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H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/04 Summer 2023 series

Contents

Introduction

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

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

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 4 series overview

It appears that, overall, candidate performance has improved significantly since last year, with a larger proportion getting into the top level for some parts of their responses. This suggests that candidates and centres have worked hard to recover from the impact of Covid. In terms of the coverage of questions all questions were answered. However, Question 1 was probably the least popular overall. Most candidates were able to sustain lengthy discussions on the topics, although the level of relevance of material selected was variable.

Question 3 was the response that candidates seemed to have the greatest trouble answering. For this question there was a much larger proportion of answers discussing the general topic rather than focusing on the specific question.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• were able to sustain lengthy discussions and draw on extensive knowledge of relevant material • included a good range of scholars/scholarly opinions on the issue • questioned and engaged with key words in the statement • had a good range of examples and evidence that they were able to draw on in order to support the arguments being made • had an excellent level of knowledge consistently across all three areas • showed an ability to engage in some really good critical analysis of the issues and were also able to demonstrate an appreciation of the topics that extended beyond the usual classroom discussions.	• demonstrated a lack of sophistication in structuring their arguments. Some of the responses needed greater clarity in the argument as sometimes several different points were discussed in the same paragraph • discussed the general topic area, with little specific knowledge shown • seemed to have significant gaps in their knowledge, either of the issue being discussed or supporting evidence that could be employed • may have only answered two out of the three essays, or only demonstrated in-depth knowledge of one area being examined • were often unable to go past a few of the more basic evaluative arguments.

Question 1*

1* 'The Sufi concept of the 'friendship of God' (wilaya), is un-Islamic.' Discuss.   [40]

AO1: It is evident from the responses that there was clearly a lot of knowledge of Sufism and Sufi practices. A significant proportion of candidates made accurate use of specialist terminology when identifying these practices and discussing methods used to attain 'friendship of God'. An area for improvement is the clarification of what the term 'un-Islamic' means. While this was clearly addressed by many candidates it could have been tackled more effectively. For example, a brief explanation of innovation and shirk as possibly the main areas contributing to the view of something being 'un-Islamic' would have given some candidates greater structure. The term was often glossed over and, in some cases, shirk was the sole issue identified when considering something as un-Islamic

AO2: There were some excellent responses to this question that saw candidates engaging in a really high-level of critical analysis of the issue. For example, a number of responses highlighted and discussed the difference between the aims of 'friendship with God' and the methods used to achieve it. They Argued, in the main, that while a closeness with God is in accordance with Islamic principles some Sufi methods/practices are not. This is an area that would be expected to be discussed at the higher levels of response. The weaker responses were those who argued more generally for Sufi practices and Sufism as a whole being un-Islamic.
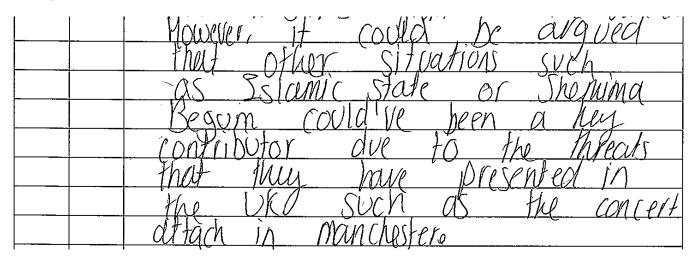
Question 2*

2* Critically assess the claim that 9/11 has had little impact on perceptions of Islam in Europe.   [40]

AO1: The better responses were clearly able to explain what 9/11 was, although some seemed to assume this was unnecessary, and give a range of examples to illustrate the various impacts the event has had on perceptions of Islam in Europe. The most obvious examples were picked up on by most students, primarily focusing on the increase in Islamophobia and various acts of discrimination against Muslims living in European countries, fuelled by negative perceptions of the religion. An interesting approach, demonstrated by some, was to discuss not just the effect on perceptions of non-Muslims in Europe but how perceptions may have led to an increase in self-reflection and/or extremist views within the Muslim community itself. In the weaker responses, references to reports, statistics, or comments by influential Muslims/scholars was lacking. While not necessarily essential it does limit the ability to reach the higher levels for knowledge. Some candidates referred to the impact of perceptions in America – this would only be credit worthy if there was also an explanation of how this impacted on perceptions in Europe.

AO2: Some of the weaker responses for this question focused their discussions more on the general impact on Muslims in Europe, as opposed to an appreciation of the effect 9/11 had on perceptions of Islam. While this may have been relevant candidates needed to unpick this further within the confines of the claim. There were some really interesting arguments put forward. Quite a few candidates included the argument that perceptions weren't changed because they were negative to start with – a variety of evidence and examples were employed to help support this claim.

Exemplar 1

> However, it could be argued that other situations such as Islamic state or Shemima Begum could've been a key contributor due to the threats that they have presented in the UK such as the concert attack in manchester.

A few candidates offered alternative factors that may have had a greater impact on perceptions of Islam in Europe – as can be seen in Exemplar 1. The most effective arguments were from those candidates who were able to incorporate a wide range of evidence both to back up the claim and to argue against it.

Question 3*

3* Evaluate the claim that Islam has made no significant contributions to scientific knowledge. [40]

AO1: There appeared to be a generally good knowledge of science and Islam, however, in many cases this knowledge was about the compatibility of Islam and science. A significant number of candidates answered this as a question – rather than focusing on specific contributions made. Some of the information was credit worthy, however candidates needed to explain how this linked to/affected the question about scientific contributions. The stronger responses were those with explicit references to individual Muslims and their contributions.

AO2: The effectiveness of evaluation and critical analysis for this question generally hinged on which question candidates were answering. Those who had good material and explicit examples for AO1 tended to address the question set, and engaged in some excellent analysis. There were some excellent responses which showed that some candidates had in-depth knowledge and understanding of a variety of contributions made by Muslims to science and scientific thought.

Exemplar 2

3. The idea that religion and science are incompatible and conflict has been prevalent throughout recent history, especially with the rise of scientific enquiry and secularism. Due to this, many people claim that religions have made no contribution at all to scientific knowledge due to the perception that they are dichotomous. However, this is not the case for Islam and it can be argued that Islam has played a significant role in scientific development and knowledge, particularly from the 7th century and the Middle ages.

From it's inception during the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad, science and Islam have been compatible due to Qur'anic evidence which encourages the use of reason and scientific enquiry. One verse, for example, advises that "Indeed, in the creation of the heaven and earth and the alternation of the night and day are signs for those of understanding." Such verses instruct Muslims to enquire about the world they are surrounded by and nature, and that by doing so and investigating its properties, one can learn about God. Therefore, Islam has been grounded in scientific enquiry, providing a base for them to make significant contributions. Its most significant institutions have been scientific instruments, libraries, hospitals, and universities - such as the university in Baghdad, which is the oldest degree-granting university. This shows, therefore, that Islam has long been encouraging scientific development and research, and it is wrong to make the claim that there have been no contributions at all.

Additionally, science and mathematics have been necessary developments in Islamic nations in order to carry out daily life as restricted by the Qur'an's practices and the Hadith. For example, astronomy and geography have developed by Arabic scholars to aid Muslims in finding the correct direction to pray towards; algebra was developed in order to help them pay zakat (money for charity), which is a five pillar of Islam (meaning it is a necessity and obligation - fard'.) Islamic influence is also prevalent in the Western, English

writing of numbers, which is in Arabic. Therefore, all of this evidence shows that Islam has made numerous significant contributions to scientific knowledge.

Barack Obama explained that Islamic scholars 'paved the way' for the Renaissance and another scholar argued that the 'cradle of science' was 'Spain, not Italy', referring to the Muslim occupation of spain during the Middle Ages, which led to the thriving of science and different communities (that under 'La convivencia'.) This shows, therefore, that Islam was the catalyst to the scientific rebirth of Europe and this is evident in the fact that many Islamic scholars were responsible for the translation and compilation of Greek works (for example, Ibn Rushd greatly promoted these actions and was influenced by Aristotelean principles.) This for These translations led to the integration into Europe, and hence, the Renaissance. It is in this way that Islam has significantly contributed to scientific knowledge, as their involvement with ancient Greek work and philosophy has been the basis to the following scientific discoveries prevalent throughout Renaissance Europe.

On the other hand, one may argue that Islam hasn't made much contribution to scientific knowledge due to the downfall of scientific discovery and enquiry under the influence of Al-Ghazali.

The extract shown in Exemplar 2 achieved a mid-Level 5 for AO1 and top of band 5 for AO2. Although the candidate discusses the compatibility of science and Islam it does this in such a way that it is made relevant to the question, as can be seen in the second paragraph. The candidate also shows some good, explicit knowledge of the fields of science that Islam has contributed to. A greater variety of examples of individual contributions from Muslims in these fields would have raised the level to the top band for AO1.

The candidate engages in some clear analysis and evaluation; however, a greater range of arguments would have improved it. For example, reference to modern contributions would have strengthened the argument in favour of the question and a more nuanced understanding of the long-lasting impact of the 'Golden Age' would also have been useful.

Assessment for learning

This question was not answered as effectively, on the whole, as the others. While some candidates did have knowledge of examples that could be used to illustrate specific contributions made by the Islamic world to science, it was not evident that this was the case for all of them.

Candidates should, at least, be able to make reference to 'The Golden Age' and have knowledge of the areas that Islam has contributed to, e.g. medicine, engineering and astronomy.

While there are no specific modern day examples that candidates are expected to refer to it would be a good idea to have some examples from the 20th and 21st centuries that show Islamic contribution to science. For example, Ahmed Zewail, Hayat Sindi and Farouk Al-Baz have all made significant contributions to science in modern times.

Question 4*

4* To what extent is it true that local cultural norms are the major cause of gender inequality in Islam? **[40]**

AO1: The better responses for this question demonstrated a really clear understanding of what 'local cultural norms' are. This understanding was not evident in all responses. A few candidates took it to only mean the cultural norms from the time of Muhammad (PBUH). While some of this material may have been relevant, and credited, the candidates getting higher marks were those who were able to give current examples of local cultural norms around gender inequality. There were some excellent and wide-ranging discussions, drawing on a breadth of material. There appeared to be a sound understanding , from most candidates, of examples that could be used to argue for Islam itself being the main source. A significant number included some Qur'anic references to illustrate, while others referenced Shari'a law.

AO2: The weaker responses were those who only argued from one side or the other. Most were able to explain why local cultural norms could be considered the major source of gender inequality, but some did not offer an alternative source. These candidates were also the ones who often talked about attitudes generally rather than being able to discuss explicit examples of gender inequality, or equality, as part of their evaluation. Many candidates argued that both local cultural norms and Islam itself contribute to gender inequality with some candidates engaging in some excellent levels of critical analysis, with a more nuanced understanding of the differences between the two. There was, also, a small minority of candidates who argued that capitalist and/or patriarchal systems could possibly be blamed as the major sources of gender inequality in Islam. This is evidence of good synoptic skills and these were likely to be higher attaining candidates.

Exemplar 3

4. In more recent years, there has been a negative view of Islam as a religion, largely due to the sentiment that it is promotes and advocates gender inequality. One of the most significant criticisms of the religion is the restrictions on women, in comparison to their male counterparts, and this idea is far prevalent among western societies. However, it can be strongly argued that any instances and 'evidence' of gender inequality in Islam is largely the result of local cultural norms which have permeated religious practise.

One argument for gender inequality being present in Islam is the ~~pla~~ Qur'anic verses that appear to encourage sexist behaviour. One of the most significant is the 'Sura an Nisa', which supposedly ~~advocate~~ supports the domestic abuse against women. This verse has been so influential among Islamic societies and households that one female Islamic scholar has described it as 'the DNA of the patriarchy'. However, this also means that such sexist interpretations of the Sura an Nisa is actually the result of patriarchal ideals. Feminist scholars have actually deconstructed the verse to mean something else: the Sura an-Nisa instructs men to only use physical action (not necessarily 'violence' or 'abuse') ~~to~~ in defence of violent behaviour of the wife. Additionally, two other actions are instructed before the final measure, which is to 'be patient' and, then 'ignore her' and sleep separately. Only when both solutions fail to work can a husband use minimal force on his wife, as an act of self-defence. It is in this way that the verse may not actually condone sexist behaviour, such as domestic violence, and this shows that evidence of gender ~~inequality~~ inequality is actually the result of local cultural norms. In this case, misogynistic interpretations of Qur'anic verses are created in order to suit the patriarchal authority of the time. Since this is entrusted to Islamic scholars and authorities, as well as the Qur'an being the highest primary authority in Islam, such ideas then permeate the religious believers, creating the misunderstanding of Islam being gender unequal. Therefore, local cultural norms are the major cause of gender inequality in Islam.

The extract shown in Exemplar 3 achieved a mid-Level 6 for AO1 and a high-Level 6 for AO2. The AO1 would have been improved with a brief explanation of what the term 'local cultural norms' means in the first paragraph, although it is evident from the response that the candidate clearly understands the term.

Level 6 was given for AO2 because the candidate engaged in some high-level critical analysis of the issue, as illustrated in the exemplar extract.

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