



**GCE**

**Religious Studies**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H173**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2017**

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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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## H173/01 Philosophy of religion (AS)

### General impression of the paper:

This was a fair paper. The questions allowed for a variety of responses, using a number of different scholars and approaches.

### Overall performance of the candidates:

- Performance was representative overall and the full range of marks within each level of response was utilised.
- There was a surprising and often mistaken use of Ockham's razor to justify just about any argument that the learner considered to be 'the simplest one' or the argument with the least faults – which generally added very little to their argument.
- A number of answers mixed up scholars or using the wrong names – content was still credited where appropriate, but it sometimes misled the learner in their answer too.
- AO1 – some merely listed everything they knew or could remember and did not directly make it relevant to the question, thus not accessing the higher levels.
- AO2 – many were too quick to resort to assertions of logic or proof with no support from philosophical argument. Some resorted to 'I believe' without reasoned support, which is not sufficient to convince the examiner that analysis was being attempted.
- Even higher level answers which showed elsewhere that they could utilise reasoning from scholars were held back by such assertions. Learners would be better advised to avoid sweeping generalisations and instead use scholarly views and demonstrate a more academic approach to analysis in order to reach the higher levels of response. There were a number of rhetorical questions within evaluation – although these may be a good starting point, weaker responses failed to engage and continue the analysis, leaving the examiner to do the work for them.

### Report on Individual Questions:

**Q1** 'There is no such thing as a soul.' Discuss.

#### AO1

Most responses covered scholars such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Dawkins. Plato was usually the best understood and a variety of arguments were used, such as his argument from knowledge and opposites. Many used the charioteer example and those that could link it to reason, appetite and spirit made the best use of it, perhaps using an example to illustrate when reason was not in control and the soul was not harmonious.

Knowledge of Aristotle was often vague but some better responses used his examples of the wax imprint and eye, showing how the soul is the form of the body. A few weaker responses confused the formal cause with the efficient and final cause, showing a misunderstanding of Aristotle's view of the soul.

Some struggled with use of Descartes – either tending to repeat 'I think therefore I am' or answered vaguely, not making any link as to why this may indicate the existence of a soul. The better answers understood substance dualism – body and soul as two entirely separate substances. Better responses also used Descartes arguments from extension and the body being divisible, with appropriate examples.

## AO2

Weaker responses tended to resort to ‘there is no empirical proof of a soul’ which, as a simple assertion, was generally unsuccessful. Better answers utilised the arguments of scholars, such as Ryle, Dawkins or Flew to give reasons why there may not be a soul. There were some answers that used issues and arguments from life after death to support analysis for or against the soul. Many of these were used effectively. For example, reference to near-death or out-of-body experiences tended to be used successfully.

Many struggled to critique or analyse Descartes effectively. Some asked the obvious question of where did the body and soul interact. Surprisingly few could use Ryle successfully to dispute Descartes’ view. Some bolted on ‘ghost in the machine’ without further development or using one of his examples of category error (cricket team spirit, university). Weaker answers tended to use ‘categorical error’ – examiners try to ignore such mistakes in key terms (from a ‘positive awarding’ approach), but some candidates made this difficult by using it repeatedly. However, there were some excellent answers which showed clarity of reasoning and used Ryle to effectively criticise Descartes’ view.

Many mentioned Dawkins’ idea of Soul 1 and Soul 2, although this confused some into arguing that he supported the existence of a soul. More successful answers linked this to the Grand Unified Theory’s assumption that science will discover all the answers of consciousness eventually, and that humans are simply physical, genetic machines. A few mentioned memes but did not usually develop this.

### **Q2. Assess the claim that natural evil has a purpose.**

## AO1

Focus on the question delineated the good and weaker responses. Weaker answers tended to give descriptive outlines of either Augustinian or Irenaean theodicies but didn’t directly link to natural evil and/or its purpose. Some weaker responses referred to ‘evil’ and did not specifically address the question, although some material was relevant, if implicitly.

Many of the responses did not know the names of scholars such as Hick or Augustine, even though they are named on the specification. A number of answers used Irenaeus (although not explicit on specification) but attributed Irenaeus with material from Hick – this was credited at the appropriate level.

Many extended responses could relate the theodicies of Irenaeus and Hick in depth and used appropriate examples linked to natural evil to support their argument. These used ideas from the vale of soul-making, development from the image to likeness of God, the counterfactual hypothesis, the predictability of natural laws, and epistemic distance. Some answers wandered into the free will defence, but better answers brought it back to natural evil.

Most answers included some reference to Augustine and could outline the Fall (some mentioned angels, others Adam and Eve) leading to disharmony in the natural world caused and linked to purpose by justifying natural evil as a punishment for humans, seminally present in Adam’s loins. Some tried to use privation but it was generally less successful for this question – where it was partially successful, answers used it to introduce the aesthetic principle.

## AO2

Evaluation in this question tended to be the most successful as long as the answer focused on natural evil. Various counter arguments were introduced from a range of scholars such as Mackie, Hume, D.Z. Phillips, Mill and Dostoyevsky. Many were used well to suggest that natural evil could not have a justifiable purpose. Examples of the digger wasp or Stephen Fry's use of bone cancer in children were common. Some were tempted to engage in discussions of free will (particularly with Mackie) which led the response away from focus on the question.

The inconsistent triad was frequently quoted, some weaker answers simply asserting it without drawing out the arguments. Some better responses could draw out the implications that God may not be powerful or benevolent enough to prevent/stop evil and tended to argue that this challenged the attributes of God, suggesting that such a God may not be worthy of worship. However, for most answers, it did not entirely help answer the question, although some credit was generally earned.

### **Q3. To what extent does Aquinas' cosmological argument successfully reach the conclusion that there is a transcendent creator?**

## AO1

Many weak responses listed several arguments for the existence of God (teleological argument, ontological argument) perhaps with a brief foray into Aquinas' Three Ways and so could not achieve above the lower levels of response. This reading of the question (that Aquinas' cosmological argument more successful than other arguments) was not a valid approach, did not focus on the question and therefore could receive little credit.

Weaker responses often used both Aquinas and Paley's teleological argument – mixing it up with his cosmological argument – and didn't seem to know the difference.

Many answers listed Aquinas' Ways 1-3, but were generally more successful in their explanations of Ways 1 and 2. Way 3 often missed the idea that if at one point there was nothing, there would be nothing now, nothing can come from nothing, so a different type of being is needed – a necessary being holds reason for its being within itself and cannot not exist, to bring the universe into existence.

There were some generic answers which proceeded to list all knowledge and understanding pertaining to Aquinas' cosmological argument. Although responses such as this could access most of the AO1 levels, they often struggled to reach higher levels in AO2. Some weaker responses forgot to link Aquinas' Three Ways to the existence of God at all.

## AO2

Those weaker responses that had mixed up the teleological and cosmological arguments tended to also be led astray when evaluating. Although they used some of Hume's criticisms that were relevant to the question, a number simply listed Hume's criticisms that would have been more appropriate for the design argument. However, any relevant evaluation was credited.

The question referred to a transcendent creator – but this was often missed except by the most successful answers which tied both AO1 and AO2 tightly to this concept.

Some good responses included wider ranging material on Copleston and Russell. Where this was understood and used well it helped the argument about a transcendent creator.

Evaluation tended to focus on Hume and Russell, although some better responses used Leibniz and Aristotle as well to support Aquinas.

**4. Any other comments:**

A significant number of candidates wasted time by writing out the questions at the beginning of their answers, which is unnecessary and obviously gains no credit.

Many seemed to be running out of time particularly on their second response. A number of scripts had excellent or very good answers to their first question but weaker second responses.

## H173/02 Religion and ethics (AS)

### General Comments:

This was the first year of this examination and for the most part candidates responded well to the questions. However, some candidates gained higher marks for AO1 than for AO2 and they did not fully justify their analysis and evaluation. Additionally, some candidates failed to use 'a range of scholarly views, academic approaches and sources of wisdom and authority to support their analysis and evaluation' where appropriate. This resulted in analysis that tended to be implicit rather than clearly justified.

The handwriting for this session's examination seemed to have been of a noticeably lower standard than in previous years. Some candidates would have benefitted from using a laptop for the examination.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

#### Question 1 – To what extent does natural law provide a helpful method of moral decision making?

Together with question 2 on Kant, this proved to be an extremely popular question amongst candidates with the majority choosing to answer this question. Generally, there was good knowledge of natural law theory demonstrated by most candidates with the major elements of Aquinas' development of natural law present in the form of the primary precepts, secondary precepts and so on. There was a heavier than usual emphasis from many candidates on the four types of law identified by Aquinas. This was used well by some candidates but simply listed by others. Other elements of natural law theory that were seen included real and apparent goods, the double-effect theory, the Synderesis rule and occasionally elements of proportionalism.

Candidates appeared to understand the thrust of the question and constructed appropriate answers to it by attempting to show the theory, how it works, and evaluating the effectiveness of natural law as a method of moral decision making.

Stylistically, candidates tended to fall into two categories. The first group constructed an answer where the evaluation of the theory was interwoven into the demonstration of the knowledge and understanding being presented by the candidate; in general, these tended to be the stronger candidates who had a deep understanding of the concepts they were dealing with and dealt very well with the question. The second group almost seemed to deconstruct the question into a legacy style part a) demonstrate natural law and part b) evaluate natural law response. This could be done well by some candidates where the knowledge and information was presented first and then evaluation completed at the end of the response. The most effective responses were those where relevant and controlled examples were used to illustrate the different elements of the response; the most common example being euthanasia.

Some candidates attempted to construct a response by contrasting natural law theory with an alternative ethical route for example Situation Ethics or Utilitarianism. In some cases, this was done well, however in others this was a simple contrast rather than a relative evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, there was a tendency for the second (or even third) theory to be given too much weight and overrule the element of natural law in the response.

While some candidates made use of a variety of thinkers in their responses including Aristotle and Aquinas, but also ranging from Cicero to Brandt, Finnis, Hume and others, in many cases there was little mention of any thinkers apart from Aristotle and Aquinas. This was a real weakness in many candidates' responses and limited their access to the higher levels which

require the use of a variety of thinkers and scholarly approaches. This was an issue found on the other two questions as well.

**Question 2 – ‘Kantian ethics is too abstract to be useful in practical moral decision-making.’ Discuss.**

The other very popular question alongside question 1, this was attempted by many candidates. The question itself proved a difficulty for some candidates in that there was some confusion over the meaning of the key word ‘abstract’, in spite it being on the specification. This was interpreted in a variety of ways, some more successfully than others, and had an impact on the quality of the responses as many simply interpreted it as meaning that Kantian ethics was a ‘good’ theory.

Again, there tended to be streams of approach in responding to the question; the first stream attempted to construct a single response that interwove evaluation and analysis with the knowledge and understanding with the second stream again constructing their own part a and b questions to provide the knowledge and understanding at the front of the response and the evaluation and analysis at the tail. Either response could potentially access any level from the mark scheme.

Generally, there was good knowledge of Kantian ethics with students being aware of the concept of duty and good will and this all leading towards the Summum Bonnum. Candidates tended to focus on the Categorical Imperative and this led to a major distinction between candidates. Some tended to simply produce lists, with little detail as part of an overall broad review of Kantian ethics; others went into more detail but either did not exemplify or chose poor examples such as non-moral questions. Better responses added more depth to their explanation and have a better choice of more effective examples and those at the highest levels were able to fully explain the different aspects of the Categorical Imperatives and include those examples given by Kant to demonstrate perfect and imperfect duties.

As usual with Kant there were many variations of both the shopkeeper and the axe man examples which were employed to greater or lesser extents.

As mentioned above, some candidates were confused by the term abstract and this had an impact on the AO2 mark with some simply giving a broad strengths and weaknesses style response to the question. Others did understand the term ‘abstract’ and focused both their AO1 and AO2 elements on to this, for example considering the claims for immortality and the Summum Bonnum as abstract concepts within the theory.

There was an absence of other scholars aside from Kant within a number of responses and this was a major limiting factor for those at the top end of the mark scheme. Many simply focused on Kant himself and may have mentioned Ross in passing. Some attempted to make the claim that other theories were more abstract or less abstract and included natural law and other ethical concepts, but there was very little in critical analysis from other academic or philosophical sources.

**Question 3 – ‘The only purpose of a business is to make a profit.’ Discuss.**

This was the least popular question answered but there were many very good responses. Candidates used good examples in their responses, although some needed to be linked more to the ethical practice of the business. Sometimes, however, the examples detracted from the explanation, but when combined the responses have often impressed.

Better answers focused on the ethical theories and evaluated accordingly. However, some responses read like a weak Business Studies essay with a lot of opinion and brief descriptions of corporate social responsibility. The analysis of some candidates simply focused on generalisations about companies and situations.

However, some excellent responses looked at a range of scholarly responses, such as, Freidman, Cardinal Vincent Nichols and Robert Solomon, but many answers lacked sources of wisdom and authority or scholarly opinion. Most responses answered the question and begun by questioning the responsibility of businesses with the line of argument flowing. Not many students targeted the word 'sole' though, which would have allowed for a better evaluative approach.

## H173/03 Development of Christian thought (AS)

### General Comments:

The best responses were clearly driven by the argument required from the question and balanced carefully points of evaluation with relevant knowledge and understanding to illustrate these points. Less successful candidates focused on knowledge and reiteration of material rather than analytical skills, sometimes resorting to guesswork and generalisation. Some candidates used a broad understanding of the basics of Christianity to answer with confidence, whereas others seemed to have focused their revision on the points of the specification without considering them in full and in a wider religious context; in this unit, there is certainly the opportunity to answer with individual flair and examiners credited appropriate responses.

All three questions demonstrated the range of ability of candidates to answer the question set. Question 1 needed a focus on universalism (or on Christian teachings on salvation), rather than a broad presentation of different views. Question 2 required candidates to engage with the nature of Jesus' moral teachings. Question 3 pointed towards Bonhoeffer's civil disobedience, rather than his life in general. Candidates who chose to plan often found that the moment taken to examine the question resulted in tighter essays.

A number of candidates seemed to have issues with time management, with the second question answered often being significantly shorter than the first. They should be reassured that examiners look for depth as much as breadth. Some candidates only answered one question. Some handwriting was very difficult to read; examiners can only credit what is successfully communicated.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

#### 1 **Critically assess the view that in Christian teaching all people will be saved.**

This was the most popular question and, as such, led to a wide range of approaches. Some candidates interpreted the question as asking them to discuss the internal issues arising from Christian teaching and whether Christianity teaches that all people will be saved; this was given due credit as an appropriate reading of the question. Many used Hick's position to argue that all can be saved due to soul-making and God's benevolence, either explicitly or implicitly linking their argument to Hick himself. Some considered the impact of Jesus' death and resurrection and who, therefore, will be saved. Some candidates confused unlimited election with universalism, suggesting that unlimited election is the idea that 'all *will* be saved', rather than 'all *can* be saved, but not all choose to accept salvation' and many candidates included a discussion on limited election, which, when focused precisely on the question, led to good responses. Relevant passages from the Bible, Calvin and Barth were often used effectively and Augustine's views often featured, with better responses linking his theology to the question and selecting material appropriately. Dawkins and Dante were often used ineffectively in general discussions of arguments for and against life after death or lengthy descriptions of layers of hell. A number of answers used the concept of purgatory to argue that all would eventually be saved, generally with limited success. Less effective evaluation was seen where learners listed knowledge and left analysis to the end of the essay; the best answers focused on universalism and its strengths and weaknesses throughout.

**2 ‘Jesus’ teaching was only about becoming a moral person.’ Discuss.**

Responses seemed to be more polarised between those who addressed the question well and those which focused on the general topic of Jesus’ teachings and were unable to narrow down the information they had learnt to address the question. Some candidates struggled with the meaning of the term ‘moral’. Some successful responses compared and contrasted presentations of Jesus from across the breadth of this unit to support their arguments, whereas others took a more narrow approach just as successfully. Many answers looked at who Jesus was as opposed to what Jesus taught. These answers tended to explore the three aspects of Jesus mentioned in the specification and assumed that the question wanted a comparison of the three. At times, these answers got lost in long discussions of the evidence for and against Jesus’ divinity without arriving back at the question. The best answers concentrated on the word ‘only’ in the question. Good use was made of Jesus’ teachings, including, but not limited to, those mentioned on the specification in order to support analysis of Jesus’ moral teachings. There were some excellent answers from candidates who had absorbed Jesus’ teachings and had reflected on how they impact Christianity today, as well as other excellent answers that explored the question purely from the evidence in the Bible; all approaches were credited appropriately, but a key feature of the best responses was the candidate’s ability to explore the life and teachings of Jesus in some context, rather than just presenting them as isolated texts.

**3 To what extent was Dietrich Bonhoeffer justified in his teaching on civil disobedience?**

This seemed to be the least popular question. Some candidates simply re-told the life of Bonhoeffer without focusing on the question about his teachings on civil disobedience; the weakest responses struggled to define what civil disobedience is. The best answers made it clear what Bonhoeffer understood by civil disobedience in his extreme situation and were able to take their analysis and evaluation beyond his life in Nazi Germany, perhaps using evidence from the Bible about Jesus’ relationship with the authorities. Good answers tended to highlight key aspects of Bonhoeffer’s teaching, such as following God’s will, which one might only know in the moment of action; solidarity and sharing in the suffering of Christ and others; duty to God being above duty to the State, and the role of the true Church in keeping the State in check. Although not necessary for a full answer to the question, a number of answers included Bonhoeffer’s teaching on cheap and costly grace, though some misunderstood costly grace as being equivalent to ‘salvation by works’, rather than as the appropriate response of a genuine Christian taking up their cross to follow the ways of Jesus, whatever the personal cost. Most candidates argued that Bonhoeffer’s teaching and actions were justified given his situation, but questioned whether, in the light of recent terrorist attacks, this approach would produce disorder and therefore be self-defeating. Some candidates used material from the ethics unit, including Kantian ethics and situation ethics, to discuss the morality of civil disobedience and this approach often worked well.

## H173/04 Development of Islamic thought (AS)

### General comments:

All three of the questions were attempted, however, questions 1 and 2 were definitely the most popular – with the majority of candidates choosing to answer these two. Most responses ranged between a level 3 and 4 for both AO1 and AO2. However, there was a small percentage who achieved levels either below or above these including a few really sophisticated responses which showed excellent selection of material and full engagement with the question.

Most candidates showed, at least, a reasonable level of knowledge of the topics being examined but there did appear to be some significant gaps in the knowledge of some. All of the candidates should have an accurate knowledge of the technical terms used in the specification and this was not always the case.

The weighting of marks for the AO1 and AO2 components of the new course are equal and should have had equal consideration, which is a change from the old specification. This is something that some of the candidates appeared to have struggled with.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

#### 1. To what extent is it true to say that the Sira and Hadith are equally important for Muslims?

**AO1:** The whole range of levels were represented for this question, with some candidates showing a comprehensive range of knowledge of both the Sira and the Hadith while others showed little accurate knowledge of either.

Quite a few candidates did not appear to know what the Sira is and this clearly affected the grade that these candidates achieved. Some referred to it as being Shari'ah law while others confused it with Qur'anic surahs. Although in some of these cases they correctly identified the Hadith this lack of understanding limited the level that they could reach. Responses of this type could only get up to a level 3 due to the fact that it did not show accurate understanding or good selection of material.

There were, however, some excellent displays of knowledge of both the Sira and Hadith. For example, there were some really good responses where candidates were able to name significant authors of the Sira and Hadith and to also explain the process of authentication that the Hadith underwent.

**AO2:** The majority of candidates were able to give reasons as to why the Sira and Hadith are equally important. For example, those who understood the concept of the Sira referred to the fact that as they both relate to the life of the Prophet, they could be considered of equal importance. The weakest responses were those who had, in AO1, misidentified the Sira as something other than a biography of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh. This obviously meant that any evaluative comments they made were generally irrelevant.

The best responses were those which showed an understanding of the authentication process that the Hadiths underwent and used this knowledge to argue for the Hadith being more important based on its level of reliability. Some candidates also discussed the law schools and the fact that some used the Hadith as a secondary source, giving it increased importance. The strongest responses were able to also demonstrate why the Sira could be viewed as more important, and in doing so were able to demonstrate a high level of critical analysis.

#### 2. Critically assess the importance of the Abrahamic prophets for Muslim belief.

**AO1:** This was a popular question, however, there was a wide variety of responses. Some candidates seemed to have an excellent knowledge of the Abrahamic prophets. These candidates were able to name those referred to in the specification (Ibrahim, Musa, Isa and

Muhammad (pbuh) and explain Islamic beliefs about each of them. For example, many candidates referred to Ibrahim's belief in the concept of Tawhid and explained how this leads to him being considered, in Islam, as someone who exemplifies true faith. Most also discussed his willingness to sacrifice his son for Allah and how this act of faith is still commemorated, every year, at the end of the Hajj.

Some candidates showed a more limited understanding of the Abrahamic prophets by discussing two or three of them but failing to include Muhammad (pbuh). This may have been due to a lack of understanding that Muhammad (pbuh) is classed as an Abrahamic prophet or possibly just an oversight. The weakest responses were those who focused more on other prophets not included in the specification, such as Adam. There were a few candidates who wrote a significant amount about Adam at the expense of including one or more of the main four Abrahamic prophets covered in the AS course. This would have prevented them from achieving the highest level as the selection of material would not have been considered excellent.

**AO2:** There were some very good evaluations and these obviously came from those candidates who had mentioned all four of the main Abrahamic prophets. The best responses were those who offered a variety of reasons as to why the respective prophets are important for Muslim belief and who also weighed up the individual prophet's level of importance, one against the other. This allowed them to assess whether or not any of the prophets could be regarded as more important than the others.

A few candidates also considered the importance of other factors for Muslim belief in order to help them fully assess the overall importance of the Abrahamic prophets, for example, discussing the Five Pillars.

The weakest responses were those who only offered a partial evaluation, for example, only explaining why Muhammad (pbuh) was important for Muslim belief and not considering any other factors affecting Muslim belief.

### **3. 'The annihilation of self (fana') is the most important practice in Islam.' Discuss.**

**AO1:** Fewer candidates answered this question, however, those that did had a reasonable understanding of the practice of fana'. Most of the candidates were able to state that it was a Sufi practice and show that they understood Sufism to be a form of Islamic mysticism. While the focus of the question is primarily on the practice of fana' candidates would have been expected to demonstrate some level of knowledge on the roots and purpose of Sufism and not all of them did this.

The better responses were those where the candidates explained, at least briefly, a number of other Sufi practices that could be compared to fana'. The candidates who achieved the highest levels were the ones who also discussed Sunni and Shi'a Islam and mentioned practices followed by adherents of both groups. For example, some candidates referred to the Five Pillars as practices all Muslims observe.

**AO2:** Most candidates were able to offer some arguments to back up this statement, such as the annihilation of the self is ridding oneself of the ego and doing this, therefore, enables a Muslim to focus on Allah without distraction. As Tawhid is of fundamental importance in Islam this is surely a reason to regard fana' as the most important practice for Muslims as it allows you to raise your taqwa (God consciousness). A few candidates were able to explain how, arguably, the annihilation of the self is in a sense what all Muslims are trying to do through greater jihad, thus strengthening their argument. This showed an excellent level of analysis.

The majority of candidates were also able to explain why you might disagree with the quote, primarily through discussing the idea of bida (innovation). Such responses demonstrated an awareness that innovation led some Muslims to regard Sufism as un-Islamic and so any practises arising from Sufism as un-Islamic too. The best responses included a variety of arguments on both sides but also referred the number of Muslims belonging to all three branches of Islam and used this information to help them evaluate fully. Those candidates not getting above a level 3 were those who failed to discuss Sunni and Shi'a Islam or any alternative Islamic practices.

## **H173/06 Development of Buddhist thought (AS)**

### **General Comments:**

The candidates appeared to be well-prepared for the demands of the paper. The majority of candidates understood the format and there were very few rubric errors in construction of the responses.

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

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

### **Comments on Individual Questions:**

#### **Question 1 – ‘The Buddha’s enlightenment was the most significant part of his life.’ Discuss.**

This question was one of the most popular on the paper and was attempted by a large number of candidates.

Responses to the question tended to fall into two focal groups. The most popular method of responding adopted by candidates was to take a biographical approach in detailing the various significant points in the life of the Buddha, often starting with his experience of the four sights and his rejection of his early hedonistic lifestyle, before going through his time as an ascetic, the enlightenment itself, his first sermon in the deer park, his teaching of the Dharma and his eventual death. These approaches then tended almost to construct an old style part (b) answer in progressing to evaluate which of these events could be considered to be the most significant part of the Buddha’s life.

Alternatively, some candidates approached the question by first considering the significance of the Buddha’s enlightenment, and questioning what this actually meant in terms of what the enlightenment was before then critically contrasting this event with other events within the Buddha’s life. Here there was a general agreement in terms of events that were considered as mentioned above.

Some candidates had a greater focus than others on the more mythical aspects of the Buddha’s life and thus did not mention events surrounding the birth of the Buddha, or did so superficially, whilst others went into some detail concerning his birth, taking into account the four steps and the prophecy made about him. Similarly some candidates were able to explore in detail the events around the enlightenment and were again able to go into detail about the more mythical aspects of the struggle with Mara.

There were convincing arguments proposed for a variety of significant events within the life of the Buddha as to being the most important, with generally well-constructed support for each view which appeared to demonstrate that candidates had been well-prepared on this element of the course.

#### **Question 2 – Assess the view that the Second Noble Truth is the most important of the Four Noble Truths.**

This was a very popular question amongst candidates who generally seemed to be attracted by the straightforward nature of the question.

There was a commonality of approach to the question in the candidates tended to focus initially on the nature of the Second Noble Truth and to detail to a greater or lesser extent the causes of suffering found with Buddhist thought. Some candidates were able to make very good use throughout this question of specific Buddhist language and there was some reference by candidates to illustrations of the wheel of Dharma. Candidates then generally took the approach of considering each of the other Noble Truths in order before then making their assessment as to which could be considered the most important of the four.

There was some good use made by some candidates of the analogy of the Four Noble Truths to a doctor that is found within Buddhist tradition and this generally helped in the construction of good responses, allowing candidates to demonstrate the relative aspects and importance of each element before making their final consideration.

Some candidates were able to make the argument that each noble truth is interdependent and demonstrated this by linking them into the whole philosophy of Buddhism belief. These candidates then tended to show a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the question leading to some excellent responses.

**Question 3 – Critically discuss the view that Buddhist meditation is pointless without mindfulness.**

Although this was the least popular of the questions on the paper, there were still a number of candidates who chose to attempt a response.

There were a larger number of weaker responses to this question in comparison to the other two, with candidates demonstrating a misunderstanding of the different forms of meditation and focusing on a more westernised concept of mindfulness leading to some very general or basic level responses.

However, other candidates were very well informed on the two basic forms of meditation and were able to draw a distinction between the basic form of stilling and breathing meditation demonstrated by Samatha meditation as opposed to Vipassana meditation which is more concentrative.

There were those students who were able to demonstrate the basic interlinking of the two forms of meditation and make reference to the fact that the Buddha himself used both forms. Others argued that Vipassana, with its 'higher' form of mindfulness, was more important within Buddhist thought and progressed from this point to discuss aspects of mindfulness. There were some instances of confusion as to where to link mindfulness in a Buddhist sense as opposed to a more westernised concept of mindfulness as awareness of the self.

Many candidates made reference to the proposed health benefits of mindfulness and mentioned its use in prisons and the NHS, although this was quite often done without making the necessary links back to the question to justify the inclusion of these points.

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