

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H572**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H172**

Examiners' Reports

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Chief Examiner's Report

As always, all examiners continue to be impressed by the extraordinary quality and erudition of the scripts of top grade candidates. It is clear that many candidates have been fortunate enough to have received excellent teaching but it is also evident that many are reading round the subject matter themselves. Their research shines through their essays and sets them apart from others.

The usual comments about examination technique continue to appear in Examiners' Reports: candidates lose marks by failing to read the question carefully; some list ideas without much explanation; some fail to construct arguments and simply present ideas hoping this will be sufficient.

However, examiners noted this year that there were many more pre-prepared answers than usual. Although it must be tempting for centres to do this, they should perhaps consider whether this is the best way of assisting. Pre-prepared essays, by their very nature (unless lucky), cannot address the question precisely enough to gain high marks.

Finally, centres and candidates should be encouraged to prepare for the examination by using more than one text book. A Level text books are inevitably selective and limited in depth and so for those aiming for A and A*, it is suggested that even one reading book other than a chosen text book would be a sound course of action.

G571 Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

There were many interesting and insightful responses to questions, demonstrating genuine philosophical understanding, though there were still significant misunderstandings amongst many candidates. A few handicapped themselves by presenting virtually illegible scripts whilst many more, because of poor grammar, struggled to produce coherent answers. Many used language inappropriately, straining to gain effect.

Perhaps of more concern were failures of philosophical grammar. 'Infer' was too often used for 'imply', 'refute' for 'deny', and very many candidates simply did not understand terms such as 'synthetic', 'a priori', 'a posteriori' or 'logic'. It cannot be repeated too often that Philosophy of Religion is a *philosophical* discipline and candidates should pay the same attention to the correct use of philosophical terms and concepts as students of mathematics devote to the correct use of symbols.

In some responses there was a tendency to bring unnecessary evaluation into the part (a) answers, leading to repetition in part (b) or the candidate being unsure of what else they could write. Examination technique was questionable at times, with some candidates producing significantly more material for part (b) answers than for part (a). Given the mark allocations for the two parts, this seems to have little benefit and much risk.

The distinction between part (a) and (b) questions continues to need to be drilled. A number of candidates were describing strengths and weaknesses in part (a) (partly due to feeling they 'ought' to keep writing because they had time spare). Equally many candidates simply wrote information in part (b), without focusing on the techniques required for critical analysis. Centres will find that more time spent doing this in preparation for AS will result in a smoother transition to A2.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) Some responses confused Augustine and Irenaeus and there was some evidence of conflation of the two. However, it was pleasing to see that the distinction between Irenaeus and Hick is better understood now.

Most candidates began with the 'inconsistent triad', attributing it to a range of philosophers, but generally showing good understanding of the need for theodicy. A number of candidates were able to make good use of the 'image'/'likeness' distinction found in Genesis 1:26. Better responses explored the way that virtues could be developed towards the likeness of God (in a much more Hickean way). It was pleasing to see some candidates identifying the link between the immaturity of Adam and Eve with Irenaeus' explanation of why man was not made perfect from the beginning through the analogy of a mother giving a child milk.

The notion of analogy of God as a potter with the believer keeping themselves moist in readiness for God's hands, with the assistance of natural evil, to work the clay of their hearts, was barely identified in responses.

There was, perhaps, too much emphasis on the afterlife in discussion of the theodicy, which led to the persistent claim from candidates that Irenaeus believed all would be saved. Indeed, the theodicy of Irenaeus himself was rarely identifiable in responses, with credit often being gained from an understanding of Hick.

A few excellent answers illustrated their understanding by using C. S. Lewis' notion of the 'chisel' blows of God (natural evil) as sculpting us and there was good use of Vardy's analogy of the king and the peasant girl.

A minority of candidates noted the reference to Irenaean theodicy and based their answers – to excellent effect – entirely on Hick. Some fell into the error – repudiated by Hick – of saying that one needs the evil to appreciate the good, and some confused Swinburne's didactic argument with Hick's more nuanced approach.

- (b)** Good answers seemed to focus on the amount and arbitrary nature of suffering and differentiated between theistic and other arguments. Weaker answers focused more on the problem of evil than the notion of a test, often simply writing out Augustine's theodicy as a contrast. Better candidates were able to utilise Augustine's view of evil as a punishment, though few went on to refute the validity of this argument due to its overreliance on the Biblical story of Genesis 3. Basic or mid-range responses tended towards a listing of scholarly views with little consideration or evaluation.

It is important to remember that part (b) questions invite critical analysis of the points being discussed in relation to the question. Dawkins, Mill and the inconsistent triad were regular features and were used to good effect. Excellent responses used a range of evidence with well thought through arguments which contained evaluation of the often original or personal evidence selected.

Some candidates introduced the notion that everyone would eventually reach heaven, but few could explain the necessity of this, according to Hick. Others demonstrated their excellent evaluative skills by using examples from the theodicies (Hick's soul making; Augustine's idea of evil as sin or punishment for sin and evil as a privation), the sheer amount of evil in the world, using such as Dostoyevsky, and an occasional mention of D Z Phillips' argument that love could never use evil as a means to an end.

- 2** This was by far the least popular question and seemed to attract either very good or very weak responses.

- (a)** Some responses showed little understanding of Aquinas' actual arguments although better answers did outline these first, to contextualise their answer.

A few responses showed very good understanding of Hume's ideas about causation, but many adopted a list-like approach with many criticisms being wrongly attributed to Hume or being more relevant to the teleological argument. Indeed, there seemed to be little actual engagement with the philosophy of the argument, the criticisms having simply been learnt as a list from notes – hence, perhaps, the confusion with the criticisms of design arguments.

Some excellent responses were able to demonstrate Hume's criticisms at the relevant point of the explanation, but many adopted the 'this is everything that Aquinas said and this is what Hume made of it approach' which, whilst lacking in finesse, answered the question at hand.

Some candidates were able to explain Hume's observation of the role of habit in linking cause to effect, which a few excellent answers were able to identify as the fallacy of affirmation of the consequent. Bertrand Russell was used regularly and to good effect as a development of Hume's ideas on infinite regress, the nature of the universe and the uncertainty of things outside of our experiential arena, although sometimes in an evaluative style that would have better been suited to part (b). The misquoting of the 'universe not needing a mother' in Russell's take on Hume's fallacy

of composition was referred to, but Hume's explanation of his 20 particles made some appearance, showing that Hume is being taught well, and in his own right, in many centres.

- (b)** Candidates who had been successful in answering part (a) were also best equipped to argue and evaluate Hume's success or otherwise, often including appropriate argument relating to Copleston and Russell and displaying a clear sense of Russell's debt to Hume.

Many candidates seemed to struggle with focusing on 'how successful Hume was'. There was a tendency to repeat much of what had been produced in part (a), with a conclusion referring to whom they thought gave better evidence for their arguments, Hume or Aquinas, often without any warning by way of holistic argument. Some candidates were able to challenge Hume's views on causation or induction on the grounds of common sense, and many candidates brought the debate alive with Copleston and Russell. Leibniz, Kenny and Aquinas also made appearances, all playing their part throughout the analysis.

- 3 (a)** Most candidates were familiar with the four causes, though significant numbers struggled with Formal Cause, either mistakenly confusing it with the Final Cause or treating it as a plan or blueprint akin to Plato's Forms. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of too many answers was a tendency to Christianise Aristotle, so that the purpose of things was to spend eternity in communion with God. Aristotle is not Aquinas and there is a notable tendency among too many candidates not to notice the extent of the significant differences between the two.

This question saw the full range of responses. A few candidates thought that the question was on Aquinas' Ways (some candidates explicitly wrote that they had only been taught three of them). Others were limited in their knowledge, and there were often what seemed to be pre-prepared answers of the Prime Mover, rather than responses to the question itself. Slightly better responses were able to list the four causes, with some exemplification, although the formal and efficient causes were often mixed up, both in order and explanation. Both the confusions over this cause indicated that the formal cause was perhaps the least well-understood cause.

However, there were some very good answers with candidates demonstrating a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of Aristotle's four causes within the context of Aristotle's understanding of change. Very good responses recognised the need to explain the particular importance of the Final Cause, and its relationship with the other causes. Some candidates were able appropriately to link the process of change and causation to the external force of the Prime Mover, though often discussion of the Prime Mover was merely juxtaposed and not properly connected to the four causes.

Candidates using the example of human beings to illustrate the four causes tended to struggle when it came to the Final Cause, with several examples of candidates claiming that Aristotle said God wants humans to grow to be like Him, which is obviously a deviation from the Aristotelian idea.

- (b)** Many candidates struggled with providing a coherent account of the problems/difficulties of Aristotle's arguments in relation to the world in which we live. Far too many candidates took little notice of the assumptions surrounding the notion of the Final Cause. Better answers attempted to compare Aristotle's understanding of the real world with that of Plato's notion, and evaluated whether he was more successful than Plato in giving us a clear understanding of the real world. Various

scientific views were introduced to argue against the idea of the Final Cause, with varying success.

However, too many candidates did not engage here with the philosophical implications of the question. They failed to explore the concept of the 'real world' and, whilst they may have investigated Plato's relationship to the question, they often stopped short of explicitly assessing which approach to 'reality' was better and why. Some candidates were able to provide examples to illustrate that the four causes did not work (often using the appendix as an example of something that has no purpose), but there were few nuanced answers which truly evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the Aristotelian approach, and thus a significant number of responses failed to achieve beyond band 3.

- 4 (a) This was a very popular question and most candidates were able to demonstrate understanding of Paley's argument. The question was generally quite well answered, with most candidates achieving at least a basic understanding of the watch analogy. Many, however, went into lengthy criticisms rather than detailing Paley's arguments. Better attempts showed understanding of purpose and regularity and gave a range of examples. A number of candidates limited themselves by simply writing out the watch analogy without exploring the philosophy behind it.

The watch itself appeared in some interesting places, including beaches, forests, desert islands, the edge of cliffs, falling out of the sky and even being found under a stone. Whilst it is not of vital importance where the watch is found, this suggests a lack of attention to detail. Some candidates incorrectly argued that the watch had to be made by God. Most candidates mentioned the eye as an example of design (though it is not, as many thought, an analogy) and better responses referred to some of Paley's other examples, such as the bird's wing or the movement of the planets. Some examples offered, such as DNA or sub-atomic particles, were anachronistic. This was particularly true of Hume's use of evolutionary theory and DNA.

Some candidates indicated knowledge of the distinction of 'design qua purpose' and 'design qua regularity' but very few were able to use the terms with grammatical/syntactical accuracy or with conceptual accuracy – many merely mentioned the distinction but did not take the explanation further or did not give an explanation with any real degree of confidence. This was especially true of 'design qua regularity', accurate understanding of which was generally a feature of the best responses.

Interestingly, since the advent of the religion and science topic, Behe began to be a regular feature of more general responses. Many candidates seem to be confused about the difference between design in term of the teleological arguments and Intelligent Design as it is used today. A number of answers had a good deal of detail on Aquinas' fifth way, often to the detriment of Paley. On the whole this question, despite its popularity, was not answered quite as well as might be expected.

- (b) Many candidates confused the purpose of the universe with the purpose of humanity, though some candidates were able to link these two ideas appropriately. It was also quite common for candidates to confuse purpose with cause, though in a very few cases candidates were able, via Aristotle, to link cause and purpose. From a number of candidates it was pleasing to see a synoptic approach to their understanding of the course, and evolution, existentialism, and many other angles were deployed to good effect. However, there was still a tendency simply to juxtapose descriptive accounts by way of response. It was pleasing to see candidates enjoying themselves constructing a response within the examination

room, but it is important that answers do not simply move from assertion to assertion and instead include analysis and critical evaluation.

Where candidates included all the evaluation of Paley and the Darwinian position in part (a), answers tended to be weaker around the topic of purpose in general, rather than a focused answer on purpose seen in the design of the universe. A number of candidates used the Hume/Russell 'brute fact' idea to good effect.

G572 Religious Ethics

General Comments

Most candidates found this paper to be clear and accessible, giving scope to both the most able and those who find the subject more challenging. There were many excellent answers; question 1 was the most popular. However, achievement did depend on the candidates reading the question carefully and answering the question set and not just writing a pre-prepared essay.

There were almost no rubric errors and most candidates managed the time well.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) This was the most popular question, and in general was answered quite well. However, there were fewer excellent responses to this question than to others, as most candidates read the question as simply 'abortion' not the 'issues surrounding abortion'. Candidates knew the basis of Natural Law, mentioning Aristotle, Aquinas and explaining the primary precepts. A good number of candidates made a link to the secondary precepts. Most said that killing went against the precepts and most included reproduction. Some candidates discussed personhood, but some did not link it to the fact that a Natural Law follower would adhere to the sanctity of life.

Some candidates included the doctrine of double effect with varying degrees of success, with some thinking that it can allow abortion if the mother's life is in danger, rather than an indirect abortion.

Better responses were able to focus on the issues with some very good discussions of telos, real and apparent goods, sanctity of life, personhood and ensoulment. Some excellent answers used the notion of telos as the focus to discuss the other issues.

There was even some excellent discussion of the work of Bernard Hoose on proportionalism as a remote principle within Natural Law along the lines of the double effect principle. Candidates who used this idea clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of this modern addition to the theory.

- (b) Some candidates read the question as referring specifically to weaknesses within Natural Law's response to abortion and so gave very directed, but limited responses on this one specific area. Other candidates failed to read the word 'serious' in the question and simply wrote about general strengths and weaknesses.

There was, however, some good discussion as to the extent to which Natural Law relied on religion as well as the extent it could be seen as rigid and inflexible.

The majority of candidates showed a clear structure to their responses and were attempting to present two sides of the argument with a conclusion. Higher level responses were able to blend the two views together as they wrote their response, rather than a paragraph of strengths, followed by one on weaknesses and then a conclusion.

The best responses were those which focused directly on the question, producing very tight arguments, with clear development and explanation.

- 2 (a) This was not such a popular question, and most responses showed that candidates were confident on Bentham and Mill, using their Utilitarianism as the main focus of their answers, but responses suggested far less familiarity with the work of Peter Singer. Many candidates did not know Peter Singer's Preference Utilitarianism at all and simply wrote a paragraph about it, often guessing what he meant.

The concept of preferences was interpreted in a variety of ways and understanding of preference as impartial spectator - or all equality of all preferencing entities - were rare.

There were some excellent answers, however, which focused directly on Singer and his arguments. Candidates explained clearly the three levels of sentience and preference proposed by him and the implications of this for ethics. Many discussed how he has lived his life by his own principles and also the controversy that surrounds his ideas. There was some very good practical application to issues such as euthanasia.

However, it was clear from many responses that candidates did not know or understand the ideas of Singer.

- 2 (b) As many candidates had a somewhat limited understanding of Preference Utilitarianism itself, there were obvious difficulties when it came to making an assessment as to the extent to which it could be claimed to be the best form of Utilitarianism.

The majority of responses consisted of a run through of the strengths and weaknesses of Bentham and Mill, often at great length and in detail, with a final paragraph to cover Preference. Analysis was often implicit with no reasoned conclusion reached.

Those candidates who understood Singer's views were able to make some very good responses to the question, often drawing on the controversy surrounding Singer's extension of sentience to animals and demanding that their preferences be taken into account. There was, however, very little mention of the practical problems with taking larger numbers of preferences into account, especially in subjects such as war.

- 3 (a) This was not a very popular question. Most candidates knew what pacifism is, but many failed to score highly as they only focused on one half of the question (i.e. *ethical and religious pacifism*).

Where the question was answered well candidates were able to discuss different degrees of secular pacifism and give examples of the proponents and use within specific situations. Good answers referred to the distinction between absolute, contingent and preferential pacifism. There was mention of Bertrand Russell to illustrate the points being made. A number of candidates used ethical theories such as Kant and Utilitarianism to explore, with varying degrees of success, how these might support ethical pacifism.

As far as religious pacifism was concerned there was good use of biblical teachings which were discussed rather than just stated. There was also wide use of the example of the Quakers as pacifists as well as mention of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Bonhoeffer

Some candidates were able to tie in Just War theory to contingent pacifism, demonstrating that peace was the preferred state, but that sometimes war was unavoidable and necessary in order to maintain a wider sense of peace and justice. Good reference was made to modern wars to illustrate this.

However, weaker responses simply gave very general answers around pacifism and not using violence in any situation.

Most answers approached the question from the view point of Christianity, but there were some good answers which used Buddhism as a religious focus.

- 3 (b)** Generally, candidates were better able to respond to this question than part a), with some candidates writing more in their response to this part of the question than they had to the first part.

Just War theory was used to good effect and better responses compared the arguments for and against war with euthanasia, murder or abortion. Much use was made of the Iraq war and Afghanistan, with some candidates referring to the situation in Libya, and concluding that killing in war was more justifiable if the war itself was just.

However, weaker candidates wrote at great length about the rights and wrongs of killing in warfare, but wrote less about other types of killing. Some answers missed this part of the question completely and simply focused on the ethics of killing in war.

- 4 (a)** This was a very popular question and one which was completed with varying degrees of success. Some answers had long descriptions of the Categorical Imperative and a brief reference to the Hypothetical Imperative at the beginning or the end of their answer.

Most candidates had a good understanding of the Categorical Imperative and were able to discuss the three formulations in a greater or lesser amount of detail. There were good discussions of duty, universalisation, ends, not means, and good will.

Most candidates understood the Hypothetical Imperative and gave examples. There was also general understanding that Kant did not consider the Hypothetical Imperative to be moral.

Some managed to tie in other aspects such as the Summum Bonnum which can only be achieved through using the Categorical Imperative.

Better answers contrasted each aspect of the Categorical Imperative with the Hypothetical Imperative, using examples to illustrate their points. Some candidates had an impressive command of the technical language in Kantian ethics.

- 4 (b)** In general, candidates seemed to have been well prepared for this question. Many were able to apply successfully the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative to embryo research and there was much discussion over whether Kant would have considered the embryo to be human life or not – leading some candidates to discuss the importance of being able to reason.

Some higher level answers were able to discuss the effects of allowing embryo research on society, much along the same lines as Kant would argue against animal cruelty, as it leads to a less tolerant and less humane society.

There were also some good use of contradictions of the will and nature by some candidates when discussing the universalisation of embryo research.

Weaker responses missed the point of the question and concentrated on what Kant would have said about embryo research rather than whether his ethics were helpful. Some candidates focused on IVF or saviour siblings rather than embryo research, but there were fewer candidates making this mistake than in the past.

Most candidates seemed to conclude that a Kantian approach is not best suited to the emotive issue of embryo research.

G573 Jewish Scriptures

General Comments

The vast majority of candidates attempted both parts of the two questions chosen but a few centres need to make sure that their candidates understand the AO1 and AO2 criteria. The four questions were of equal parity and accessible, achieving the intended differentiation.

Rubric infringements were rare and most candidates managed to complete the paper within the ninety minute time limit. The main weakness was a tendency to regurgitate lesson notes without due regard to engaging with the wording of the questions. Many responses relied on story telling and general knowledge. It remains disappointing that candidates do not make much reference to wider historical and literary critical scholarship and, in a few cases, it seemed that candidates have not even read the set texts.

There were, however, some excellent responses which showed depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding, quoted the set texts appropriately, made reference to issues of date, authorship, purpose and historicity when relevant and were a pleasure to read. It was obvious that such candidates had enjoyed their studies.

No question presented any significant problems and the most popular was Question 1, from the covenant section, whilst the least popular was Question 3 about Elijah.

Comments on Individual Questions:

- 1 (a) Responses needed to address the differences between the two covenants but some candidates just explained what was in the covenants G-d made with Abraham and with Moses and left the examiner to discern the differences. It cannot be reiterated enough that candidates need to answer the question set in order to access the higher levels.
- (b) There were some excellent responses from those who knew the set texts and a wide variety of different but equally valid approaches to the discussion.
- 2 (a) This question elicited much story-telling about Jonah but some offerings read like summaries of teachers' notes rather than echoing familiarity with the text. There were some excellent scripts, however, which went beyond sailors, storms and big fish, to explain the kikayon incident and the religious theme of universalism.
- (b) There were some interesting discussions about the relevance or irrelevance of dates, authorship and historicity, as well as some exploration of 'value' in the context not only of the book of Jonah, but regarding the multifarious purposes of the different types of literature found in the Jewish Scriptures.
- 3 (a) This relatively new topic was the least popular question, though it was often handled extremely well by those, who not only knew all the set chapters, but also had some understanding of the historical background after the division of the kingdom into Israel and Judah. For such candidates, it was clear that they had engaged with the main characters and situations in the text. Unfortunately, some candidates confused Elijah with either Jonah or Job, leading to somewhat muddled responses.

- (b)** Discussions need to be based on sound evidence so mistaken identity hampered a few of the responses. There were, however, some excellent responses which usually gave a definition of the varied roles of a prophet, then applied this to the Elijah stories. A few pointed out that Elijah is not a canonical prophet in that, though we have stories about him, we have no book attributed to any actual named prophets till the next century; so our evidence cannot be certain. Some saw the appointing of Elisha as a sign that G-d might not have seen Elijah as a 'perfect' prophet, but often they countered that with other things they had gleaned about Elijah, e.g. spare cups, heavenly chariots and links with end-of-age prophecies.
- 4 (a)** Responses were good when they addressed the actual question, with evidence of competent usage of the set texts. Some of these offered convincing psychological reasons why Job was not comforted by the views of 'his so-called friends who did not try to empathise'. The most frequent weaknesses seemed to be that candidates either knew that Job had rejected the traditional views, but did not know what he actually said, or they attributed the traditional arguments or quotations to the wrong contender.
- (b)** It was clear from the discussions that some candidates had been fascinated by their explorations of the purposes of the writer of Job and by issues such as suffering. A few candidates defended the 'comforters' on the grounds that sometimes the reasons they gave were the true causes of suffering. Some candidates had examined the structure of the book, which aided their responses. Such answers made a good case that the writer assumed that the traditional story of the patience of Job was known by the readers, (or audience), and the poetic rebuttal that forms the centre of the work was to challenge the traditional theodicy expressed by 'the comforters'.

G574 New Testament

General Comments

Overall there was a good performance across the ability range, and questions allowed the majority of candidates to exhibit their knowledge and understanding effectively. Responses to part (a) of questions generally showed diligence in preparation and an intelligent selection of material. Many candidates were comfortable with the topic they chose. The candidates who spent an appropriate amount of time on part (b) of questions produced high quality responses. When candidates view this part of the question with the same application and seriousness as part a) questions, and respond with challenging answers, they improve their overall performance.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) Most candidates appeared well prepared for this question and engaged enthusiastically with the topic. Many candidates provided an intelligent and coherent summary of the complicated synoptic solutions and were knowledgeable about the key arguments for Markan priority. Candidates approached the answer in a variety of ways, which were all equally credited. When candidates combined a summary of some of the relevant source criticism with explanation of the issues of the content, context and style of the gospel, they produced some outstanding answers.
- (b) This question differentiated between candidates who understood and could evaluate the relative importance of historical fact to faith and those who could not. There were some very good answers. Other candidates might have improved their performance by showing a better understanding of the term 'historical accuracy' as a context for the gospel.
- 2 (a) Many answers showed an excellent understanding of the symbolism of the 'Triumphal Entry' and its relevance to the life of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels. Candidates also showed an awareness of Old Testament links and explained them. Candidates were rewarded for their depth of understanding and many gave a thoughtful exposition of the entry in Jerusalem, showing a perception of the many layers of meaning which have been attributed to it and its possible consequences. Some candidates made a good attempt at explaining the event but might have improved their performance by more accurate knowledge of the text.
- (b) This question differentiated well in favour of candidates who responded to the challenge of considering what evidence there might be that Jesus' actions were proof that he considered himself to be the Messiah. It was clear that these candidates had taken time to read and understand the question and formulate their answer.
- 3 (a) Responses to this question were mostly general, outlining all the resurrection appearances in Luke. The specific text required of Jesus' appearance to all the disciples was included in the answer along with the empty tomb and the Road to Emmaus. The answer required less than the whole of Luke Chapter 24 and those who concentrated on Jesus' appearance to all the disciples, as specified, tended to have more success.

- (b)** This question was relatively well answered and, for some candidates, their performance on part (a) of the question would have been improved by including some of the physical details of Jesus' resurrection appearance to the disciples which they used as evidence in a very good answer to part (b). This indicated that their knowledge and understanding of the text required for part (a) was better than they had previously demonstrated.
- 4 (a)** Some excellent, well informed answers showed a good understanding of Judaism in first century Palestine. There was good use of sources (such as Josephus), modern scholars and examples from the gospels to illustrate answers, as well as appropriate use of technical terms such as 'synergism'. On the whole, candidates were well prepared on this topic showing engagement with the material. Candidates who attempted to draw comparisons between the two groups (i.e. Sadducees and Pharisees) rather than just providing a separate description of each, tended to achieve the higher levels of marks.
- (b)** An understanding of the term 'political stability' was key to achieving good marks for this question. The best answers assessed the astuteness of the Sadducees in relation to others and the limitations imposed by Roman occupation. Some candidates could have improved their marks by providing reasons and evidence for their views.

G575 Developments in Christian Theology

General Comments

There were many excellent answers. On the whole, those who wrote good clear English and set out their answers using paragraphs, scored better than those who wrote a lot but did not organise their ideas. It should be noted in this paper that not all part (b) questions refer narrowly to the question posed on part (a) and that candidates are encouraged to use different parts of the specification in their answers.

For example 1(b) was not necessarily about Augustine but about human nature in general (good responses, for example, tended to discuss Sartre and Kant); and 3(b) refers to 'theology' in general not just liberation theology. Candidates are therefore encouraged to use their knowledge, from one part of this unit, to answer a question in the other part.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) This question was more popular than question 2, and was tackled well by most candidates. Most candidates were able to outline Augustine's teaching, in particular the nature of the will after the Fall and the effects of concupiscence on the will/soul and body. Most candidates were able to discuss the distinction between the deliberate and obedient functions of the soul in men and women. The best responses looked at the relationship between soul and body before and after the Fall, and were able to relate Augustine's ideas to neo-Platonism, Manichaeism and St Paul.

Weaker responses tended to give a vague commentary on Genesis 1 or concentrated too much on women.

- (b) This question produced a wide range of responses. Some candidates took an ethical approach and used Natural Law to good effect, and many looked at different theories about human nature; others considered how desire has an effect on our actions. Some very good answers used Augustine and drew out his ideas on akrasia and contrasted to it other interpretations of akrasia which were more positive about human nature. Some discussed Freud and Sartre and considered whether the term 'human nature' was a meaningful term.

Weaker answers tended to reiterate Augustine's teaching on sin and the Fall and were little more than a repetition of part a).

- 2 (a) There was a wide variety of answers to this question. Some candidates approached this question solely through the four causes, better answers included these, but put them in their Aristotelian context and went on to examine Aquinas' teaching of creation ex nihilo and God's place in or of time. Most were able to talk about how Aquinas identified God as both the final and efficient cause of matter and many chose to discuss Aquinas' Five Ways (cosmological argument); more successful answers related the Five Ways to God's relationship with matter and not just as 'proof' of his existence.

Other candidates chose to talk about God's relationship with matter through the intermediary of angels, although weaker answers concentrated on angels at the expense of other ideas. The best answers looked at God's continuing relationship with matter over time through primary and secondary causes.

(b) This question proved quite challenging to many candidates. Most answers were based on the idea that God can relate to matter as he wants, as he is both omnipotent, and has demonstrated his ability to get involved with his creation through the Incarnation and miracles. Others took the Incarnation as evidence that God has to work through other created things, and linked this with his work through intermediaries such as angels. Better candidates latched onto the word 'directly' and discussed primary and secondary causes in relation to contemporary science.

3 (a) This was the more popular question for the second half of the paper. Many candidates had a good understanding of the three mediations. Responses were differentiated by their ability to describe the mediations in detail and in the accurate use of technical language (first and second act praxis; types of sin). Good answers used Marx and explained his key role in the socio-analytic mediation. Surprisingly, few candidates mentioned specific biblical texts in the hermeneutical mediation (notably the Exodus motif and Luke 4) and just spoke of the process of 'judging'. Good responses also tended to relate the mediations to their role and function in the Base Communities.

(b) Most candidates interpreted 'theology' to mean liberation theology and wrote solely on the change (or lack of it) which liberation theology had brought about. Better responses differentiated between various types of theology – for instance, academic versus practical, and some discussed the Roman Catholic criticisms of liberation theology, arguing that politics/action and theology have an uneasy relationship.

The best answers were able to consider the theology of the classical thinkers such as Aquinas and Calvin and compare it with the variety of different contextual theologies emerging today. Some recognised the question as a re-wording of Marx from his Theses on Feuerbach and were able to reflect on the question from a Marxist perspective.

4 (a) This was the least popular question on the paper, and proved difficult for some of the candidates who chose it. Very few candidates knew that development was referring to aid and interpreted the question as the historical development of liberation theology over time.

Candidates felt on safer ground with reversal and there were some good responses which used Marx, the mediations and social justice biblical passages to discuss this. Many candidates' grasp of Marx was vague and incomplete.

However very few candidates were able to deal effectively with both development and reversal in the same answer.

(b) This question was well tackled considering its difficulty. Many candidates chose to explain why liberation theologians thought it was good to show bias to the poor given their situation. Others chose to say that theology should not favour one group above another and referred to the arguments of Cardinal Ratzinger as evidence of that view. Conclusions varied: some argued that a preferential treatment for the poor was inconsistent with an all-loving God, whilst others argued that if God (and we) remain neutral then wickedness prevails. Weaker responses struggled to discuss a range of views.

G576 Buddhism

General Comments

There was a full range of achievement on this paper. There was evidence, however, of an increasing number of candidates failing to read the question and adapting their material appropriately.

Many candidates wrote about all three refuges in question 1 or all four noble truths in question 4. They also missed key words such as 'importance' in questions 1 and 4 or 'used' in question 3. This meant that candidates who had a good knowledge of Buddhism were not using it appropriately and did not secure high marks for their answers. Centres may wish to remind candidates that they are assessed on their ability to answer the question asked not on their knowledge of Buddhism as a whole.

In conjunction with this, poor grammar marred some answers. Candidates who obviously had extensive knowledge of Buddhism at times formulated their arguments poorly. Occasionally their clumsy expression led to them to make seemingly contradictory statements, which did not form part of the discussion, or lead to a considered conclusion.

The best responses were articulate and clearly showed an engagement with the material at a personal level. At times, reading candidates' answers, as they thought their way through the issues presented, was a real pleasure, particularly in some of the best part (b) responses.

In general candidates had been well prepared for the examination in terms of their knowledge, but a focus on examination technique might benefit a number of centres.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) Poorer responses tended to explore all three refuges, and often explored the Buddha and Sangha in more depth than the dhamma. They often included AO2 material which would be more suited to part b).

Many mid-range answers were able to explain what the dhamma was, and made a reference to its importance in helping Buddhists seek enlightenment, before focusing on specific teachings (often the four noble truths or the eightfold path).

Better responses focused on the dhamma as a refuge. They explored the eternal dhamma and the teachings of Siddhatha Gautama. They were able to explain, at times using specific examples, how they could be turned to for advice, support or guidance.

- (b) Weaker responses often repeated material from part a), though often with more success here.

Most candidates were able to construct an argument supporting one of the three refuges as 'the most important', and providing a valid reason for their claim.

The best candidates were able to keep their arguments more tightly focused on the reasons why the dhamma was or was not the most important refuge, linking their points back to the question explicitly.

- 2 (a)** A few weaker answers concentrated on the five precepts, rather than the five khandas, in their answers. Weaker responses also seemed to be characterised by mentioning all three marks of existence rather than focusing on anatta.

In the mid-range, candidates often wrote more on anatta than the five khandas or vice versa, without linking the two aspects effectively. There was also a tendency to outline the chariot analogy from King Milinda's Questions with only a tenuous link to the five khandas.

The best candidates demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the five khandas. They were able to explore each in detail, and then use these to show why the Buddha denied the existence of a Self and taught anatta instead.

- (b)** Some candidates felt the need to explain anatta again, which delayed them addressing the question. Some made simplistic statements arguing that rebirth required a self, and therefore rebirth and anatta were contradictory.

There were some very well argued responses exploring the difference between rebirth, reincarnation and rebecoming. These often supported the Buddhist view that rebirth (unlike reincarnation) did not entail a permanent essence, and thus was not contradictory to the teaching of anatta. Reference to the teaching of dependent origination often supported these answers, as did reference to the concept of anicca and the idea that 'we' are constantly changing anyway.

- 3 (a)** A small number of candidates mistook the traditional accounts of the life of the Buddha to refer to the historical origins of the Buddha, and misdirected their answers. Where appropriate material was included it was credited.

It was common for weaker responses to be simply narrative answers, with little or no reference to how the accounts might be used by Buddhists. Often these narratives went on for 4 or 5 pages, with perhaps a line or two at the end saying the accounts were used for guidance or as an example to Buddhists.

In the mid-range, candidates tended to talk about how parts of the life of the Buddha were interpreted rather than how they were used. Often this showed an implicit understanding of the ways in which the accounts could be used, and thus they were credited appropriately. It was pleasing to note that in this range more students were attempting to link back to the question after each section, rather than long descriptions with only a final paragraph linked to the question.

The best answers talked about how the accounts were used more explicitly. They were often equally long, and still had a tendency to describe part of the account and then demonstrate its use. There were, however, several very good answers which used little or no narrative of the accounts themselves and simply explored the ways in which they might be used by Buddhists. They tended to focus on their use as teaching methods for children and the laity, as an example for the laity and the sangha, as a refuge, and as a meditation focus for a particular aspect of Buddhist practice.

- (b)** Some weaker candidates struggled with the locution 'not a good man' and this appeared to lead them into a discussion on which parts of Buddhism might be seen as negative by non-Buddhists.

Most candidates, however, were able to provide solid evidence to support a claim that the Buddha was a good man referring to his practices or teachings. They often explored the idea that he gave up everything to help others avoid suffering.

The best responses explored the aspects of the Buddha's life which might be considered negatively with facility, providing appropriate defences for these aspects of his life. The most common defence was that these aspects of his life had occurred before he became enlightened and when he was thus 'a human like us', and made mistakes like we did.

- 4 (a)** Many weaker responses tended to explore all four noble truths with little or no extra emphasis on the eightfold path than the other three truths. This was often coupled with a listing of the eightfold path, rather than an exploration of it. A surprising number of candidates believed that right speech was part of the wisdom section of the path rather than the action section.

Candidates who linked back to the question, after exploring a section of the path, tended to address the question better than those who went through the path and then added a final paragraph referring to the question.

The best responses were able to explore the importance of the path well. They often made links to other Buddhist concepts showing how the path supported a Buddhist's understanding of a concept, or how the path allowed a Buddhist to put into practice a Buddhist teaching.

- (b)** This was perhaps the best addressed question on the paper. Most candidates were able to construct arguments for and against the statement before reaching a supported conclusion.

The best responses explicitly addressed the 'to what extent' aspect of the question, critically evaluating the strength of the various arguments in support of this claim.

G577 Hinduism

General Comments

There was a full range of achievement on this paper. There was evidence, however, of an increasing number of candidates failing to read the question and adapting their material appropriately. As a result, many responses this year were not as good as in previous sessions.

It was apparent that in many cases candidates had an extensive understanding of Hinduism, but were not using this to address the questions explicitly. This was particularly apparent in Question 1 where candidates often explored the system of varnashramadharma in great depth, but made very little reference to its importance.

Candidates also missed key words such as 'importance' in questions 1 and 4. This meant that candidates who had a good knowledge of Hinduism did not use it appropriately and hence did not secure high marks for their answers. Centres may wish to remind candidates that they are assessed on their ability to answer the question provided not on their knowledge of Hinduism as a whole.

The best responses were articulate and clearly showed an engagement with the material at a personal level. It was a real pleasure to read some candidates' work as they thought their way through the issues – particularly in some of the best part b) responses.

In general, candidates had been well prepared for the examination in terms of their knowledge but a focus on examination technique might benefit a number of centres.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) This was a very popular question. A significant minority of candidates were not addressing the importance of varnashramadharma and their responses often became too descriptive.

Candidates tended to refer to Gandhi without linking this back to the question.

Some candidates evaluated the importance rather than explained it. Where this incorporated relevant material it was credited.

Where candidates did make reference to the importance of the caste system, for example, as a way of 'working out of karma', this was often stated without being developed.

Few candidates referred to *rita* or the need to maintain order in society.

The best answers did explore why varnashramadharma was important, for example, in determining religious and family obligations.

- (b) There were lots of generalised statements in response to this question, for example, that society had changed. These tended to be repeated with little elaboration, as though repetition would strengthen the argument.

Better responses tended to give examples demonstrating how changes in society made implementing the varnashramadharma system difficult, for example public transport, the changing nature of jobs, and the difficulty on following a sannyasin lifestyle in Western societies.

Very few candidates queried whether parts of the system worked or analysed how the system could survive the problems it faced.

- 2 (a)** Many candidates used the words soul and Self interchangeably. Few explored the Hindu concept of a Self in detail or showed awareness of the differences between the Hindu concept of Self and the Western concept of a soul.

Many candidates explored the concept of rebirth in much more detail than the atman, and did not make relevant links between the two to ensure this approach worked. The explanation of the atman was often limited to two or three lines.

Quite a few candidates wasted time exploring the relationship between the two concepts, or explaining how the atman could escape (outlining the yogas in depth). These often felt like 'prepared' answers, with candidates not adjusting their material appropriately to address the specific question.

Some candidates used the teachings of Ramanuja and Sankara to address the question. In some cases this led to a generic Ramanuja versus Sankara response which did not get to grips with the question asked. In other cases, the responses focused very tightly on their views of atman and rebirth, and this led to very effective responses.

- (b)** This elicited the best responses of all the (b) sections in the paper. There was a variety of well argued responses, some of which were unexpected but entirely valid.

Some candidates approached the question on a scientific level, arguing that science could not support claims of rebirth, and thus, such claims made no sense. This was often the least well-argued response, with statements rather than arguments being presented.

Other candidates argued that rebirth was important due to its links with karma, as a necessary and important Hindu support for other Hindu concepts.

Other candidates took a practical approach exploring how the teaching of rebirth was necessary in order to provide society with a system of reward and punishment. This meant that individual behaviour could be controlled for the benefit of society as a whole, by delaying benefits to the individual to a later date.

- 3 (a)** Some candidates evaluated this question rather than explained it. The answers generally included some relevant material which was credited as appropriate.

Weaker responses tended to describe all the gods, and then say Hinduism was not monotheistic.

Mid-range answers tended to explore the concept of Brahman and explain that all the other gods were simply aspects of Brahman, so Hinduism was monotheistic.

The best responses tended to take one of two approaches. Some explored the concept of Brahman, and the relationship of the deities to Brahman in different schools in detail. Some candidates, however, picked up on the word sometimes in the question. They then explored where Hinduism could or could not be considered

to be monotheistic – often with explicit references to the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita.

Some candidates used the teachings of Ramanuja and Sankara to address the question. In some cases this led to a generic Ramanuja versus Sankara response which did not get to grips with the question asked. In other cases the responses focused very tightly on their views of Brahman, and this led to very effective responses.

- (b)** Weaker responses tended to state that by looking at the avatars we could clearly see this was the case.

Better responses tended to explore the idea that the appearances of the murtis were deceptive, as they were all aspects of the one God.

The best responses considered whether different Hindus might worship many, one or no God before reaching their conclusion.

- 4 (a)** This was the least popular question. In general it was better answered than some of the other questions. Most candidates who attempted the question did make a clear attempt to explain the importance of Lakshmi, rather than simply describing her attributes.

Some candidates made clear and effective references to artha, and the duty of the householder to secure artha when referring to Lakshmi's importance. More usual references were to her role in Divali celebrations and her importance to business people.

- (b)** There was a range of good arguments used to counter the claim. Lakshmi's relationship to the mother goddess was cited as evidence that any goddess is important. Her importance as the shakti power of Vishnus was used proficiently by some candidates.

Some candidates made effective contrasts with the male power to develop their arguments, whilst others contrasted her with other goddesses before reaching a conclusion.

G578 Islam

General Comments

Many scripts were a pleasure to read, but there were others where the quality suggested that the candidates were poorly prepared for an examination at GCE level. The four questions were of equal parity and differentiated well. The least popular question was Question 3. The other questions were virtually equally popular but there was a fair amount of evidence that candidates who performed less well tended to choose the questions on salah and the mosque.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) There was a tendency to tell the Prophet's life rather than concentrate on the reasons for the migration to Madinah, but those who focused on the question often provided very competent explanations drawing on their knowledge and understanding of the political, social and religious situation in pre-Islamic Arabia.
- (b) Some discussions concentrated on the importance of the migration without any hint of comparison with other events. Those who did tackle the question of comparative importance often settled for the revelation of the Qur'an on the Night of Power as the most significant, but granted that without the flight to Madinah, the revelation would not have survived. Some conceded, however, that the will of Allah would have found another way to continue to protect it.
- 2 (a) Weaker candidates clearly did not understand the word 'theological'. However, often by accident, these touched on matters which were clearly theological, in the specific or general sense, and thus gained some credit. There were some excellent responses full of Quranic references and material from assorted hadith. The night journey featured in most responses. Some candidates also thought to include reference to devotional mystical states of Sufi Muslims.
- (b) There were some thoughtful responses which kept the wording of the question in mind. However, there were far too many responses which seemed to be pre-prepared and were general commentaries on the Five Pillars.
- Some distinguished between prayer as a feature in each of the pillars and the overarching theological significance of salah in Islam which they had written about in part (a). Some responses recognised the source of the stimulus and wrote that Abu Hanifa is quoted as saying, 'Salah is a significant aspect in a Muslim's life, however not all the five pillars are about Salah'.
- 3 (a) This is a relatively new topic in the specification. Only a few candidates chose to answer the question, limiting the feedback available. However, the full spectrum of ability seemed to be represented. Only one candidate misunderstood the term, 'kalam'.
- (b) There were some interesting discussions, often hinging on the importance and sufficiency of faith, rather than 'proofs'. Some candidates made a case that one argument for the existence of Allah was not really sufficient and there were other arguments besides the first cause, which they proceeded to present, which tended to miss the thrust of the question.

- 4 (a)** Many candidates began by explaining that Muslims can worship anywhere. Then they addressed the importance of mosques in Islam. Inevitably, there were descriptions of the mosque with every detail identified as 'important', but there were some very good responses which included why particular features are essential in terms of the Ummah and the life of a Muslim community.
- (b)** To what extent all people are regarded as equal in Islam was approached in a variety of acceptable ways. Weaker discussions tended to concentrate on gender. Some started with the principles of the first Ummah in Madinah, whilst others began with the theological principles which lead to belief in the equality of humans, and practices like the Hajj which reinforce this. A few responses, however, seemed to suggest that all Muslims were equal but others (non Muslims) were not.

G579 Judaism

General Comments

Most candidates seemed to cope well with the paper and there were very few who did not attempt both parts of their chosen questions. In general, the same points made in previous reports are valid, such as the need to focus specifically on the question asked. Candidates should also appreciate that in part (b) questions they are expected to engage in analysis rather than description. All questions were attempted with Questions 2 and 4 proving the most popular. There were no rubric infringements.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) Answers were generally disappointing. Most candidates demonstrated little knowledge of the major Babylonian academies and the scholars associated with them. Many focused on the content of the Babylonian Talmud rather than its origins. Some confused the work of the tannaim with that of the amoraim.

(b) In their evaluation, nearly all candidates argued that the Law-codes of the Written Torah are so brief that they cannot be understood without the interpretation of the Talmud. Some argued that the ordinances of the Talmud continue to have the same authority for Orthodox Jews today, as they did in the past. Others argued that although the Talmud is more important for Jewish life today as a whole, it is of secondary importance with the Torah.
- 2 (a) This was the most popular question and there were some excellent responses. Most candidates had good knowledge of the religious obligation that men and women have under Jewish law in relation to public worship. Some distinguished the role of men and women in Orthodox and Progressive practice. Some included good discussion of the role of parents in teaching their children the Jewish faith.

(b) Those who agreed with the statement in the question frequently argued that women have no obvious role in synagogue services and are seated away from the men. Those who disagreed, generally argued that the local synagogue leadership do encourage women to attend synagogue; it is just that men and women fulfil different roles in Judaism, and the traditional role of women is enough.
- 3 (a) Responses were generally good. Most candidates chose to explain Purim; however, Hanukah, Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Yom Hashoah were also selected. A sizeable minority of candidates were unable to distinguish the Rabbinical festivals from other Jewish festivals, and wrote about the Sabbath, one of the Pilgrim Festivals, or Yom Kippur, and thus received little credit.

(b) The majority of candidates disagreed with the statement in the question. Most argued that the Rabbinical festivals serve many purposes, and Jews cannot say that one purpose is more important than another. Some argued that the main purpose of Hanukah is for Jews to thank G-d for being able to practise the religion of their forefathers.

- 4 (a)** A popular question which was generally well done. Many candidates began by outlining what they perceived as the four essential characteristics of G-d: G-d as supranatural, personal, good and holy; they then used their analysis of these attributes to develop discussion. Most argued that ethical monotheism is important for Jews today in order that they understand what G-d requires of them, and live their lives accordingly.
- (b)** Those who agreed with the statement in the question often argued that acts of kindness help the individual to become a better person, as well as contributing to social harmony. Others argued that belief in one G-d is the core concept in Judaism, and necessarily involves Jews in acts of kindness, since all acts towards others are acts toward G-d.

G581 Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

This session there were many good scripts – however, some candidates failed to do justice to their abilities through not reading the question as set. Good candidates establish relevance by making it clear to the reader why a particular point has been made.

Some essays read simply as lists as if learned by rote from PowerPoint notes or lists of bullet points made in class. Better responses demonstrated some reflection on issues rather than simply learning them. The best responses demonstrated thoughtful consideration of points as they developed their answers. In doing so, they were able to construct effective arguments. Weaker responses tended simply to outline theories, with a few generalised assertions in the final paragraph.

Some candidates handicapped themselves by poor use of English; muddled expression too often points to, and creates, muddled thought.

A particular problem for many was inadequate grasp of the grammar of philosophy, with terms such as 'prove' (used as a synonym for 'argue'), 'refute' (used to mean 'deny'), a priori (often mistakenly used for 'innate'), a posteriori, 'analytic' and 'metaphysical' commonly misunderstood. This is an examination in philosophy, and understanding the conventions of the subject is as significant as understanding correct notation in mathematics.

It seems clear that some candidates are still struggling to engage with a deeper level of debate due to a lack of focus from the outset of their essay writing. The belief that all essays need to be laden with AO1 content seems to prevail, at the cost of considered development of analysis and debate emerging from issues identified through knowledge and understanding. Candidates who were able to approach whichever questions they chose with a more holistic view, were appropriately rewarded as they demonstrated a higher and wider level of understanding.

Some candidates penalised themselves by writing illegibly. Examiners can reward only what they are able to read.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 This was a popular question, though unfortunately a large number of candidates approached it from a general perspective on religious language. There were some pedestrian and unfocused responses based on what appeared at times to be pre-prepared answers. Those who addressed the question specifically were appropriately rewarded.

Most recognised the relevance of verification theory to the question, though significant numbers of candidates struggled with accurate understanding of the verification principle. A number of candidates surprisingly associated *via negativa* with the Vienna Circle, and many incorrectly thought Wittgenstein and Popper were members of the Circle. Some also thought, erroneously, that verification theory required that a proposition must be true. Whether a proposition was true was, for the Circle, a matter for science, not for philosophy – the philosopher's job was simply to determine whether it was meaningful.

Many candidates failed to note the asymmetry of eschatological verification, assuming that post mortem we would know whether there was a God or not. A significant minority of candidates assumed that falsification meant that a sentence was true until proven false.

This is incorrect. Many of the answers used falsification as an alternative approach to the question of meaningfulness, which was credited appropriately.

It was refreshing to note that increasing numbers of candidates were aware that falsification is the demarcation between scientific and non-scientific, not between the meaningful and the meaningless. Many, however, still would benefit from reading the University debate: rather fewer would then assert that Mitchell argues that faith pays no attention to disconfirming instances. A number of candidates seemed keen to settle on what they saw as the mid-way point by concluding that Wittgenstein offers the best approach to the issue of religious language, but detailed knowledge and understanding of Wittgenstein was often absent.

- 2 This question was popular and often very well done by candidates who recognised the range of views on the topic. A minority of candidates wrote pre-prepared afterlife essays, which gained little credit. John Smith once again went off on his postmortem travels to various corners of the globe, though it was odd that so many candidates considered Hick's thought experiment to be a defence of dualism.

Instead of assessing the coherence of the soul as distinct from the body, a significant number of candidates chose to move through different the thinkers without establishing any meaningful evaluation. There was a great deal of depth of understanding of the variety of philosophical approaches but this AO1 was not always developed into meaningful assessment, leaving a good number of answers with an AO1 'top heavy' feel.

Candidates would have been better served assessing their chosen thinker's idea around the notion of 'identity' or 'the problem of interactionism' – instead they moved in an unfocused manner which appeared to be 'a brief history of the soul'. Better responses were able to critically assess whether the concept of the soul was coherent in the works of Plato, Aristotle and Descartes by engaging with the views of these thinkers, though only a few were able to suggest that Aristotle's view of the soul could still be seen as 'distinct' even though he wouldn't consider it as surviving death. Plato was dealt with in a great deal of detail with good accuracy in the main, with Descartes less so. However, it was refreshing to see how many candidates accurately understood the views of Geach and Anscombe. A significant number of candidates, however, mistakenly identified Gilbert Ryle as either a dualist or a materialist, despite his emphatic denials of both positions.

- 3 This attracted many very thoughtful responses. Most candidates concentrated on issues of foreknowledge, with good use of arguments from Calvin, Boethius and Swinburne, and there were some very valuable discussions of the distinction between an eternal and an everlasting God. There were some interesting arguments about the problem of evil.

Some candidates considered wider issues of omniscience, including God's relationship to human experience and temporality. A small minority misunderstood the meaning of 'omniscience' or wrote general problem of evil essays.

The nature of the different philosophical views of God inside or outside space and time meant that candidates were able to provide a solid foundation for high level analysis of the different distinction and the problems arising in the form of free will, predestination and God's ability to 'know' the future. Weaker responses were unable to draw out the 'problems' for believers, focusing instead on different views of omniscience and only stumbling upon problems by chance rather than design. Many candidates were able to elucidate Boethius' view on God's foreknowledge with clarity as well as providing some critical insight as to whether God's knowledge being contingent on human free will is a problem for some religious believers and philosophers. However, a significant number of candidates, whilst able to explain Boethius well, were unable to criticise his views and contrast his approach with other models of God (e.g. Swinburne). Some candidates were

content to take a 'best fit' approach in their conclusions, ignoring those other aspects of the God of classical theism that fall by the wayside when this is done.

The more traditional wholly Thomistic approach was also dealt with well, with the key philosophical problems for this view on omniscience highlighted. Weaker answers once again became trapped by the 'problem of evil' without focus on the omniscience of God and the ramifications that followed. Excellent responses tended to employ the 'process' view and suggest that God's omniscience is limited, with Schleiermacher's friend analogy being put to good use.

- 4 This was the least popular question but produced some very good responses from candidates who concentrated on visions (as demanded by the question) rather than religious experience in general. Some candidates used this as an opportunity to write a pre-prepared response on Hume on miracles or James on experience, without mentioning visions at all. On the other hand, some had very precise and detailed knowledge of a variety of scientific arguments.

Many candidates, however, spoke of visions briefly as a form of miracle, and then proceeded to discuss the issues surrounding miraculous intervention. Some excellent responses drew on a range of evidence, discussing physiological, psychological and sociological responses to visions. It was pleasing to see some scholarly restraint from a number of candidates in not spending too long outlining the views of, for example, Freud and Marx.

Swinburne and Otto featured regularly, and were overused by many. The discussions around these philosophers were often unfocused and lacked direction as candidates failed to select the relevant material for their responses. Some uncritical presentation of Freud was ever present, poorly dealt with and unchallenged. There was a lack of critical analysis of Freud in the sense that even though his methods were both scientifically and psychologically questionable, candidates were prepared to accept his findings on prima facie values.

Karl Marx made some brief cameo appearances with little or no relevance to the question in the explanation given. However, these classic errors were vastly outshone by some good assessment of alternative approaches to the origins of visions. The notion of delusions and drug induced hallucinations was dealt with well with some good assessment as to whether one can ever know if the vision in question was objective or simply subjective. JL Mackie's observations on Swinburne's principles of testimony and credulity were used to good effect as candidates challenged the view (echoed by Hume) that people may unintentionally mislead or exaggerate their accounts of visions or religious experience. Mention of the different types of visions was present in most answers with appropriate examples, sometimes using Augustinian classifications of corporeal, intellectual and imaginative visions.

G582 Religious Ethics

General Comments

This paper enabled candidates to achieve the full range of marks, with Question 2 being the most popular and Question 4 the least frequently answered. Candidate performance varied between those who were obviously very well prepared for the examination, and aware of the demands of the questions, and those who were not so well prepared and whose writing lacked the skills of evaluation.

In general, however, analysis was far more fluent than in previous sessions and on the whole responses were more coherent.

Very few candidates seemed to suffer from timing issues. Some had shorter second answers but, in general, candidates coped well with the questions in the time allotted.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 This was a popular question with some very good and excellent responses.

Some candidates showed a most impressive range of knowledge and understanding regarding metaethics. Clear analysis was also apparent. Such candidates were able to present and assess Ayer's approach to emotivism, giving its background in the Vienna Circle, and the challenges it presented to naturalism. They were also able to counter this approach by highlighting the strengths of intuitionism and prescriptivism. It was pleasing to see how many candidates provided insightful comment into the views of Stevenson and Pritchard and also the debt owed by Ayer to Hume for his basic approach.

Weaker responses often just listed the different approaches, providing implicit evaluation only. Some even answered the question as if it was 'ethical statements have no meaning' and few seemed to appreciate that Ayer believed that ethical statements do hold a type of meaning; it was largely felt that 'no more than expressions of emotion' meant meaningless.

Some candidates seemed a little less sure of the approach taken by naturalism and references to the likes of Bradley were not common. Also, some responses seemed to suggest confusion as to the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism.

Some candidates introduced the conscience, but usually failed to relate it to the question. Occasionally, candidates made some very interesting links between ethical statements and the origin of conscience, usually using this to argue against the statement.

This question demanded clarity of knowledge and expression, and although it was challenging, on the whole candidates tackled it well.

2 This was the most popular question and there was a variety of responses. Almost all candidates made the link between the title and the free will and determinism debate, though some candidates did focus their answers on conscience, with some success.

Some candidates gave very good and excellent responses which assessed the way in which moral responsibility for evil actions could be equated with the approaches suggested by Hard Determinism and Libertarianism. Many answers, however, were rather formulaic and candidates should be encouraged to read more widely around this topic, so that they can provide different and more original insights. Some candidates, for example, made

good use of the Milgram experiment and the nuances of Darrow's argument were explored in some responses, rather than a simple re-telling of the events of the trial. The ideas of Honderich were also used effectively in some responses.

For all the detail candidates were able to employ on Hard Determinism, there was again significantly less development of Libertarianism and Soft Determinism. In a number of cases, these were only outlined briefly by candidates, while others made vague reference to thinkers without development or analysis of their views. However, very good responses recognised that Soft Determinism is not a middle point but a re-defining of free will.

A minority of candidates focused too much on the issue of punishment and forgot to address the issue of responsibility

Theories of conscience and childhood development made a number of appearances – sometimes used effectively, but in other cases not tied to the question at all. However, much good use was made of Freud, Piaget and Fromm. Many of those candidates who focused on the impact of conscience as the 'voice of God' or predestination on our free will, often concluded that these approaches meant that we are not morally responsible. Stronger answers took this further to discuss what it meant for God's culpability for our evil actions, with particularly good answers making use of Boethius to argue the case.

- 3** This was a fairly popular question but candidates generally performed less well here than with other questions.

Some candidates, however, did respond particularly well, showing evidence of wide reading and good understanding. A number of candidates were able to cite the views of Foot, Hursthouse, Slote and MacIntyre in responding to the question. Individual virtues of fidelity, friendship, loyalty, selflessness, compassion etc. were discussed along with the communal implications of extramarital sex in terms of the eudaimonia of society at large.

Other candidates limited their answers by only talking about Aristotle and the Golden Mean, and the vices of excess and deficiency. There seemed to be a general understanding of the distinctive nature of Virtue Ethics, but a lack of awareness of the more modern approaches in the aretaic field were also notable.

The following of virtuous exemplars was an interesting area of discussion with repeated references to Martin Luther King and Gandhi as virtuous examples, suggesting that a little more research would be beneficial.

Weaker responses were perhaps a little too quick to dismiss Virtue Ethics as being of no help before going on to list the approaches taken by Natural Law, Kant and Utilitarianism. Better responses contrasted Virtue Ethics with other ethical theories without letting them dominate the response.

- 4** This was probably the least popular question and was usually answered well.

Good responses showed a sound knowledge of secular approaches with references to Naess, Sessions, Singer, Aldo Leopold and Lovelock. Candidates knew these ideas in depth and were prepared to discuss and argue the concepts put forward by these thinkers at some length. The strengths and weaknesses of deep (dark green) and shallow (light green) ecology were frequently discussed and linked to the insights offered by a religious perspective.

Religious responses were often centred on dominion and stewardship, with some candidates pointing out the tension between these two views. Some candidates were able to cite biblical references other than Genesis to support these views such as Leviticus 25:4 and the 'sabbath rest' for the land. Some candidates also developed their arguments with reference to Rapture theology. There was also mention of St Francis of Assisi and the concept of communion with God through nature.

The real challenge seemed to be effectively relating religious approaches to specific issues, and not simply dismissing them as being unhelpful because society in the UK is secular. Fewer references were made to the religious approaches taken by scholars such as Northcott, White or Fox.

G583 Jewish Scriptures

General Comments

Although the entry was fairly small, the full spectrum of ability was evident. Question 3 was the least popular. The questions were of equal parity and achieved the intended differentiation.

Most candidates managed to complete the paper within the ninety minute time limit. Quite often, differentiation depended on the extent to which candidates addressed the AO2 element in their responses. The main weakness was a tendency to regurgitate lesson notes without due regard to engaging with the wording of the questions. The better responses tended to quote the set texts appropriately and made reference to issues of date, authorship, purpose and historicity when relevant, and were a pleasure to read.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Some candidates not only did not know the visions in Amos (locusts; fire; plumbline; basket of ripe fruits; G-d standing by the altar) but viewed the word 'visions' as some general meaning as to what Amos saw around him, and therefore seemed to write pre-prepared answers on the sins of the people. The word 'essential' caused problems for a few candidates. There were, however, some excellent responses. Some considered the extent to which being a prophet inevitably included both forth-telling and foretelling and discussed how far the impact of the doom-laden visions was intended to be the catalyst for repentance in the situation in which Amos was called to give his message.
- 2 A pleasing number of candidates had considered the dating of the book of Ruth, and some were aware that scholars have suggested that the story was a polemic against the stern ruling of Ezra about separatism and marriage with foreign women. Most candidates knew that Ruth the Moabite was the ancestor of David and therefore of the Messiah. Some candidates argued that even if it was written or edited later than the time of the Judges, the story must have been based on fact transmitted orally or the point being made would not be valid. Other candidates ignored the historical aspect and told the story in considerable detail which, for some, proved this was an ordinary story from the time of the Judges and, for others, proved that every detail was, in fact, extraordinary which is why the Book of Ruth is read at Shavuot.
- 3 This was the least popular question but was well done by most of the candidates who chose to tackle it. Isaiah 40-43 and Isaiah 53 are the chapters about the Servant in the specification. Some made reference to Deutero-Isaiah from their AS studies. Responses often included quotations from the set passages and references to the views of scholars. Candidates tended to make introductory outlines of Servant references and then to engage with the question by focusing either on the theme of Messianic Hope, cross-referencing with Micah's view of the ethical kingdom, or on the concept of vicarious suffering and the identity of the Servant. Most knew that the servant might be interpreted as various particular individuals or as a reference to the Jewish people at the time of the Exile. Discussions sometimes considered the interpretation of the texts from several points of view.
- 4 This question was very popular in some centres and, if the candidates knew the set texts, they often wrote well. Those who had simply memorised their class notes were at a disadvantage. Some credit was given for references to other set texts which had elements of reward and punishment. Jeremiah 31, Jonah and Job (from the AS specification) tended to be included in some responses. Ruth and Amos sometimes featured also. The actual

texts are Isaiah 53, Jeremiah 7, Ezekiel 18, Daniel 12, Psalm 1, and 2, Maccabees 7. The best responses tended to be those which demonstrated familiarity with some of these chapters in addressing the question. The specification is open to all faiths or none, so there were many different, but equally valid, approaches to the discussion of the extent to which the texts apply only to the Jewish nation.

G584 New Testament

General Comments

The questions appropriately challenged the candidates to use their knowledge and understanding in a discursive way and to debate the key issues on each topic. Many candidates wrote excellent responses and tackled the debates with enthusiasm. Candidates should be encouraged to address the questions in this way, with succinct arguments and analysis. A number of candidates who showed extensive knowledge and understanding and produced good answers could have gained a higher level of marks with greater critical insight, showing engagement with the question. Some satisfactory attempts to answer the questions produced the makings of a good answer which would have been improved by accurate knowledge of the text and understanding of different views.

Across the ability range, it is apparent that candidates who pay careful attention to the correct spelling of technical terms and legibility also maintain a better focus on the question and are more successful.

Comments on Individual Questions.

- 1 The majority of candidates had a good knowledge of the healing miracles in Mark and they were able to make some comment and analysis on their significance, both within the gospel narrative and in the life of Jesus. The quality of the commentary was varied; but there were some excellent discursive arguments challenging both the traditional interpretation of text and the views of scholars. Some of the best answers made an attempt to distinguish between the theology of Mark and the teaching of the historical Jesus. Candidates should be aware that it is preferable to display knowledge and understanding of the miracle/text in a succinct way, and not necessarily in great detail in order to spend the necessary amount of time on argument and analysis. In analysing the views of scholars it is also important to attribute the correct view to each scholar.
- 2 Most candidates who answered this question approached it in a variety of ways, all equally valid. Some candidates produced excellent responses by examining the criteria established by scholars for analysing the historicity of the gospels and addressing the view that Jesus, as presented in the gospels, was a creation of the evangelists. Others used examples from the gospel narratives alone to argue that the presentation of Jesus was less than historical. Some candidates concentrated on a historical overview of scholars' views in their quest to identify the historical Jesus. No route was better than another, but to gain the highest marks candidates should be encouraged to include textual analysis and criticism in their answer. A few candidates concentrated on evaluating which of the titles of Jesus was most accurate. This was not the focus of the question.
- 3 In most responses, candidates concentrated on the parables and miracles in Luke to explain what his theology revealed about salvation. This was a good approach and it produced varying degrees of success. Some candidates did enhance good knowledge and understanding of the gospel text with thoughtful analysis. Some more limited attempts only considered the parables of the Lost. Some of the good essays would have been further enhanced by showing understanding and evaluation of scholarly views on Luke's theology as salvation history.

- 4 Candidates from across the ability range tackled this question with engagement and enthusiasm. There were some exceptional and very good answers, which thoughtfully explored the reasons for the confusion over the Parousia and arrived at interesting and challenging conclusions on the evangelists' attitude towards it. Some candidates tackled the question directly from the beginning and discussed the problems caused by the delay of the Parousia, followed by informed debate on key gospel passages and an assessment of whether the evangelists' attempts to account for the delay in the Parousia either clarified or increased the confusion. Some more limited responses would have been improved with a better understanding of the term Parousia and an awareness that the question was not solely about teachings on the Kingdom of God.

G585 Development in Christian Theology

General Comments

There were many excellent answers to the questions on this paper. It was particularly pleasing to see how many candidates were prepared to think creatively, and connect various parts of the A2 and AS specifications in theologically imaginative ways, as per the synoptic assessment for A2. It was also noted how much independent reading had been done and the mature, reflective and critical thinking which many candidates are giving to the topics way beyond the demands of A level.

All questions were tackled; the least popular was Question 4.

Comments on Individual Questions.

- 1 Many of those who answered this question were able to refer to the Barth-Brunner debate and give good explanations as to why Barth objected to Brunner's 'point of contact' argument. Many were aware that Barth's objections to Brunner were over-stated, and were the result of his anxiety about liberal Protestantism and the rise of Nazism. Some, but not many, were then able to consider why Barth put so much emphasis on revealed theology, notably the doctrines of the Word or Trinity. Very few candidates looked at his teaching on 'the abolition' religion and his doctrine of Creation.

Inventive answers considered Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* and discussed how other theologians have used natural theology when discussing the relationship of religions to one another. Many treated John Hick as a natural theologian and some candidates were able to offer some interesting reflections on Hick and Barth. Others though, were less successful and there was a temptation to become tangential. The same observation could be made of those candidates who chose Karl Rahner as an example of a natural theologian (especially his Neo-Thomism and existentialism).

On the whole, more analysis of whether Barth was right or wrong in his approach would have led to better answers.

- 2 This was a popular question, and many tackled it well by looking closely at the ideas of Feuerbach, Smart and Cupitt. Where this was done accurately candidates generally scored very highly. Many had a good grasp of the distinction between pre-modern, modern and post-modern (although very few questioned whether there is such a thing as 'post-modernism'). Some excellent responses argued that modernism often has an essentialist view of religion which is explained in humanist terms (Feuerbach and Marx) or in some general 'invisible dimension' (Smart) or even transcendent deity (Barth). On the whole good responses showed a better understanding of Feuerbach than they did of Smart – despite the fact that Smart was often referred to. Even quite general answers were able to offer a sound understanding of Feuerbach; almost all candidates concluded that Feuerbach considered that it was inevitable that religion would die out in a modernist age. Unfortunately, only a few candidates knew that Feuerbach was not necessarily critical of religion per se, but that many people tend to read Feuerbach from a Marxist perspective.

Cupitt was used variously to support the modernist and post-modernist position. In either case some justification was needed to explain which viewpoint he supported. Those who had defined their terms, including what is meant by religion, were often able to give

nuanced analysis of modernism by contrasting it with post-modernism (Lyotard's death of the meta-narratives was sometimes referred to in this context).

However, weaker answers ignored or did not know the material suggested in the specification and tended to talk generally about religious practice today, with little reference to what is meant by 'our modernist age'. This produced a generalised approach, with lots of sweeping statements about Darwin and Dawkins and the secularisation of society. Some candidates fell back on quotations about multiculturalism from David Cameron. Some found it hard to mention any theologians at all, whilst others saw 'religion' in the title and answered using material from Barth, Rahner and Hick regardless.

- 3** This was a very popular question and many candidates answered this question well. Most were able to outline the main schools of feminist theology and survey the key thinkers in each school.

The best responses demonstrated that candidates knew a lot about individual feminist theologians, and were able to describe their ideas with well chosen quotations and examples. The best essays were those, which considered the word 'simply' in the essay title and argued that feminist theologians are not looking just for equality, but for spiritual and religious transformation, which reconstructionist feminist theologians in particular have developed. There were some excellent discussions on the relationship of secular feminists (notably de Beauvoir and Woolf) and their impact on reconstructionist theologians – especially the hermeneutics of suspicion employed by Ruether and Fiorenza.

Some argued that radical feminist theology indicates that mainstream Christianity cannot manage simple equality. It was good to see such a variety of radical feminist theologians being mentioned in this context i.e. Daly, Hampson, Sowle Cahill and Pagels.

Weaker answers were often able to outline the main elements of equality feminism but were unable to consider in any depth what other feminist theologians are seeking. Frequently they confused secular theologians and feminists.

- 4** Very few candidates attempted this question. Those who did were able to talk intelligently about what is meant by gender, how it is hard to talk about the Trinity without reference to it and whether this is a good or bad thing. The best focused on differing views of religious language, the differing feminist schools notably Ruether (*Sexism and God-Talk*) and the re-imagining of the Trinity inspired by the writings of Julian of Norwich. There were several excellent answers which referred to and discussed with considerable maturity, the arguments of Janet Martin Soskice. Good answers considered the relationship of language, religious consciousness and the nature of God as expressed in Trinitarian ontology.

Weaker responses were generally on the topic, but with very little understanding of what the Trinity is, let alone feminist theology.

G586 Buddhism

General Comments

This paper differentiated well.

There were some very 'busy' answers this year. Candidates often included a list of material which was not relevant to the question, and thus hindered, rather than helped their overall mark. Candidates should be reminded of the need to select information appropriately, and encouraged to recognise that an apposite short response might be better than an unfocused long one.

There was also a tendency for some candidates to apply a generic concept to all Buddhist schools, and then to try and fit their answers around this (for example 'the aim of all Buddhists is to reach enlightenment'). Whilst in some cases this approach is not wrong, it can make responses rather contrived and lacking genuine exploration of ideas which are characteristic of more thoughtful responses.

It was clear in many cases that candidates had been prepared well for the examination, and they were often able to refer to appropriate Buddhist thinkers and scholars of Buddhism.

The best responses showed a genuine interest in the subject and a personal engagement with the material. It was a pleasure to read such answers as they grappled their way through the issues raised and engaged critically with the thoughts of others.

There were more candidates than usual this year whose handwriting made it very difficult to read their scripts. Centres are reminded of the need to assess this factor and arrange scribes where appropriate.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Most candidates had a good general understanding of Zen, but were often unclear on the specific differences between Soto and Rinzai Zen. In some cases they attributed practices to the wrong traditions in their answers.

Many candidates used either upaya or sunyata to argue that the differences were not important as they were simply a skilful means to encourage practice, or ultimately unimportant. Candidates who took this approach with upaya generally constructed a solid argument. Those who did so with sunyata were not always so successful. The better responses still discussed the 'conventional' understanding of the differences before arguing that they did not matter in the grand scheme of things. Weaker answers, however, tended to state that it did not matter as a means of avoiding any discussion of the differences, which weakened their approach.

Some candidates clearly had an extensive knowledge of the Chinese origins of Zen. In rare cases this was used to address the question effectively. Too many candidates, however, described the origins in too much detail without relating it to the question, leaving them little time to address the real focus of the essay.

Centres might wish to consider covering a variety of koans with their candidates – the 'sound of one hand clapping' featured almost exclusively, but they did not consider the 'original face' idea.

- 2 In general candidates had a much better knowledge of the Heart Sutra and its teachings than in previous sessions (although a minority did claim that the Heart Sutra contained the Parable of the Burning House).

Weaker candidates tended to struggle with the construction of the essay. They either launched into a comparison of the Heart Sutra and the Lotus Sutra, or a comparison of Mahayana teachings with Theravada teachings. Whilst the material from both approaches could have been used effectively to sustain a valid argument, if handled correctly, this was not the case in these weaker answers. Weaker answers would often have been improved by explaining the teachings of the Heart Sutra, and then simply to say how these teachings link to Mahayana concepts. When candidates tried to go beyond the question they often confused themselves, lost focus, and gained fewer marks.

Some of the very best responses focused directly on the question and offered a thorough exploration of the teachings with clear links to the Mahayana concepts which they supported or developed.

There were also good responses which explored whether the concepts in the Heart Sutra were more or less representative of the Mahayana traditions than those in the Lotus Sutra. Done well, with clear focus on how well they linked to Mahayana concepts such as tathgatagarbha, the trikaya doctrine, and the bodhisattva path, led to some very effective answers.

The best answers sometimes explored the differences between Mahayana traditions, and considered whether the question was flawed in assuming that 'The Mahayana Tradition' was unified enough for any one scripture to represent it. They then considered how well the Heart Sutra represented different Mahayana traditions such as Zen or Pure Land.

- 3 Candidates tended, on the whole, to perform less well on this question. Some candidates did not know all five precepts, which should not be the case for A2 studies. Many candidates tended to divert their answers into areas with which they felt more comfortable, at expense of actually answering the question set. Some added the further five precepts for bhikkhus or the vinaya rules, and explored the ethics of the monastic sangha. Some made a link showing that the five precepts were about gaining good kamma and then wrote extensively about kamma and rebirth, but without linking this back to the question. Others made a link to the right action part of the eightfold path, and then proceeded to outline the rest of the eightfold path in too much detail. As with the previous question, used well, these areas could have been fruitful areas of exploration, but this was rarely the case.

Weaker responses also tended to provide little discussion in relation to AO2. They often made a simplistic statement – for example the Buddha wanted all five otherwise he would not have given five; they then repeated this point continuously .

Better responses explored each of the five precepts in detail, showing how they led to similar/different outcomes depending on the view they were taking. They then used these points to frame an argument that they did have the same aim (often ahimsa, getting good kamma or leading to enlightenment), or that they had different aims (often focused on different points from the eightfold path).

- 4 A surprising number of candidates who attempted this question clearly had no knowledge of the Sukhavati scriptures. Whilst candidates would not be expected to have studied these scriptures in the same level of detail as the specified texts, some knowledge of their existence and main content would be expected.

Where candidates did not know the Sukhavati scriptures their answers were limited in approach. Some attempted to explore how other Mahayana scriptures were of little

importance to the tradition, with limited success. Most explored the importance of the Pure Land practices with the odd statement thrown in about how scriptures were irrelevant. This approach generally resulted in candidates getting higher AO1 marks than AO2 as the discussion of the question asked was very limited.

The very best answers had a good understanding of the Sukhavati scriptures. Such answers were thus able to argue that they were important for the founding of the school or as a basis for its current practices, though perhaps of less importance for the 'ordinary' Pure Land Buddhist, who tend to focus on practices rather than scripture. Candidates here were often able to exploit the differences in approach between the Pure Land schools in order to develop their argument.

G587 Hinduism

General Comments

There were some excellent scripts this year, and some answers were a genuine pleasure to read. These candidates had clearly been interested in their studies and engaged with the material on a personal level. They showed a good awareness of the wider issues related to their studies, and a critical engagement with the thoughts of others about these issues.

Teachers should be pleased with the way they have prepared and enthused these candidates. They have clearly given them a thorough grounding in the nature of Hinduism as a whole rather than a narrow focus on the specification. A number of candidates had clearly been engaged with books suitable for undergraduates and had been challenged in order to deepen their critical awareness of their studies.

A pleasing number of scripts gained full marks on at least one answer, with some candidates managing to demonstrate these skills in both answers.

Questions 2 and 4 were the most popular, with Question 3 being the least popular.

A few weaker responses had a tendency to 'tell stories' in all four questions, for example the story of Roy's life in Question 1 or the story of Arjuna and Krishna in Question 2, without relating them to the question being posed. This was less common than in previous years, however.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Pleasingly, most candidates did focus on the aims of the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj, thus directly answering the question. In general the candidates' knowledge of the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj was excellent. They had a good awareness of the methods, history, key figures, attitudes to scriptures and murtis, and social ethics as well as their aims. Most candidates were then able to use their knowledge to specifically and very successfully explore the extent to which the two traditions could be said to have the same aims. Many were adept at selecting only those points of knowledge which they could then use to frame their arguments.

Some candidates were unclear about the importance of the Vedas and Upanishads to the two traditions, and confused the attitudes of one with the other.

A few candidates did 'compare and contrast' type answers on the two traditions, and those who did tended to lose the focus on the aims of the two, weakening their answer.

- 2 Most candidates were able to construct an argument supporting the views that either dharma, karma or bhakti was the most important concept in the Bhagavad Gita.

Fewer candidates than in past years 'told the story' without relating it to the questions, and most candidates only gave a brief outline in order to set the scene for the rest of their response.

There were some exceptional answers exploring the scholarly views of Gandhi, Ramanuja, Sankara and other more modern scholars on the Bhagavad Gita. This enabled candidates to discuss the value of different aspects of the text, and some good discussion about how the views of scholars and Hindu thinkers reflected their own preconceptions and values was developed.

- 3** In general this question produced the weakest responses. A significant minority did not know what the purusharthas were and mistook them for the 4 ashramas, the 4 yogas or some combination of these and the purusharthas.

Some candidates also focused too heavily on describing the varnashramadharma system at the expense of addressing the question.

There were some good responses arguing that only certain castes were able to follow all four as a result of the restrictions on other castes or the outcastes.

Some candidates also argued successfully that all four were not possible in the modern era due to changing expectations of family life, or different expectations of cultures beyond India for those living in other countries.

Some candidates also focused successfully on the practical difficulties for those trying to follow the purusharthas, for example poverty making it impossible to meet artha.

- 4** Good responses to this question tended to employ one of three strategies:

- 1) Demonstrating the flaws in monism and then arguing that although Sankara thought he was a monist he could not be because monism did not work successfully.
- 2) Arguing that non-dualism was distinct from both monism and dualism, and Sankara was a non-dualist not a monist.
- 3) Arguing in support of the statement that Sankara was a monist, using Sankara's own views and arguments.

Some candidates used Ramanuja's views effectively to point out flaws in Sankara's thinking, or differences between Ramanuja and Sankara to develop the views that Sankara was a monist.

Weaker responses to this question demonstrated little specific knowledge of Sankara or his thinking. They sometimes showed how Ramanuja had criticised Sankara but did not relate this back to the question.

G588 Islam

General Comments

Questions were of equal parity and differentiated well. A few centres have clearly used appropriate textbooks and resources effectively, which meant that there were some interesting individual responses to the questions that reflected independent study. There were only a few references to the usual 'standard' A level religious studies textbooks but a number of candidates referred to historians, secularists, translators and other Muslim scholars such as Mondher Star, Ahmad Ali Al-Imam and Ibn Warraq. Questions 2 and 3 were marginally the most popular.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Several weaker responses gave the background of pre-Islamic Arabia, told the life and teaching of the Prophet and ignored the articles of belief altogether. There were some excellent responses, however, which usually classified the articles under the topics of Tawhid, Risalah and Akhirah and worked through the beliefs identifying the extent to which each might be considered somewhat derivative or completely new.
- 2 The best responses used the actual text of Surah 4 but, more often, the candidates seemed to be regurgitating classroom notes. Nevertheless, in applying the teaching to Islamic life today, there were many thoughtful and insightful essays, which suggested that the candidates had benefited from their textual studies. Some centres interestingly used the views of feminist scholars such as Fatima Mernissi and Rifat Hassan.
- 3 Many candidates took the opportunity to set the scene by giving detailed explanations of the original split in Islam after the death of Muhammad ﷺ. Several candidates made some sweeping generalisations, but many responses carefully demonstrated scholarly objectivity, trying to avoid stereotypes in analysing the differences in belief and practice between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, and explored the ways in which and the extent to which these differences are significant. Some argued that authority was the key issue but that, ultimately, Muslims had more to unite them than to fragment the Ummah.
- 4 Most candidates concluded that Islam contains only five pillars and that to make Jihad the sixth would be to distort the word of Allah, but did still consider why some/many Muslims might consider that possibility. Most candidates distinguished between the Greater and Lesser Jihad and often referred to current world events. Many candidates considered Jihad (particularly Greater Jihad in everyday life) as underpinning all the five pillars or as the glue that binds them together.

G589 Judaism

General Comments

The standard of response was generally quite good and the paper was successful at differentiating between candidates of varying abilities. Excellent responses were produced by those candidates able to demonstrate and apply in-depth knowledge of the topic. Weaker responses tended to lack focus and often contained significant gaps in content knowledge. It was clear that candidates had been encouraged to debate important issues and a large number offered a personal conclusion to their discussion. All questions were attempted with Questions 1 and 3 proving the most popular. A handful of candidates failed to complete two questions.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Responses were generally good. Nearly all candidates showed good awareness of the centrality and sanctity of the Land of Israel in Jewish life. Many discussed the development of the various types of Zionism and explained Jewish opposition to Zionist philosophy. Some focused on the importance of Jewish integration into Western civilisation. Some discussed the differences between the concept of the Land of Israel and the reality of the present day State of Israel.

In their evaluation, some candidates argued that the role of Jews in being a light to all humankind is best achieved by those who are integrated into modern, secular societies. Others argued that it would sanctify Jewish life to live in Israel. Some argued that it is G-d Himself who will return all Jews to the Land of Israel, and that humanity should not attempt to do this work for Him.

- 2 Answers were generally sound and there were a few outstanding responses. Most candidates were able to cite the Thirteenth Principle of Faith and some made reference to the biblical text, including the books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Job. Many offered explanation of concepts such as Sheol, Eden and Gehinnom, and some candidates discussed Reform's rejection of the notion of bodily resurrection. Nearly all candidates incorporated useful discussion of the interconnected doctrine of the Messiah.

In their evaluation, nearly all candidates agreed that life after death is a Jewish concept, but that it is not the main focus of Judaism, which is that Jews should concentrate upon living this life well. Some argued that, in biblical terms, the promise of Daniel is the answer to the torment of Job, in that there can be a resurrection. Some candidates argued that the concept of hell is at variance with the idea of a benevolent G-d.

- 3 This was the most popular question and there were some excellent responses. Most candidates confined their answers to the post-Holocaust theologians cited in the specification; however, some considered the views of other scholars, notably Wasserman and Maza. A significant number confused the thinking of Fackenheim and Maybaum, and some candidates erroneously supposed that Fackenheim did not consider the Holocaust a unique event. Maybaum was frequently classified as an Orthodox rabbi.

Opinion on the question was evenly divided. Some argued the credibility of Orthodox approaches over Progressive on the assumption that they do not attempt to change the basic foundations of Judaism. Some sided with Rubenstein's approach that the only honest answer to the sufferings of the Holocaust is that the G-d of traditional Jewish faith is dead. Many candidates argued that suffering is ultimately redeemed by G-d, and therefore it is still possible to believe in His power, justice and love.

- 4 Answers were generally quite good. Most candidates discussed the impact on Jewish identity of historical factors such as the Enlightenment, anti-Semitism and the establishment of the present day State of Israel. Some discussed Jewish religious and cultural elements e.g. the observance of the mitzvot, Jewish festivals and the distinctive dress of the Hasidim. Some focused on the Law of Return. Surprisingly, few candidates discussed the distinction between secular and religious Jewish identity. Weaker responses tended to lose sight of the question and often gave no more than an outline summary of the development of various Jewish groups.

Many candidates argued that the Enlightenment has been the major contributing factor in the formation of contemporary Jewish identity. Others argued that the most effective contributions are those factors which express something uniquely Jewish, such as Jewish festivals, culture and food. Some argued the traditional view that only those who have been born of a Jewish mother, or converted by a recognised Orthodox rabbi, qualify as bona fide Jews.

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