A LEVEL

Candidate Exemplars

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573
For first teaching in 2016

Developments in Christian thought (H573/03)

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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. 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
‘Hell is an idea not a place.’ Discuss.

Candidate A

There are multiple beliefs regarding the afterlife and hell in particular. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say that any one person could think hell is real as there is insufficient evidence that such belief is even a real place. Whether it is a spiritual state, or whether it is physical, it is Augustine and the view that indicates that hell is very much a real place. As it takes the words of the Bible as fact, and literally true, it could be argued that hell is the same as described in the Book of Execls, ‘hell, fiery pits of hell etc.’

Dante, an Italian Brunogian, has a similar view. He writes about multiple stages of hell that he saw when he was in a dream. So each stage, according to Dante, there are certain categories where one would be flung down to stage. At the bottom is Satan himself.

Hick is introduced in the next paragraph. Note that the introduction of each key thinker is done so in the format ‘X believes…’ – rather like a ‘PEE’ paragraph. However, this is knowledge-driven, i.e. the candidate is selecting material based on knowledge surrounding the topic. Better responses are argument-driven, selecting material based on the point for/against the statement that is trying to be made.

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The Hick paragraph is a simplistic overview of his views but does serve as an opposing approach to Augustine, although the complexity of Hick’s ideas is covered very swiftly.
The next paragraph recalls information on Christian views on the afterlife. A lot is covered in a series of short sentences; this is often (not always!) an indicator of the quality of writing (note the ‘Assessment of Extended Response’ in the final line of each level at AO2).

The concluding paragraph demonstrates the lack of focus on the question as hell is barely mentioned.

Examiner commentary

The application of the levels of response varies each year after standardisation and this essay is likely to sit on the borderline between Levels 2 and 3 for AO1, depending on whether, in a given year, the essay is deemed to be ‘basic’ or the beginning of ‘satisfactory’. At this stage it would seem like low Level 3 might be attained because of the third bullet point.

At AO2, the selection of material for and against the idea of hell fulfils the idea of ‘assertion’ found in the levels of response. This response probably would sit towards the bottom of Level 2 because of bullet points 2, 3 and 4 especially of the levels.
‘Hell is an idea not a place.’ Discuss.

Candidate B

Hell is the term given to the punishment sinners receive after death. There is much debate as to whether Hell is a physical place, spiritual state, a lack of both, or simply a metaphor. The debate is fuelled by Augustine, Dante, and many other theologians. However, the reality appears to be that Hell is an idea, not a place.

Augustine argued Hell was a physical place. He suggested it was a literal lake of fire where sinners burn eternally forever. Dante supported Augustine’s view by his idea of the ‘nine circles of Hell’ being a physical place at the center of the earth. Both of them are supported by scripture as in Matthew 25. Hell is described as a place of fire and smashing teeth, seemingly a physical place. However, there are many logical fallacies and inconsistencies in the idea of Hell being a real, physical place.

The introduction to this essay states clearly what hell is and the terms of reference for the response. It states clearly the direction of the essay in the final sentence, telling the assessor that the candidate has understood the focus and drive of the question – and intends to answer it.

The first main paragraph begins with Augustine and uses Dante and then Matthew 25 as supporting evidence. The counterpoint is stated and might have better engaged directly with material on Augustine; in the end, more could perhaps have been said about Augustine.
Candidate B (cont)

Augustine's idea of sinners being eternally burned is logically impossible according to mortal observation and science. Physical burning cannot occur without physical deterioration. Thus Augustine's idea is illogical and inconsistent with reality. However, Augustine attempts to overcome this criticism by saying God performs a 'miracle' which allows sinners to feel physical pain but not physically change. Augustine hence implies sinners are given an eternally preserved body. As God is all-powerful, he would be capable of doing this, and thus Augustine's idea gains more logic. However, many believe this idea is unjust as it is not in line with the nature of an all-loving God. People argue sinners being rewarded with a eternally preserved body and an afterlife is too kind and does not act as fair and just punishment. Some people also argue the other way that giving mortal, fallen, damaged sinners eternal punishment is too harsh as our sins are finite yet they suffer infinitely. Thus, there are two arguments which show Augustine to create an unjust God. However, Augustine yet again

The next paragraph engages directly with a point attributed to Augustine. There is a balanced discussion of this point before it is expanded well in a discussion of the nature of God and whether the Christian God could allow eternal, physical punishment. As the paragraph develops, it is clear that the candidate is engaging with the material raised in order to assess whether hell can be a physical place.
In the next paragraph, there is further discussion about the nature of a loving God and hell's place within this. This is developed in the following paragraph with a discussion on the Irenaean theodicy (wrongly-attributed, but the analysis is more important), leading to a rejection of hell being a physical place.
Furthermore, Irenaeus argues we experience a vale of soul-making that continues after death. This process maintains us going through a process of purification until we reach perfection and ascend to heaven. Heaven is the end-result for everyone who takes part in vale of soul-making, and according to Irenaeus, all of humanity take part. Thus, Irenaeus implies Hell is purposeless as no one will ever go there; we all go to Heaven. If Hell is no use, it is logical to conclude it must not exist either, and is rather just an idea.

Other Christians argue as heaven is described as fullness of being, then hell may be taken to be loss of being. Heaven is an afterlife with God, and thus hell can be taken to mean the absence of an afterlife with God. The Catholic Church supports this theory that Hell is a privation; a separation from God. Thus, Hell is neither a place or idea but the spiritual state of being without God.

There follows a statement of the idea that hell is a separation from God, with a simplistic portrayal of Catholic beliefs. The next paragraph looks at hell as a human idea that fits the deserved punishment of mortal sinners. Further engagement with these points may have been useful.
Others argue Hell is merely a term used to describe what sinners are deserving of, not what they actually endure. They argue Hell is just an idea of what we think would be a just afterlife for sinners, not a physical place or spiritual state.

Others argue further for Hell being a spiritual state. They argue the soul is what lives on after death, not the physical body, and that Hell is an absolute eternal state of self-loathing, hatred of others and infinite despair and hopelessness which consumes the soul ‘like a fire’. Thus, this idea is in line with the Christian doctrine of an immortal soul and mortal body and implies that Hell is a spiritual state, not a place. However, there is no scientific evidence of the soul which can prove this theory.

Overall, the idea of a physical Hell is incompatible with science and justice. The idea of Hell being a spiritual state is also unjust and inconsistent with the all-loving nature of God. Even though Augustine...
Candidate B (cont)

Examiner commentary

The essay shows a wide range of knowledge, usually well-developed, and solid argument in many paragraphs. The candidate is perhaps struggling to work out where hell as an idea fits into what they have learnt. As a result, the clarity of the essay at both AO1 and AO2 suffers. The candidate is clearer on the arguments about hell as a physical place, but is perhaps not sure whether hell as a spiritual place is the same as hell as an idea. At AO1, therefore, it seems to fulfil all the bullet points for Level 4 and perhaps begins to fulfil criteria for Level 5. At AO2, the argument is 'mostly successful' because of the inconsistencies in paragraphs. It perhaps does not fully meet the third bullet point in Level 5's requirement of being 'coherently developed and justified' (because of inconsistencies) and so would not achieve all marks in Level 5 for AO2.
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