

GCE

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H572**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H172**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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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)

General Comments

This year's candidates presented a full range of responses, although there seemed to be more in the middle range of marks and there are a number of general patterns that might point to this. Firstly, (a) question responses seemed not to target the question specifically – the question on Anselm attracted long explanations of Descartes and Kant; the question on Irenaeus often included long explanations of Augustine's theodicy.

There were many attempts to use key philosophical terms (a priori, a posteriori, inductive, deductive, synthetic and analytic) but not always successfully. There seemed to be a formula in the introductions of stating 'this is an analytic, a priori, deductive argument' but this was sometimes incorrect or terms were muddled. Many candidates struggled somewhat in response to question 4, often missing the emphasis on Irreducible Complexity in the stimulus statement.

Equally, the (b) responses often did not target the specifics of the question, and simply wrote out strengths and weaknesses of areas to do with the topic. Although they are not required, a reduction in the number of conclusions seen for (b) questions indicates that the questions themselves were not fully engaged with.

A number of candidates deviated from the question and what they were writing appeared to be a list of everything they know about the topic.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

a.

This was one of the most popular questions and candidates successfully identified the question as asking about Anselm's Ontological Argument. Significant numbers knew that Anselm defined God as the greatest possible being and were able to explore how this definition, for Anselm, made the existence of God definite. Some candidates were able to move on to the second formulation of the argument, as found in *Proslogion* 3. However a number of responses confused this argument with Aquinas' third way and suggested that God's necessity meant that the universe had a starting point; some also erroneously suggested that Anselm wrote chapter 3 of *Proslogion* in reply to Gaunilo's objections. While there were many excellent responses to this question, some responses did not have the precision required to access the top of level 5 of the Levels of Response. For example, it was not always understood that the Fool to whom Anselm refers, while representing atheists, indicates that there is universal acceptance about the definition of God; without this step, his argument certainly fails. Other candidates limited their marks by conflating Anselm with Descartes.

b.

A variety of answers were seen for this question, with some candidates clearly grasping the question and showing a clear understanding of logical necessity. Candidates who had understood the deductive nature of Anselm's argument in part (a) tended to produce the best responses. Those that had not understood the term necessary were at a disadvantage. Less successful responses simply explored why God is important/ necessary/needed from different perspectives e.g. the Design, Cosmological or Moral arguments. Some candidates made links to Aquinas' Cosmological ideas which worked best where the link was made with Aquinas' own criticisms of deductive arguments and to his Way Three. Quite often descriptive responses were

presented and thus did not reach the higher Levels of Response. There was also a tendency in some responses to rewrite what was written in part a) with little analysis or evaluation. Some answers, though, were exceptional, exploring the different perspectives of Descartes, Kant, Plantinga, Aquinas, Gaunilo and Russell to say whether God's existence is a logical necessity for the being of God.

Question 2

a.

Some candidates conflated Kant's moral argument with those of Aquinas or Newman, which received limited credit. Some simply gave a complete account of Kantian ethics, without linking it sufficiently to the postulation of god's existence. Others were able to explore Kant's morality, and from there move on to explore why Kant believed that this must lead us to postulate God's existence. Many candidates made very good use of Kantian language to demonstrate their understanding, although a number of responses confused the *summum bonum* with heaven, and therefore God-the-guarantor with God-the-rewarder.

However, better responses explored how the universe appears to be irrational since virtue does not always coincide with happiness, how 'ought' implies 'can' (particularly in relation to the *summum bonum*) and thus how God's existence can therefore be postulated as a guarantor to ensure the exact coincidence of happiness and morality and of the afterlife. The best answers understood and explained the three main postulates, (freedom, immortality, and God, with very few errors in spelling i.e. Immorality) defined what postulate actually means, and why God's existence is therefore essential to demonstrate the rationality of morality.

b.

Many answers clearly recognised the importance of Freud's arguments. The extent of these points however differed greatly. Some clearly understood Freud, his ID, Ego, Superego and 'Obsessional Neurosis' arguments and how these link to morality as a psychological need. Other simply explained the Oedipus complex in great detail, or wrote general criticisms of Kant, or a sweeping overview with little analysis or links to the question. Some weaker responses took the opportunity to write all they knew about Freud and ignored the focus of the question, for example, they simply described the Oedipus Complex without demonstrating how Freud's views challenge Kant's need for God in his moral argument. This answer also produced quite one sided views with little consideration of the opposing views, for example, a number of answers ignored 'not a proof of God existence' and concentrated on whether or not morality was a psychological need learnt from our parents or society. Others ignored the "psychological need" element and simply focused on whether God could be proved through morality. Some, however, did link in ideas surrounding conscience (e.g. Newman) as evidence of God, whilst others explored the cultural relativism of morals resulting in morality stemming from our psychology not God. Some were able to relate the question to Kant's view of the origin of moral duty.

Question 3

a.

This was a popular question and on the whole demonstrated good knowledge and understanding. However some responses spent far too long explaining the Inconsistent Triad, which was not needed and did not gain any particular credit.

Most remembered the question wording and could at least explain the difference between natural and moral evil, using examples.

Weaker responses failed to distinguish between Augustine and Irenaeus' views or wrote so generally that it could apply to either. This led to a general response which simply outlined Irenaeus without detail or precision. Some also seemed unaware that Irenaeus lived before Augustine and repeatedly put that Irenaeus was a response to Augustine. Those that missed the highest levels of response, often had not fully explain Irenaeus' views on natural and moral evil, perhaps conflating these together in a vague manner or ignoring one area completely. For

example, some were able to explain how Irenaeus accounted for moral evil (based on free will, autonomy and the choice to follow God) but did not fully explain how he accounted for natural evil – that it is necessary to produce second-order goods of sympathy, kindness, charity, benevolence, etc. using examples such as humanitarian aid/rescue efforts in the wake of natural disasters; and so assists in the maturation of the human species.

Better responses effectively explained how God did not create a perfect world and demonstrated a clear and concise understanding of how Irenaeus explains the existence of both moral and natural evil. The best answers were able to explain, often with biblical passages (Jonah and Job), the move from image to likeness of God and how freewill is needed for this process to happen. Understanding of Irenaeus was demonstrated by some through use of his examples of spiritual development, for example solid food and mother's milk; and keeping moist like clay in the hands of the potter. Many presented a clear understanding of soul-making and some elaborated on Hick's ideas as a support for Irenaeus, although this was not expected from the question.

b.

This question elicited a wide variety of responses focusing on the tension between human suffering and a loving God. Discussion of the statement attracted some excellent answers which were insightful and well thought out, using a range of evidence from Dostoyevsky, Hick, Mill, and Free Will Defence with particular reference to dysteleological suffering and its extent.

Some used this as an opportunity to put all of Augustine into their answer, although this sometimes lacked evaluation and links to the question. Some chose the structure of Irenaeus in comparison to Augustine, how Irenaeus sees evil as a test, even if a harsh test, and how Augustine sees evil as a privation and therefore God can remain good. Many used Dostoyevsky to emphasise how evil in the world is too much of a test and looked critically at God's characteristics and why a good God would test us. Weaker responses showed very little evidence of scholars and instead presented a vague discussion with little philosophical exploration. Some relied upon Biblical examples such as Job which worked to an extent. A number of responses spent too long exploring the Inconsistent Triad, again, very often a repeat of material in (a), and ideas surrounding God's nature as omnipotent and omnibenevolent, rather than specifically focusing on the question and the 'goodness' of God. Weaker responses emphasised throughout that God therefore does not exist, which was missing the point of the question.

Question 4

a.

This was the least popular question and one which polarised answers. Common mistakes included detailing intelligent design and ignoring the irreducible complexity aspect entirely. Where examples were used they were sometimes not explained fully or were explained superficially. A disappointing number of candidates answered as though it was a question on the teleological argument.

Where candidates did recognise this as a religion and science question, they often lacked in-depth knowledge and failed to go beyond simply referencing Behe and the mousetrap analogy. The weakest responses used this question to discuss Paley's analogy of the watch and attribute this to irreducible complexity. Very occasionally candidates were able to identify that Behe was challenging the theory of evolution by suggesting flagellum were not able to be explained by the small series of successive changes. The majority of candidates suggested that Behe was saying that if a part was removed that the flagellum would cease to function. The difficulty with this view was that the majority of molecules would cease to function properly were this the case. Some appeared to conflate irreducible complexity and specified complexity.

b.

The degree to which this question was answered successfully often depended on how well candidates understood part a). Those who focused on Paley's design argument in part a) continued to discuss this in part b). Very few seemed to understand the links between the different types of creationism and irreducible complexity, showing little knowledge of Creationist views, or of the strengths and weaknesses of Irreducible Complexity.

However, most made some connection to God as a Creator, often taken from the Genesis account. "Delusion" was rarely understood or addressed. The most successful answers had clearly engaged with the science/religion topic and brought criticisms of Irreducible Complexity; for example highlighting that evolutionary pathways have already been discovered for the flagellum.

Other comments:

- Handwriting is still an issue. There were some scripts that were extremely difficult to read with some parts completely illegible. Since examiners can only mark what they can read, this may have a detrimental effect on some marks. Schools may be advised to provide scribes for those who have difficulty with handwriting. This will be especially important at A2 level as the answers tend to be more longer and the argument needs to be clear.
- Students seem to over-use words (especially in Anselm) that they clearly did not fully understand – for instance analytical, deductive, and a priori. Many introductions were extremely rehearsed, often incorrect and lacked any explanation or link to the specific question in a lot of cases.
- Much of the material added into some part a) answers was just not relevant to the question – for instance, the whole of the ontological argument or the whole of the Problem of Evil. This often had negative impacts on the part b) because the material was not repeated or it was simply referred to in passing – as cross-crediting between parts a) and b) is not allowed, this left the response in the realms of a basic, asserted argument.
- Part b) responses generally were weaker because of the lack of argument or simple repetition and listing of knowledge of "who said what". Some missed the connections between parts a) and b) which may have helped to build an argument from the understanding already shown in a).

G572 Religious Ethics (AS)

General Comments:

Candidates did not appear to have been as well prepared for this paper as in previous years – there were issues where some candidates were including AO2 critical elements within the part a) responses and there was also some indication of a lack of practice in responding to part b) questions which often seemed to show little development from GCSE practice.

More candidates than in previous years seemed to find timing an issue, with many appearing to run out of time or failing to fully complete their final questions, leading to responses that simply cut off.

There were more alternative religious responses used this year, with a greater number of responses referring to Buddhism than in previous sessions, along with some use of Judaism and Islam.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1a

This was one of the more popular questions on the paper, and was answered by a large number of candidates leading to a diverse variety in terms of both quality and styles of response.

This question demonstrated the issues some candidates still have with ‘question blindness’ in examination situations. Instead of reading the whole of the question, significant numbers only read ‘follower of religion’ and ‘abortion’ and did not read the key word ‘object’. This led to a large number of candidates including explanations of how a religious follower would approve of abortion and demonstrating arguments to support this viewpoint, as well as those that were opposed to abortion and specified by the question. Although these responses were not negatively marked, these parts did not add to the response and effectively meant that the candidate lost time in the exam when they could have been writing about a concept that would have added marks to their overall response. There was also a tendency for candidates responding to this question to revert to a GCSE style response on both elements of the question, with concepts broadly mentioned but not developed with detail, evidence or argument.

Many responses, however, were well-written and were well-constructed explanations of objections to abortion from the perspective of the follower of a religion studied. The majority of these involved Christianity. Here some responses presented key points from the Divine Command Theory approach rooted in the Bible and from Natural Law. Some responses developed objections based on more general approaches such as that taken by Sanctity of Life, or that taken by a focus on Divine Providence, whereby the whole of a human life from conception onwards is under God’s guidance.

Some responses did not develop the explanation made sufficiently, and thus what was written was a simplistic stating of points. Some responses did not focus sufficiently on the question and wrote explanations as to why abortion might be accepted.

Question 1b

A number of responses demonstrated a sound level of understanding with regard to Sanctity of Life, and discussed whether the principle was one only for religious people to believe in, or whether non-religious people might also believe in it. It was disappointing that not enough emphasised that Sanctity of Life is in itself a religious concept and by definition would not apply to non-religious people - however there were many who were able to demonstrate that this did not preclude people from finding intrinsic value in human life.

Some responses posited a secular form of Sanctity of Life, whereby the unique nature of human life could be upheld without any overarching religious belief being involved. There was some successful exemplification here which noted the value placed on human life by the law, the health service and by society in general.

Examples have been used well in the better responses and many have referred to Kant. Some students simply compared sanctity and quality of life and so did not fully respond to the precise question. The theory of utilitarianism was noted in a number of responses but was not generally used successfully in analysis.

Some candidates presented somewhat basic responses as their knowledge of Sanctity of Life was insecure.

Question 2a

Some responses were able to both explain and apply Singer's Preference Utilitarianism in detail. Thus a number of his key ideas were presented, including the Impartial Spectator, 'trade-offs' and speciesism. Some candidates would have benefitted from trying to explain what Singer meant by the term 'preference' insofar as it means significantly more than just what a person prefers.

Some responses showed very limited knowledge of Singer and it was therefore surprising that the question was attempted. Unfortunately, a large number of responses failed to focus on any of the unique elements proposed by Singer in his approach to ethical decision making, and instead made very generalised responses on Preference as a Utilitarian approach, or focused on Bentham and / or Mill and then attempted to tie a little of preference to this.

Responses that did focus on Singer showed good knowledge of his idea of reducing pain rather than increasing pleasure and explained how this negative painism was considered an effective approach to decision making. Some also included the concept of different types of preference and replacement theory to build highly effective responses to the question that included some very impressive applications of the whole theory to specific issues.

Question 2b

Those responses which had a good understanding of Singer were able to discuss the extent to which his version of Utilitarianism was a 'much better guide' than Mill's version.

Generally, candidates were able to write at much greater length and with greater confidence regarding Mill's version of Utilitarianism and its strengths and weaknesses when compared to Singer's version. This led to a large number of responses that only focused on Mill within their answer, some of whom produced highly detailed explorations of Mill with large amounts of his Utilitarian theory being demonstrated, such as the higher and lower pleasures and the harm principle. These responses struggled in making a successful argument for one version being better than the other, as they lacked the basic appreciation of Singer to be able to demonstrate a real viewpoint.

For some, the simplicity and practicality of Singer's version were regarded as being a better guide today, whilst for others the quasi-deontological nature of Mill's 'Rule Utilitarianism' provided a better framework for ethical decisions. Excellent responses explained how one of the theories manages to overcome weaknesses of the other, and so therefore is more successful.

Question No. 3a

A number of responses demonstrated a secure level of knowledge and understanding with regard to Kantian ethics. Overall however, a number were less successful in the application of Kantian ethics to war and peace.

Sound explanations were provided as to how Kant's concept of duty might be evident in terms of soldiers fighting in war, and of how the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative might be applicable. The inclusion of good examples helped many responses in their application. Some responses gave a simplistic explanation for each of the formulations – for example if war was universalised there would be no peace anywhere. Others were able to present useful explanations of how Kantian ethics might mesh in part with the Just War Theory and its three components – jus ad bellum, jus in bello and jus post-bellum. Some candidates ventured to suggest that only the Hypothetical Imperative was truly applicable in war.

Very few responses actually focused directly on the peace element of the question – this was often dealt with implicitly while the candidates were discussing various elements of war.

Some responses showed knowledge and evidence of "On Perpetual Peace" by Kant.

Question 3b

There were a number of strong responses to this question. Responses presented balanced discussions of the weaknesses of Kantian Ethics. Many highlighted the focus on rationality to the exclusion of any other factor as being a significant weakness, whilst others highlighted the complexity of the ethical approach or the weaknesses shared by all deontological ethical approaches.

Many responses made use of the developments by Ross in responding to the issue of conflicting duties and were able to use this well as an informed element of their response.

There were also some responses which approached the question by critiquing the whole of deontological and absolutist approaches to ethical decision making and built their arguments around these elements. This was done very effectively in many cases, either as part of a larger assessment of Kant, or as a main focus of critique.

Question 4a

This was the most popular question on the paper.

Many responses included detailed and full explanations of the main features of Aquinas' Natural Law Theory. Here again, sometimes too long was spent on unnecessary detail in explaining the background to Aquinas.

Many responses took very similar approaches in responding to this question, firstly grounding the theory in the work of Aristotle and the Stoics before describing the placing of Natural Law within a hierarchy of laws. This was then usually developed into the Primary Precepts which led into the secondary precepts. From here, most candidates finished by describing the differentiation made between real and apparent goods and concluding with the principle of Double Effect.

Variations on this approach saw the inclusion of internal and external motivations and some mention of virtues and vices within the system. Specific mention of the synderesis rule only explicitly appeared in a minority of responses – this seemed to be overlooked by many candidates or dealt with implicitly instead.

Some responses demonstrated a deep knowledge of the system, employing concepts such as the application of *phronesis* and *sophia* within the element of rational decision making and some described the difference between *synderesis* and *conscientia* when making moral decisions.

The major element of difference between responses often came down to the quality of exemplification that was used to support the explanation of concepts, such as the different aspects of the primary precepts or the development of the secondary precepts.

Some responses, however, only gave very brief descriptions of the key features of Natural Law rather than full explanations.

Question 4b

Some responses grasped the key point of the question by focusing on the word 'purpose' and the extent to which the teleological aspect of Natural Law is its most important feature. Responses thus considered that this was the case, given the focus of Aquinas on human life having its key purpose fulfilled in the afterlife with God in heaven.

Other responses argued that the most important aspect of Natural Law was instead the more readily grasped primary precepts given their clarity and ease of application via the secondary precepts. A popular argument was one which stated that the most important aspect of Natural Law was rationality, as this was the driving force behind a person's discerning purpose and doing what they could to achieve that purpose.

Weaker responses misunderstood Aquinas' understanding of purpose and argued that purpose is *not* the most important aspect of Natural Law, whilst simultaneously arguing that perfection (being in the image of God) or eudaimonia are instead.

Many good responses delved into more nuanced discussion of whether the end purpose or the guiding rules/structures matter more, and whether an end goal or a daily focus is more essential.

G573 Jewish Scriptures (AS)

General Comments:

There were some outstanding responses to the demands of the paper which demonstrated a high level of theological understanding, a developed ability to deploy key information/argument, and a clear understanding of, and engagement with, the specification demands. It was a pleasure to read such responses which were very impressive for AS candidates. Some candidates presented solid AS responses; these were characterised by a good selection of knowledge and a respectable attempt at evaluative analysis. Regrettably some papers did not show that development past GCSE had been made; such responses relied on basic ‘story telling’ rather than engagement with the nuances of the studied text, and provided basic and simplified AO2 arguments.

The questions differentiated well between candidates. All questions were attempted with question 2 and question 3 being the most popular. The questions appear to have provided opportunities for candidates of a wide range of ability to demonstrate their skills. As the report of last year, some candidates were let down by poor exam skills. Some candidates wrote a disproportionately longer amount for the lower marked AO2 question and appear to lack understanding of how to formulate an evaluative, critical AS answer which moves beyond the ‘*on the one hand...on the other hand*’ structure employed by many candidates at GCSE. Some candidates seemed unable to tie their responses successfully to the trigger word or question focus; they offered responses which, although may have discussed the set text at length or in detail, did not explicitly hone in on the question focus area and as such could not score past L2/L3.

The best responses were those that showed organisation and structure and fully answered the set question; such responses kept returning to the question throughout, and demonstrated explicitly how the question was being answered by the evidence the candidate was providing. The best responses demonstrated focused application of knowledge through clear reference to scriptural passages and scholarship; these answers also included a high level of analysis and evaluation. Whilst it was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to engage with the set texts at a high level and show awareness of key passages and textual moments, many candidates were unable to engage with historical-critical readings, textual analysis and theological debate or traditional Jewish readings in order to present a high level analytical response. Most candidates were able to describe the set passages well; however, only the best responses engaged with the material in a critical manner and could discuss the primary source material and scholarship fluidly. It was disappointing that very few candidates were able to confidently engage 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.

There were no rubric errors. However, some candidates had clearly run out of time as answers were not complete.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1(a)

This was the least popular question; however many candidates that answered this question produced good answers. Some candidates appeared to not understand the trigger word ‘theological’ but were able to score marks through providing detailed exploration of the set texts. Satisfactory responses concentrated on describing the texts and the main events at Mount

Carmel and Mount Horeb. 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 ‘story telling’ rather than engaging critically with the text; candidates do not need to write out the story, rather they should be demonstrating a theological point, which is then developed through citing evidence within the text and explaining the reasoning/s for this. There were however, some excellent answers to this question which were well written and showed a high level of theological understanding.

Question 1(b)

This was a well answered question. Many candidates were able to discuss the features of a prophet and whether Elijah failed or succeed at his role. The best arguments were those which were able to discuss other examples of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ prophets; some candidates discussed Jonah, and whilst this was not necessary to score a high mark, this showed a high level of ability to deploy relevant learning to create a well-balanced and critical argument. The better responses were those which were well structured and showed critical engagement in order to deconstruct the question demands. Candidates who unpacked different ways of understanding ‘good’ and ‘for whom’ often produced very good responses. 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. Some answers showed a very high level of engagement with the set text and demonstrated in detail an understanding of the nature of G-d. These answers often were presented thematically; candidates focused on an aspect of G-d’s nature (such as omnipotence) and discussed where, and how, the text of Jonah exemplified this. Very good responses demonstrated an ability to manipulate the set text to construct an essay of a high standard; these answers made explicit and direct reference to the text and candidates were able to quote relevant textual passages. More basic answers provided a narrative overview of Jonah, often discussing each chapter in turn. Some candidates who used this approach did provide a ‘few lines’ about the role of G-d following discussion of each chapter, however, often this was basic and was not developed enough at AS to move beyond L2/L3. It should be noted that although the ability of candidates to ‘retell’ the narrative of Jonah is impressive, this was not the question set. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to discuss the historical-critical context of Jonah and presented fluid and strong introductions to their essays; very able responses linked this to the question focus of ‘nature of G-d’ explicitly.

Question 2(b)

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully. Very good answers were those which were able to discuss concepts such as Form Criticism with ease and were able to use this knowledge to construct a well-balanced argument. Weaker arguments were those that demonstrated poor argument style, which did not deconstruct the question demands, or showed little development past GCSE content. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to discuss at length the question focus ‘literally’; very successful responses made reference here to the historical-critical context of the narrative, to arguments surrounding divine revelation of text, and the layers of teaching contained within the text which traverse time.

Question 3(a)

This question was answered well by many candidates. Some answers showed a very high level of engagement with the set texts; candidates were able to discuss at length each of the comforters’ arguments presented to Job and explore in detail the reasons for Job’s suffering. The very best responses were those which were able to manipulate the set text to construct an essay of a high standard; these answers made explicit and direct reference to the text, candidates were able to quote relevant textual passages, and were able to explain at length how suffering was being understood both within the context of the book and within the context of historical-critical analysis. Weaker responses simply repeated the text of Job, and did not engage with the question demands at a high level. 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 3(b)

There were some very convincing arguments presented to this question. Many candidates offered well-written, focused responses which engaged with the question at a high level. Numerous candidates discussed Job as ‘wisdom literature’; better responses were those which were able to critically engage with how wisdom literature presumes to offer insight and wisdom about nature and reality but that this insight can be known only to G-d. Good responses were also those that were able to engage at a high level with the ‘to what extent’ part of the question; many candidates suggesting that Job provides a literary ‘answer’ to suffering but not a rational ‘answer’.

Question 4(a)

Answers to this question were mixed; some candidates produced exemplary answers in the L5 band, while others were very weak. Some candidates produced what appeared to be a ‘rehearsed answer’ to an A02 question rather than presenting an A01 essay; these candidates received mixed marks depending on the content of their essay and how much it did, or did not, focus on the question demand. Some candidates were able to discuss the historical-critical context of the covenant of Moses and other covenants in detail and used this to construct high level answers. Many candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the Mosaic covenant and were able to cite and discuss the set text with ease. 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. Some candidates confused aspects of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. It was disappointing that more candidates did not pick up on the unique features of the Mosaic covenant in terms of the giving of the covenant, the content of the covenant, and the place of the covenant within Judaism past and present.

Question 4(b)

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully. Good answers were those which were able to discuss the different settings of, and the different foci of, the covenants studied and use this knowledge to construct a well-balanced argument. Many responses 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 disappointing to see that some candidates were unaware of the different skills required for the A01 and A02 questions and here ‘repeated’ their A01 response; such b) part responses could not score highly due to a lack of evaluation and analysis.

G574 New Testament (AS)

General Comments:

This year's paper produced many good responses but there were a number of candidates who are still addressing the general topic of the question and ignoring its specific focus. Many scripts contained a number of inaccuracies; texts were misremembered, Mark and Matthew's gospels confused and scholars misattributed.

The evaluative part b questions were generally well done. A number just stated a number of views and there was little sense of a narrative or flow of argument. Addressing the statement in the opening paragraph, e.g. "There is some truth in this statement..." or "This statement is wrong..." proved most effective for some and helped propel the argument along.

Some handwriting was barely legible and a number of scripts were devoid of paragraphing.

Comments on Individual Questions:

1 (a)

Candidates approached this in a number of ways. Some looked at it chronologically and charted Roman Rule over Palestine, bringing out its effect on Jewish religious life and practices. There was some outstanding knowledge of the early years of Roman rule, particularly on Herod's reign, but sometimes this petered out and responses did not move on to look at Judea under the procurators. The destruction of the temple, surely the key event of Roman Rule, was omitted by many or simply stated rather than explained. A number of candidates approached this question thematically, examining key beliefs (monotheism, election, law, temple etc.) and this proved successful. Candidates were distinguished by their ability to explain the impact of Roman policy rather than just describe.

(b)

It was good to see candidates tackle this question head on. Many presented a clear case for the synagogues surviving Roman rule after the destruction of the temple and then went on to contrast it with other factors such as the Covenant, Law or faith in general. This was a good plan of attack and those with fully justified and explained conclusions did well.

2 (a)

Although this was not a popular question many who attempted it did well. The best responses had a fine command of the texts and themes lurking behind Mark's crucifixion narrative and showed excellent knowledge of Psalm 22, Isaiah's Suffering Servant song, and Maccabean martyr texts to illuminate the theology of the crucifixion. It was pleasing to see a number of candidates explaining how Mark used Old Testament texts, for example, to comment on Jesus' death as a sacrifice or actually create the narrative.

A few weaker responses looked at the use of the Old Testament in the whole Passion Narrative, whilst others only had a cursory knowledge of Psalm 22 to draw on.

(b)

A number of candidates interpreted this question to mean historical=true and theological=false and thus missed out on some opportunities to debate and argue. Many candidates were content to come down on one side or the other- some argued the crucifixion is multiply attested and so therefore is true, whilst others argued the sacrificial themes of the crucifixion made it theological.

Surprisingly, few went for a more nuanced conclusion, by arguing that there was no contradiction in seeing the crucifixion as both theological and historical.

3 (a)

This was the most popular question on the paper, however many candidates struggled to stick to the focus of the question. Many wrote generally on the beliefs of the three named parties, incorporating extensive details on free will and the afterlife, but it was only the sections on the Law that could be credited. Others had a decent knowledge of the Pharisees and Sadducees (though there was some confusion as to who supported the Oral Law) but seemed to have little understanding of the Essenes, beyond general platitudes about their origins.

Some candidates did do well, and worked through the parties systematically, explaining their differing views of the law, giving reasons for this and pertinent examples of their beliefs. Some candidates successfully tied in other beliefs by rooting them in the particular party's exposition of the Law.

(b)

Again, this question was answered well. Some candidates argued it was the Law, Covenant or the Temple that united the parties whilst others latched on to anti-Roman sentiment as the unifying factor. Some skilfully showed that there was still disagreement on many of these factors and the statement for debate was true. All responses were given appropriate credit and it was good to see candidates using key material in differing ways.

4. (a)

The best answers to this question worked through Pilate's appeal to the crowd, systematically explaining each aspect of the story. There was a lot to say and many commented on the historicity of the Passover custom, the presentation of Pilate, whether or not Barabbas existed and Mark's motives for including the scene. There were some clever links made between this scene and the earlier parts of the Passion Narrative, for example the crowd's change since the Triumphal Entry. Not all candidates commented on all of these features.

A few misread the question and wrote about the role of the Romans in the whole of the Passion Narrative and a number conflated Matthew and Mark's scene, not something that has been often done in the past.

(b)

This question was well done. Candidates typically contrasted Pilate's role in Jesus' execution with the role of the Jewish authorities. Many took Mark's gospel as accurate historical information but a number argued that Mark had skewed the blame for Jesus' death and Pilate deserves full blame. Others looked at Judas, the disciples or Jesus himself - in the sense he provoked his own death - these were perfectly valid routes to take and proved interesting reading. Some were content to put Jesus' death down to being part of 'God's plan', without further clarification or linking it to Mark's theological motives; such faith statements gain very limited credit as an appropriate mode of argument in an academic essay.

G575 Developments in Christian Theology (AS)

General Comments:

There were fewer entries this year but many of the scripts were of a very high standard with candidates showing an excellent and sophisticated grasp of the facts and an impressive ability to argue and debate. The Liberation Theology section furnished slightly weaker responses; some candidates here struggled to focus on the question and muster sufficient knowledge and understanding to do the questions justice.

In both sections, the part b) evaluative questions were well done. Those who really took issues with the statement in the question did particularly well. A number of responses struggled a little to find an opposing side; they should be aware that it is not always necessary to give a binary or opposite view; giving a range of differing views, before reaching a justified conclusion, is just as effective.

Comments on Individual Questions:

1 (a)

The majority of candidates attempted this question and many were able to give a full, detailed and well-explained account of Augustine's teaching on the soul. Most responses were set out clearly and logically and showed a fine understanding of concepts central to Augustine's thought. A few wrote almost exclusively about sex, some talked about the Soul after the Fall, and a few wrote generally about Augustine's teaching on human nature without mentioning souls at all. A number conflated Augustine and Calvin, perhaps with half an eye on the b) part question.

(b)

Most responses to this question followed a similar path. Many looked at the fundamentalist position and contrasted it with an atheist's, typically Dawkins', reading of Genesis. This approach worked and candidates were distinguished by the level of argument threaded through their response and the extent to which they justified their conclusion. A few took a different approach and looked at existentialism, particularly Sartre and/or Bultmann, to argue that the Fall was more than a mere story but an expression of the human condition.

2 (a)

There were some excellent responses to this question and many had a full and sophisticated understanding of Calvin's theology. Many responses worked through key ideas such as the idea of creation as a mirror, the *sensus divinitatis*, and conscience very well, and explained their meaning and how they pointed towards knowledge of God. A number looked at Calvin on knowledge of God as redeemer – where this approach was taken there was a tendency to lose focus on the question. A few went off on a tangent and discussed the Barth and Brunner debate, which would have been more appropriate in the b) part question.

(b)

This prompted some interesting responses. Some looked at the Barth and Brunner debate, others looked at Calvin again whilst others showed some excellent knowledge of religious epistemology and the thought of the likes of Alvin Plantinga and his ideas on warranted belief. A number contrasted a religious approach with an atheist one and concluded that God can't be known because He does not exist; this was partially successful. Better responses 'thought themselves' into the theology debate and dealt with the question on these terms.

3 (a)

Most candidates answered this question. Some did not know what the hermeneutics of suspicion were and wrote in general about the use of the bible by liberation theologians. Many had some knowledge of what the hermeneutics of suspicion is and there were a number of full responses which showed a fine understanding of Ricoeur's theory. Some on went on to look at how the masters of suspicion, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche could be used to 'interrogate' the text, whilst others looked at the hermeneutics of suspicion in practice, and in the thought of theologians such as Miranda. It was excellent to see some detailed examples used to illuminate candidates' explanations, typically these were the Exodus and the Virgin Mary.

(b)

Some candidates struggled a little with this question and found it difficult to argue why one should not be suspicious of church teaching. However, there were some fine responses which drew on the magisterium of the church, papal infallibility, and the dangers of Marxism to weave clear and well-justified arguments.

4 (a)

Some approached this from a purely Marxist angle and looked in depth at Marx's teaching on false consciousness, looking at its origins with Feuerbach and going on to link the 'opium of the people' idea to this key concept. Others outlined Marx's views and then explained how it is used in Liberation Theology, particularly in conscientisation and the three mediations. Both approaches were acceptable.

(b)

This question prompted some interesting responses. Some came down on the side of revolution as the only way to achieve liberation, whilst others thought education inseparable from revolution. Some mentioned Liberation Theology, others only Marx; again both approaches were acceptable. Very few candidates latched on to the phrase 'true liberation', some thought this could be taken in a religious sense and that only God can truly liberate.

G576 Buddhism (AS)

General Comments:

Candidates were well prepared for the paper and had good general knowledge and understanding on which to base their answers. Some centres prepare their candidates extremely well and those candidates have a wide range of information to draw on and produce some incredibly detailed and knowledgeable answers. Some have a wide range of scholarly views and textual evidence to draw on which, for candidates of this age, is impressive.

Most candidates seemed to be able to access most the questions and form some relevant responses to most questions. However, some of the technical terminology did cause some challenges, for example some did not know the difference between the monastic sangha and the four fold sangha which also includes the lay community. Some did not know that bhikkhunis are nuns.

Where candidates did not access the higher marks, this was generally where their responses did not show a careful selection of material. In the Levels of Response for the higher levels it asks for “very high level of ability to select and deploy relevant information”. This means that candidates need to select out the key information to use in their response and not write everything they know. This occurred with Question 1 more so than with the other questions. Candidates either told the story of the Deer Park Sermon or explained at great length the four noble truths. Whilst both are perfectly correct it would have been better to select elements of the story to focus on, such as showing that the result of the sermon was the enlightenment of one of the ascetics, or that there was an earthquake signifying that the earth concurred with the Buddha’s teaching.

Candidates also need to be mindful of the wording of the question. Where the question says explain the importance, candidates must explain the importance and not just focus on the concept. Some candidates did not access higher levels because they did not fully address this aspect of the question.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Q1a

This was generally a well answered question. Almost all of the candidates knew what the Deer Park Sermon was. Some, as stated above, needed to be more focused on the question or more selective in their use of evidence.

Q1b

There was a wide range of responses to this question. Lots of candidates made good use of the trikaya doctrine to show the different views of the Buddha. Some made use of the 3 refuges or the fact that the arhats collected the Buddha’s teachings together after his death, and this limited the effect of the Buddha’s death. Some suggested that the Buddha’s death had to happen in order to prove that all things are impermanent.

Q2a

The majority of candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge of the concepts involved in this question. Some made use of ideas from question 1a which was acceptable. Some did not fully focus on the wording of the question, or were not selective enough in the evidence they had chosen. Some demonstrated exceptional levels of knowledge and understanding of scholarly views and textual sources.

Q2b

This question presented few problems to candidates who showed how each relies on the other and any of the three can be showed to be more or less important than the others.

Q3a

Most candidates responded well to this question. The responses that attracted higher marks did so because they showed how the various concepts in the question interlink to form a holistic view of the world within samsara. The majority of candidates made good use of the Tibetan wheel of life but some focused too much on this to the exclusion of other ideas or concepts.

Q3b

The vast majority of candidates who attempted this question demonstrated that they fully grasped the concepts involved and how they interlinked within Buddhist thought. There was lots of clear and detailed analysis of ideas. This means that candidates showed what the concepts were and how influential there are within a specific context, giving specific judgments on this.

Q4a

A range of responses were again seen. The four fold sangha is the monastic sangha and the lay community working in a symbiotic way to keep both Buddhism and society functioning harmoniously. A large number of candidates knew this and could articulate it well, using some good examples.

Q4b

Surprisingly, a number of candidates mistook bhikkhunis for monks. The candidates who gained the higher marks did so because they gave an indication of what 'least important' actually looked like in reality and measured bhikkhunis to this. This is always a really good way to address questions which are evaluative in nature. Some candidates had clearly been very well schooled in this and wrote fantastic responses.

G578 Islam (AS)

General Comments:

Generally the candidates performed at a similar level to previous years with only a minority of candidates achieving lower than a level 3. There was, however, a slight improvement overall on the standard of the evaluative questions. On the whole candidates seemed to be reasonably well prepared for the type of questions on the paper.

Comments on Individual Questions:

1a)

This was a popular question and the majority of candidates touched on both the particular and unique nature of the Qur'an, to some extent. The weaker responses were those that focused more on the particular nature of the Qur'an – detailing the method of revelation, the qualities of Muhammad pbuh as messenger and the method of compilation. These responses tended to be more descriptive in nature.

The stronger responses were those that also dealt thoroughly with the unique nature of the Qur'an. Those candidates generally made reference to the infallible nature of the Qur'an and discussed the belief that, through it, Muhammad pbuh was reinstating a message which had become distorted.

It was evident that this type of question was familiar to most candidates, however, some candidates failed to address the exact wording of the question.

1b)

This was the part b) question that candidates appeared to find the most challenging, and as such it proved a good discriminator. A few candidates did reach a level 5 for this evaluation. Their responses showed an appreciation of how knowledge of Makkan and Madinan surahs may enhance a Muslim's understanding of the development of Islam and the problems facing Muhammad pbuh, which in turn allows for an enhanced understanding of the faith. Some responses were one-sided, only able to suggest reasons why it doesn't matter – the most common argument being that they are all the words of Allah so it is the words, not the location that is important. There were also a number of candidates who clearly tried hard to find arguments as to why it does matter but whose arguments were ineffective.

2a)

This was another popular question. The majority of the candidates had, at least, a reasonable knowledge of the Hajj. There were very few candidates achieving below a level 3 for their knowledge and understanding. Most responses dealt with the significance of Hajj on both Muslim life (which most candidates interpreted as referring to the individual Muslim) and the Ummah. This was done, however, with varying degrees of success.

The stronger responses were those that demonstrated a really good knowledge of the various rituals associated with the Hajj and were then able to explain the significance of these rituals for the Ummah and Muslim life respectively. A few candidates, however, showed little understanding of the Hajj rituals speaking only generally about the Hajj.

2b)

In general this question was reasonably well addressed by most candidates. The majority of candidates were able to offer more than one perspective on the issue. Some picked up on the frequency that both the Hajj and prayer are to be observed, arguing that as prayer is done 5 times a day it is more important than Hajj, which only has to be done once in a lifetime. Others discussed the deep spiritual impact of the Hajj on Muslims as a way of arguing that it can be considered as equally important, if not more so.

A few candidates took the once in a lifetime journey to be Muhammad's pbuh night journey. As long as the accompanying arguments were related to the wording of the question candidates were given credit for approaching the question in this way.

3a)

This was the least popular of all four of the questions. Most candidates were able to demonstrate a basic understanding of Judaism and Zoroastrianism but few candidates showed sufficient knowledge to achieve a level 5. The weaker responses were those that had a superficial knowledge of both religions and in some cases where the knowledge was inaccurate. There was a number of candidates who just provided a descriptive account of all the religions present in Pre-Islamic Arabia. There were, however, a few very good responses to this question. These candidates demonstrated a very good knowledge of both religions and the various ways in which they influenced Pre-Islamic Arabia. For example, some candidates discussed the economic importance of the Jewish community and the influence of this in Pre-Islamic community. Others referred to the belief in monotheism and an afterlife and linked it to the hanifs.

3b)

A number of the candidates who chose this question appeared to find this easier to answer than the part a). Many of the responses demonstrated a good understanding of the different religious beliefs present in Pre-Islamic Arabia and were able to explain which of these had an influence on Muhammad's pbuh message. A lot of candidates also referred to the idea that the message itself was not a new message and therefore the environment had no influence on it at all. There were actually very few candidates who weren't able to offer more than one perspective for this question and on the whole it was reasonably well addressed.

4a)

There were some excellent responses to this question which demonstrated a clear understanding of how the principles of Shirk influence the design and decoration of a mosque. The best responses were able to give a good explanation of shirk and then pick up on a variety of aspects of the design and decoration of the mosque explaining how they help to either avoid shirk or reinforce tawhid. For example, many candidates referred to the absence of images and statues as a way of avoiding shirk and the calligraphy on mosque walls as a way of reinforcing tawhid.

The weaker responses were those that gave a more descriptive account of mosque design and decoration but failed to link it to the concept of shirk.

4b)

There were some interesting discussions for this evaluation with a few candidates showing a high level of engagement with the question. Most candidates were able to offer a reasonable variety of points as to why the architecture and design of a mosque could be considered an important aspect of Muslim worship. The weaker responses generally argued from just one perspective and/or failed to quantify the extent to which it is an important aspect of Muslim worship.

The best responses gave a variety of reasons as to why the design and architecture of the mosque is both important for Muslim worship but also not an essential aspect of it.

G579 Judaism (AS)

General Comments:

There were many very good responses to the demands of the paper which demonstrated a high level of understanding, a developed ability to deploy key information/argument, and a clear understanding of, and engagement with, the specification demands. Some candidates presented very solid AS answers; these answers were characterised by a good selection of knowledge and a respectable attempt at evaluative analysis. Although there were many good answers, a large percentage of answers were very similar/identical in content and structure and appeared to be 'rote' learnt; as such, many answers although good, did not engage with the nuances of the question at a developed enough level.

Some candidates presented answers which although rich in content did not address the set question. Disappointingly some papers did not show that development past GCSE had been made; some answers showed confusion in knowledge and presented simplified A01/A02 essays.

The best responses were those that showed organisation and structure and fully answered the set question; these answers kept returning throughout to the question and demonstrated explicitly how the question was being answered by the evidence the candidate was providing. Such responses demonstrated focused application of knowledge through clear reference to beliefs and practices and scholarship; these answers also included a high level of analysis and evaluation. There were some very good responses to all questions which showed a very pleasing standard for AS candidates. It was however, disappointing that very few candidates were able to confidently engage in discussion of scholarship to support their answers.

Some candidates ignored the trigger word within the question and wrote everything they knew about the wider topic area; whilst some of this knowledge was impressive in the detail presented it did not relate to the set question and as such was superfluous. For example, many answers to Q3(a) did not mention 'practice', which is the central focus of the question, in their answer at all. Moreover, some candidates wrote a disproportional amount for the lower marked A02 question. Some candidates were unaware of how to formulate an evaluative, critical AS answer which moves beyond the 'on the one hand...on the other hand' structure employed by many candidates at GCSE. Some candidates completed more than the required 2 A02 answers. The scripts of many candidates were difficult to read; centres are reminded that only ball-point black pens should be used not felt-style or ink rollerball pens. If candidates struggle to write legibly in exam conditions, a line can be left between every line of written answer to aid the reading of a scanned script.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1 (a)

Satisfactory responses concentrated on a discussion of the several 'Nevi'im' that may have been studied while the better responses engaged in wider discussion of the historical-social context of the Nevi'im. The best responses completed a narrative and historical-critical overview of studied prophets in tandem with a thematic discussion of the messages of, and importance, of the Nevi'im for Judaism/theology today. It was disappointing that very few candidates were able to confidently engage in discussion of scholarship or primary source materials to support their answer. Some candidates were able to discuss their learning here from G573 (Jewish Scriptures); however this was not a requirement.

Question 1 (b)

This was a well answered question. The better answers were those which were well structured and showed synoptic thinking, critical engagement and an attempt to deconstruct the question demands. Those candidates who unpacked the subtle nuances of what is meant by ‘important’ 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)

Performance varied here. There were some very good responses that approached the question thematically and were able to discuss the centrality of mitzvot to Jewish life through clear and accurate examples. Good responses were also able to discuss the development of mitzvot and/or how the branches within Judaism may respond to this question differently. The best responses were those which were structured around clear themes such as gender, age, mitzvot performed at home/synagogue, time specific mitzvot etc. A few answers appeared to have confused ‘mitzvot’ and ‘mikveh’ and their entire answer was about the use of the mikveh; these answers scored limited marks. Many answers appeared to be ‘rote learnt’ and candidates were presenting the same information in the same order and structure; whilst these answers were in the main good, a large percentage of candidates were not explicitly and directly focusing in on the set question.

Question 2 (b)

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully and the question differentiated well resulting in a wide range of marks. Good answers were those which 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 construct a thematic argument as to why it may be impossible to ‘keep all of the mitzvot’, drawing upon themes such as time, gender, location and practicality to create a logical analytical argument. The best responses were those that successfully used a range of evidence, discussed different opinions from within Judaism to this evidence, and located the question within the perspective of a wider multi-religious 21st century society. Many candidates demonstrated a very good/good understanding of the nuances of the question and were able to discuss the question fluidly and confidently.

Question 3 (a)

Performance varied here. Many responses did not focus on the question demands of ‘practice rather than belief’, rather presenting a general overview of ethical monotheism; such answers did not score highly. However, some answers showed a very high level of engagement; such candidates were able to discuss confidently ethical monotheism and how this is lived out through Jewish practice. Excellent answers were those which were able to make links between a concept within ethical monotheism (such as ‘G-d’s goodness), how this is demonstrated in biblical and historical narrative and practice, and how this is still ‘practised’ today by the Jewish community. These answers were very pleasing for AS.

Weaker responses were those that listed generic knowledge about ethical monotheism, and did not engage with the question demands. There were some misunderstandings around the ‘subject’ of the question; some candidates did not relate their answer to the Jewish community living out ethical monotheism (as expected) but to G-d. Moreover, many answers described at length pagan monotheism, which was not required here, unless it was being used to explicitly argue for a particular point regarding practice/belief. There were also some inaccurate statements surrounding Christian and Muslim beliefs and the beliefs of non-Orthodox Jews.

Question 3 (b)

Some candidates were able to engage with this question successfully. Good responses were those which were able to discuss if belief and practice are separate, part of a spectrum of faith, or inextricably linked and cannot be discussed as separate concepts. Weaker arguments were those that demonstrated poor argument style or which did not deconstruct the question demands. As with question 3 a) some candidates presented a confused understanding of Christian and Islamic beliefs, or suggested that there was no plurality of thought within these religious traditions; this resulted in a confused and restricted argument.

Question 4 (a)

This question was answered well by most candidates that attempted it. It was the least popular question. Many answers showed a 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 'origins' and 'observance' and presented answers focusing on just one aspect of the question. Weaker answers were those that just repeated basic learning on Tishah B'av and did not engage with the question demands and/or showed confusion with Yom Kippur. However, many candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the festival and were able to discuss the question fluidly and confidently. There were some very pleasing answers to this question which could have been developed by reference to scholarship.

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 'significance' and for whom. There were some pleasing responses to this question.

G581 Philosophy of Religion (A2)

General Comments

This paper elicited responses from a full range of ability. There was much less of a tendency than in previous years to answer from the topic area, rather than to the question itself, which was a pleasing development.

The main weaknesses observed were in the structuring of essays, where there was sometimes a tendency to put all knowledge in the first section, and then list strengths and weaknesses after that. A critical essay would generally better mingle the two Assessment Objectives.

Notwithstanding the initial comment, there were still a small number of candidates who deviated from the question and what they were writing were not specific responses, rather there appeared to be a list of everything known about a topic. Other candidates scored very high marks through detailed analysis of the topics and included a wide range of material with examples and critical analysis.

Question 1

This was a popular question. Some candidates set the scene well through a discussion of the work of the logical positivists and how the verification principle came about. A few answers focused solely on depth and the Verification Principle, the heart of the question, and were rewarded highly. The better responses tended to include both the original Verification Principle, from the Vienna Circle and Ayer's adaptation to strong (verification in practice)/weak (verification in principle), with a few understanding Ayer's final division of direct/indirect verification.

Weaker responses simply credited Ayer with everything and were unable to move beyond verifying analytic and synthetic statements. However, most answers went for a broader approach and structure including Verification, Falsification and Language Games. Those who included Wittgenstein's language games generally did this well, tying it to the question. There was a tendency (in weaker and in even in some better responses) to narrate, for example selected Parables from the Falsification debate, without identifying the extent to which meaninglessness is established. Of course, this is difficult as the debate was not about meaning, but about the efficacy of religious statements being used as scientific assertions. A number of weaker responses included other elements of the Religious Language topic, but found it more difficult to focus on the question.

Some responses presented all they knew about religious language from those aforementioned aspects as well as analogy, symbol, myth, etc. and this was not made relevant to the question.

Those who had opted for depth discussed and analysed the Verification Principle to great effect, using criticisms from Swinburne, about universal scientific and historical statements and the toys coming to life analogy, to illustrate its weaknesses and moving onto Hick's eschatological verification. Those that had understood Ayer's weak form were best placed to assess the effectiveness of Hick as applying verification in principle to the end of the road at the Celestial City. There were many excellent and good responses that used elements from the University Symposium to effectively argue about the meaninglessness of religious language. Many answers like this favoured Hare's Bliks as a counter argument, although several used Mitchell to good effect. Those who got to grips with the question found it easier to critique the verification principle as they went along and this added weight to their argument. The weaker responses almost ignored the question and gave a general answer including a range of issues associated with religious language. Nevertheless, good examples were used to illustrate points being made. The best answers were able to ground their argument in distinguishing between cognitive and non-cognitive language.

Question 2

This was a popular question and in general candidates engaged well with the issues, using a variety of material. As the question was so open, it led to a range of scholarly views being incorporated, although most concentrated on Hume and Wiles. Again, breadth or depth was rewarded, dependent on the focus on the response. Most answers were able to explain a number of philosophical problems principal among which was the problem of evil and suffering. Many candidates referred to Wiles' key point that there was one single miracle, the act of creation, as well as considering how Christians can believe in an omnibenevolent God, and yet admit to him being both partisan and acting in an arbitrary manner.

Many answers drew upon the criticisms of Hume, although weaker responses defaulted to narrating his criteria and commentary at the expense of identifying the problems raised from his approach. Some responses spent a great deal of time describing the definitions for miracles before then going on to focus specifically on the question. The best answers were able to pick up on the wording of the question and this permeated their critique throughout the essay. A number discussed the miracles at Lourdes and critically assessed the validity of these.

Those that questioned what kinds of miracles God performs then started to assess the problem of evil; those that did this well continuously reflected on the question, those that didn't went off on a tangent at times. There were some good discussions drawn to the debate about the paucity of evidence for God's intervention in people's lives today compared with biblical times.

Many answered used Swinburne and Holland to respond to the issues raised by Hume and Wiles. The best answers came from students who took time to isolate the philosophical problems as being those of definition, evidence, induction and natural laws, problem of evil, nature of God, and free-will; many however did not clearly isolate them, although recognition of the problems was clearly there. The very best answers took time to consider whether the philosophical problems taken holistically were just too many to sustain any belief on miracles.

Question 3

This was the least popular question. Better responses began with an explanation of what we understand conversion to be, with examples, the most common being Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus or Nicky Cruz. Some candidates went on to explain and use effectively William James' pragmatism (and occasionally empiricism), particularly how the effects, so clearly seen in conversions, may produce the best evidence for the existence of God. However, weaker responses simply listed the four common criteria /characteristics of religious experience, although some tried to link these to conversion by mapping the similarities. The best answers included James' specific ideas on conversion, his definition, ideas about gradual/sudden conversions and the fruits, again linking to pragmatism. Some of the best answers were also aware of the vagueness of James' own conclusions, which linked well to other psychologists' views such as Starbuck or Freud.

Discussions on whether conversion experiences can prove God's existence, where they occurred, were generally good. Many responses referred to a wide range of scholars. Swinburne's principle of testimony was often used although the principle of credulity was less well understood and often conflated with testimony. Some discussions used Starbuck (a normal adolescent phenomenon) and those with opposing views such as Freud (psychological construct of father figure, seeking comfort in a time of need) and Marx (more often used as religion but still successfully at times, rather than conversion per se – "the opiate of the people"), citing the use of empirical data from psychology and drug inducement. The more successful analysis related it back to the conversion examples, for example the physiological explanations for Saul's experience.

A number of answers appeared to be addressing a different question – ‘*conversion is the best/most convincing argument...*’ For example, in many cases at least half the answer was dedicated to another type of religious experience, usually corporate experiences or visions. Subsequently, such answers are not securing the ‘good’, ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ levels of response as the material focussing on conversion and its supporting God’s existence is limited.

Much of the reference to alternative ideas from psychology was superficial and references to drug taking were seen as absolute proof that God could not be involved. A few candidates were able to see that psychology and God did not necessarily cancel each other out and that there is the possibility of God working through our psychological awareness to bring about his purposes. Some weaker responses conflated conversion with other examples of religious experiences such as visions or voices. The focus on ‘the existence of God’ proved tricky for some. Those candidates who focused on this element of the question were able to discuss the different types of conversion and whether each of the examples discussed promoted a belief in God or not, with thoughtful analysis throughout.

Question 4

Candidates approached this question from a number of angles. Some responses spelt out the differences between dualism and monism and their respective positions on the body/soul relationship. This was often accompanied by those scholars who support the different viewpoints. Those attempting this question seem to grasp the fundamentals of what disembodied existence is and discuss the various approaches to the mind-body problem – dualism, monism, materialism – successfully.

Excellent answers were seen that either opted for breadth or depth. In the latter, one or two scholars covered and critiqued well in relation to the coherence of body/soul separation was enough for full marks. Those candidates securing the higher levels of response have done so by offering depth to their analysis through knowing their selected scholars in depth, being able to cite wider evidence to support their claims.

Many answers approached the question by looking at Platonic and Cartesian dualism and then contrasting this with monism as espoused by Aristotle and others such as Dawkins.

There were references made to resurrection, immortality of the soul and reincarnation as the necessary result of the varying standpoints. In less successful responses, the references to life after death led to tangential responses - better responses used this material to argue for/against the coherence of the body and soul being separate.

The core of the question did not always come through explicitly, with some offering a more generic critical commentary on the aforementioned schools of thought, failing to deal with levels of coherence in explicit detail. Aristotle, Richard Dawkins and John Hick were amongst the most popular scholars explored in these essays, with the majority of candidates aligning their arguments to agree with the working title.

Although most conclusions favoured dualism being incoherent due to lack of empirical evidence, many favoured dualism being coherent due to the afterlife favouring a separation of body and soul.

G582 Religious Ethics (A2)

General Comments:

The overall standard seemed better than in previous years. Centres might, however, find it useful to remind candidates of the importance of focusing on key words in the questions - 'more important', 'most important', 'little use'. These are key in structuring a discursive essay. In addition, centres might remind candidates of the importance of focus within their essay on the key terms involved, for instance, the Golden Mean and Kantian ethics in this particular session. Sacrificing depth in favour of generic breadth will rarely produce the best responses – while candidates can respond through either breadth or depth it is important to address the particular question set. More candidates than in previous years seemed to find timing an issue and ran out of time with their final response.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

Many responses engaged fully with this question. They showed detailed knowledge of metaethics through explanation and exemplification. Many wrote about Naturalism, Intuitionism, Emotivism and Prescriptivism and cited scholars appropriate to each approach. Some responses were also able to distinguish clearly between cognitive and non-cognitive approaches within metaethics.

Clear knowledge and understanding was also shown regarding normative ethical theories such as Natural Law, Kantian Ethics, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics and Religious Ethics. Some responses were able to juxtapose successfully the cognitive approach of, for example, Naturalism and Natural Law and discuss which was the better approach or whether the two approaches were entirely complementary. Likewise, the non-cognitive approach of Emotivism was compared to Utilitarianism in some responses, with useful discussion about the meaning of 'good' and whether one approach was better than another.

Some responses focused mainly - if not solely - about metaethics with only a very brief mention of normative ethics. Unfortunately, in this range of responses there were those who had no clear understanding of the meaning of the term 'normative' ethics, leading to one-sided responses that were detailed on metaethics, but ultimately failed to respond to the question effectively as they could not argue the reverse side. These responses were often typified by brief mentions of normative ethics in the introduction and / or conclusion, but material was conspicuously absent in the body of the response.

A significant number of responses failed to mention the term 'normative ethics' at all in their response.

Many responses simply juxtaposed one system against another. This approach meant that an evaluation of whether the one approach was better than the other was not addressed sufficiently and hence the question was not answered as well as might have been expected.

Responses with a firmer grasp of the systems involved showed more confidence in comparing systems and concepts as the argument progressed, weaving concepts together to create a fully justified conclusion.

Question No. 2

This was a very popular question and generally well answered.

Some responses were able to address this question fully with a very secure level of understanding and knowledge regarding the Golden Mean and Virtue Ethics in general. There was evidence of good learning and teaching in that a number of responses showed familiarity with the approaches taken by a variety of modern Virtue Ethicists. Popular thinkers included were Anscombe, Foot and MacIntyre, however this year saw more use being made of Louden, Hursthouse and Nussbaum who were deployed well in structuring the responses by candidates who used these thinkers. There was some use made of Annette Baier this year. This meant that responses were full and developed answers to the question and discussed the importance attached to the Golden Mean over and against, for example, the importance of 'eudaimonia', the community, or virtuous role models, in the views of such scholars.

Some responses were not as successful in that the approach taken was simply a generic overview of Virtue Ethics and its strengths and weaknesses as an ethical theory. This approach meant that there was insufficient focus on the Golden Mean itself and its relative importance as asked by the question.

There were very few weak responses to this question and most candidates who responded appeared to have at least a sound understanding of the concepts they were writing about.

Question 3

This was the least popular question.

Some responses rose to the challenge of this question by presenting a variety of religious perspectives on the environment and the responsibility placed on human beings to care for it. Many focused on the contrasting approaches of stewardship and dominion as exemplified in the roles of Adam and Eve in the Genesis creation narratives. Better responses were able to demonstrate the concepts with accurate biblical references and teachings, and could illustrate this further with reference to specific issues or incidents. Some responses focused their responses around the Hebrew word 'Radah', leading to some impressive pieces of writing and analysis.

Other responses simply spoke about the two concepts without giving any biblical support for the concepts.

Other elements of religious concepts towards the environment tended to focus on St Francis of Assisi and his belief of a theocentric world whereby God could be known through the natural world. This was often contrasted with end-time belief and the negative environmental concerns from those who believe in the Rapture. Much of this viewpoint was focused on John Hagee. There were also some interesting discussions on the views of Matthew Fox.

In addition there was useful discussion about the application of other religious teaching, particularly that found in Natural Law and Situation Ethics. Responses contrasted and compared the major religious responses with such secular theories as Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis and both Shallow and Deep Ecology. Reference was made to George Sessions and Arne Naess as would be expected. Again, higher level responses were able to analyse the links between these concepts and religious belief, whereas others simply juxtaposed the two, or presented this with little in the way of links to the question.

Some responses were less successful in that knowledge of religious approaches was limited and they simply wrote about secular approaches. Some responses addressed the question successfully by addressing the issue of free will and the limits placed on human responsibility given concepts such as religious hard determinism whereby environmental events – ranging from natural disasters to carbon emissions from fossil fuels – were already in some sense predestined by a divine creator.

Some responses were found which made use of Judaic or Islamic concepts towards the environment. There was a single response which referred to Jain and Rastafarian belief.

Question 4

Some responses to this question showed a full and detailed knowledge of Kantian ethics including reference to the various formulations of the Categorical Imperative, the Good Will, duty and Kant's more specific teaching in, for example, his Lectures on Ethics. Common use was made of the concept of 'crimina carnis' and the reference to suicide. Often these responses were able to distinguish between Kantian ethics and Kant's own theory and used this dichotomy to structure the answer.

Such responses were then able to apply Kant to a variety of areas in sexual ethics including pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, contraception and homosexuality. Useful comparison was then made with other ethical theories such as Natural Law, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, Religious ethics etc.

Some responses were less successful when a limited and sometimes very limited application of Kant was followed by a generic overview of other views before reaching a conclusion. These candidates tended to mention Kant in only the broadest terms (if at all beyond the introduction / conclusion) and instead often wrote several pages on Natural Law or other ethical systems.

Amongst the issues being explored, weaker responses also tended to include the medical ethics issues of fertility treatment and abortion.

However, some responses gave a detailed assessment of the usefulness of, for example, the formulation of humanity (treating the human person as an end and not as a means) and how this would be applicable in areas where sexual exploitation might be an issue. Some good responses also discussed the word 'use' and gave different definitions: clarity, authority, or use for people in the 21st century.

G583 Jewish Scriptures (A2)

General Comments:

There were many very good responses to the demands of the paper and the questions differentiated well between candidates. Many answers were at the top of the 'good' marking range; such responses showed that candidates were able to discuss the biblical text 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 and produce detailed answers showing a high level of ability to deploy relevant textual passages.

Many answers were, however, very similar in their response in terms of content and answer order indicating that perhaps a 'rote learnt' essay had been used by many. In many cases the candidates had been able to use this to their advantage and produce good Assessment Objective O1 responses to the exam question, although some lacked the same depth of Assessment Objective O2 analysis, as they were unable to engage with the subtle nuances of the set question. Some candidates however, did show a very good ability to evaluate and some candidates demonstrated sophisticated argument with clear synoptic thinking. It was disappointing that more answers did not engage in wider scholarship and textual criticism in order to deepen A01 and A02 knowledge, argument, and evaluation especially as aspects of textual and social-historical criticism are studied at AS level.

All questions were attempted with question 1 and question 3 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 the set biblical text; these answers also included critical analysis and evaluation. It was felt that candidates had been very well prepared for the exam and demonstrated that they had engaged at a high level with the specification content demands and the set texts.

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. A small number of candidates presented a general answer; as such, they could not score highly 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.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This question was very popular. Those candidates that engaged at a high level with the set text and were able to select and deploy relevant knowledge and formulate a critical argument performed well. Some answers however, lacked detail and length of response. It was evident that some candidates were very familiar with, and could cite with ease, key aspects of the Amos narrative 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.

Many candidates were able to discuss with ease the extent to which Amos was concerned with predicting the future as opposed to speaking out about social injustice. Most candidates were able to discuss the negative doom-laden prophecies within Amos such as the locusts, fire, plumb line and basket of fruit, and were able to argue how these are symbols of urgency intended to be the catalyst for repentance. Some candidates were able to discuss how the role of a prophet is a

balance between foretelling and forth-telling; many answers could have been improved by a more focused discussion on the key focus of the question 'fortelling' and the wider role of the prophet. Most candidates however, 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. 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 detailed and focused answer addressing the key demands of the question – the ethical kingdom in Micah. Such candidates were able to discuss fluidly, and with confidence, various opinions as to whether the prophecy of Micah was concerned with the Ethical Kingdom and social justice or a message of Messianic prophecy. The best answers were those which argued that Micah combines both the ethical kingdom with the messianic age as a time of peace, righteousness and social justice (e.g. Micah 7:14-20). Some candidates were able to provide evidence from both within the text and from within history to support their answer and answers showed in the main good organisation and structure.

It was felt however, that some candidates had prepared an answer for a general question on Micah and had just written this rather than engaging with the nuances of the set question. The examiners read many near identical answers, which although were good, did not show the candidates critically engaging with the question. There were, moreover, some good answers which discussed how Micah has been interpreted by Jewish thinkers such as Maimonides but paid little, if no, attention to the set biblical text which the question was examining. Centres are reminded that candidates should be taught to address the question specifically if higher marks are to be sought. On the whole however, there were some very pleasing answers to this question which demonstrated a good ability to select and deploy relevant information.

Question 3

Performance varied here. This was a very popular question; however, some answers did not address the question demands fully and there was limited reference to the text studied. Some candidates gave a 'general answer' on Ruth and the responses were not directly linked to the question demands until the conclusion; these answers were unable to score highly. Many answers however, 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 various aspects of the text and the importance, or not, of this for the modern day. Many candidates outlined key themes within the narrative such as conversion to Judaism, loyalty, triumph over adversity, and that trust and love overcome differences of race, rank, wealth, background and age.

Some candidates were able to argue that these themes are important lessons on the place of strong, intelligent and resourceful women in society today. Some candidates considered that the teaching of the book is less interested in the place of women in society than with the timeless religious lesson, celebrated at Shavuot, that, everyone can be used by G-d as part of his plan. Weaker arguments just focused on whether the theme of conversion or gleaning is relevant to today. It was very pleasing to see that some 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.

Question 4

This was the least popular question 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 presented a simplistic answer focusing on the content only of Ecclesiastes; 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 to the variation in candidate response.

G584 New Testament (A2)

General Comments:

Overall there were a number of very good papers this year and it was pleasing to see many candidates wrestling with the questions and show a fine command of their set texts.

What made answers stand out was candidates' knowledge and understanding of the set texts and an awareness of a range of interpretations. Selection is often important; choosing the most pertinent text for discussion rather than trawling through all is an important skill. It was good to see many really grappling with the question set and keep coming back to the wording of the question as their argument progressed. Some needed a little more justification in their evaluation; just stating a case is not enough.

Some scripts proved difficult to decipher- some candidates' handwriting was barely legible.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This was a popular question. Some candidates chose to respond by drawing on texts only from the Sermon on the Mount; this was successful only when they drew attention to the teachings on the Law or ideas from the Torah, which underpin Jesus' ethical teaching. Many candidates found selecting a wide range of texts more fruitful and typically included reference to Jesus' teaching on divorce, food laws and Sabbath observance.

A fair few candidates were certain that a particular teaching on the Law would or would not have been shocking, often not backing up their assertions. Better responses were more nuanced in their discussions and showed the ambiguity of many key texts. Some candidates displayed excellent background knowledge and tried to relate Jesus' legal teaching to that of varying Pharisaic schools, others compared Jesus with Essene or Sadducean thought, whilst others questioned the historicity of the legal stories, showing a fine understanding of the evangelists' motives.

A few candidates carefully considered the term 'shock' and reasonably deduced that it is not always a negative term.

Question 2

Some candidates had little understanding of what a restoration prophet is thought to be and wrote generally about Jesus as a teacher or a prophet. Some tried to disguise their lack of understanding about the features of a restoration prophet by arguing quite strongly that Jesus was 'more than a restoration prophet' and should be seen as the Messiah or Son of Man but gave no support to the assertion that Jesus could be seen as a prophet of restoration. Candidates need to be aware of the importance of delivering a balanced argument.

A number of good responses acknowledged that E P Sanders saw Jesus as a restoration prophet and marshalled evidence – the temple incident and the gathering of 12 disciples for instance - in support of the statement. Typically, candidates also looked at the claims that Jesus was the Messiah or Son of Man and most incorporated this into their narrative well. Not all candidates were able to criticise the notion that Jesus was a restoration prophet and candidates should be careful to avoid faith statements - 'Mark saw Jesus as the Messiah' is to be preferred over 'Jesus was the Messiah'.

Question 3

Most candidates were able to pinpoint the nature miracles in Mark, though a few wrote generally about all miracles. Pleasingly most responses showed some engagement with the question. Some were adamant that the nature miracles show nothing about the Kingdom of God (often without any justification) but argued that they showed more about the person and status of Jesus or argued that the healing miracles did.

The best responses tended to be more uncertain about what these nature miracles showed; discussing a variety of interpretations before making a call on the most likely one proved a good approach. Some agreed with E P Sanders that the miracles show little but did try to explore their possible messages. Some saw the storm in the Stilling of the Storm as a metaphor for the Kingdom but concluded that this was a little forced; some saw the feeding of the 5000 as the clearest Kingdom miracle and made links with the Messianic banquet but also contained messages about discipleship and the status of Jesus.

Question 4

Some candidates were adamant that the parables had nothing to do with politics and argued a case for them being a vehicle for Kingdom or judgement teaching, but did not attempt to defend that proposition that the parables may have something to say on politics. Again, balance is important.

Typically candidates worked through the blocks of parables from the set texts; it was not necessary to discuss every parable or write out each story and often very good candidates only focused on three or four parables over the course of their essay.

Some candidates argued that the Kingdom of God, the key theme of the parables, is inherently political – if the Kingdom were to come, earthly power structures would be swept away. Some went on to see early Church politics reflect in the parables – for instance, Luke's dialogue with the Pharisees in the Lost Parables and Matthew's anti-Pauline stance reflected in Matthew 25. There were some good discussions on wealth in Luke 16, though some did not make the link between money and politics clear.

G585 Developments in Christian Theology (A2)

General Comments

Almost a full range of responses was seen. While knowledge and understanding displayed often exceeded full marks, the quality of argument was at times weaker, with argument by juxtaposition often replacing holistic discussion. The 'way in' for candidates should always be the question, not the topic.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

The understanding of Cupitt from those candidates who selected this question was often excellent. The strengths and weaknesses of his approach were often known, explained and evaluated effectively. With varying degrees of success and accuracy, many candidates attempted to compare post-modern with modern explorations of religion, using approaches such as those of Smart or Feuerbach. The best responses were able to analyse critically the strengths and weaknesses put forward; others analysed and argued more or less implicitly or by simple juxtaposition.

Candidates were usually able to identify the distinctive roots of Cupitt's thought in such strands as Kierkegaard, Buddhism, Wittgenstein and/or Nietzsche and to show how these fed into his re-exploration of religious symbols and language. In discussion of strengths and weaknesses a range of points were seen, with some particularly good use made of the concept of the grand narrative.

Question 2

This question was the more popular of the two in part 1. Some candidates offered a somewhat generic essay on pluralism, implicitly accepting the first half of the statement. Other candidates engaged more or less fully with that clause and wrote excellent essays on the distinctive characteristics of religions and how far there might be underlying shared fundamentals or not. Most candidates in some way or other explored Barth, Rahner and Hick, as was to be expected. The better responses explored each of these critically, rather than stating the views of each with a strength and a weakness. Some excellent responses were particularly critical of Barth and the extent to which he is a genuine exclusivist.

Question 3

This was generally well-answered. Some candidates tried to make this into the essay on this topic which they might have hoped for; arguing with a variety of success that one form of feminism or another (or none) has a future. Womanism was more than occasionally a preferred approach in this cohort.

However, others engaged directly with the question and used the strengths and weaknesses of reconstructionist feminist theology, especially from Fiorenza, to explore the future of this school of thought and thus brought in contrasts with other forms of feminist theology and feminism more widely.

Julian of Norwich was used a lot to help the argument, but some candidates lacked the clarity required to explore her use of mystical androgynous female/male language; others imputed some anachronistic membership of specific feminist approaches to her; some candidates made clear, effective and relevant use of her thinking and comparatively recent impact.

Question 4

There were a number of ways to respond to this question, any and all of which received due credit. Some candidates took a largely exegetical approach and explored the question from the perspective of weight of evidence in the New Testament. Better responses in this category separated Jesus and Paul and Deutero-Paul out.

Many candidates attempted more or less accurate and/or effective comparisons between the Old and New Testaments in respect of this question; a number contrasted aspects of St Paul's approach with those of the Gospels' presentation of Jesus. Such approaches were most convincing where a grasp of the range of apparently differing approaches within the New Testament was addressed. Location of St Paul's writings within the Old Testament corpus – and even the Gospels likewise – from a number of candidates, did not enhance credit for accuracy. Other candidates approached the question equally appropriately from the direction of feminism; successful answers tended to focus well on more than just the female characters of the Bible, the logos/Sophia tradition and so on.

G586 Buddhism (A2)

General Comments:

Candidates seemed to be extremely 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:

Some concern has been raised by centres about the fact that the syllabus does not ask candidates to compare the Heart Sutra to other prajnaparamita literature, such as the Diamond sutra. However, the vast majority of candidates who responded to this question make reference to a range of literature that would be considered as wisdom literature and therefore fully addressed the question and were awarded for that. There was a very wide range of literature used in this and it showed that candidates have been given the opportunity to read and study a wide range of Mahayana literature. Centres should be commended for allowing their students this opportunity. Some students took the line that the Heart Sutra was the most important of the prajnaparamita literature but not the most important of the Buddhist texts and compared it to the Lotus Sutra and the Pali Canon. This is a really good response and was credited accordingly. Some focused on the content of the Heart Sutra and showed why it has importance from a concept point of view. Again this was an excellent approach.

Question 2:

This was a popular question and candidates answered it very well. They showed a wide range of knowledge and understanding of the concepts themselves and the related concepts within Buddhism. Candidates could also show how the concepts fit into Buddhism holistically which is also excellent. Candidates make excellent use of scholarly views and many quoted from text which shows just how well prepared for the exam the candidates have been. Candidates who only compared the three concepts without talking about the 'ethical decisions' did not receive as much credit as those who did. Some made excellent use of specific ethical situations such as abortion, euthanasia and environmental ethics (to name but a few) and this showed clearly that the candidates could see the concepts within their conceptual framework and within a practical context.

Question 3:

Candidates were asked to compare two very different forms of meditation, which on the face of it do not really have many points of comparison. However, the vast majority of candidates who responded to this question showed that they addressed similar conceptual skills and that each one moved the practitioner away from ego-centred thought towards bare attention or mindfulness/ the elimination of conceptual thought. Candidates made good use of this point of comparison. Some also showed how they were both equally important within their own context or that neither were more important than Zazen or Samatha meditation. All candidates knew and understood both forms of meditation.

Question 4:

This was the most popular question with the majority of candidates responding to it, often providing similar responses. Scriptures ultimately are unimportant to Zen Buddhism. Candidates explained this in a variety of ways usually starting with the flower sermon. Then candidates contrasted this with the different ways in which text is used within Zen Buddhism. For example the symbolic passing of the Lankavatara Sutra from Bodhidharma to his dharma heirs; or the use of Nagarjuna's Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā, records of kaons such as the Blue Cliff Record or even Dogen's Shōbōgenzō (amongst other scriptures written by Zen Patriarchs). Some candidates even showed how the Pali Canon, particularly the Vinaya Pitaka, established the sangha and without that there would be no Buddhism and therefore scripture is important. Some candidates focused on the two levels of thought and showed how literature was important on a conventional level but not on an ultimate level.

G588 Islam (A2)

General Comments:

There was a slight improvement in the overall standard of responses. Candidates, on the whole, showed reasonably good evaluative skills. This may suggest that centres and candidates have an improved understanding of the mark scheme.

Questions 1, 2 and 3 were the most popular of the four questions. Question 4 was only answered by a minority of candidates.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

On the whole this question was answered reasonably well by most candidates. The majority of responses demonstrated a good knowledge of angels – giving examples of the particular duties of specific angels and most also making reference to the two recording angels. The best responses placed angels in context by referring to the Article of Faith. The weaker responses were those who failed to make reference to the Articles of Faith and who showed a basic knowledge of angels within Muslim theology. There were a number of excellent responses to this question where the candidates really engaged with the evaluative aspect of the question. The most successful responses were able to offer a range of reasons to argue both why angels could be considered very important for Muslim theology, such as the role of angels as intermediaries between Allah and His messengers, and why they could be regarded as less important. The weaker responses tended to either offer just one perspective or failed to evaluate to any extent.

Question 2

This was another popular question and all candidates clearly had some level of knowledge as to what Sufi Islam is. Some of the weaker responses had, however, a fairly superficial understanding of Sufism and may not have differentiated between the beliefs and practices of Sufi Muslims. The stronger responses were those who were able to show an in depth knowledge of both Sufi beliefs and practices. They also demonstrated knowledge of 'other Muslims' which generally involved an explanation of Sunni and Shi'a Islam. On the whole the evaluative element of this question, for most candidates, was of a level 3 or higher. While some candidates were unable to engage in any real level of evaluation there were also some excellent responses. The best evaluations were those that differentiated between the beliefs and practices of Sufi Muslims.

Question 3

All candidates were able to explain what the Qur'an and Sunnah were. However, some were able to go into much greater detail – citing, for example, the differences between the two sources and how they are used. Most candidates were able to offer some reasons as to why the Sunnah is needed as much as the Qur'an. These tended to focus on the need to have a living example for Muslims as well as written guidance in the form of the Qur'an. The weaker responses were those that were unable to give more than one viewpoint. There were a number of very good responses that demonstrated a clear understanding of the demands of the question – showing a range of arguments. For example, some candidates picked up on the way that some law schools rely on both the Sunnah and the Qur'an and so argued that they are equally important. Others argued that the Qur'an is, in fact, all that a Muslim needs and that following the Sunnah could actually lead to shirk.

Question 4

This was the least popular question with very few candidates attempting to answer it. This may suggest that this was an area that candidates felt less confident answering. All of the candidates who answered the question were able to explain what the Ummah is. However, not all of the candidates were able to explain either what Muslim family and community values were or the challenges facing them in the Western world. This was the evaluation that candidates seemed to struggle with the most. There were a few very good answers, however, many of the candidates didn't fully understand the demands of the question. One of the main reasons for a poor level of evaluation was a lack of knowledge for candidates to work with. The best responses were able to pick up on specific challenges that the Ummah has successfully addressed alongside examples that show the opposite. For example, some responses referred to the emergence of extremist groups as evidence that not all the challenges have been successfully addressed.

G589 Judaism (A2)

General Comments:

There were some excellent responses to the demands of the paper and the questions differentiated well between candidates. Many answers were good, however, there were some answers which lacked the detail and depth required at A2; such answers were superficial in their response and showed little, if no, engagement with primary source materials or scholarship. Those answers which were at the top of the 'good' or 'very good' marking range were those that were able to discuss the set question fluidly and were able to use comprehensive knowledge and evaluation to support and develop their argument. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were able to engage with the specification content at a critical and high level and produce detailed answers showing a high level of ability to deploy relevant learning through the use of primary scholarship materials. It was disappointing however, that more answers had not engaged in wider scholarship especially for Q1 and Q3 where explicit engagement with the primary source materials would have deepened the A01 and A02 knowledge, argument, and evaluation.

Many answers were very similar in their response in terms of content and answer order indicating that perhaps a 'rote learnt' essay had been used by many. In some cases the candidates had been able to use this to their advantage and produce good A01 responses to the exam question although some lacked depth of A02 analysis as they were unable to engage with the subtle nuances of the set question. Some answers to Q3 were 'identical' and did not actually fully address the answer or appear to show any awareness of the biblical texts of Micah or Isaiah; although model answers can be beneficial for candidate learning, learners should be made aware that the 'answer' may not answer the set question within the exam. Some candidates however, did show a very good ability to evaluate and produce well written essays which demonstrated sophisticated argument with clear synoptic thinking.

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 which fully answered the question set. High marked answers demonstrated focused application of knowledge through clear reference to the specification, scholarship and primary source materials; these answers also included critical analysis and evaluation. On the whole, it was felt that candidates had been well prepared for the exam and demonstrated engagement with the specification content.

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 or encouraging candidates to write in a non-cursive script.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This question was very popular. Those candidates that engaged at a high level with the specification content, and were able to discuss the approaches of the Holocaust theologians they had studied fluidly and with confidence, performed well. These answers showed the ability to select and deploy relevant knowledge and to formulate critical argument. Some answers however, lacked detail and length of response; these were limited responses that were unable to be marked past Level 3. It was evident that some candidates were very familiar with the 'basics' of the writings of the Holocaust theologians they had studied, however, very few answers were able to show that they had engaged in any depth with the thinkers' arguments and writings. It was felt that answers could be further improved with clear reference to, and citation of, primary source materials in order to support argument and show engagement with scholarship.

Many answers were able to demonstrate learning of the specification content and could discuss the thinking of Rubenstein, Fackenheim, Maybaum, Berkovitz and Cohn Sherbok. Some candidates were able to discuss that according to Berkovitz the G-d of Israel remained hidden in order to allow human free will, however, many candidates had not picked up on the 'free will' aspect of this thinker or how it could relate to Ethical Monotheism. Many candidates were able to discuss Rubenstein with more ease and were able to develop some argument on the idea that 'G-d died in Auschwitz' and that the thread uniting G-d and humanity, Heaven and Earth, has been broken. It was disappointing however, that some candidates had clearly misunderstood the actual nuances of the phrase 'died' and presented confused and/or simplistic argument.

Some answers presented over 2 pages of historical background to the Holocaust which, as it was not related to the question, was superfluous and gained little credit. Very few candidates engaged in a discussion at length on Ethical Monotheism, but those that did were able to argue that the belief in one omnipotent and merciful G-d who is concerned with people's moral behaviour, and who has entered into a covenant with His chosen people, is juxtaposed to the events of the Holocaust. On the whole answers were good and showed some sophisticated philosophical and theological discussion and evaluation.

Question 2

This question was answered very well by most candidates. Most candidates offered a detailed and focused answer addressing the key demands of the question. Many candidates were able to discuss fluidly, and with confidence, the historical background to the movement including the work of early leaders most notably, the Baal Shem Tov. Good answers were those that were able to discuss the further development of the movement and were able to talk confidentially about the beliefs, practices and life-view points of the Hasidim. There were many good answers in which candidates showed depth of knowledge of characteristics of the movement including stress on the immanence of G-d in worship and prayer, kabbalah, devotion to the Rebbe, distinctive dress and use of Yiddish. Many candidates were also able to evaluate differences in belief and practice among Hasidic groups (such as Lubavitch Hasidim and the Satmar Hasidim) and use this learning to formulate developed analysis and evaluation.

Curiously, not many answers engaged at a high level with the AO2 aspect of question to address the subtle nuances of 'mainstream Judaism'. Many answers were very good on A01 factual knowledge but did not hone in specifically on this part of the question demand. On the whole, however, the responses to this question were very pleasing and showed excellent subject knowledge.

Question 3

Performance varied here. This was a very popular question however, some answers did not address the question demands fully and there was limited reference to the text studied. Some candidates gave a 'general answer' on the concept of the Messiah through 'time' and did not directly make reference to, or it was very brief, the set texts of Isaiah and Malachi. Some answers showed a good level of ability to select and deploy relevant knowledge and to formulate a critical argument; these answers were able to cite the biblical texts studied in order to discuss how these ideas are relevant, or not, for the modern day. Very good answers were able to engage in a discussion of textual criticism.

It was felt however, that some candidates had prepared a rote learnt answer for a general question on Messiahship and had just written this rather than engaging with the nuances of the set question. The examiners read many near identical answers, which although they were good, did not show the candidates critically engaging with the question. These answers for example, discussed how Micah has been interpreted by Jewish thinkers such as Maimonides but paid little, if no, attention to the set biblical text. Centres are reminded that candidates should be taught to address the question specifically if higher marks are to be sought. On the whole however, there were some very pleasing answers to this question which demonstrated a good ability to select and deploy relevant information and the question produced a full range of marks.

Question 4

This question was answered very well by most candidates. Like question 2, most candidates were able to offer a detailed and focused answer addressing the key demands of the question. Many candidates were able to discuss fluidly, and with confidence, aspects of emigration and the Land and showed throughout their answers depth and breadth of knowledge. It was very pleasing that candidates did not present a rehearsed 'rote' learnt response to this question but rather candidates approached the question from a variety of perspectives, all of which were valid. Many good answers included a discussion on the biblical understanding of Israel as the Land promised by G-d and were able to cite biblical textual evidence for this. Many candidates were able to discuss historical events focused on 'the Land' such as Zionism, the Holocaust, the creation of the State, and responses to the Land from within Judaism. Good answers were also able to engage in discussion as to whether Jewish values and observances are limited to the Land of Israel. Most candidates were able to engage with this question very successfully and candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the nuances of the question. Centres should be congratulated for very clear evidence of successful and detailed teaching of this topic area.

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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