AS LEVEL
Candidate Exemplars

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H173
For first teaching in 2016

Developments in Christian thought (H173/03)
Version 1

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Introduction


The sample answers in this resource have been extracted from original candidate work to maintain their authenticity. They are supported by examiner commentary, both in annotations and in summary at the end of the document. Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

Whilst a senior examiner has provided a possible level for each Assessment Objective when marking these answers, in a live series the mark a response would get depends on the whole process of standardisation, which considers the big picture of the year’s scripts. Therefore the level awarded here should be considered to be only an estimation of what would be awarded.

How levels and marks correspond to grade boundaries depends on the Awarding process that happens after all/most of the scripts are marked and depends on a number of factors, including candidate performance across the board. Details of this process can be found here: [http://ocr.org.uk/images/142042-marking-and-grading-assuring-ocr-s-accuracy.pdf](http://ocr.org.uk/images/142042-marking-and-grading-assuring-ocr-s-accuracy.pdf).
Question: Critically assess Augustine's teaching on Original Sin.

Example essay 1

Saint Augustine of Hippo was a Christian theologian who taught about human nature and our fallen nature, original sin. Understanding the question as an assessment of Augustine's theology, it will become clear in this essay that his teachings are not accurate and weak in their basis.

Augustine's teaching on original sin is based on the book Genesis (3) from the bible. In this story, the first humans, Adam and Eve, created by God are tempted by the Devil (in the form of a snake) to eat an apple from the Tree of knowledge (the original sin since God commanded them not to). This story, called the Fall, is the biblical explanation of human nature and our consequent relationship with God (after breaking his only command). From the Fall story Augustine teaches that humans are corrupted in nature and that the only cure for this is God's grace (St Augustine was often called the doctor of grace).

A first weakness that can be identified in Augustine's teaching was his reliance on the Genesis 3 story being taken literally and not metaphorically. The reason that the Genesis 3 stories shouldn't be taken literally is because of the several inaccuracies with it. Scholars like Dawkins might argue that Genesis 3 couldn't have taken place since according to the Bible it happened around six thousand years ago; he would maintain that humans and the earth didn't come about a few days apart and, like Darwin before him, that humans evolved and were not created. Dawkins and Darwin's points bring up major weaknesses in Augustine's teachings since they both have empirical (and scientific) knowledge to back up their claims whilst Augustine relies on revealed knowledge from the bible; scholars like Wittgenstein would argue that biblical stories need to be 'demythologised' and hence not be taken literally.

Augustine then goes on to teach that the only cure for humanity's fallen nature is God's grace. Often called the doctor of grace, Augustine was said to have 'prescribed' grace as a cure to our corrupted nature which was passed down from generation to generation (starting from the original humans – Adam and Eve).

Again, atheistic scholars (like Freud) would argue that actually the human condition isn't actually corrupted in nature but conditioned by the nature of our environments. Perhaps an even stronger argument against Augustine's teaching on grace saving humans from original sin is that even Christian scholars like Aquinas and Jean-Jacques Rousseau disagree with his approach. Aquinas' view is that humans are naturally inclined to seek good, according to his natural law principles. The reason why Aquinas' Christian argument against Augustine is stronger is because they both were writing for the Church and yet even with the same biases they reached differing conclusions. Also arguably Aquinas' view is backed up by modern scientists and scholars who have used empiricism to back up their claims.

Overall Augustine's teachings are not sufficiently backed up by evidence and have met great disagreement in their conclusions. To further discredit the accuracy of his teachings several inaccuracies in the basis of them have been identified.
Example essay 1 (cont)

Examiner commentary

The candidate reiterates their point, seen through the essay, about lack of evidence. The essay does seem to stop abruptly and overall is rather short.

The mark it would get depends each summer on the whole process of standardisation, which considers the big picture of the year’s scripts.

The essay explores some of the relevant knowledge about Augustine’s view of Original Sin. However, there is a lack of both range and depth, but it is more than a ‘basic’ response. It seems, therefore, to be a fit for the level 3 descriptor at AO1 – a ‘satisfactory’ response; ‘mostly sound selection of mostly relevant material’ and ‘some accurate knowledge’.

The candidate has clearly reflected on the issues raised by those points that have been raised and as such the AO2 mark is solidly in level 3 – views are ‘asserted by often not fully justified’, for example.
Question: Critically assess Augustine’s teaching on Original Sin.

Example essay 2

Augustine was a key influence in Christian thought and taught about original sin, which is a state that everyone is born with, with the inclination to sin and to turn away from God. This question is asking how convincing Augustine’s teaching about original sin is. This essay will argue from the point of view that Augustine’s teachings which may have some truth about human nature, though it should not be taken historically.

Augustine’s teaching on original sin is based on the fall. This is in Genesis when Adam and Eve sinned against God by eating the fruit he told them not to eat. By doing this they turned against God and brought sin on humanity. Since original sin is a state that we are in and not what we do, it means that we are not able to be cured from original sin by our own merits. Psalm 51 explains that we have original sin from conception ‘surely I was sinful before I was born, sinful from when my mother conceived me’. This is important because it shows that original sin isn’t something that we gain during our lifetime, but something we have. In Christianity we can be saved by the grace of God when he sent Jesus. This would make sense if the biblical references of Jesus are correct, as otherwise there is no reason why Jesus came. He was sent to close the gap between God and his people, caused by Adam and Eve, and passed on through intercourse to the rest of humanity. This is convincing because it is known that Jesus was a real person and in the bible he comes to forgive our sins, closing the gap between God and his people. Pelagius disagreed with the idea that we need Jesus and believed that we can be cured by our own merits, and that by doing good we can still close the gap between people and God. This is an unconvincing disagreement as in the bible we are taught that it is only through the grace of God that we can be saved from original sin. This shows that Augustine’s teaching can be convincing in that we can see that people have an innate sense to do wrong.

One problem with Augustine’s teaching on original sin is that it is talking about the story of Genesis and takes it literally. Since there is no scientific evidence that the story of the fall in Genesis is historical, it means that we may not be able to take the story literally. However, though it may not be taken literally, from it we can understand human nature and our inclination to be sinful. This is convincing as it is something that you can observe in everyday life. People can be selfish and ruthless and unloving. Augustine goes on to explain about our before and after fall nature. Before we sinned against God we lived in harmony with God, but after we sinned we turned our back on God as a result we live with pain, lust and a gap between us and God. This self love is also known as cupiditas. Augustine said that in our post fall state we are selfish and love being selfish. If you do not take the story of the fall literally and believe in evolution then this may be a problem, as it is hard to say historically a point in time where we once lived in harmony with God. This is a weakness in Augustine’s argument as we don’t know where along the line of evolution we started being held accountable for our wrongdoings.

The principle of synderesis was put forward by Aquinas. This goes against the teaching of original sin because it explains that everyone has an inclination to do what is good and to avoid evil. This fundamentally disagrees with the teaching of Augustine who believed that we have an innate sense to do what is wrong instead of what is good. Though it seems a fairly weak argument, as by observing the world it could be said that this is not the case. People are unkind and evil. Aquinas would explain this by the reasoning of apparent goods and actual goods. People do what they think is good but are mislead because they are only apparent goods and not actual goods.

This essay was done in timed conditions without notes and has been typed up for the purposes of this exercise.

A clear introduction.

This paragraph has a clear explanation of Original Sin and useful evidence to back it up. It explains the idea of Original Sin being contracted, not committed and introduces the idea of grace, backing it up with some justification and analysis. The use of Pelagius is relevant, though simplistic. The paragraph concludes coherently and works well as a ‘mini-essay’ with both AO1 and AO2.

The criticism of a literal interpretation of Genesis is a standard one and there is an attempt to argue that a non-literal interpretation still has the ability to teach us today. There is understanding that Augustine saw a change in human nature pre- and post-Fall. The use of evolution is relevant, although under-developed and perhaps not best-placed in this paragraph.

Synderesis provides an alternative approach to human nature, which is an important area to consider in this topic. The discussion has a series of assertions about human nature, without full critical analysis.
Example essay 2

It is hard for people to reconcile with a loving God who would cause his people so much pain. However, it makes sense, since the command God gave people was so small, but yet we still turned away from God, so the punishment is so great. This doesn't make sense as if God is all loving it doesn't make sense that he would want to cause us pain, even if we did sin against him. A strength of Augustine's teaching is that God doesn't leave us with original sin but he sends Jesus to cure people of original sin which would surely show his love for his people. This can be made evident when looking at the bible and seeing where God sends Jesus. Romans 5 explains 'forgiveness through faith'. Through faith in Jesus, we can be forgiven.

The teaching that Augustine gave is that we are ill from our original sin, and because of this we are caused to sin. Just like original sin is the illness, grace from God is the cure. By accepting God you can accept God's grace and be cured from the ills of original sin. It is hard to understand that we are held by the same original sin from a past generation, since we didn't do the wrong ourselves, it isn't faith that we should have the same judgement. However, as Augustine explains, since we all do wrong in our everyday lives, we are all guilty of sinning against God. Augustine said that there are three ways that original sin has us, by disease, power and guilt. The disease of original sin has been passed down to us from our parents through intercourse. This can only be healed by Jesus and God's grace. However, a key problem with this is if God doesn't exist then we do not have original sin, and there is nothing that can cure us. Another problem is that some people may believe that it is not original sin that makes people do wrong, but just human psychology and that we do wrong as we grow up.

In conclusion, though Augustine's teaching on original sin can be helpful in understanding human nature, it is not entirely accurate as it focuses on the fall, which should not be taken as a historical event.

Examiner commentary

The conclusion is solid and no more would be expected of a candidate given 35 minutes.

The mark it would get depends each summer on the whole process of standardisation, which considers the big picture of the year's scripts.

The essay shows a range of relevant knowledge and understanding about Augustine's view of Original Sin which is generally well-selected and quite well-explained. The essay certainly seems to meet all the criteria for level 4 and on examination has enough accurate knowledge to be considered detailed at a 'very good' level and so seems to be sufficient for level 5.

At AO2 the essay has varying success. There are elements of highly successful analysis but also areas of assertion. The examiner would not work by averages, but would consider the argument holistically. Overall there is a good demonstration of analysis and evaluation in response to the question with a generally (but not always) successful and clear approach – meeting the criteria for level 4.
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