

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCE Religious Studies
6RS04_1C
Buddhism

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1C Buddhism

Congratulations are due to many candidates who achieved success in their thorough understanding of the selected passage and for their commendable examination techniques. It is essential for candidates to examine the passage on the exam paper. Candidates must relate what they have learned and apply it to the extract. What is essential is an explicit focus on the text, whatever method is used to examine it. There was evidence of some candidates inserting several paragraphs of material not linked to the question.

The division on the paper into the two assessment objectives is intended to assist candidates to structure their answers and to enable them to make sensible use of their time in the allocation of material. In most cases candidates had the required examination technique to make effective use of their material. There is no necessary requirement to follow the structured division as seen in the question. However, for candidates creating a holistic answer, there is a tendency to pay inadequate attention to AO2, especially in relation to the implications aspect of part (b).

Q1(a): There was a wide range of answers to this question, though generally the question was answered extremely well. There were some excellent scholarly responses which fully responded to the demands of the question. Some focused upon the passage and used material from the set texts to support their answers, especially *The Questions of King Milinda*. Others used principles/ideas from different elements of the course to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the views found in the passage. Concepts considered were anatta, anicca and dependent origination. Many responses focused on the variety of ontologies found within the Buddhist tradition, which Griffith describes elsewhere in his essay. Many candidates used contributions by other scholars, such as Gethin, Peacock and Wittgenstein to illuminate their answers.

The weaker responses failed to answer the question and tended to use too much irrelevant detail, which candidates failed to relate to the question. A number of responses were only about what the candidates knew about Buddhism.

Q1(b): Some responses simply stated personal opinions and made little attempt to justify their ideas. Others seemed to write little for this part of the answer. Others demonstrated a weak grasp of some of the fundamental Buddhist ideas and unjustly criticised Buddhist belief. A surprising number said that they disagreed with the Buddhist position because it differed from their own faith with little or no further elaboration.

Some good responses focused on the implications of these ideas and the philosophical challenges they faced. For example, some questioned the effect of anatta upon moral behaviour whilst some focused on the seeming paradox of anatta upon compassion.

Some candidates made effective use of a variety of scholars in questioning whether or not this is the “middle” path. Some used evidence from Rupert Gethin, who argues that depending on which text is used, one could interpret that Buddhism veers towards eternalism **or** annihilationism.

In terms of the implication for religion and human experience, a number of candidates identified the problems with understanding religious terms, such as anatta and anicca, from cultures other than ones’ own. A significant number of candidates argued that there were significant problems with understanding ‘alien’ concepts due to a lack of accurate conceptual language.

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