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GCE

Religious Studies

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H173**

OCR Report to Centres June 2018

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This report on the 2018 Summer assessments aims to highlight:

- areas where students were more successful

- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection

- points of advice for future examinations

It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

The report also includes links and brief information on:

- A reminder of our **post-results services** including **reviews of results**

- Link to **grade boundaries**

- **Further support that you can expect from OCR**, such as our Active Results service and CPD programme

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H173/01 Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

Responses to this year's questions were not as strong as last years. A significant number of answers were general topic essays with little or no evaluation.

There was also a distinct lack of scholarship in many of the responses, with many essays which were more superficial religious discussions with no sense of philosophical debate.

As we found in the legacy specification candidates lost marks because examiners could not credit material they could not read.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. **"Conversion experiences do not provide a basis for belief in God.' Discuss.**

Better responses demonstrated an understanding that the essay needed to focus on conversion and developed an evaluation of the effects of this kind of experience. Many focused on the effects on the experiencer and the extent to which it did or did not count as evidence, which justified belief in God. Good use was made by these candidates of William James, Swinburne and Freud.

Many, unfortunately, spent most of their time writing out accounts of various alleged conversion experiences. Mostly these were Saul of Tarsus, St Paul and Nicky Cruz. A significant number of candidates thought St Paul was an atheist before his conversion to Christianity or in some cases Roman Catholicism. Others described him as a serial killer or a soldier with a lust for killing.

Many wrote out Swinburne's Principles of Credulity and Testimony without assessing how they might be used to answer the question. Also very few candidates understood that for James conversion may point to something larger but that larger thing may/may not be God.

2. **Critically discuss Aristotle's understanding of reality.**

There were some very good responses to this question, giving a very good account of Aristotle's empiricism and his explanation of the four causes, though some still confuse the efficient and formal causes. Many went onto a good description of the Prime Mover, contemplating perfection and moving the universe by drawing things to him in a disinterested way.

Some gave an account of Aristotle being a pupil of Plato, what Plato taught and why Aristotle disagreed with him about the realm of the Forms. Those who did this in an evaluative way gained credit in the higher bands. However, some seemed to read the question as write all you know about Plato and then compare him with Aristotle in the last paragraph. It was not possible to credit these responses above general topic.

Other weaker responses confused Aristotle's Prime Mover with that of Aquinas and his assessment of infinite regress.

3. To what extent does Kant successfully criticise the ontological argument?

While a popular question, candidates struggled to produce good responses and very few recognised that Kant was critiquing the Cartesian version of the ontological argument. The best responses discussed both Descartes examples of the triangle and the valley assessing the extent to which Kant's view that 'existence is not a predicate' successfully undermines the ontological argument.

Most candidates outlined Anselm's version of the argument and used Guanilo and his greatest possible island as a critique which lead to a discussion of necessary and contingent existence. A paragraph on the idea of predicating existence was shoe horned into these responses.

H173/02 Religion and Ethics

General Comments

The paper was fair and was reasonably attempted by the majority of candidates with very few rubric errors. Responses were very evenly split between the questions with roughly equal numbers of candidates choosing each question. Of the three, question 2 on agape was the least popular but the difference in terms of numbers of choices was negligible.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. Voluntary euthanasia is always morally acceptable. Discuss.

There was significant variation over the knowledge possessed by candidates of voluntary euthanasia, with a number of candidates failing to focus on this specific type of euthanasia and instead producing a generalised review of the moral status of euthanasia.

Where candidates were firm in their understanding of voluntary euthanasia, there were often very good discussions of the issues, which were supported by case studies such as Diane Pretty and Dr Anne Turner, as well as consideration of the work of Dignitas and other areas that have seen a legalisation of the practice.

Significant use was made of natural law theory, although again, there was confusion over the double effect principle and this was generally not used well by candidates. The majority focused on the primary precepts and in particular the precept to preserve life, although better responses were able to engage a wider variety of precepts with the issue including living in society and worship God.

Some candidates were able to make significant links between natural law and sanctity of life concepts, while others talked about sanctity of life without making this link. As contrast, quality of life arguments were often presented alongside the situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher. Here candidates focused on the agapeistic value of voluntary euthanasia and made the argument that it was potentially a loving action.

There were a number of responses that purely detailed a reportage style overview of euthanasia as an issue, but failed to include any ethical concept or theory as part of the response. These essays were limited in response as they failed to complete a convincing argument based on ethical concepts, although their actual knowledge of euthanasia itself was often good.

2. The concept of *agape* gives no help at all in moral decision making. Discuss.

Some candidates did not realise that this referred to situation ethics and tried to focus on a response solely on agape, without broadening the concept into situation ethics. This left the candidates struggling to find material to include once they had completed their knowledge of the term itself.

Those candidates who extended the question into situation ethics and assessed the role of agape within this ethical framework often did better, with good mention and use of the four fundamental principles and the six working propositions. The propositions were often more

alluded to with only 1 or 2 detailed by the majority of candidates. Most appeared more confident in employing the principles such as relativism, etc.

There was significant use made of criticism from Barclay and Robinson with many candidates using these thinkers to highlight the potential weaknesses presented by the agapeistic approach in moral decision making.

3. **Critically assess the view that utilitarianism provides a helpful way to make moral decisions.**

As expected, this was a popular question that was approached in a common way by candidates who had a tendency to detail the act utilitarianism style first attributed to Bentham and to follow this with the rule utilitarianism of Mill. It also produced some of the best answers, as it was straightforward with little room for misunderstanding.

While the majority of candidates were able to write at length on the hedonic calculus proposed by Bentham, there was less mention of other elements of his theory such as why he focuses on pleasure and pain, and his assertion that all pleasures are equal.

Great use was made of examples such as sadistic guards to illustrate the potential difficulties raised by the system and to link in to the development by Mill of the utilitarian concept. There was some use of Mill's own criticisms such as the swine ethic by some candidates.

Mill's utilitarianism was covered in a more variable way by candidates. Again, the majority focused on the division of good into higher and lower as part of the qualitative emphasis developed in the system, but there was significantly less mention of other important concepts such as the harm principle and the role played by qualified judges. There were a number of candidates who appeared confused in their writings over the concept of developing utilitarian rules itself.

Frequent mention was made of additional thinkers, particularly the work of Peter Singer and his development of preference utilitarianism, with a few including Popper and his focus on avoidance of pain.

The criticism tended to take the form of Bentham being criticised by Mill before direct contrast being made to other ethical systems, particularly Kant.

H173/03 Developments in Christian thought

General Comments

The best responses were clearly focused on the question and driven by the argument required and balanced carefully points of evaluation with relevant knowledge and understanding to illustrate these points. Less successful candidates focused on writing out knowledge, sometimes only focusing on the general topic rather than the specific material required by the questions.

All three questions attracted a full range of responses. Question 1 needed a focus on the significance of Augustine's teaching on human relationships rather than simply on human nature and needed to examine his teachings pre-Fall, rather than the events of the fall itself or just the consequences of the Fall – although these were creditable when used well. Question 2 required candidates to engage directly with the extent to which Church teaching is the most important source for Christian ethics. Question 3 asked candidates to consider how far faith was the only way of knowing God and needed a focus on faith in order to answer the question fully. Candidates who chose to plan often found that the moment taken to examine the question resulted in tighter essays.

It is clear that some candidates struggled with some of the key terminology in Developments in Christian Thought; for example, the terms "church" and "faith" were at times incorrectly defined.

Some handwriting was very difficult to read; examiners can only credit what is successfully communicated.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. **Critically assess the significance of Augustine's teaching on human relationships before the Fall.**

This was a popular question, which resulted in a variety of approaches. Many candidates struggled to cover the various aspects of the question and launched into a survey of all they knew about Augustine, which perhaps highlights the need for them to spend a short time thinking about and ideally planning the response to the question before they start writing, rather than attempting to write out a pre-prepared answer. There was some knowledge of Augustine's life demonstrated, although often used inappropriately and in an overly descriptive way, not focused on the question. The best responses successfully considered Augustine's teachings before the Fall by looking at Adam and Eve's relationship with the world, God and each other. All three of these were credited as a reasonable interpretation of 'human relationships'. Many also compared this to relationships after the Fall showing analysis in the process. Many chose to examine issues with Augustine's teaching in terms of a literal interpretation of Genesis, the impossibility of the perfection presented by human relationships pre-Fall, the implication of Darwin's theory of evolution and a Freudian interpretation of Augustine's teachings, among others. Successful responses were able to focus these on the question in hand regarding pre-Fall and human relationships rather than slipping into a discussion regarding Augustine's teachings regarding human nature. There was a good understanding of some of the technical terminology, for example, cupiditas, caritas and concupiscence, and these were, on the whole,

deployed effectively. Weaker responses described the events of the Fall without connecting this to the content of the question or only discussed Augustine's teachings on human relationships after the Fall or focused purely on human nature rather than relationships. In terms of AO2, better responses critically assessed the teachings throughout the response rather than saving an evaluation of Augustine until the end of the essay.

2. 'The most important source for Christian ethics is Church teaching.' Discuss.

Responses to this question were divided between those who had a good grasp of why some give significant authority to Church teaching and those who found this concept more of a challenge and resorted to a much more general approach to the question. Many candidates had clearly learnt the main approaches to Christian ethical decision making through three categories: a heteronomous approach (Bible, Church, reason or conscience); an autonomous approach (often using Situation Ethics) and a theonomous approach (the authority of the Bible alone). The most successful responses evaluated the extent to which Church teaching is the most important source in comparison to the other options available, considering the strengths and weaknesses of Church teaching, ranging from issues with reliability, authority to concerns with corruption. Some candidates drew on their knowledge from ethics and others used knowledge from the Christian Moral Action section of the specification and used Bonhoeffer to consider the challenge of using Church teaching as a source of ethical decision making. Weaker candidates struggled to comprehend fully the nature of Church teaching and were limited by concerning themselves with the teaching that takes place in the Church building itself or considered the other forms of ethical decision-making exclusively.   Again, better responses integrated the evaluative element of the response throughout, referring back to the terms of the question while weaker ones often simply listed the different approaches to Christian ethics and evaluating them at the end.

3. To what extent is faith the only means of knowing God?

Some candidates focused heavily on a philosophical response to the question, considering what it means to know God, and whether we can know God at all; others considered the other ways of knowing God exclusively, for example, natural theology and therefore did not consider the extent to which faith was the only means of knowing God.   While it can be valuable to draw on material from other aspects of the course as a whole, in this case, candidates sometimes got side tracked by a description of the arguments for God's existence in philosophy and the question of proving God's existence rather than the means by which a person may come to know God. It is clear that the majority of candidates knew there are two main ways of knowing God: natural and revealed theology; however, some found it hard to understand where faith fitted in and this led to some confusion. The more successful candidates focused on the question throughout and evaluated the extent to which faith was the only means of knowing God, often by contrasting faith as a means of knowing to that of natural theology, examining the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. Many candidates referred to the Barth-Brunner debate, Calvin and Plantinga, among others, and gave a range of examples of natural and revealed theology effectively in order to answer the question. Those who had read the wording of the question carefully and picked out 'only' were able to provide a more cohesive response to the question.

H173/04 Developments in Islamic thought

General Comments

All of the questions were answered; however, question 3 was the least popular of them all. A range of levels were represented across the cohort. The majority of the candidates were around the level 3 to 5 area, with only a minority of candidates gaining either the lowest or highest levels. Overall, the candidates appeared to be reasonably well equipped to address both the AO1 and AO2 elements of the questions.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. **Critically compare the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite approaches to the idea of divine will and human action.**

AO1 This was a popular question and the majority of candidates showed, at least, a sound understanding of who both the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites were (8th century theologians). The weaker responses were those that were unable to explain specific ideas that either group held in relation to divine will and human action.

The strongest candidates were able to show a good understanding of the concepts of divine will and human action, as well as being able to demonstrate a knowledge of the beliefs of both groups towards these.

AO2 There were a few candidates who failed to engage in any real level of evaluation and these responses were only able to get a level 1 at best.

The majority of candidates offered a reasonable variety of arguments to help evaluate the two responses and were able to reach, at least, a reasonably justified conclusion. The best responses were able to show not only why one response to the issue of divine will and human action might be better/worse than the other but also give reasons why both responses may be equally valid.

2. **To what extent is it true to say that Islamic law (Shari'a) is not equipped to deal with new problems?**

AO1 This was also a popular question and there were some examples of excellent responses. Although in the minority, a few candidates did get a level 5 for this question. They did this by showing an in-depth knowledge of Islamic law – referring, for example, to the formation of Islamic law and the differing law schools. These candidates also offered a range of new problems such as cohabitation and same sex marriages.

There were a small number of candidates who did not really explain what Islamic law was and who referred to few, if any, new problems. These responses failed to get more than a level 2. The majority of candidates were able to show a reasonable to good understanding of Islamic law. They did this by making reference to the four law schools and detailing some of what

Islamic law covers. They also showed reasonable knowledge of some new problems encountered by Muslims – generally demonstrating either depth or breadth of knowledge.

AO2   The weaker responses were those that had a fairly minimal understanding of Islamic law and knowledge of new problems as this gave them little to evaluate. Candidates who were only able to offer one or two arguments, overall, did not get higher than a level 3.

The best responses demonstrated an appreciation of a variety of responses to the question and were able to support the various arguments with a range of evidence. In doing, so these candidates engaged in critical analysis, which is something they need to do to get a level 6 for evaluation.

3. 'The teleological argument is the strongest proof of Allah's existence.' Discuss.

AO1   There were a few candidates who appeared to have mixed up the Kalam cosmological argument and the teleological argument. As a result of this, the knowledge they demonstrated was either very limited or only partially accurate, meaning that they could not get higher than a level 1 or 2 for this element of the question. It is really important that candidates have sound knowledge of the different arguments in order to avoid falling below a level 3.

The majority of responses, however, were able to show a good knowledge of the teleological argument as a whole as well as being able to discuss alternative/s (primarily the Kalam cosmological argument).

The strongest candidates showed a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of differing types of argument that can be used to prove Allah's existence, an in-depth knowledge of teleological arguments along with alternative arguments.

AO2   The weakest responses were those that contained inaccurate/minimal knowledge of the teleological argument as this meant that any evaluative comments were only partially useful. Other weak responses were those that solely focussed on the teleological argument as evidence for the existence of God but failed to address alternatives. This clearly limited the extent to which they were able to give a fully justified conclusion.

While the majority of candidates were able to demonstrate good evaluative skills, there were a few who fully engaged with the evaluative element of the question and showed an ability to critically analyse differing arguments. They did this by explaining reasons why the teleological argument may be the strongest proof of God's existence and giving evidence to support this. They were also able to do this for other arguments, in order to demonstrate a deep level of engagement with the question. These candidates gave a fully justified conclusion.

H173/06 Developments in Buddhist thought

General Comments

The candidates appeared to be well prepared for the demands of the paper. The majority of candidates understood the format and there were very few rubric errors in construction of the responses. However, there were far fewer entries this year compared to last year.

The questions were very clear in their language and structure and were easy for the vast majority of candidates to access and understand and therefore candidates were able to structure their responses appropriately.

Overall candidates appeared confident in their preparation and approach to the paper and were aware of the necessary structures. Most candidates were well prepared by centres and they understood how to best respond to the questions.

All three questions were attempted by candidates however; question 1 was the most popular. Candidates made good use of a range of sources of information to respond to the questions including specific Buddhists texts, teachings of the Buddha and modern Buddhist scholars including Harvey, Gethin, Cush, Side, Rahula and Bhikkhu Bodhi. Candidates did not need to use named scholars in order to meet the assessment criteria (and those who did not were not disadvantaged) but where they have done, it has shown how well prepared they are for the exam. Some knew a considerable amount about Buddhism and should be very proud of the knowledge and understanding they demonstrated.

With questions about concepts, the stronger candidates tended to use text like the Nikayas and linked the concept in the question to other Buddhist concepts to show how and why concepts exist as they do. This interdependence of concepts is key to understanding and showing understanding of Buddhism.

Some candidates did not access the higher marks on the more specific questions such as question 2. Candidates needed to make sure that they gave clear and specific examples. For the higher marks candidates needed to show why there rebirth is unavoidable or why which stage of the eightfold path is the most important.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. **'The Buddha is the most important refuge.' Discuss**.

Some candidates gave descriptive responses to this question and told the story of the Buddha or just stated reasons why he was important without really demonstrating an understanding of the nature of the three refuges. These responses were less likely to be credited the higher marks.

Other candidates outlined all three refuges and said why each one was important/ not important. These responses tended to be better. However, some went further still and suggested a reason why a refuge was important ie it led to enlightenment and evaluated each of the three refuges based on this criterion. These responses tended to be credited the higher marks.

Better responses also tended to make use of other Buddhists concepts and showed how these interlinked with the three refuges. This shows a greater holistic understanding of Buddhism and is always a good way of demonstrating good knowledge and understanding. For example, candidates linked the four sights to the four noble truths to show why this element of the Buddha's life was important in the development of the dharma. Or they showed how the Buddha talked about the dharma being the only refuge in the Mahaparanibbana Sutta.

2. To what extent is *punabbhava/punarbhava* (rebirth) unavoidable?

This was a very specific question and candidates who gave a general response tended not to be credited the higher marks. Some just stated the fact that bad karma traps a person in samsara and explained the Tibetan wheel of life, outlining the six realms. Some talked about the fact that enlightenment was the release from samsara and that nirvana was the destination after this release. Neither of which are entirely correct (nor are they entirely wrong). These responses did not really fully address the question.

Better responses talked about karma in more sophisticated terms showing how karma is just volitional actions and that karma phalia (or vipaka) are the 'fruit' of the karmic action. It is the fruit that tend to make rebirth inevitable but only if there is 'fruit'. These better responses showed an understanding of how karmic fruit affect rebirth and also looked at reproductive, supportive, obstructive and destructive karma. This showed a really good understanding of this concept.

The candidates who were credited the highest marks were those who not only understood karma at a deeper level but also linked this to the twelve nidanas or the links of dependent origination. Those who showed that the twelve nidanas are the determining factor in rebirth and in understanding the nature of karma and other concepts such as self/ not self, impermanence and suffering were credited the highest marks.

3. Critically compare the different stages of the Eightfold Path.

This question also led a number of candidates to just describe the eight categories and then at the end of their response they said which was the most important and why. These responses tended to be good where the discussion about why the particular categories being the most important were detailed or showed a greater awareness of other Buddhist concepts. Where this was not shown then the candidates did not achieve very high marks.

The better responses saw that the categories of the eight-fold path were interlinked categories and not stages or a step-by-step path to enlightenment. They showed how each category helped to develop the others. For example, showing how by developing good ethical conduct the mind is easier to tame which makes right effort easier. Also, being mindful helps one to see where they might be developing good or bad karma, which helps them to live morally and also helps which the intention to renunciate.

Some candidates made good use of Rahula and Bhikkhu Bodhi in their responses and these two texts do seem to have a great deal of discussion in them of the eightfold path and the interdependence of each category.