

GCE

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H572**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H172**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

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

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G571 Philosophy of Religion (AS)

Questions 2 and 4 were the most popular questions this session. It was good to see that there were increasingly fewer rubric errors, although an increasing number of candidates answered both (a) questions first before the two (b) questions. There is no clear evidence that this benefited candidates who did this.

Examiners expressed some concern at the number of candidates who presented similar inaccurate materials, presumably originating from internet sources. It is important that in preparation for the examination, candidates cross-reference material they find with authoritative sources and their teachers. There were lots of attempts at using key philosophical terms (a priori, a posteriori, inductive, deductive, synthetic and analytic), which were not always successful. There seemed to be a formula in the introductions of stating ‘this is a synthetic, a posteriori, inductive argument’ but often this was incorrect or terms were muddled.

In questions 1 and 2, the (a) part prompted a vast range of material – and many candidates wrote more than usual for these questions. It was equally possible to achieve excellent marks on shorter responses – it is a skill that merits credit in this examination to be able to identify appropriately and select material to show understanding.

Across all four questions there was an increase this year in the tendency to try to evaluate or analyse in the (a) part, for which credit cannot be given.

(b) question responses seemed to be weaker than in some previous years. There seemed to be a lack of sophistication in analysis from some; for example, a number of candidates relied on the argument from clarity – that if a scholar’s points are clear or easy to understand then they merit praise. Where (b) questions involved the use of material not directly covered by (a) – and all four questions could have been answered in this way – it seemed that some candidates provided further explanation, rather than demonstrating their AO2 skills. This was clearly seen in question 3b where the issue of guilt was raised in the evaluation and candidates spent an inappropriate amount of their responses describing the work of Freud with little or no critical analysis.

Q1 (a) Explain the belief that god is both lawgiver and judge.

This question was generally answered with competence. A range of Biblical material was used, such as the 10 commandments, Adam and Eve, the smiting of the Amorites, Sodom and Gomorrah, Sheep and Goats, sacrifice of Isaac, Job and various aspects of Jesus’ teaching. Others took a more philosophical approach and talked about the concept of God’s judgement separately to the Bible, with a range of success. There were some candidates who, having seen the (b) question wrote long answers about the problem of evil and others who launched into an analysis of the Euthyphro Dilemma. A number of candidates combined material on the idea of God as a creator, rather than seeing God’s goodness, or, indeed, God as lawgiver and judge as separate units. However, where relevant, this combination produced excellent answers, such as an explanation of the idea that God’s establishment of the universal laws at the moment of creation established the universal moral law.

Where responses were successful, biblical or other relevant information was deployed accurately and implications behind the references for God as lawgiver and judge were explained. Weaker responses tended to be limited to simple narration. A few responses used an Islamic perspective to address the question and this was credited as a valid approach.

There were some GCSE style responses, where weaker answers tried to use any knowledge of God to try and justify him as lawgiver and judge. These responses tried to shoehorn into their answers general creator / attributes / goodness of God material which was not always successful. Some better responses balanced Old Testament concepts of God as lawgiver and judge with the New Testament portrayal, utilising texts such as those found in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. the Golden Rule). Some high level answers also considered synthesising the texts and examining if they revealed a compassionate, forgiving, merciful judge or a harsh, demagogue figure.

(b) ‘God is not good.’ Discuss.

This question was often answered well, even where the (a) part had been basic or satisfactory. The question allowed for a very broad range of answers in responses, from an analysis of the scriptural examples of seeming cruelty or arbitrary actions by God within the Old Testament (Job, sacrifice of Isaac, Israelite battles) to problem of evil discussions. A range of evidence was used to sustain arguments and this was gathered from a range of sources. Those that used biblical texts often contrasted those mentioned above with the creation accounts, the story of Hannah or the Incarnation and life of Jesus to argue that God is good. The implication for God’s goodness in the face of evil and suffering was a popular argument, with citations of the inconsistent triad, Stephen Fry’s YouTube posting about a God who allows children to die from forms of bone cancer, J S Mill’s attack on the attributes of God using nature and Dawkins’ example of the Digger Wasp.

Some answers talked about the Problem of Evil and it was acceptable for the entirety of the answer to take this approach, as long as the analysis was evident, rather than there being a description of the theodicies studied. A number of candidates attempted to use the Euthyphro Dilemma, but not always successfully. It was possible to achieve full marks through a range of different approaches to this question, although a number of candidates did not achieve high-level responses as they produced unsophisticated responses on the problem of evil that often did not reflect the quality of writing in their other questions.

Q2. (a) Explain the teleological argument and Hume’s criticisms of it.

This was a very popular question, which on the whole was addressed with success. The best responses demonstrated an appropriate balance between the two question elements and developed the details with engagement and understanding.

The material on Aquinas’ archer and arrow seemed better than in previous years. Although only one teleological argument would be sufficient here, there were some really good explanations of both Aquinas and Paley (both design qua purpose and qua regularity) and occasionally modern versions such as Tennant’s Anthropic Principle.

An alarming number of answers attributed design qua regularity to Aquinas instead of design qua purpose, juxtaposing his ideas on Natural Law (Ethics), although many continued to explain the archer/arrow analogy as indicating a thinking being directing inanimate objects towards a purpose. This may again highlight the need for candidates to be aware of erroneous sources on the internet, or the urban myth that Aquinas argues for qua regularity and Paley for qua purpose.

A small minority of candidates used most of Aquinas’ Five Ways or conflated the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments and/or Hume’s criticisms of cosmology which received no credit in (a). Where answers were unbalanced, the material on Hume was usually weaker. A common feature of this type of response was a very good explanation of Paley and Aquinas with a paragraph or two on Hume’s builder analogy tagged on the end. Some here also seemed to feel that Hume was a polytheist.

There was a number of errors in chronology, attributing the discovery of photosynthesis to Aquinas, for example. It was unfortunately not unusual to see Mill's criticism attributed to Hume or to see Hume's Epicurean Thesis muddled with Darwin's evolution but others knew that Hume preceded Paley. A few answers are still trying to link the modern 20th century scientific theory of irreducible complexity to the 18th century thinking of Paley. These elements were ignored but received no credit, although generally these responses also included other credit-worthy material. The most successful responses explained how Paley's design qua purpose demonstrated how both the watch and examples such as the eye had specific purposes (to measure time, to see) and then related the idea of purpose to a designer. Weaker responses simply equated the watchmaker with God.

Many responses showed a disproportionate amount of time had been spent on teleology, at the expense of articulating Hume's criticisms. Subsequently, explanations of Hume either ended prematurely or were asserted with little explanation and development. Better answers clearly explained the Epicurean hypothesis in that given infinite time and infinite particles, order would eventually occur and explained how this challenged Paley's design qua regularity.

(b) 'Hume successfully demonstrates that there is no evidence for the existence of God.'
Discuss.

Some candidates simply repeated the material they had used in part (a) without actually considering the extent to which Hume is successful, which led to answers where the evaluation was mainly implicit. Another common mistake has been to read the question as 'Does God exist?' and for some this became a broad discussion on the arguments for/against the existence of God rather than an analysis of the success or otherwise of Hume's arguments. Many asserted that Hume claimed there was no evidence for the existence of God, whilst better responses argued that Hume did not disprove God, only the God of classical theism.

Where candidates answered this well, they often engaged in a discussion of how well anthropic versions of the argument responded to the criticisms of Hume. Many candidates used Darwin's theory of evolution in relation to Hume's criticisms; others used their knowledge of Behe to demonstrate a counter argument to Hume. The problem of evil was looked at by a fair number, who stated that Hume was successful because we have evidence of evolution and evil in the world.

The best responses actually engaged with the question and addressed the extent to which Hume's criticisms of theism in general were successful. Credit was given for analysis of any of Hume's criticisms, spanning both teleological and cosmological arguments. Thus, those that had been less successful on Hume in (a) were able to assimilate more credit in (b). F.R. Tennant and J.S. Mill were popular references when countering or affirming Hume's ideas, though again only where these were analysed explicitly (either in relation to Hume, or to the question title), could the answer earn the top levels of response.

Q3. (a) Explain what Kant believed about the innate moral awareness in human beings.

This was the least popular question. Many candidates struggled to relate their answers to an understanding of innate moral awareness resulting in answers that were unfocused, failing to address the 'innate moral awareness' element and instead writing everything they knew about Kant's views. Subsequently, many answers did not progress beyond Level 3.

Most candidates appeared to understand the meaning of the term 'innate'; however, fewer candidates were able to explain the source or reasons Kant gave for this. Better responses explained that moral awareness does not directly link to God for Kant and managed to link categorical imperatives, summum bonum and ought implies can to moral awareness. The best responses explained and engaged with the emphasis that Kant puts on the role of reason, good

will and autonomous moral agents, making good use of their knowledge from Kantian ethics and often using key terms to good effect. Thus, it is rationality/reason that is innate for Kant, and the objective moral law has its basis in autonomous rational application of the three maxims of the categorical imperative.

Weaker responses erroneously stated that the innate moral awareness was implanted by God so that we could get to heaven or that innate moral awareness equated to conscience; more Newman's approach (though not named) than Kant. A frequent error in scripts stipulated that for Kant it is a God-given morality, rather than recognising God as a postulate of pure practical reason. Analogies of visiting ill grandmothers and shopkeeper's moral imperatives are also quite popular. A frequent mistake was to associate the Summun Bonum with some kind of divine reward that we should strive for as if we should be motivated by a desire to achieve it, clearly countering Kant's deontological theory of morality, although a few answers attempted to point out the apparent contradiction within their understanding.

(b) 'Moral awareness is more about guilt than God.' Discuss.

On the whole, (b) was answered significantly better than (a). Very often, candidates understood that the notion of guilt and Freud are synonymous with one another, although it was surprising that many answers did not recognise the link to Freud in the question. Those who didn't talked about conscience being about guilt. Thus, where answers had conflated Newman's view of conscience with Kant in (a), there was more scope for credit. Many demonstrated a wide knowledge of Freud, and many spent a good deal of time explaining his ideas (AO1) rather than applying them either to guilt, or analysing how guilt formed moral awareness for Freud. Several explained Freud's understanding of the mind as id, ego, super-ego and the Oedipus Complex accurately but this would have been better suited to an (a) part answer. Since the level of analysis was not always very clear, such answers were limited to Level 3.

Those that did analyse showed how the super-ego repressed the lessons learned from society/parents and the desires of the id, which later re-surfaced as guilt, thus appearing as a type of conscience and arguing the psychological origin rather than any links to God. Better responses considered how successful Freud's theory is in establishing guilt as the root of moral awareness and provided some excellent analysis.

Weaker answers simply provided disjointed paragraphs of assertion, often structured as a list of different views e.g. those of Christians, atheists etc. Many used Kant's innate moral awareness postulating God as an opposing argument, though again not explaining how this poses a more effective alternative than Freudian ideas. Some simply reiterated general criticisms of Kant.

Q4. (a) Explain what Aristotle meant by material, efficient, formal and final causes.

This was a very popular question leading to diverse responses. Overall, it was answered very well - candidates knew the Four Causes and could explain how they work, linking them to the Prime Mover, potentiality/actuality and purpose/telos.

The best responses were able to use appropriate examples, for example, the bronze sculpture, to deepen their explanation. The vast majority of candidates competently defined in brief what each cause was and then illustrated their response using an example. A disproportionate amount of time was often spent talking about the theory of the Prime Mover, potentiality and actuality and its relationship to the universe, rather than directed discussion towards the four causes. Although this was credit-worthy to some extent, more was needed to explain the four causes in detail, as many answers were limited by extent. Frequently, answers were seen that crammed the explanation of the Four Causes into one paragraph. Often the difference between reasonable/good and very good answers was the extent to which candidates had linked in other material and made it relevant. Listing biographies of Aristotle could only gain a little credit.

A surprising number of candidates was confused about efficient and formal causes, stating the efficient cause to be the form of the object and the formal to be the way it is made. Some candidates explained the efficient cause as the final cause, and talked about the 'efficiency' of the object and how well it worked.

Unfortunately, some answers erroneously explained formal cause as the design/blueprint of an object rather than the characteristics, shape, structure or form it has, which demonstrated a slightly more limited understanding. Again, candidates need to be aware that not all sources found on the internet are reliable and should be used with care. A few higher-level answers recognised that the Platonic form becomes immanent and innate in Aristotle's formal cause.

Some responses showed confusion about the Prime Mover, arguing that it is an efficient cause or some form of active creator/first cause who brought the universe into existence (possibly confusing Aristotle with Aquinas). Better responses explained the Prime Mover as final cause, attracting all motus (from actuality to potentiality) towards its own perfection, often using the cat and milk example. Although this was not essential for high marks, it did demonstrate a very clear understanding of the role of the final cause. Equally, better responses related the four causes to the movement between potentiality and actuality.

A few answers acknowledged that Aristotle didn't limit his application and discussion of the four causes to physical objects and/or were able to demonstrate that the four causes are not mono-causal in nature. For example, Aristotle was clear that there were many factors that were efficient causes in the final cause of health.

(b) To what extent was Aristotle successful in explaining the world?

This question resulted in some very good responses as candidates discussed the success or otherwise of each of the causes. However, many answers were quite implicit in considering Aristotle's overall success, with weaker responses simply listing arguments for and against. Better responses evaluated the extent to which Aristotle's ideas were successful - comparing them with scientific/empirical method or contrasting them with Plato's rationalism. A notable number defaulted to Plato's ideas, although there were some excellent answers that compared Aristotle's empiricism thinking to Plato's rationalism.

Some interesting responses tried to evaluate the extent to which Aristotle was successful in overcoming Plato's critical evaluation in the role of the senses in gaining accurate knowledge of the world around us. Many responses pointed to the role of Aristotle's Four Causes in informing scientific enquiry, discussing the benefits of a posteriori knowledge.

There was sometimes unsuccessful investigation of the practical application of the four causes, often citing arguments which declare 'it shows us how things in the world work' with unexplored examples. Some explored with moderate success Aristotle's idea of the Prime Mover and the inadequacy of this model when understanding the wider universe and purpose, perhaps comparing the Prime Mover to the immanent God of Christianity.

Good and excellent responses often focused on the idea of purpose/ final cause and were able to provide examples of things which have questionable purpose, for example, mosquitoes and cancer cells; they argued that the final cause is applicable only to objects, or that objects have many purposes; but it is harder to identify the purpose for humans or the universe.

A few answers considered whether purpose was simply a human assumption. This area provided good opportunity for critical analysis.

G572 Religious Ethics (AS)

General Comments:

The overall standard was good with fewer very weak responses. Better responses indicated that candidates planned their time wisely, but some spent too much time writing detailed plans and so did not quite complete the last question they answered.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1a

This was a popular question. Some candidates were able to weave together a well-constructed response linking key points regarding euthanasia alongside key points regarding utilitarian thinking. Stronger candidates were often able to place the Utilitarians they highlighted – Bentham, Mill and Singer – within a general context i.e. referring to their overall secular approach which gives human life extrinsic value. Other candidates were less successful in this area and whilst presenting a good level of knowledge regarding utilitarianism wrote very little about how this applies to euthanasia. Likewise some candidates showed good knowledge regarding euthanasia but were less secure regarding utilitarian thinking. It was pleasing to see that a number of candidates were familiar with useful case studies and used these to good effect in their answers.

Some candidates remain unsure as to what Singer means by ‘preferences’ and their application to the case of rational beings with a biographical concept of past, present and future. Some candidates were also limited by having, for example, revised the criteria of Bentham’s Hedonic Calculus without fully understanding the application of the said criteria. Weaker responses struggled to get beyond. Maximising pleasure and minimising pain, and so tended to conflate all the thinkers saying that they would all agree with a painless death.

Question No.1b

There was a number of good responses to this question with candidates focusing on a variety of ethical approaches to the case of terminally ill patients and helping them to die. There was evidence of wide-ranging knowledge of Natural Law, Kantian Ethics and religious ethics. Some candidates were less successful by giving a general answer as to the rights and wrongs of euthanasia without keeping in mind that the question is specifically about terminally-ill patients. Some candidates contented themselves with presenting a range of assertions, which while well-argued were often lacking in the depth provided by reference to scholars studied.

Good responses focused on the words ‘helping’ (implying that this is voluntary euthanasia) ‘terminally’ (implying that the patient is likely to die anyway), whereas weaker responses simply made statements with little analysis, evaluation or explanation.

Question No. 2a

This question had fewer responses. Those candidates who answered it did so in a variety of ways. Better responses were able to focus on the key term ‘embryo’ and went on to present what ethical theories might argue about ‘the status of the embryo.’ Some candidates were able to offer a range of views. These included those that regard the embryo as a human person with a soul, having intrinsic value, with all the rights of an adult human person, and as having full potentiality which should be realised at birth and beyond. These were successfully juxtaposed

against those views that regard the human embryo as a cluster of cells with extrinsic value only and with the potential to become a human person at birth. Some responses made use of the idea of ensoulment and there was good use of specific thinkers who wrote on the idea of personhood such as Mary-Anne Warren and Peter Singer. Less successful responses regarded the question as being one about the issue of abortion and answered accordingly. Technical terminology was often not apparent and whilst the mark scheme provided latitude for consideration of the status of the zygote, embryo or foetus, centres might want to ensure that candidates are familiar with the basic difference between these three.

Question No. 2b

Most candidates interpreted this question to represent potential life 'in utero' at various stages of pregnancy. There was a number of good responses which focused on issues such as PGD, embryo research and abortion. Candidates were able to contrast the various ethical approaches in an effective manner drawing out, for example, a religious ethical approach which might support the statement as opposed to a utilitarian approach which might question the nature of the potential life and whether the consequences of PGD, embryo research and abortion could be seen as suggesting that in some cases potential life should not be protected. Better responses used such informed insights combined with case studies. Some candidates limited themselves less successfully to a simple discussion of abortion. Some attempted successfully to explore moral differences between potential life and actual life.

Question No. 3a

This was a popular question, which elicited a number of responses that successfully set out the main aims of Kant's ethical theory in a comprehensive and detailed fashion. The mark scheme provided for latitude with regard to how much focus was given to the phrase 'main aims' in the question but again centres might consider reminding candidates of the importance of reading the wording of the question carefully. Better responses were able to present Kant's ethical theory by providing an overview of key features before going into more detail with apt use of technical language, for example highlighting Kant's approach as being a priori synthetic, noting the contradictions in the will. Better responses also demonstrated an ability to apply Kant's ethical theory to specific cases in order to support their explanation. Less successful responses simply presented a brief outline of the formulations of the categorical imperative without reference to good will, duty, maxims and the hypothetical imperative. Centres might wish to advise candidates to avoid using trivial exemplification, as this does not fully illustrate the complexity of Kant's theory. A number of candidates was also unclear as to the Third Formulation of the Kingdom of Ends and centres might benefit from clarifying its meaning.

Question no. 3b

This question elicited responses with a variety of approaches, which were credited accordingly. More successful responses were able to focus throughout on the meaning and implications of the First Formulation of Universalisation and whether it did or did not work in practice. Such discussions were able to question the practical possibility of universalisation against the background of relativism and consequential ethical thinking. However, some responses showed a lack of understanding of universalisation by saying that it obligates everyone to do the same thing, rather than seeing that Kant's point is simply that we should only do things if we were willing for everyone else to do the same. Somewhat less successful responses answered the question in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of absolutist and deontological approaches to ethics.

Question No. 4a

The mark scheme allowed for latitude in how this question was answered with the key term noting that the theory to be explained had to be religious. The vast majority of candidates were able to write appropriate responses with Natural Law as the chosen religious ethical theory. The most successful of such responses were able to provide the context of Natural Law as having roots in Aristotle and as being developed by Aquinas. Such responses then linked Natural Law to the four types of law noted by Aquinas and provided details and exemplification of the theory including reference to the primary precepts, secondary precepts, the doctrine of double effect and interior and exterior acts.

Less successful responses tended to be those which simply listed the Primary Precepts and gave minimal exemplification. A smaller number of candidates opted for another religious ethical theory such as Divine Command Theory or Situation Ethics. These responses tended to be less successful simply because the candidates had very little explanation to give. For example, Divine Command Theory is more than a statement and explanation of the Ten Commandments and Situation Ethics is more than a simple statement followed by exemplification that agape should always be applied in moral situations. However, there were some excellent, accurate and detailed accounts of Situation Ethics that covered its background, Fletcher's aims, the four working principles and the six fundamental principles and linking it to examples of agape in the New Testament as well as soften using pertinent examples.

Some candidates chose to answer the question from the perspective of the ethics of the whole religion studied with varying degrees of success. Better responses provided careful selection of material and suitable exemplification. Less successful responses tended to be vague and general in terms of knowledge and understanding.

Question No. 4b

This question elicited a variety of responses. Many were more successful through defining terms in the question such as morality being dependent on God. Such responses were able to discuss, for example, the religious foundation of Natural Law according to Aquinas, and the question of the dependency of Kant's ethical theory on the postulates of freedom, immortality and God. Some responses were able to juxtapose the issue of theories such as these alongside the secular approach taken by the various forms of utilitarianism. Some candidates were able to link the question to a discussion of the Euthyphro Dilemma whilst others queried whether morality might be dependent on completely secular factors such as parents, authority figures or society at large. Some candidates demonstrated a wider application of their knowledge, including reference to Sigmund Freud and Richard Dawkins as evidence of both alternative sources of morality and the morality of atheists.

G573 Jewish Scriptures (AS)

General Comments:

There were some very good responses to the demands of the paper and the questions differentiated well between candidates, producing the full range of marks. Some responses showed a high level of engagement with the set texts and candidates were able to discuss the primary source material and scholarship fluidly. It was pleasing to see that many candidates were able to engage with the set texts using historical-critical readings, textual analysis and theological debate alongside traditional Jewish understanding.

The best responses addressed the specific question asked, considered all aspects of the question in a relevant way and were supported with careful analysis. The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised. When candidates did not achieve higher marks it was usually because they did not answer the question set and instead provided an answer for a question they had prepared for. Answers that only described the set texts could not be rewarded as highly as those that attempted to engage in critical analysis even if the description of the text was detailed and full.

Most candidates were able to describe and explain the teachings found within the set passages well however, only the best responses engaged with the material in a critical manner. Some candidates produced outstanding and detailed answers showing a high level of ability to deploy relevant information and analyse accurately the question demands. Some candidates were let down by poor exam skills. Some candidates wrote a disproportional amount for the lower marked AO2 question and some seemed unable to identify the question focus or trigger word rather offering a general response.

All questions were attempted with question 1 being the most popular. The questions appear to have provided opportunities for candidates of a wide range of ability to demonstrate their skills. The best answers were those that showed organisation and structure and fully answered the question set. High marked answers demonstrated focused application of knowledge through clear reference to scriptural passages and scholarship; these answers also included a high level of analysis and evaluation.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1 (a)

Satisfactory responses concentrated on describing the differences between the covenants while the better responses engaged in wider historical-critical analysis and were able to cite relevant sections of the two set texts to support their discussion and argument. Some candidates spent considerable time discussing similarities, which was not required by the question and as such was not credit worthy.

It was disappointing that very few candidates were able to engage confidently in discussion of scholarship to support their answer. Whilst it is noted that many candidates were able to write out sections of the set texts, emphasis should be on citing the verse reference or key aspect of the textual section in order to support or challenge discussion. Textual citation with no critical engagement or discussion cannot by itself lead to a higher-level answer. Moreover, lengthy descriptions of types of covenants within the Ancient Near East, although factually correct, were not credit worthy unless the candidate used this information to unpack the question demands.

Question 1 (b)

This was a well-answered question. Many candidates were able to discuss Form Criticism, and archaeological, literary and theological debates in order to construct a well-balanced argument. The better answers were those that were well structured and showed synoptic thinking, critical engagement and an attempt to deconstruct the question demands. Those candidates that unpacked what is meant by 'meaningless' and 'for whom' scored highly. Some answers were let down by a poor style: 'on the one hand...on the other hand..' is better suited to GCSE.

Question 2 (a)

This question resulted in mixed responses by the candidates. Some answers showed a high level of engagement with the set texts and wider scholarship. Some candidates were able to discuss the historical-critical context of the covenants in detail and used this to construct high-level answers. Some answers showed confusion surrounding the Christian interpretation of the Jeremiah text and as a result answers were disorganised and muddled. Many candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the Mosaic covenant and were able to cite and discuss the set text with ease. There were some very pleasing and high scoring answers to this question. Again it is noted that lengthy descriptions of types of covenants within the Ancient Near East, although factually correct, were not credit worthy unless the candidate used this information to unpack the question demands.

Question 2 (b)

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully. Good answers were those that were able to discuss the different settings of the covenants and the different foci and used this knowledge to construct a well-balanced argument. Many answers drew upon Form Criticism and historical-critical arguments to support their analysis. Weaker arguments were those that demonstrated poor argument style or which did not deconstruct the question demands. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to discuss at length 'intention' and 'replace' rather than repeating AO1 knowledge.

Question 3 (a)

Performance varied here. The majority of responses did not focus on the set text of 2 Samuel 7 but rather gave a general response focusing on David as king; such answers did not score highly. Some answers appeared to have no knowledge of the content of 2 Samuel 7 with only a handful of answers making reference to the set text and Nathan, the Ark of the Covenant, the covenant promises and conditions. There were however, some excellent answers which showed a detailed awareness of the text and which engaged at a very high level with the question demands.

Question 3 (b)

Most candidates were able to engage with this question very successfully. Good answers were those that were able to discuss Form Criticism and scholars associated with this type of literary approach with ease and were able to use this knowledge to construct a well-balanced argument. Weaker arguments were those that demonstrated poor argument style or which did not deconstruct the question demands. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to discuss at length 'essential' and 'for whom' and 'understanding' and 'for whom'. Some high-level answers were able to conclude that depending on the reader intention and reading focus that these would be shifting.

Question 4 (a)

This question was answered well by most candidates. Some answers showed a very high level of engagement with the set texts and wider scholarship; such candidates were able to discuss different dating, authorship suggestions and historical-critical contexts of the text. Some answers did not pick up on the question demands of 'why' and 'when' and presented answers focusing on just aspect of the question. Weaker answers were those that just repeated the text of Job and did not engage with the question demands. Many candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of Job and were able to cite and discuss the set text with ease. There were some very pleasing and high scoring answers to this question.

Question 4 (b)

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to discuss at length 'importance' and 'for whom'. Some candidates were able here to make synoptic links to Form Criticism and other ways of reading texts in order to enhance their discussion and argument. There were some pleasing responses to this question.

G574 New Testament (AS)

General Comments:

There were many fine papers and it was pleasing to see a high level of engagement with the set texts and ancient Jewish background, as well as thoughtful attempts to tackle the questions head-on. In general, the main areas of weaknesses were a lack of attention to detail, a poor grasp of the set texts – some struggled to pinpoint the right texts and inaccuracies. For example, the Roman and Jewish trials were frequently confused.

Most responses to a) questions did explain but a few were too list-like. Some candidates did need to think a little more carefully about the organisation of material, for example a chronological approach is often most logical. There were some excellent evaluative b) questions but some candidates need to be sure to revisit the essay title in their conclusion and give a clear, reasoned and focussed response.

Comments on Individual Questions:

1 a) Explain the significant features of common Judaism in first-century Palestine.

Candidates generally approached this question by looking at the key beliefs most Jews hold – monotheism, election, law and covenant and land and temple. The best scripts showed a detailed understanding of each issue and were able to give supporting texts as well as explaining the importance of each belief. Some deepened their explanations by referring to challenges under Roman rules or diversity of belief among the religious parties. Less convincing answers tended to be a little uneven, perhaps focussing exclusively on the temple and law, or providing thin explanations.

Some candidates chose to answer the question via religious parties; provided it did not become too list like and focussed on Jewish belief, this was given full credit.

A few misunderstood common Judaism to refer to common / ordinary / poor Jews.

1 b) 'Most Jews, in first-century Palestine, were not concerned about Temple worship.' Discuss.

This question was answered well. Most candidates approached the question by comparing the Pharisees and Sadducees acceptance of the Temple with the views of the Essenes' rejection of the Jerusalem temple. It was pleasing to see some candidates really debate the question and argue around the word 'concerned', arguing that the Essenes were concerned with the Temple but perhaps the ordinary Jewish peasant was not.

2 a) Explain the significance of the incident in Mark 11 where Jesus' authority is questioned.

This question was not popular and not well done. Candidates struggled to pinpoint the text mentioned in the question. Some wrote at length about Jesus' authority in the trials or about authority in general in Mark 11. A few, however, were able to discuss question of authority and, after putting the conflict in context, went on to explain the importance and irony of the scene.

The Examiners recognised that candidates struggled with the focus of this question and gave credit to discussions of 'authority' in the whole of Mark 11.

2 b) To what extent was Jesus a threat to the Jewish religious leaders?

This was well-answered, although some counted Pilate as a Jewish religious leader. Candidates drew on events such as from the Triumphal Entry and Temple incident to argue that Jesus could have been perceived as a threat. A few just stated that these actions were threatening but most were able to explain. Some had difficulty providing a counter argument but others typically argued that it was the Passover situation that made Jesus seem like a threat or that Jesus was not a threat to the Jewish religious leaders but to the Romans.

Again, firm, clear and reasoned conclusions shone out.

3 a) Explain the way in which Mark presents Jesus as both Son of God and Son of Man.

This was a popular question but there was some confusion about its focus. Some interpreted Son of Man to mean human and Son of God to mean divine and so wrote general essays about Jesus' humanity and divinity, avoiding the Christological titles that were the main focus of the essay title. Those who did choose to look at Son of Man and Son of God struggled to pinpoint the precise place where Jesus used or was given these titles. There was an assumption that Son of Man, Son of God, King of the Jews, Messiah, Lord and Suffering Servant were synonymous. This is not the case.

A number of good candidates worked through the Passion Narrative systematically picking out the four Son of Man sayings and the three Son of God sayings and explained problems of their interpretation and the meaning for Mark and his Passion Narrative. The centurion's confession in the crucifixion was obviously key to this question but not all were able to pinpoint the text or discuss it meaningfully, for example explaining how it is in many respects the climax of the gospel and that Jesus' sonship is revealed through suffering for those with eyes to see.

3 b) 'At the trial before the Jewish Council, Jesus acknowledged that he was the Messiah.' Discuss.

A number of candidates did not appreciate that Messiah and Christ are the same concepts and thus argued Jesus accepted the claim to be Messiah and not the Christ. There was also some confusion between the questions at the Jewish and Roman trials. Those who did argue that Jesus did, at least at first sight, acknowledge that he was the Messiah typically went on to challenge the historical accuracy of the trials with reference to E P Sanders' writings or by highlighting the theology and irony of the scene.

4 a) Explain why issues of authorship and purpose are important when studying Mark's gospel.

This was a popular question too and generally well-done. Most managed to discuss both 'authorship' and 'purpose' and naturally the main part of the essay fell on purpose. The best answers highlighted the difficulty in identifying the authorship of the gospel and looked at Papias' evidence and possibilities of a link between Mark and Peter or Paul. On 'purpose' most looked at the Roman hypothesis and good answers gave examples from the text to support this. Some moved on to look at themes such as Mark and the Jews and eschatology. Very good candidates were distinguished by their grasp of detail and mastery of their set texts.

4 b) 'The Good News is not a history of the life of Jesus.' Discuss.

There was a little confusion about what was meant by 'the Good News'; those who interpreted it as Jesus' message had difficulties but most saw it, rightly, as a way of talking about the gospel. It was good to see candidates drawing from a wide variety of stories to discuss and using scholars such as E.P. Sanders to evaluate the historicity of Mark's account.

G575 Developments in Christian Theology (AS)

General Comments:

There were very few poor answers and as always candidates who performed well showed a personal engagement with the ideas and were able to develop their own interpretation of the ideas often with impressive maturity.

Candidates should be reminded that planning answers pays off and longer answers do not necessarily gain higher marks. They should also be reminded not to repeat material in part b from part a. While it is true that often there may be an overlap, the point of part b is to evaluate and discuss the ideas not to describe them again. Part b evaluation format still causes some candidates problems and they feel the need to respond with from 'on the one hand' to 'on the other hand' every paragraph. Some failed to have a concluding paragraph – this is vital if the AO2 criteria are to be fulfilled.

Centres might wish to refer to the G575 teachers' notes and suggested reading and resources on the OCR website

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

Part a

This very open question produced a variety of responses. There was a tendency for weaker candidates to rely on a general or GCSE knowledge base to write very generally about the person of Jesus and the atonement. Better candidates were able to anchor their arguments in the thought of particular theologians. Many candidates looked successfully at James Cone's presentation of Jesus as the liberator from racism, white ideology and political oppression. Some explained the Jesus of history/Christ of faith distinction and its implications for seeing Jesus as saviour. Many other candidates, equally successfully, looked at Calvin's and/or Augustine's presentation of Jesus as the mediator of grace post-Fall.

Part b

This question was generally well-done but some candidates struggled to give evidence for seeing Jesus as a 'good moral example' although good candidates referred to his teaching through the parables and Sermon on the Mount. Most were able to contrast the claim using evidence from the miracles, the resurrection and Christological claims.

Only the best answers latched on to 'that's all' in the essay title.

Question 2

Part a

Most candidates were able to give a good overview of Calvin's teaching on knowledge of God. The best candidates were able to give a detailed account of his teaching on God the Creator and God the Redeemer in terms of natural and revealed knowledge. Surprisingly quite a few candidates forgot to mention the key moment 'If Adam had remained upright' as the seminal moment that affected the original state of human-God knowledge. Some candidates became side-tracked into general discussions about natural and revealed theology. All candidates might do well to be reminded that Calvin begins by posing the question at the start of the *Institutes* as to what *true* knowledge is.

Part b

Many weaker candidates repeated much of the material from part a) but better candidates saw this as an open-ended question and used their wider appreciation of the syllabus to address the question. Many employed the problem of evil (based on their knowledge from the Philosophy of Religion unit) and the Barth-Brunner debate. Although many candidates understood Brunner's 'point of contact' argument, they overly exaggerated his support of natural theology. Candidates who used Paley's design/teleological argument often did so to good effect, especially those who distinguished between the existence of knowledge of God.

Question 3

Part a

There were some impressive answers to the question of what the underside of history means to different liberation theologians. Weaker candidates just wrote all they knew about liberation theology but better candidates used their knowledge of Marx to investigate liberation theology's concern to reverse church-people/society power structures and develop a new biblical hermeneutic. Many explained how mediations were necessary in developing a praxis, which prioritises the poor as the underside. Some reviewed Friere's conscientisation process and others investigated the operations and organisation of base communities.

Part b

This question produced some good arguments especially from those who defined theology in classical terms with reference to one of the other theologians (notably Aquinas) they had studied in the unit. Some argued that God and the poor were in some way synonymous; very good answers justified this by looking at God of Exodus or via the incarnation and Jesus' parable of the Sheep and Goats. Pleasingly some even argued robustly that theology is not a failed form of sociology.

Question 4

Part a

Some wrote at length about Marx without reference to Liberation Theology, others discussed the relationship in general terms but avoided the essay question's 'explicit use' of Marx. Others, though, showed a fine appreciation of Leonardo Boff, Segundo and Miranda and outlined their theories highlighting where Marx was used and illustrated their answer through their reinterpretation of the Bible and analysis of sin/poverty. However, surprisingly few focussed on the socio-analytic mediation.

Part b

This produced some very good responses. Some argued that given its historical setting in 1960s Latin America Marx, or at least communism, was indeed the necessary catalyst for liberation theology. Some argued that as the first mediation is sociological and not theological then without Marx liberation theology would collapse. Some very good answers discussed whether Marx explicitly is needed or some other social scientific analysis.

Many very good answers argued along Miranda's lines that notions of social justice are central to many parts of the Bible (from Amos to Luke 4) quite independent from Marx and so liberation theology came into existence because the conditions of the time reawakened the call to social change, which is central to the gospel proclamation.

G576 Buddhism (AS)

General Comments:

Candidates seemed to be well prepared for the exam. The level of subject knowledge was very high and candidates can explain the full range of Buddhist concepts and see how they fit together holistically. There is also a greater use of scholarly work and scriptural references than in previous years and this has made a significant difference to the quality of the work.

However, some candidates are still not fully addressing the question and writing responses which cover the general topic. Also, far too many AO2 answers failed to offer a conclusion to the question. The 'ping-pong' approach to argument often failed because there was no *progression* of thought.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1a

Good candidates were able to explain different notions of anicca (gross and momentary) and why the experience of change and impermanence is merely an observation of the natural world. Some related anicca to other concepts such as sunyata and paticca samupadda – although many candidates are not entirely clear what 'emptiness' really means. Many attempted to explain how anicca is related to dukkha. Weaker candidates confused themselves and thought that somehow anicca is dukkha, whereas better candidates were able to explain how anicca could lead to dukkha (of various kinds).

On the whole candidates had more to say about anatta and many related the parable of King Milinda's chariot. Most understood that anatta means 'no self' but many confused this as meaning Buddhism rejects the idea of personhood. Those who understood the concept to mean no essential self or no soul fared better.

Most candidates compared the two concepts well and understood that they shared the idea of change and lack of permanence. Good candidates explained that anicca was the more general doctrine to be applied to all matter whereas anatta specifically applies to sentient beings notably humans.

Question 1b.

There were many good answers especially from those who considered the problem of rebirth and lack of an essential soul. Many discussed the relationship of kamma with the self and how kamma could be said to effect rebirth if the khandas dissipate at death. Some concluded that Buddhism is more essentialist than the anicca/anatta doctrine suggests.

Far too many candidates argued that the doctrine could only make sense for enlightened Buddhists but for all others at the conventional stage anatta would naturally make no sense. Unfortunately in the majority of cases this short-circuited any kind of reasoned argument.

Question 2a

There were many good answers here which not only outlined the five khandas but also explained how each functioned in relation to the others. Many related the story of King Milinda and how the notion of the self is a linguistic device to refer to an emergent but non-essential human property.

However, many missed the key word 'importance' in the essay question. Those who did tackled it fully focused on the problem of egoism and the human tendency to gratify the sense. From there some were able to relate this to samadhi and the practice of dhyana as a means of overcoming ego.

Question 2b

This question was generally well done. Many argued that the Four Noble Truths is the more important concept as it implicitly incorporates the idea of the khandas in its diagnosis of what causes dukkha.

Weak answers often failed to offer a concluding paragraph and were content simply to offer two contrasting views but with little to no analysis.

Question 3a

This question was a less popular question and the quality of answers varied a great deal depending on the way in which candidates approached it. Some explained the general Mahayana idea of the bodhisattva; some discussed the historical origins of the bodhisattva; some compared it to the arahat path.

There were, however, some excellent answers which not only explained accurately each of the paramitas but connected them with the ten bhumis and the role of celestial bodhisattvas (in particular Avalokiteshvara). Most focused on the delay of parinirvana, dana and karuna and the vows taken at the bodhicitta stage.

Some made use of the eightfold path in their responses and this is appropriate to Tibetan ideas of the Bodhisattva but this was not often made clear and some explanations focused too much on the path and these responses seemed to be almost providing a description of the Arhat path.

Question 3b

Most answers compared and contrasted the arahat and bodhisattva path – many pointed out that the Buddha himself was a bodhisattva so the notion was not alien to Theravada Buddhism. Good answers focused on 'everybody' and discussed the relationship between lay and ordained sangha and whether the bodhisattva path is really intended for the lay even in Mahayana Buddhism.

Weak answers were often very descriptive and, by omitting a conclusion, failed to answer the question.

Question 4a

This was a very popular question. Surprisingly, some candidates did not know each of the four sights/signs and invented some new ones. Far too many candidates related the early life of the Buddha from birth to the four signs. Some focused too much on Siddhartha's experience at the ploughing festival and should, perhaps, have reserved this event to answering 4b or just retold the story of the Buddha's life.

Good answers focused on the three kinds of dukkha and how the first three signs prompted Siddhartha to reflect on the nature of change and suffering. Some showed these reflections later formed the basis of his first sermon. Some candidates took each sight and showed in great detail which teachings come from this experience and this was very good.

Very good answers picked up on the fourth sign and suggested that this was decisive moment in the Buddha's life as was the real reason for the 'setting forth' and the foundation of the middle way.

Question 4b

Most answers suggested it was highly unlikely that the Buddha had not encountered suffering from simple experience, of stubbing one's toe to moments of sickness. Many reflected on the fact that his mother had died when he was born.

Good answers suggested that the four signs were moments which crystallised what Siddhartha had experience for a long time and recounted in the tradition of the ploughing festival moment, ie the unease or dissatisfaction of life in the palace.

Excellent answers discussed the symbolic power of the signs and their truth value as teaching aids. Some pointed out that as the miraculous events of Buddha's birth are not usually treated as having actually happened because they are symbols then the same could be said of the four signs.

G578 Islam (AS)

General Comments:

The full range of ability was represented. There were a slightly higher proportion of top-level answers and fewer bottom level responses. The majority of candidates did address the specific questions set, compared to previous years, although this was to varying degrees.

All questions were attempted with question 1 being the most popular. Question 4 appeared to be the least popular of the four. Overall the part b) answers were of a slightly better standard than in previous years, which suggests that candidates have stronger evaluative skills.

Comments on Individual Questions:

1a) Explain how the architecture and design of a mosque have theological meaning. (25)

This was definitely the most popular question. The majority of candidates had a reasonable knowledge of the significant features in mosque architecture and design. The weaker responses stuck with a descriptive account and included little or no points relating to the theological meaning of these features. However, there were some excellent responses, which demonstrated a thorough understanding of the theological significance of all the aspects of the architecture and design of a mosque. It was also noticeable that a higher percentage of candidates addressed the actual question rather than discussing the general topic - which has been a common tendency in the past.

1 b) Assess the view that teaching about the Qur'an is the most important role of the Imam. (10)

This was probably the most successfully answered of all the part b) questions. The majority of candidates were able to discuss at least some alternatives to the teaching of the Qur'an as the most important aspect of the imam's role. The best responses were those that discussed a range of arguments not only for alternative aspects of the imam's role but also for why the Qur'an could be considered the most important part of his role.

2a) Explain the relationship between zakah and obedience to Allah. (25)

This was a reasonably popular question but was not dealt with as well as the other part a) questions. Most candidates were able to show a good knowledge of the purpose of zakah and how it is calculated. However, a large proportion of candidates struggled to successfully explain the relationship between zakah and obedience to Allah. A few candidates almost completely ignored the question preferring to focus on the benefits of zakah instead. There were a few excellent responses. These were the ones that were able to pick up on different aspects of zakah and demonstrate fully how they show obedience to Allah.

2 b) To what extent is zakah the most practical of the Five Pillars? (10)

There were some interesting discussions for this question. Candidates interpreted practical in different ways. Some used it to mean 'easy to do' while others used it to refer to the observable benefits created by the giving of zakah (the physical implications of giving the money). Addressing either or both was equally acceptable as long as the accompanying arguments were valid.

3a) Explain why Muhammad pbuh and his followers migrated from Makkah to al-Madinah. (25)

This was another popular question. The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate a good understanding of chronology of the hijra. The weaker responses went no further than providing a descriptive account of this. The candidate who gained the better marks was able to present a variety of reasons for the hijra. The best responses not only explained why the situation in Makkah pushed Muhammad pbuh and his followers to leave Makkah but were also able to explain the factors pulling them towards al-Madinah.

3 b) ‘Muhammad’s pbuh life inMakkah was less important than his time in al-Madinah.’ Discuss. (10)

Most candidates answered this to, at least, a satisfactory standard. There were a few candidates who only argued for the quote and in doing so were not able to achieve a level 5. However, the majority of responses included points from more than one perspective. There were also a few excellent responses which demonstrated a variety of arguments and who also followed these up with a strong conclusion. A large number of candidates also introduced the idea that his time in both was of equal importance.

4a) Explain the theological ideas in Surah 1 about the relationship between Allah and his people. (25)

The majority of students seemed to have a sound to good understanding of the contents of Surah 1. However, there were a few weaker candidates who had a very superficial knowledge of the Surah and who resorted to discussing material from other surahs too. For these candidates inappropriate selection of material prevented them from gaining above a level 3. There were some excellent responses and these were the ones that showed a comprehensive knowledge of the surah and were also able to suggest a variety of theological ideas referred to/alluded to in the text.

4 b) To what extent is Surah 1 only concerned with religious ideas? (10)

This was the question with which candidates seemed to have the most difficulty. Virtually all of the candidates were able to offer reasons as to why Surah 1 may be considered to be only about religious ideas. However, a significant number of candidates failed to offer any suggestions as to what else the surah may be concerned with. There were a few candidates who did engage fully with the question. These candidates came up with some really innovative ways of arguing that Surah 1 is not only concerned with religious ideas; however, they were definitely in the minority.

G579 Judaism (AS)

General Comments:

There were some very good responses to the demands of the paper and the questions differentiated well between candidates, producing the full range of marks. Some responses showed a high level of engagement with the specification content and candidates were able to discuss primary source material and scholarship fluidly in order to support and develop their argument. It was pleasing to see that many candidates were able to engage with the specification content at a critical level and were able to discuss historicity, textual analysis and theological debate alongside traditional Jewish understanding.

The best responses addressed the specific question asked, considered all aspects of the question in a relevant way and were supported with careful analysis. The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised. When candidates did not achieve higher marks it was usually because they did not answer the question set and instead provided an answer for a question they had prepared for. Some candidates presented a general answer, could not score highly and often were unable to pass L2 due to the general rather than specific nature of their answer.

Some candidates produced outstanding and detailed answers showing a high level of ability to deploy relevant information and analyse accurately the question demands. Some candidates were let down by poor exam skills. Some candidates wrote a disproportional amount for the lower marked AO2 question and some seemed unable to identify the question focus or trigger word rather offering a general response.

All questions were attempted with question 2 and question 4 being the most popular. The questions appear to have provided opportunities for candidates of a wide range of ability to demonstrate their skills. The best answers were those that showed organisation and structure and which fully-answered the question set. High marked answers demonstrated focused application of knowledge through clear reference to specification content and scholarship; these answers also included a high level of analysis and evaluation.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1 (a)

Satisfactory responses concentrated on a discussion of the key aspects of ethical monotheism as demonstrated in the Ten Commandments while the better responses engaged in wider discussion of the historical-social context of the Ten Commandments and how this is linked to the development of ethical monotheism. Some very successful answers also were able to discuss confidently key features of G-d such as G-d's omnipotence. Some candidates spent considerable time discussing similarities and differences between the ethical monotheism of Judaism and pagan monotheism which was not required by the question and as such was not credit worthy. It was disappointing that very few candidates were able to confidently engage in discussion of scholarship or primary source materials to support their answer.

Question 1 (b)

This was a well-answered question. The better answers were those that were well structured and showed synoptic thinking, critical engagement and an attempt to deconstruct the question demands. Those candidates who unpacked what is meant by 'survive' and 'for whom' scored highly. Many candidates were able to place Judaism within a modern UK setting and used this to

suggest how the Ten Commandments have both legal, and moral status, outside of Judaism. Some answers were let down by a poor style: 'on the one hand...on the other hand..' is better suited to GCSE.

Question 2 (a)

Performance varied here. The majority of responses did not focus on the question demands of 'relevance' and '21st century Jews' rather presenting a general overview of kosher and/or kosher food; such answers did not score highly. Many candidates it appeared did not have sufficient awareness of exam skills and whilst giving technically correct information, were not addressing the question. Moreover, candidates should be aware that repeating the question at the end of every paragraph or so does not in itself equate to addressing the question. Candidates may find that constructing essay paragraphs through a point, evidence, explain, link structure may help to address this. There were however, some excellent answers, which showed a detailed awareness of the food laws. The very best answers were those that discussed the food laws and their relevance at a high level and were able to pick out conceptual themes such as identity, remembrance and tradition in order to discuss the question.

Question 2 (b)

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully. Good answers were those that were able to discuss the different viewpoints to this question from within Judaism, and used this knowledge to construct a well-balanced argument. Weaker arguments were those that demonstrated poor argument style or which did not deconstruct the question demands. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to discuss at length 'necessary' and 'observance' rather than repeating AO1 knowledge and used this as an opportunity to demonstrate synoptic thought to other areas of study.

Question 3 (a)

This question was answered well by most candidates. Some answers showed a very high level of engagement; such candidates were able to discuss confidently the role and the importance of the Oral Torah for Jews today. Some answers did not pick up on the question demands of 'importance' and 'Jewish living' and presented answers focusing on just aspect of the question. Weaker answers were those that just repeated basic learning on transmission of the Oral Torah and did not engage with the question demands and/or which appeared to have not progressed beyond GCSE content. However, many candidates demonstrated very good understanding of the nuances of the question and were able to discuss the question fluidly and confidently.

Question 3 (b)

Most candidates were able to engage with this question very successfully. Good answers were those that were able to discuss clear examples of where Jewish Laws are either relevant or not possible/necessary for modern life. The better answers were those that were able to discuss confidently a specific example and set this within both its historical and modern day context. Weaker arguments were those that demonstrated poor argument style or that did not deconstruct the question demands. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to make links to wider discussion of Talmud development.

Question 4 (a)

This question was answered well by most candidates. Some answers showed a very high level of engagement; such candidates were able to discuss confidently different approaches to the practice of the festival, historical basis for the festival and the importance of the festival for Jews today. Some answers did not pick up on the question demands of 'practice' and 'purpose' and presented answers focusing on just one aspect of the question. Weaker answers were those

that just repeated basic learning on Rosh Hashanah and did not engage with the question demands and/or which appeared to have not progressed beyond GCSE content. However, many candidates demonstrated very good understanding of the festival and were able to discuss the question fluidly and confidently. Some candidates showed confusion between the festivals and gave answers on Yom Kippur.

Question 4 (b)

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully and it was a highly-marked question. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able demonstrate a high level of engagement through unpacking what is meant by festivity and what festivity may or may not include and for whom. There were some pleasing responses to this question.

G581 Philosophy of Religion (A2)

General Comments

While the standard this year seemed similar to previous sessions, there were some noticeable trends. Where candidates were less successful, there was a tendency not to address the question set, or else, to try to over-think the question being set and to introduce material that was not directly relevant. For example, in all four questions there were examples of candidates determined to use religious language material to try to construct an argument. The sacred scripture and revelation question, for example, did not really lend itself to a detailed critique of the views of the Vienna Circle. In a related way, AO2 was less successfully approached than AO1, and candidates should bear in mind the absolute necessity of arguing points for and against the question set, not the general topic – at best general topic answers will attain level 3 in the levels of response.

Overall the questions on the paper were accessible and wide-ranging, being reasonably well-balanced across the specification. In particular, Question 3 on the coherence of theories of life after death was an excellent opportunity for candidates to engage with an eclectic mix of theories both from the Western and Eastern traditions. Question 4 was the most popular, with questions 1 and 3 addressed evenly across the board. Question 2 on Sacred Writings was the least popular question. There were a number of concerns about the quality of handwriting – a clear increase on previous years.

Q1 To what extent can it be believed that religious experiences are no more than illusions?

This was a popular question that attracted a range of responses. Some candidates equated miracles with religious experience and therefore were generally unsuccessful. Others showed good knowledge of the topic but did not engage fully with relating miracles with religious experience.

A number of good and excellent responses acknowledged the variety of religious experiences and then used psychology, sociology, and physiology to try and show how they could be seen as illusions. Typically, discussions of Feuerbach, Marx and Freud were popular, alongside the explorations of Richard Swinburne and William James. There were regular references to Persinger and the 'God helmet' in physiological challenges as well as the effects of hallucinogenic drugs.

In sociological aspects, Marx and his opiate of the people were used frequently, with better responses able to elucidate the reasons behind the drug-like control of the state. Freud was often cited as the main proponent of the psychological view, made particularly relevant when neurosis was linked to the need for comfort and a father-figure.

With James' argument, weaker responses simply listed his four criteria (PINT) whereas better answers engaged with James' ideals of pragmatism, empiricism, pluralism as well as the fruits and effects of the experiences, thus engaging with how James would counter the notion of experiences being illusory. Swinburne's Principles of Credulity and Testimony were used frequently to defend religious experiences, and although many could accurately utilise the Principle of Testimony (we should believe what someone tells us, their testimony, unless we know they are untrustworthy), the Principle of Credulity (we ought to believe things are as they seem unless there is evidence to the contrary) was less precise.

A number of answers showed understanding of how the material is conducive to the question title but fell short of explaining the significance of their arguments fully. When exploring William James's argument, for example, mid-range answers identified that experiences are indicative of God or even induced as a means to a divine end, but did not fully explain how these ideas indicate that they are not illusory. It seemed a challenge for most to provide a really strong argument either way - only a few managed this really successfully. Weaker responses sometimes evaluated religious experience through Hume's arguments against miracles, with some, though mainly limited, success.

The most successful responses were able to draw on a wide range of scholarship, for example the views of Flew contrasting with Alston, and were well argued throughout.

Q2. 'Sacred writings are the most effective way for God to reveal himself.' Discuss.

This was a less popular question and generally the question answered least well. Many responses offered generic answers that explored the broader significance of biblical revelation in relation to other forms of revelation. Miracles were a popular selection and point of comparison; however, as stated in the mark-scheme, this was a valid approach, but only in reference to sacred writings.

Those that limited their discussion of sacred writings to one paragraph could not fully address the question. Many better responses made good use of the propositional / non-propositional approaches, although not always in the depth required for the higher levels. Natural theology was explored in several answers. There was an occasional foray into biblical criticism, for example using form and redaction criticism with selected biblical extracts, which was another successful and alternative approach. A number of answers also approached the question from liberal/conservative/literal stand-points and were perhaps more successful in addressing the different interpretations of revelation.

Many candidates mistook this for a religious language question and focused responses on analogy/ symbol/ language game discussions, or even on the verification principle, mostly unsuccessfully.

Some candidates who responded well in demonstrating understanding did not always compare scripture to other types of revelation. The word 'best' in the question requires at least a little in the way of comparison. There was a number of implicit or asserted arguments. Such responses simply did not discuss the efficacy of biblical interpretation in sufficient detail to warrant higher marks.

Most responses focused on evaluating the various stand-points outlined in their AO1 material. A proportion of answers attempted to evaluate scripture from a religious language perspective, and was given some credit where it was made relevant to the question. Arguments from myth and Bultmann were more successful, when this approach was used. Weaker responses wrote briefly about scripture and went on to explain why miracles and/or religious experiences were a better/worse method of revelation. There were sometimes attempts to explore the notion of propositional and non-propositional forms of revelation, or else an exploration of other ways of considering the revelatory nature and impact of sacred writings; however, almost all candidates were then able to make a judgement about the resultant success of sacred writings as revelation, or, indeed, as implied by the question, to compare it to the success of other forms of revelation.

Q3. 'Philosophical beliefs about life after death are incoherent.' Discuss.

This question was a popular choice. Responses often deployed appropriate material to good effect with some based on monism and dualism and some on religious theories. Weaker responses tended to simply describe a number of different body/soul theories, such as those from Plato, Descartes and Aristotle with limited reference to life after death. Some candidates were not sure of the meaning of 'incoherent', which limited their argument. It was possible to achieve high marks through exploring the nature of the soul and its succession to another life or through exploring the differences between resurrection and reincarnation or through exploring so-called empirical evidence for the afterlife. Many candidates rejected the notion of dualism, but fewer candidates were sure of the difference between materialism and monism – a useful reminder that categorising scholars is not always the best way to engage with their thinking.

However, better responses could clearly elucidate the relevant elements such as Plato's arguments from opposites and knowledge to support his claim of the soul's existence separate to the body. Many candidates clearly understood that Replica Theory was a thought experiment and linked it to resurrection, often citing biblical texts in support. Dawkins was a popular alternative to the incoherency of dualistic theories - linking ideas of the afterlife to genes and memes – supplemented by discussions on neuroscientific research and the incoherency of near death experiences as well.

The best answers focused on the concept of coherence rather than just a list of strengths and weaknesses of the various theories. Where the argument centred on an evaluation of each theory, there was often success in highlighting the features that counted either in favour or against each approach, and many of these answers concluded with what they considered to be the most successful approach. Weaker responses tended to avoid the concept of coherence, perhaps not understanding what it meant, instead attempting to argue that life after death could not happen. A few better answers also acknowledged that perhaps coherence might be justifiably considered irrelevant for this topic by definition although this was a rare approach.

Some responses where the argument was asserted or implicit simply wrote out a series of different approaches to life after death. Other candidates concluded that because some of the questions they posed in their essays remained unanswered (perhaps due to time constraints), life after death must be incoherent - analysis-by-rhetorical-question is not a useful tool.

Q4. Critically assess the philosophical problems raised by believing in a god who is omniscient, omnipotent and eternal.

This was a popular question. The real challenge for the candidate was structuring a consideration of three areas of God's nature into the time limit. However, many were successful. Some used a broad-brush approach, outlining problems associated with each attribute. Others attempted to combine the three attributes and assess the issues from that perspective. A further approach was to concentrate on one attribute and bring in the other two whilst discussing the issues. All approaches were successful to varying degrees.

There were some excellent answers using the Boethian understanding of eternity to explain simple and conditional necessity and thus attempt to address the problem of omniscience. Many answers explored the Problem of Evil, a-temporal vs Sempiternal; the implications for free-will; and paradoxes around omnipotence. The strongest responses also touched on the concept of intervention. Many answers focused on the ideas of Boethius, Aquinas, Descartes, Kenny, and Swinburne. The most successful responses were able to explain the opposing views with clarity and accuracy, utilising key terminology effectively.

The majority of answers compared views from the listed scholars, mostly to good effect. Some excellent responses managed to structure a holistic argument around an interventionist God.

Many answers were able to analyse and examine the inconsistencies of the properties surrounding the God of classical theism. God's omnipotence was often explored in relation to the prevention of evil and suffering, with several candidates highlighting the contradiction raised by Dawkins and others between God's omnipotence and omniscience. Furthermore, candidates engaged with, and analysed, the Boethian God, highlighting its merits against the incoherence of an everlasting, covenantal God, where personal relationship predominates.

Some answers simply assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each viewpoint, with varying success. There was limited ability from some candidates to explore other scholars' models of deity and their implications for philosophical and religious thought. The tendency to juxtapose different viewpoints meant that strong critical analysis was sometimes missing.

G582 Religious Ethics (A2)

General Comments:

It was pleasing to note that a number of candidates showed considerable breadth and depth in terms of their knowledge, understanding and evaluation. There was much evidence of excellent teaching whereby candidates had been able to explore topics in depth using a wide variety of scholars and case studies. Some centres might further assist their candidates by explaining the best approach to writing a discursive essay. This involves providing the appropriate balance of explanation, exemplification and juxtaposition of concepts alongside evaluation and discussion of the question. Perhaps more so this year than in previous years, some candidates did not read the question carefully enough before beginning their answer. Each of this year's questions contained clear key trigger words and phrases such as 'most coherent', 'most useful', 'unquestionable intuitive knowledge' and 'never gives answers'. In some cases such trigger words and phrases were ignored so that the response given tended to be generic and thus lacking in focus. A further general point that centres might find useful is to suggest that candidates avoid the simple listing and juxtaposition of concepts in their responses as this immediately limits the possibility of candidates being able 'to sustain an argument holistically.'

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.1

Some candidates were able to engage fully with the question. A clear understanding of Natural Law was evident whether in terms of the approach taken by Aristotle, Aquinas or more recently by Finnis. Such candidates were able to present Natural Law in a holistic manner ranging from, for example, the concept of all creation having some form of telos to the dominance of the human person as being the sole rational entity within the natural world. Some candidates were also successful in selecting and then applying a more limited range of concepts such as the primary and secondary precepts of Aquinas along with assessing how his understanding of real and apparent goods might be relevant. With regard to exemplification of environmental ethics, some candidates were also able to present useful case studies such as pollution in the BRICS nations, which was concomitant upon the development of an ordered society in which education and preservation of life aided eudaimonia. Some candidates equated Natural Law with Christianity and debated the relevance of stewardship versus dominion in terms of coherency

Some candidates showed a limited understanding of Natural Law, which prevented them from making a good attempt at the question. Such candidates tended to confine their explanation of Natural Law to, for example, a brief paragraph. Some candidates appeared to be very knowledgeable with regard to a number of different ethical theories such as Kantian ethics and Utilitarianism alongside approaches to the environment such as those found in Shallow Ecology and the Gaia Hypothesis. However in some cases such knowledge was juxtaposed against minimal consideration of Natural Law, which meant that candidates were unable to make more than a satisfactory response to the question. Despite evidence of very good knowledge of ethical theories and environmental ethics in general, some candidates were unable to make a very good/excellent attempt to address the question as they ignored what the question asked as to whether 'Natural Law is the most coherent approach'. Some candidates limited themselves to a brief consideration of each ethical theory in the specification before deciding which one was of most use.

Question No. 2

Some candidates were able to engage fully with the question, which invited a wide variety of approaches. With this question it was clear that those candidates who read the question carefully were able to present good, very good and excellent responses whether they chose to evaluate the claim with their focus entirely on meta-ethics, on conscience or on a combination of both. Thus with some candidates a clear understanding of meta-ethical theories was evident with excellent discernment of the differences between, for example, emotivism and prescriptivism. It was notable that the level of knowledge with regard to naturalism was – in a number of cases – much improved on that evident in previous years. However, few candidates seem to appreciate that this view extends beyond F. H Bradley and embraces Bentham's and Mill's Utilitarianism as well as Natural Law, and continues with more recent work such as that of John Dewey

Some candidates focused on G.E. Moore's intuitionism and as to whether this gave 'unquestionable knowledge of what is good' or as to whether the perceived weaknesses of the theory undermined such 'unquestionable knowledge.' Some candidates focused on whether, for example, Newman's understanding of conscience as the 'voice of the law-giver' – of God – meant that moral judgements made by the fully-informed conscience were ipso facto unquestionable in terms of their apprehension of what is good. Some candidates were able to present holistic responses which, for example, juxtaposed the concept of intuitionism whereby the person could state in the words of Moore, 'good is good and that is the end of the matter' alongside the concept of an intuitive conscience as posited by Butler.

Some candidates limited themselves in their responses by simply presenting a generic meta-ethics or a generic conscience essay. Here, in particular, centres might find it useful to discourage students from learning formulaic model answers as these are never flexible enough in terms of addressing the particular question asked.

Question No. 3

Some candidates were again able to engage fully with the question through demonstrating a detailed and comprehensive understanding of Kantian ethics and whether or not it provides 'the most useful approach to business ethics.' Such candidates benefited from a holistic understanding of Kant and were thus able to apply a range of particular elements of his ethical theory including the concepts of good will and duty alongside the various formulations of the categorical imperative. Some candidates were also able to select a number of key areas in the field of business ethics such as, for example, the shareholder versus the stakeholder model, whistleblowing, outsourcing and the importance of the profit motive. Some candidates when examining Kant's support of whistle-blowers explained how Ross' *prima facie* duties could potentially be used to deal with clashing duties.

Exemplification was also evident in a number of good, very good and excellent attempts to answer the question in terms of whether, for example, the Ford Pinto case demonstrated the potential for business in seeking profit to contravene the second formulation of the categorical imperative – using the human person as a means to an end.

Some candidates attempted to answer the question by presenting a brief and cursory treatment of Kantian ethics and business before devoting the rest of their responses to a consideration of whether other ethical theories were of more help with regard to business. In this area centres might help candidates by reminding them that if a question names a specific ethical theory, then the said theory should be the dominant feature of the essay rather than every other theory.

Question No. 4

Some candidates were able to engage fully with the question through demonstrating a very high level of ability in selecting and deploying relevant information. Some candidates kept their focus, for example, on Aristotelian Virtue Ethics whilst others combined this with modern approaches to Virtue Ethics. This year it was pleasing to note that such a wide range of scholars in the field was often cited including MacIntyre, Hursthouse, Foot and Slote. The thinking of MacIntyre, however, seemed to be less well understood than that of the other modern scholars. Some candidates used such knowledge to good, very good and excellent effect in discussing whether the problem with Virtue Ethics is that it never gives answers to moral problems. A number of holistic responses raised the question of whether in the first instance moral problems were ever within the scope of Virtue Ethics as such moral problems belonged much more in the realm of other normative ethical theories.

Whilst some candidates demonstrated familiarity with key scholars they did, in some cases, limit themselves to something of a list format in their essays by juxtaposing what one scholar stated alongside what another scholar stated. Such an approach limited candidates' ability to present a strong discursive essay as required by this question. Some candidates were content to present a minimal explanation of why Virtue Ethics might or might not give answers to moral problems before explaining how other ethical theories might approach such moral problems. Explication of moral problems varied. Some candidates were able to question whether, for example, the mean of virtues and vices was of use with regard to the courage required of a soldier in fighting on the battlefield or the courage required of a criminal intent on breaking a law. Again, some candidates were able to question whether having a virtuous role model might present a pattern of presumptive behaviour which would enable a person to find an answer with regard to issues surrounding abortion and euthanasia.

G583 Jewish Scriptures (A2)

General Comments:

There were some very good responses to the demands of the paper and the questions differentiated well between candidates, producing the full range of marks. Some responses showed a very high level of engagement with the specification content and candidates were able to discuss the biblical text and scholarship fluidly in order to support and develop their argument. It was pleasing to see that many candidates were able to engage with the specification content at a critical and high level.

Many candidates produced outstanding and detailed answers showing a high level of ability to deploy relevant information and analyse accurately the question demands. Some candidates were let down by poor exam skills; some candidates wrote a disproportional amount for the two questions and so were unable to score highly on the second, often limited and rushed, answer. Some candidates only attempted one answer. The evaluation aspect of the question was often handled very well and candidates demonstrated some sophisticated argument with clear synoptic thinking.

All questions were attempted with question 1 and question 2 being the most popular. The questions appear to have provided opportunities for candidates of a wide range of ability to demonstrate their skills. The best answers were those that showed organisation and structure and which fully answered the question set. High marked answers demonstrated focused application of knowledge through clear reference to specification content and scholarship; these answers also included a high level of critical and synoptic analysis and evaluation. Many of the answers were very pleasing to read and were substantially more focused and detailed than the corresponding unit paper at AS; although this is expected both AS and A2 answers should show clear and focused interaction with specification content, scholarship and primary source materials.

The best responses addressed the specific question asked, considered all aspects of the question in a relevant and critical way, and were supported with careful analysis. The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised and showed a high level of engagement with biblical texts, critical scholarship and other sources. When candidates did not achieve higher marks it was usually because they did not answer the question set and instead provided an answer for a question they had prepared for. A small number of candidates presented a general answer; as such, they could not score highly and often were unable to pass L2 due to the general, rather than specific, nature of their answer.

Some scripts were very difficult to read. Candidates with difficult-to-read handwriting may benefit from leaving a line between each line of script in order to ease reading of their answer. Moreover, centres are reminded that candidates should be writing in black ball-point pen and not fibre tipped or handwriting pens as these again make scripts difficult to read.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This question was very popular and was answered very well by most candidates. Many answers showed a very high level of ability to select and deploy relevant knowledge and to formulate a critical argument. It was very evident that candidates were familiar with, and could cite with ease, key aspects of both the Amos and Micah set text in order to support their argument. It was very clear that candidates had a detailed knowledge of the historical context of the texts and could manipulate this learning well in order to enhance their answer.

Most candidates were able to engage with this question very successfully and candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the nuances of the question and were able to discuss the historical context, the textual sources, critical scholarship and theology with ease. Centres should be congratulated for very clear evidence of successful and detailed teaching of this topic area. Nonetheless, it was felt that answers could be further improved with clear reference to, and citation of, both textual verses to support argument or critical scholarship; those that did this scored very highly for this question.

Question 2

This question was answered well by most candidates. Some candidates offered a very detailed and focused answer addressing the key demands of the question – the dating of Ruth. Such candidates were able to discuss fluidly, and with confidence, various opinions as to when Ruth was written; they were able to provide evidence from both within the text and from within history to support this. It was very pleasing to see that many candidates had a detailed understanding of the textual context of Ruth and were able to discuss the form of narrative and scholarly opinion in order to construct a detailed answer. Some candidates however, missed the key focus of the question and instead gave a general answer on Ruth. Such answers were not linked to the question demands until a conclusion and as a result did not score highly. Centres should be congratulated for very clear evidence of successful and detailed teaching of this topic area; again, candidates who were able to engage in discussion of critical scholarship performed well.

Question 3

Performance varied here. Some answers showed a very high level of ability to select and deploy relevant knowledge and to formulate a critical argument. Many candidates were able to discuss confidently and fluidly the historical development of beliefs about life after death in the two texts and the importance or not, of this. Again, candidates demonstrated an ability to manipulate the texts studied in order to support their argument and were able to discuss and analyse the textual sources, scholarship and wider historical-critical context. Some candidates however, appeared to present a pre-prepared answer on life after death which ran through all the set texts in order and which, as a result, did not address the question fully. Centres are reminded that candidates should be taught to address the question specifically; if they use other learning this should be done in such a way as to construct an argument for or against the set question. Recall of learning with no link to the question is not credit worthy.

Question 4

This was the least popular answer and was attempted by only a handful of candidates. Some candidates offered a detailed answer and engaged well with the question. Some candidates did not focus on the question demands and instead recalled the narrative of Ezekiel 1 only; these answers did not score highly. It was disappointing that more candidates did not attempt this question. It was felt by the examiners that centres had not prepared candidates as well for this topic area on the evidence of variation in candidate response.

G584 New Testament (A2)

General Comments:

In general the questions on this year's paper were answered well. There were few weak scripts and a number of fine, impressive sets of answers. What distinguished the best candidates was their accurate grasp of their set-texts, attention to detail, their willingness to acknowledge a range of possible interpretations of key texts and a flexibility to really focus on the question set. Repeated reference to keywords in the question throughout essays bore fruits for many candidates.

Contemporary scholarship was used well and generally accurately. The few candidates who invented scholars and quotations from their imaginary works did not fool the examiners!

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Q1 Critically examine the theological significance of the parables in the synoptic gospels. [35]

This was a popular question and the standard was variable. Less successful responses tended to describe the parables, list-like, in great detail and give a one or two sentence summary about their theological significance. Similarly excessive focus the three Luke 15 parables, all with essentially the same message, left little time for more interesting discussion, Re-telling of the stories are not required. Many candidates were adamant that the parables had a clear, singular meaning but it was good to see some responses exploiting the ambiguity of the message of particular parables; for example some debated whether the parables in Mark 4 had a clear futuristic, realised or inaugurated eschatology.

Scripts that accessed the higher bands wove clear and clever arguments into this very open question. Some made a distinction between the significance of the theology of the parables for Jesus and the particular evangelist, whilst others tied the themes together, most notably Kingdom ideas, and provided a holistic summary of the theology of the parables. Very good responses showed a fine grasp of detail, for example the significance of nesting in the parable of the mustard seed, and showed an accurate and critical appreciation of contemporary scholarship.

Q2 Critically discuss the authorship and purpose of Luke's gospel. [35]

Again, this was a popular question but there was a tendency for it to turn into a list (probably derived from a textbook) of Luke's key themes. However many candidates were focused on both authorship and purpose. Many were able to list theories on who wrote Luke – a doctor, a companion of Paul for example - but only the best went further and analysed whether these attributions were accurate or indeed important. There were several excellent scripts, which, with reference to Roland Barthes, discussed whether the identity of any author was important.

Regarding purpose, many discussed whether Luke was writing to address a crisis derived from the delay of the Parousia, Conzelmann's 'big idea', but only the best went on to criticize and analyse whether this was the case. Other purposes included inclusion, the importance of the spirit and Luke's concern to present a realised eschatology. Very good scripts were able to link these together holistically.

Food was a popular topic for candidates to address. Many focused on Luke's seeming obsession with meals. Some thought this meant that Luke was a dietician but only a few went on to link this to the Eucharist and messianic banquet and inaugurated eschatology and thence to the delay of the Parousia.

Q3 To what extent did Jesus attack the politics of his day, as well as the religion? [35]

Although this was not the most popular question on the paper it produced the most imaginative and interesting responses. A few topped and tailed a pre-prepared question on the Sermon on the Mount or Jesus and the Law but most impressed with their ability to select from a range of texts and really get their teeth into an argument.

A number chose to begin by referencing their AS course on the death of Jesus (naturally, this was not expected or required for top marks) and began by arguing that Jesus' crucifixion was a political death and the temple incident or triumphal entry were inherently political acts. Most moved on to A2 material and discussed a range of texts and themes. Some looked at Jesus' Kingdom teaching and whether the reversal envisaged there had political implications or not- if God's Kingdom came the Romans would be swept away. Some thought that the Sermon on the Mount provided a challenge to the Pharisees; others debated whether Jesus' attitude to the Jewish Law was political or merely religious. A common conclusion was that it was impossible to separate politics from religion in Jesus' world. No one strain of argument or conclusion was expected or credited more than another but the examiners looked for a sustained argument based on a detailed grasp of set texts.

Q4 Only Matthew's gospel presents the Kingdom of God as a future expectation.' Discuss. [35]

It was good to see that only a few candidates when faced with the trigger 'Kingdom of God' went in to "there are three views on the Kingdom of God..." mode. The majority realised this was a different type of question and answered it head on. What distinguished very good from average candidates was their ability to select key texts accurately and well and their focus on the question – they kept coming back to the wording of the title at the end of paragraphs.

A number of candidates attacked the assumptions of this question from their first sentence and provided clear, detailed and flowing arguments. Many concluded that Matthew was not the only gospel to focus on the Kingdom as a future expectation. Some cleverly pointed out that there were realised texts in Matthew too (e.g. Matthew 12:28) and went on to exploit the ambiguity of the eschatological perspective in Mark and Luke.

There was no set answer to the question, but some candidates struggled to argue that Matthew was the only gospel to present the Kingdom of God as a future expectation because they saw both Mark and Luke as clearly and unquestionably displaying realised eschatology.

G585 Developments in Christian Theology (A2)

General Comments:

There were as usual some impressive answers that often displayed a grasp of theology well beyond A2. Good answers were usually from those who wrote less, planned carefully and set out their argument in the opening paragraph (very few defined their terms) and stayed focused on the essay question throughout. There were too many potentially good answers that lost marks simply because they failed to answer the question by including a *succinct* conclusion.

Yet again this year there were too many almost illegible scripts.

As noted last year the most common weakness, especially of the middle to lower band candidates, was to use a form of argumentative style which consists of writing that on the one hand they are in agreement, and, on the other hand in they are in disagreement throughout. Although the laudable intention is to stay focused on the question the result was not so much of a discussion as a dizzying set of contradictory statements.

Finally, for the first time many candidates (including those who otherwise wrote intelligent essays) used the term 'salvated' when they meant 'saved'. It would be good if next year's candidates could learn the right term along with the correct spelling of Ruether (not Reuther).

All questions were attempted. There were no questions that proved more popular than others.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

Most candidates who attempted Hick realised that this was a straightforward analysis of his main ideas. Good answers balanced his philosophical approach to theological pluralism with reference to Kant and Wittgenstein, although very few commented on Hick's shift away from his earlier theocentric position to his later reality-centred approach (partly to include non-theistic religions). Few understood that Hick considers that the noumenal Real or *An Sich* is knowable as a postulate of phenomenal religious experience. There was some confusion as to whether Hick considers the Real to be unknowable or whether this is a criticism levied against him by his critics. Good candidates also considered his Christology and use of demythologising and the reasons why this process is necessary to make interfaith dialogue possible.

It was good this year to see how many candidates had considered the practical considerations of interfaith work and whether Hick's theology was help or hindrance in this area.

Too many candidates failed to address the specific issue of Hick's *global* theology and why this is different from a global religion. Those who did focus on this issue often offered much better evaluations of the essay question.

There was good use of critics including D'Costa, Küng and Sinkinson. Some compared Hick with Rahner or Barth to good effect.

Question 2

The question hinged on whether candidates understood the range of possible meanings of modernism. The majority took it to mean the post-Enlightenment quest for objective truth based on reason and experience. However, many assumed that this led automatically to the death of religion. This assumption made answering the question difficult when it came to considering theological inclusivism. If these candidates had understood the challenge to be the reasonableness of *revelation*, then there would have been more to discuss.

However, there were many very inventive and interesting answers. The majority of candidates chose to review Rahner's theological inclusivism. Only the best had a knowledge of Rahner beyond the concept of anonymous Christian. Good candidates suggested that his open Catholicism was a self-conscious attempt to use modernist methods and ideas (such as Kant's good will and existential experience of finitude) to develop his anonymous Christianity. Many appreciated his desire to retain the integrity of Catholicism whilst engaging with the modern world.

Some candidates argued that Feuerbach offered a better solution to modernity than Rahner. They considered his application of the hermeneutic of suspicion to Christianity and recovery of genuine human experience of nature. Many argued that whilst Feuerbach's answers permitted a renewed understanding of religion, he did so without allowing for the possibility of revelation. Some candidates argued that in this respect Karl Barth's theology actually engages with modernity far more effectively than any other theologian.

Other candidates considered whether if the aim of modern liberal societies is social cohesion, Rahner's theology does this better than theological pluralism because he retains the integrity of each religion in its relationship to Christianity.

A few candidates mistook Hick for an inclusivist.

There was some confusion between modernism and postmodernism - suggesting that an idea or view is relative doesn't mean it is automatically postmodern. Feuerbach and Hick, for example, are not postmodern, as they both hold an objective view of reality.

Question 3

Most candidates treated this essay as a general question about women's ministry without the specific issue of episcopacy. Even those who began their essays with reference to the Church of England's recent inclusion of women bishops did not really understand why being a bishop was any different from being a minister or priest. Candidates were not penalised for failing to discuss the specific issue of women bishops, although those who did so effectively were credited accordingly.

On the whole this question was done well and in a variety of different ways. There was an impressive knowledge and understanding of appropriate biblical texts. Many were able to discuss these texts in their historical and sociological setting. Many, for example, when considering St Paul's view of women's ministry argued that his apparently patriarchal teaching limiting women's leadership role was deliberately reducing the radical nature of Christianity in order to make it more socially acceptable in the Greek-Roman world.

Candidates used a good range of feminist theologians. Many still misunderstand Daphne Hampson and think that she supports a golden thread argument when in fact she uses the term ironically to indicate how Christianity will never avoid its intrinsic patriarchy. Some good answers considered Fiorenza's historical reconstruction analysis and others referred to the possible place of female leadership in the Gnostic churches.

Some very effectively discussed a 'kairos' theology which argues that just as Jesus' ministry tackled a particular time for change in the human-God relationship, so the issue of women in the Church marks a contemporary kairos moment.

Many candidates exploited the ambiguity of the phrase 'non-issue' and suggested this could equally apply to conservative theologians (citing the headship argument, Augustine, Luther etc) as well as liberal feminist theologians (citing Galatians 3:28 and all equality arguments). Others argued that there is an issue: some intriguing conclusions suggested that from a radical point of view women should *not* become bishops as this would be to buy into a patriarchal institution.

Question 4

There were many approaches to this question. Many candidates began by considering the relationship of language, consciousness and liberation (Daly's famous aphorism was frequently cited). Answers generally looked at the biblical tradition and the way in which women's relationship to God shapes Christian understanding of the divine.

Good answers considered the arguments of feminist theologians such as Ruether and Soskice. Most were aware of Ruether's interest in the biblical wisdom tradition and the way in which it had been subsumed and masculinised in the New Testament (via the Logos/incarnation doctrine). Others discussed her usage of goddess imagery from the ancient world as a means of informing developments in human relationships with the divine. Many candidates connected Ruether's gnostic interests with Pagels' fuller analysis. Candidates were less well informed here; few referred to the Gnostic androgynous pleroma (God/First Principle) and how this might be reflected in the Jesus-Mary Magdalene relationship.

There were many references to Janet Soskice's reimagined Trinity. Most candidates were aware of her feminist argument to re-think the Trinity as a *community* of persons (male/female) but fewer realised that her real challenge was to question the patriarchal 'one-over-the-many' presentation which favours the tendency to see the Trinity in hierarchical power terms.

There was some good use of Julian of Norwich's insights into the nature of God and Jesus 'the mother'. Candidates should be cautious about calling her a feminist theologian. Criticisms of her views were less convincing especially those who dismissed her insights because she was 'ill' at the time.

There were some thoughtful and theologically creative conclusions. Many argued that as all language about God is human then it is not an issue whether female language is used because God is not gendered. Others argued that if humans are made in the image of God then it follows that God should be referred to equally as male and female (as the Bible does on occasions). Others argued that calling God 'she' does not tackle the master-slave ontology inherent in the Christian God as argued by Daly and Hampson. Some referred to Daly's 'unwholly' trinity as an example of the essential inability of Christianity to offer women spiritual liberation. Many candidates showed an excellent understanding of her idea that using feminine language was no more than a male god in drag.

G586 Buddhism (A2)

General Comments:

Candidates seemed to be well prepared for the exam. The level of subject knowledge was very high and candidates can explain the full range of Buddhist concepts and see how they fit together holistically. There is also a greater use of scholarly work and scriptural references than in previous years and this has made a significant difference to the quality of the work. However, some candidates are still not fully addressing the question and writing responses which cover the general topic.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1:

This was a very popular question with the majority of candidates choosing to answer it. The majority of responses was very good with a range and depth of knowledge of both schools of Pure Land Buddhism. Better candidates made really good use of quotes and scholarly opinion, which helped gain the marks in the higher grade boundary.

The word betrayal caused some candidates a problem. Some were not sure what betrayal might be and only a few gave a definition of betrayal. The ones that did give a definition tended to produce stronger responses. Many compared Pure Land to Theravada Buddhism rather than narrowing it down to Buddhist origins. For the very good candidates Buddhist origins included the Mahayana school as the Lotus Sutra is the words of the Buddha and therefore counts as origins. This gave a very different view of betrayal and made for a better response.

Some just described Pure Land Buddhism and this was not enough to address the question. There were also some misunderstandings around the nature of morality in Pure Land Buddhism. Pure Land Buddhists tend to see morality as important and look to the 19th vow which states that Amitabha Buddha will appear at the moment of death to one who cultivates virtue, resolves to seek awakening, and single-mindedly aspires to be reborn into the Realm of Bliss. Cultivating virtue means morality, wisdom and compassion, although this is not universally help amongst Pure Land Buddhists. Better candidates made reference to this; however, some used this misunderstanding in other responses especially if they answered question 2.

Question 2:

This was not very popular as a question. Candidates who did attempt to respond to it often gave a superficial answer. Many did not focus on the ethical guidelines aspect of the eightfold path (sila) and discuss the path as a whole showing why or why not it should be followed. Better responses focused on comparing Right Action, Livelihood and Speech to other ethical concepts within Buddhism such as the five/ ten precepts, the six paramitas or the Bodhisattva path.

This made for a really good response and showed the similarities in the concepts and therefore showed that all Buddhists not just should but do follow the ethical guidelines from the eightfold path. Some look at the specific beliefs of different schools of Buddhism and made this their point of comparison and this worked in some cases except where there was this misunderstanding about Pure Land Buddhism.

Question 3:

This was a popular question and candidates were able to access the highest marks with their discussion about the nature of Nibanna and the importance of it within various Buddhist schools.

The very good responses showed how the concept of Nibanna has been developed in different traditions and that this meant that it was a unifying feature. Again some did not define unifying and this did lead to less clear and precise responses. One candidate suggested that the fact the disunity of ideas was accepted within Buddhism actually united Buddhists and this was an interesting and valid conclusion to draw. Less good responses did not fully address the unity feature element or took the Zen idea of satori to mean that Zen Buddhists do not aim for Nibanna. Some also suggested that Pure Land Buddhists aim to be reborn in the Pure Land also mean that they did not see Nibanna as a goal, which again is not entirely correct. Better candidates used this well and showed that even in these cases Nibanna was still the ultimate goal and therefore united all Buddhists.

Question 4:

This was also a popular question and candidates showed their range and depth of knowledge of different Buddhist scriptures. Most could quote from them and knew the importance of them to different schools. Most candidates suggested the all scriptures are equally importance as each is important to a particular school. This is a good response. Some took this further and showed the Tibetan idea that the Buddha's teachings as recorded in the Pali canon can be seem as the first turning of the wheel of dhamma, the Mahayana scriptures as the second turning of the wheel and the Vajrayana as the third. This gave an interesting response to the question and really showed how well-prepared the candidates were for the exam.

Weaker candidates focused on describing the contents of the Pali canon and compared this to the Lotus Sutra and then described the different parables (often retelling them).

G588 Islam (A2)

General Comments:

The general standard of responses for all questions was reasonable to good with some candidates producing excellent answers. A few of the candidates had not sufficiently mastered the change from AS style questions to that of A2 where the AO1 and AO2 elements are combined. However, the number of these was significantly lower than in previous years. Where this was the case the knowledge demonstrated was not detailed enough and the evaluative skills shown did not always reflect the additional weighting given to AO2 at this level. Questions 1 and 4 seemed to be the most popular questions although questions 2 and 3 were also reasonably well represented.

As a whole the quality of this year's responses appear to be of a higher standard compared to previous years and this is encouraging to see.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Q1 To what extent is belief in the last day the least important of the Articles of Belief for Muslims?

AO1: This was probably the most popular of the four questions. Many of the candidates were able to give a lot of detail on all of the Articles of Belief. The weaker responses were those that just gave a descriptive account of the articles rather than only selecting information that was directly relevant to the question.

The importance of Tawhid was explained well by the majority of candidates and they were generally able to demonstrate its relationship with the other Articles of Belief. There were also some excellent responses that explained, using examples, how the last day provided a focus for this temporal life.

The candidates that didn't perform as well tended to be those that focused almost exclusively on the last day. This meant that they were unable to get higher than a level 3, which shows a satisfactory level of knowledge.

AO2: The evaluative element of this question was dealt with reasonably well. The majority of candidates fell into level 4, as they were able to show some clear and successful analysis. The extent to which they sustained a line of argument and provided evidence, however, varied.

The vast majority of responses showed a level of appreciation of the variety of arguments both to show why the last day could be considered the least important of articles but also why this may not be the case. Most candidates seemed to come to a similar conclusion, which was that the Articles of Belief are all interrelated and so equal in importance.

A few candidates achieved a level 5 for the AO2 element showing that they had fully comprehended the demands of the question. These candidates used a wide range of evidence to back up their arguments and had clearly prepared well for the exam.

Q2 'Surah 4 is mainly concerned about protecting the weak.' Discuss with reference to the text.

AO1: This question was, on the whole, answered to a reasonable standard with the majority of candidates knowing the name and general contents of the surah. Many responses demonstrated good relevant knowledge of the surah including, at least, general references to the text. While nearly all of the candidates discussed women as one of the main focuses of the surah some failed to show why women could be considered as weak. This is clearly a vital part of the discussion and needed to be addressed in order to achieve the higher levels. Most candidates also picked up on the surah's references to orphans as other weak members of society.

The best responses were those that were able to demonstrate a good knowledge of other topics addressed in the surah such as jihad, hypocrites and other faiths.

AO2: As with question 1 the vast majority of candidates gained a level 4 for the evaluative element of this question. The weaker evaluations were those that didn't discuss other topics addressed in the surah as they were only able to present a one-sided response. There were also some candidates who flipped their conclusions – contradicting their main line of argument running through the essay. This obviously affected the level they could achieve as it showed they were unable to 'sustain a critical line of argument.'

Some candidates, however, demonstrated some excellent evaluative skills. These responses showed a comprehensive knowledge of the contents of the surah as well as an understanding of the importance of these. The best responses were able to critically analyse the teachings on women, for example, in order to show if they really did help protect women or not.

Q3 Assess the importance of Jihad in preserving the Islamic way of life.'

AO1: This was probably the least popular of all four questions. However, those that did answer it seemed to have a good understanding of Jihad and were able to divide it into two or three main types. Some candidates divided it into Greater and Lesser Jihad and showed a good level of knowledge as to what they both involve. Others divided Jihad into Jihad of the tongue, of the heart and of the sword (or similar divisions). There were a few excellent responses that demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of Jihad and the ways in which it helps Muslim's in various aspects of their lives.

The weaker responses were those that did not explicitly state what is meant by the Islamic way of life and so failed to link the two parts of the question together.

AO2: There was quite a range of marks for this question. Those who said little about the Islamic way of life were limited in the level of evaluation they could do. These candidates were only able to achieve a level 3. The better responses were those that evaluated the different types of Jihad separately. For example, some candidates discussed the relevance of Lesser Jihad in today's society with many deciding it was less important than the Greater Jihad.

Q4 'It is practices not beliefs that divide Sunni and Shi'a Muslims.' Discuss.

AO1: The standard of knowledge for this question was generally good with most candidates achieving a level 4. Although not all responses focused equally on practices and beliefs the majority of them discussed both to some extent.

The majority of candidates were able to pick out the practices and beliefs that caused the greatest divisions such as the status of imams, attitudes towards the shahadah and the historical reasons for the split.

AO2: The conclusions for this question were wide-ranging. A large proportion of the candidates came to the conclusion that it was both beliefs and practices that caused divisions between the two branches. Others addressed the fact that without the differing beliefs about the leadership of the Ummah the different practices would not have emerged.

The majority of responses were of a level 4 standard. However, there were a larger number of candidates getting a level 5 for the evaluation.

G589 Judaism (A2)

General Comments:

There were some very good responses to the demands of the paper and the questions differentiated well between candidates, producing the full range of marks. Some responses showed a very high level of engagement with the specification content and candidates were able to discuss primary source material and scholarship fluidly in order to support and develop their argument. It was pleasing to see that many candidates were able to engage with the specification content at a critical level.

The best responses addressed the specific question asked, considered all aspects of the question in a relevant and critical way and were supported with careful analysis. The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised and showed a high level of engagement with primary source materials and scholarship. When candidates did not achieve higher marks it was usually because they did not answer the question set and instead provided an answer for a question they had prepared for. A small number of candidates presented a general answer; as such, they could not score highly and often were unable to pass L2 due to the general, rather than specific, nature of their answer.

Many candidates produced outstanding and detailed answers showing a high level of ability to deploy relevant information and analyse accurately the question demands. Some candidates were let down by poor exam skills; some candidates wrote a disproportional amount for the two questions and so were unable to score highly on the second, often limited and rushed, answer. Some candidates only attempted one answer. The evaluation aspect of the question was often handled very well and candidates demonstrated some sophisticated argument with clear synoptic thinking.

All questions were attempted with question 1 and question 3 being the most popular. The questions appear to have provided opportunities for candidates with a wide range of ability to demonstrate their skills. The best answers were those that showed organisation and structure and which answered fully the question set. High marked answers demonstrated focused application of knowledge through clear reference to specification content and scholarship; these answers also included a high level of critical and synoptic analysis and evaluation. Many of the answers were very pleasing to read and were substantially more focused and detailed than the corresponding unit paper at AS; although this is expected both AS and A2 answers should show clear and focused interaction with specification content, scholarship and primary source materials.

Some scripts were very difficult to read. Candidates with difficult-to-read handwriting may benefit from leaving a line between each line of script in order to ease reading of their answer. Moreover, centres are reminded that candidates should be writing in black ball-point pen and not fibre tipped or handwriting pens as these again make scripts difficult to read.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This question was very popular and was answered very well by most candidates. Many answers showed a very high level of ability to select and deploy relevant knowledge and to formulate a critical argument. There were several different approaches to this question all of which were valid; however, as this is a Religious Studies exam it is expected that candidates would explore and demonstrate their theological learning via discussion of those scholars outlined within the

specification (Rubenstein, Fackenheim, Maybaum, Berkovitz and Cohn Sherbok) in addition to any historical content answer. Although many candidates scored very highly on this question it was somewhat disappointing that many answers were identical and there was clear evidence of rote learning; although these answers often scored highly for the AO1 demands such answers did not demonstrate the same level of response for the AO2 skills. Most candidates were able to engage with this question very successfully and candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the nuances of the question and were able to discuss Holocaust theology and anti-Semitism fluidly and confidently. Centres should be congratulated for very clear evidence of successful and detailed teaching of this topic area. Nonetheless, it was felt that answers could be further improved with clear reference to, and citation of, primary source materials; it was felt that many candidates had learnt by rote the basic fundamentals of the arguments of Rubenstein, Fackenheim, for example, however, had not engaged with the materials at a critical and independent level. It was pleasing to see that many candidates were very able at deconstructing both 'inevitable' and 'tragedy' and were able to provide evidence and argument to debate these terms.

Question 2

Performance varied here. This question was the least popular and there were only a handful of responses. Some candidates offered a detailed answer and engaged well with the question. Some candidates did not focus on the question demands and instead offered a general response on differences between Progressive and Orthodox Judaism rather than the beliefs about life after death; these answers did not score highly. It was disappointing that more candidates did not attempt this question. It was felt by the examiners that centres had not prepared candidates as well for this topic area due the variation in candidate response. The majority of responses did not focus on the question demands of 'convincing' and 'contemporary' Judaism; presenting a general discussion on beliefs about life after death. Many candidates it appeared did not have sufficient awareness of exam skills and whilst giving technically correct information, were not addressing the question. Candidates may find that constructing essay paragraphs through a point, evidence, explain, link structure may help to address this.

Question 3

Most candidates answered this question very well. Many answers showed a very high level of ability to select and deploy relevant knowledge and to formulate a critical argument. Many candidates were able to discuss confidently and fluidly the historical development of Zionism, the different forms of Zionism and the impact, or not, of Zionism in the modern world. Although many candidates scored very highly on this question it was somewhat disappointing that many answers were identical and there was clear evidence of rote learning; although these answers often scored highly for the AO1 demands such answers did not demonstrate the same level of response for the AO2 skills. Most candidates were able to engage with this question very successfully and candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the nuances of the question and were able to discuss Zionism fluidly and confidently. Schools should be congratulated for very clear evidence of successful and detailed teaching of this topic area.

Question 4

This question was answered by more candidates than Q2 however, was not as popular as Q1 or Q3. Most answers showed a high level of engagement; candidates were able to discuss confidently the historical development of Reform and Liberal Judaism and where able to provide examples of how practice differs and why. Some answers were let down by limited GCSE style content and evaluation rather than engaging at a theoretical and theological level with essay content. Some answers did not engage with the focus of the question on Jewry within the United Kingdom and as such some answers were limited. However, many candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of these forms of Judaism and were able to discuss the question fluidly and confidently.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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Facsimile: 01223 552553

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