding of specific terms used on the specification, such as hierarchy of Forms, Form of the Good or the falsification symposium.

## Common misconceptions

A common misconception is that all questions have an implicit comparison. For example, if the question asks for discussion of the teleological argument, it is not necessary to compare with other arguments for the existence of God. There is more than enough in the specification to use material that supports and criticises teleological arguments (selected from: Aquinas' Fifth Way, Paley, Hume, evolution).

Another misconception is that asserting a strength or weakness of a view is the same as evaluating it. To access higher levels for AO2, assertions need to be developed, extended and justified with reasons.

Some responses incorrectly claimed that the Form of the Good was Plato's god.

## Key teaching and learning points – comments on improving performance

### Analysis and evaluation

Analysis and evaluation are essential to improve the quality of responses. While examiners only see a summative performance, the most successful seem to be comfortable with weighing up and justifying their own views which no doubt comes from both oral and written practice in the classroom.

A suggestion to encourage candidates to extend their reasoning and more fully develop an argument, is to keep asking the question 'why?'. For example, after making a point, before moving on to another, candidates could consider why is this a strength or a criticism (of the thinker or view named in the question); whether it is a successful strength or criticism, giving reasons and an example to support their view. It is important to also reflect on whether the analysis weakens or strengthens their own line of argument, again discussing reasons why or why not.

## Focus on the question


In every series, focus on the question, or lack of, is one of the main observations from examiners. Where there is a specific thinker or technical term used in the question, the essay should focus on analysing this. So even where a synoptic or broader approach is adopted, this should also directly answer the question. No question will expect candidates to regurgitate everything they know on a section of the specification.


Performance can be improved by regular practice, for example by writing essays in 40 minutes, using previously unseen questions. Students could use the specification to devise their own essay question, or try using different command words, for example. Many textbooks and revision books include exam-style questions too. Another activity that promotes focus on the question is where students write an introduction or conclusion to an essay and the rest of the class guess the question.

## Familiarity with technical terms and key thinkers on the specification

If candidates have studied GCSE RS, they will be familiar with some elements of the A Level course, for example, basic teleological or first cause arguments. While this is a useful basis, it would be worth re-visiting to deepen understanding. For example, Paley's teleological arguments for the existence of God: just as a watch is designed with a purpose (to tell the time) and infers a designer or watch maker, purpose and regularity observed in natural beings indicate design and a designer.

The H573 specification could be given to students to make a personal learning checklist. For example, students could highlight the key words, named scholars or theories and write their own glossary with brief definitions and revision card summaries. For each topic, check that students can accurately recall essential knowledge, can discuss strengths and weaknesses and have come to their own view on the issues raised.

	<b>AfL</b>	One method to help students focus on the question is to use BUG – box the command word, underline important words and glance through again to check if anything has been missed.
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	<b>OCR support</b>	Command words and what is expected for each are explained in <a href="#">this document</a> .
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## Guidance on using this paper as a mock

This paper covers a wide range of the specification so is a useful reminder to revise every topic, particularly topics that may have been taught early in Year 12. Each question has a focus within a broader topic so should help to practise selection skills. There is an argument identified in most questions which could help less confident candidates to evaluate by agreeing or disagreeing with the statement.

Some questions on this paper are not as straightforward as those that may have been used to build confidence in candidates in the early part of an A Level course, before or during lockdown, so it will be challenging.

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