Contents

Introduction 3
Question 2 4
Question 4 12
Introduction

These exemplar answers have been chosen from the summer 2018 examination series.

OCR is open to a wide variety of approaches and all answers are considered on their merits. These exemplars, therefore, should not be seen as the only way to answer questions but do illustrate how the mark scheme has been applied.

Please always refer to the specification http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242913-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-religious-studies-h573.pdf for full details of the assessment for this qualification. These exemplar answers should also be read in conjunction with the sample assessment materials and the June 2018 Examiners’ report or Report to Centres available from Interchange https://interchange.ocr.org.uk/Home.mvc/Index

The question paper, mark scheme and any resource booklet(s) will be available on the OCR website from summer 2019. Until then, they are available on OCR Interchange (school exams officers will have a login for this and are able to set up teachers with specific logins – see the following link for further information http://www.ocr.org.uk/administration/support-and-tools/interchange/managing-user-accounts/).

It is important to note that approaches to question setting and marking will remain consistent. At the same time OCR reviews all its qualifications annually and may make small adjustments to improve the performance of its assessments. We will let you know of any substantive changes.
Question 2

2. ‘Nibbana cannot be explained.’ Discuss. [40]

Exemplar 1

AO1 Level 6, 16 marks  AO2 Level 6, 24 marks
Total 40 marks

| 2 | Within Buddhism, the ultimate goal for a Buddhist is to achieve enlightenment. Enlightenment leads to freedom from duṣkha, Taṇhā and Saṃsāra and to nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa is literally translated as ‘blown out’, as it represents freedom from the pain of conditioned existence. However, the degree to which nirvāṇa can be explained has been widely debated, and this essay will argue that it can be explained, however ultimate understanding comes from being enlightened yourself. Buddha himself gained knowledge of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa when he became enlightened under the bodhi tree. Harvey describes the idea of Nirvāṇa as ‘cessation or extinction’, in the sense of the 3 poisons being extinguished. In the dilemmas of king Milinda, Nāgasena, when asked by the king ‘What is nirvāṇa?’ Nāgasena replied that it is like ‘a cool drink of water when you are really thirsty’. Nāgasena tells Milinda that without direct experience of Nirvāṇa, there is no way of knowing what it really is — so we use ‘Via Negativa’ to explain what
It is not, for example conditioned.

Nirvana is also sometimes described as a mountain. Buddha used the analogy to explain that like a mountain, Nirvana must be climbed and attained for oneself to know what it is.

This view of Nirvana being outside of Samsara and experienced alone is supported by Theravadans and the Buddha’s own view of ‘being your own lamp,’ (Cāippassiko). However, Nagarjuna would disagree with this idea of Nirvana explained as ‘conditioned,’ and argue it is actually, too subject to Samsara.

In Mahayana philosophy, Nagarjuna believed in the doctrine of Sunyata. Sunyata, or emptiness, is the idea that ‘everything is empty of inherent existence.’ Nagarjuna believed that this idea could also be used to explain Nirvana, believing ‘the limit of Samsara is the limit of nirvana.’ For Nagarjuna, even nirvana is subject to Sunyata; of pothica samrupayda and so should be explained differently.

Nagarjuna believed Nirvana was ‘the calming of false concepts,’ and when we realise that Nirvana is too subject to pothica Samrupayda, then we shall be free of tanha and dukkha. Nagarjuna furthered his explanation with the concept of 2 levels of truth, one on a conventional level, where we may see Nirvana as outside...
Samsara, but in an ultimate way they are both sannyasa. Nagarjuna's explanation of how Nirvana is understood is supported by McKeown, who says 'when we see the serpentine snake is actually a coiled rope, we stop fearing it.' McKeown believes, as Nagarjuna does, that through right action, and right mindfulness we can see Nirvana for what it really is - inside us. However, sannyasa is still a very difficult concept and way to understand reality and arguably Batchelor would say it is not the main aim of Buddhism - to be free of dukkha is more important than explaining the difficult.

Arguably, one can never fully understand the idea of *Nirvana, nor explain it unless they become enlightened. However, Zen Buddhism agrees with Nagarjuna that Nirvana can be explained through sannyasa, and is revealed through practice and active meditation. As Suzuki explains:

Zen is about practising the dharma for yourself, and any sutras are merely waste paper for wiping the dirt of intellect. In Zen, Dogen says our inner buddha nature explains Nirvana. In the Lates Sutra, the story of the hidden gem, wherein a man who is poor has a precious gem hidden in his coat lining, learns that he did have the capacity to be a buddha all along. For Zen, this is Nirvana. Through Satai or zazen meditation we can practice the dharma to see our
inner Buddha nature - nirvana - is inside us - not outside of us. Suzuki and Sierpe support this explanation of nirvana as our inner Buddha nature and say that in the true Pure Land, meeting Amitabha is also a metaphor for self-realisation of our Buddha nature a nirvana. However, does this make nirvana any better explained? Arguably, it is even harder to explain nirvana this way, as it it you who have to attain enlightenment or satori to understand it. Still, it does provide a logical explanation for why it is so hard to explain - it is hidden and differs in us all.

In conclusion, with regards to the statement 'Nirvana cannot be explained,' I would disagree that it cannot be explained on a conventional level, as people such as Nagarjuna have shown it can. However, whether this can be explained and understood on a conventional level, I would disagree. Nirvana is difficult to understand because it is a goal for so many theravadans & Mahayanas alike, and so ultimately can only be fully explained & understood for those who have directly achieved enlightenment.
Examiner commentary

This is an excellent introduction, although it is still rather long it shows a great deal of understanding of the key terms used in the response.

The first paragraph shows an excellent understanding of the teachings around nirvana and it shows named scholars views that support the candidate's own excellent knowledge.

The second paragraph shows a greater holistic knowledge and demonstrates a clear understanding of and an ability to analyse and evaluate the concepts being discussed.

The discussion of the two levels of truths is excellent.

The final paragraph brings in Zen concepts and shows an even wider range of ideas and a nuanced approach to the discussion of the different views.

The conclusion is fully supported by the response and shows that the candidate has focused on the question throughout and is thoroughly in command of the material they have used. This is probably more than full marks!

Exemplar 2

AO1 Level 5, 11 marks AO2 Level 5, 17 marks

Total 28 marks

Nirvana is the state of escape from the endless cycle of rebirth. And subsequent suffering and therefore as it is beyond the existence of human experience it is often described as unexplainable and indescribable.

Due to the very nature of it, Nirvana cannot be described or understood by anyone. Damien Keown said that Nirvana cannot be described by words and is only knowable through experience. In addition to this, there are 2 types of Nirvana; part Nirvana (Nirvana after death) and Nirvana with remainder, where enlightenment is achieved before death. While they are still living it seems clear that if it were possible to explain Nirvana, then surely someone who had achieved Nirvana with remainder would have explained it. And because...
they have not, it seems logical to suggest that Nirvana is incomprehensible for those who are not enlightened.

Furthermore, Nirvana can be described analogically, for example, Dharma C. Chok describes Nirvana as the blowing out of the flame (of the 3 poisons). This suggests that, although not an accurate explanation of what Nirvana is, analogy can be used to explain and give some kind of limited understanding. Furthermore, in Zen Buddhism, the moment of which people become enlightened is translated as ‘sudden awakening’ and Della Sartre describes this state of Nirvana, which follows as being waking up from a deep sleep. This again shows the use of analogy being used to make Nirvana understandable although not fully explained.

According to the Buddha, described Nirvana is the Dhammapada as ‘not existent, but not non-existence’, giving an explanation of Nirvana thereby regardless of whether it can be understood by someone who has not been enlightened. A criticism of this is that if people are not existing and not non-existing, then what are they? The Buddha’s response is that if you were to blow out a candle flame, you would not ask where the flame went, you would just recognise
that the flame had gone out, and similarly with Nirvana, you should not question the metaphysical, but work in what is plausible. The analogy of the arrow can be drawn on here: if you were hit with an arrow, you should not question where it came from and why it hit you, but instead should focus on relieving the pain caused by it. Therefore, showing the Buddha’s explanation of Nirvana and his defence against criticisms of his explanation, showing that Nirvana can be described through analogy.

In conclusion, Nirvana cannot be accurately explained through words and is only knowable through experience, according to Keown. However, the use of analogy can give a limited understanding of Nirvana, such as Keown’s ‘blowing out of the flame of the 3 poisons’ and the Buddha’s explanation via negation explanation of ‘not existence, but not non-existence’, and defence against criticisms. Therefore, it seems best fair to suggest that Nirvana can be then explained through analogy, although cannot be accurately explained due to it is a state of existence beyond human understanding.
Examiner commentary

The response has a nice clear introduction which addresses the question.

In the first paragraph the candidate uses Damien Keown's writings to suggest that nirvana is only knowable through experience. This is a very good point but it is not fully developed or fully analysed. The candidate might have discussed how it can be knowable through experience if there is nothing of us after death to experience it.

The second paragraph uses Cush and Santina to show how nirvana is described analogically. Again, this is very good but again the ideas are not fully developed or analysed. For example, what might be the problem with using analogies? Why might Santina’s analogy give the wrong impression of nirvana?

The third paragraph again uses some good ideas (the quote is not from the Dhammapada) but again fails to get to grips with the ideas. The quote from is, for example used by Nagajuna in his explanation of the non-duality of existence and has been linked to the Buddha’s unanswered questions where he does not want people to get the wrong impression of what nirvana is or is not. The analogy of the arrow is good but again it is more about the cessation of suffering rather than a description or explanation of nirvana. The candidate could have used the ideas from the Udana chapter 8 which talks about nirvana using the via negative which gives an idea of what nirvana is not but some scholars have suggested it does not really take us any closer to what nirvana really is.

The conclusion logically follows from the response and clearly states a particular view. This is a very good response. The candidate has made good use of their knowledge and understanding to present a clear discussion using named scholars’ views. However, the lack of detailed analysis and the slightly generalised nature of the response stop it from being excellent.
Question 4

4* Critically assess the view that social activism is an important part of Buddhist practice.

Exemplar 1

AO1 Level 6, 14 marks  AO2 Level 6, 21 marks
Total 35 marks

While some argue that social activism should not engage itself in social activism, it is clear that social activism is an important part of Buddhist practice due to its intrinsic connection to the eightfold path, specifically the ethical element and secondly due to the idea of interdependence developed by Buddhist monks. First of all,

Firstly, that it could be argued that Buddha himself was a social activist as he appears to have aimed to rebel against the strict caste system within which the Brahmanical social structure had implemented. He created a religion which was not based on merit but wealth. He then developed this bachelors' claim that he appears to favour democracy over monasticism. However, it could be argued that we should not follow Buddha as a historical figure but as a historical figure, as appears to be evident in the popularity of the Dalit path as Buddha taught the ideal of despising following a path more similar to that
of the later developed Buddhism. However, there are other clear examples of Buddhists who perform social activism and on Emperor Ashoka who set up hospitals and support for those in need. In this example, it is clear that his activism did not stem from blind faith—rather his own delight and feeling of guilt. Despite this, it may be argued that these are vastly different issues and are therefore incommensurate. Buddha did not focus about modern social activist issues and so we cannot manipulate his teachings to support them. This view is ignorant and ignores the foundation of “come and see” which Buddha taught—on how he encouraged his followers to adopt and explore his ideas personally. Furthermore, it appears that the teaching does not have to be adapted that greatly to suit promote the importance of social activism in Buddhist practice. That the eightfold path (maggas) is considered the foundation of Buddhist practice by the Dalai Lama and was part of the first teaching Buddha ever taught in the Deer Park sermon on it in the 4th fourth noble truth. One part of the eightfold path is “right speech” and “right livelihood” are the very foundation of Buddhist ethics. This makes it impossible to claim that social activism is anything but an incredibly important part of Buddhist practice as well. Buddhists must protect right and
Another point to illustrate the importance of social activism is how Buddhist practice is found in the Buddhist monk Thich Thanh Hinh's understanding of projects as "Dharmakaya." He claims that we are all interconnected and we must help others as if they were on our side. This can be illustrated using the example of a king as it would the parable shows that if a king is unjust it affects the whole natural order. It could even be argued that for the king, it is his duty (dharma) to protect his people - a form of social activism. However, it could be argued that this idea of interbeing disregards the idea that Buddhism is a personal journey as it causes an attachment for them the goal of enlightenment. Furthermore, it appears to be attachment.

2. In worldly issues which is considered a cause of dukkha (suffering).
   However, this interpretation is selfish and while Theravada Buddhism considers worldliness the goal, Mahayana Buddhism considers all people cease suffering to suffer. Always explaining this as it is a form of dependant origination: "if this exist, that exists" showing that if
Examiner commentary

There is a clear introduction that sets out the ideas to be discussed.

The first paragraph shows a very good level of knowledge and understanding and uses that understanding in a skilful way which is why the response is in the bottom of level 6 rather than the top of level 5. The use of Batchelor’s ideas and the link to King Asoka show that social activism is a part of the Buddha’s teachings and the history of Buddhism. There is some good analysis of these ideas but these could have been developed further in terms of David Loy’s comments about the changing nature of the modern world and the need to update the teachings from a very different culture and time. The link to practice through the eightfold path is very good and shows a higher level of understanding as well as an ability to link the different concepts within Buddhism together. This is the key to understanding Buddhism and conveying that understanding.

The next section about Thich Nhat Hanh is also very good. It shows a higher level of knowledge and understanding but it would have been good to see some more examples such as the 14 precepts of engaged Buddhism or real world examples such as the Sangha Metta Project in Thailand. The discussion after this is excellent and shows some of the dilemmas in modern Buddhism around personal enlightenment verses compassion for others and the desire to help them achieve enlightenment. The question over whether the Buddha was a model arhat or a model bodhisattva is a good one and could have been developed further.

The conclusion draws the ideas together well but shows that the candidate understood the concept of inter-being but did not develop this further in the response. For many this is a fundamental concept on modern socially engaged Buddhism and therefore it could have been made more of in order to develop the discussion further.
Social activism is when Buddhists get involved with society in order to try to help to end suffering and create a more peaceful society. As a form of engaged Buddhism, social activism has become more and more common in Buddhism with more monks believing it to be an important part of Buddhist practice.

Social activism came to light in Buddhism during the Vietnam War, where many monks fought. A famous monk Thich Nhat Hanh became involved in social activism during this period of time. He is said to have saved many lives in helping people into fishing boats to help them from fire and the war and save their lives. As an influential Buddhist monk, many regard Thich Nhat Hanh to be their inspiration for getting involved in social activism because surely if he was involved in social activism then it must be an important part of Buddhist practice. However, not all Buddhists would agree with this as they may argue that social activism distracts one from fully focusing on the most important part of Buddhist practice: meditation. They may argue that leaving the monastery to get involved with the wider community is not an important role for a Buddhist; instead one must practice focusing the mind through meditation. This may be more commonly the view of Theravada Buddhists as they follow the scriptures very literally and focus on maintaining the historical traditions of Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhists on the other hand tend to take a more diverse and open approach to Buddhism. Therefore, they may be more open to the view that social activism may be an important part of Buddhist practice. They may argue that actually the two go hand in hand by taking part in social activism, it could be argued that Buddhists are...
performing their ‘right livelihood’ which is an important step in achieving more merit on the road to enlightenment. If taking part in social activism means helping to improve the lives of others then it is being more—they will help one to move closer to achieving enlightenment.

If this is the case, even social activism is definitely an important part of Buddhist practice, because it helps them to move closer to the main goal for all Buddhists: enlightenment. Moreover, in helping others and becoming more moral, as social activism will help you do, surely it will also aid one in developing good karma. Buddhists want to get good karma, as it will help them to get a better rebirth and will help them to eventually escape the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (samsara) and reach liberation.

Taking part in social activism, such as helping to get the homeless off the streets, will lead to good karma, thus is an important part of Buddhist practice.

There are many examples of social activism by Buddhist monastics across the world. For example, the John Dowerers are a group of social activist Buddhists who teach English, help to get sex workers off the streets and build rehabilitation centres for ill people.

Another is the East-West organisation who help to treat people with addictions. The thing that brings all of these social activists together is that they use Buddhist training as part of it. For example, mindfulness therapy is based around mindfulness training through meditation.

That Buddhists getting involved with this would argue that social activism is an important part of Buddhist practice, because like a Bodhisattva helps them to achieve enlightenment, they are helping people to achieve a proper life with less suffering. There is evidence of the positive effect. Buddhists getting involved in social activism are raising in that Government run rehabilitation drug centres have a 30% success rate and Buddhist run ones
an 80% success rate. Through actively making a difference to the world, Buddhists involved in social action are showing what an important part of Buddhism it is.

Some forms of social action involve violence through and as a very peaceful religion, Buddhism does not advocate violence. Surely, then, if social activism goes against Buddhist teachings by being violent then it cannot be a Buddhist practice and not merely an important one. An example of social activism which Buddhists are involved in which shows evidence of violence is self-immolation. This is when someone sets their body on fire in a peaceful protest. This was done by many Buddhists across during the Vietnamese War in attempt to bring an end to the war. However one of the 5 precepts of Buddhism is to “abstain from harming any living thing.” Self-immolation does harm the body. Thus it shows how social activism is not an important part of Buddhist practice as it goes against important teachings.

Nevertheless, there is an example in the Lotus Sutra of self-immolation which does not inspire. In many Buddhists in taking part in self-immolation as a form of social activism. The story is of the Medicine King who is believed to have let his body burn for 1500 years. It is thought that the Medicine King had emptied his mind so much that he died no even scream. Surely, if the Lotus Sutra tells us many of inspirational stories of monks getting involved in social activism, this shows that it must be an important part of Buddhist practice.

Overall, whether social activism is truly an important part of Buddhist practice is questionable, and a distinctive answer cannot be given. However, with Buddhism making more Western in recent years, Buddhist practice has adapted to be more practical and to fit in with modern lives. This is good because has made Buddhism
more accessible to all, yet bad because traditions are lost. It could be argued that this move has led to more social activism, and it may growingly become a more important part of Buddhist practice as more Buddhists are coming to the realisation that there are more methods than just meditating to help you reach enlightenment.

Examiner commentary

This is a very good introduction. It is short and concise and shows not only that the candidate is addressing the question but also that they understand the terms in the question.

The first paragraph, even though it is not entirely accurate has some very good information in, which shows that the candidate does understand the topic. There is also a good discussion later in the paragraph which shows that not all Buddhists agree that they should be social engaged as this distracts them from their main purpose i.e. attaining enlightenment.

Later in the very long first paragraph the candidate counters these views from a Mahayana point of view and makes good use of the eightfold path (right livelihood) in this discussion. They then move onto look at the idea of karma which shows a good level of understanding of a range of Buddhist concepts.

The second paragraph is good because it shows some specific examples of Buddhist organisations which are working to support/help those in society. The facts are mostly accurate and they show a clear line of argument running through the response. There is good use of the bodhisattva ideal here as well.

The candidate then goes onto look at self-immolation by monks as a form of social activism and supports this in the penultimate paragraph with information from the Lotus Sutra. This again shows a very good level of knowledge.

The conclusion tries to tie all of these strands together but does so rather uncritically. What is lacking from the response and what stops it from being any better than the bottom of 'very good' level 5, is that there are some inaccuracies in the knowledge but more importantly much of the information is not analysed sufficiently to make an informed evaluation of the issues. Some ideas are stated and not developed such as self-immolation, the bodhisattva ideal and drug rehabilitation. If these points were discussed to show why some Buddhists thought they there are an essential part of Buddhist practice whilst others disagreed, then this would help the response achieve a higher mark.
We’d like to know your view on the resources we produce. By clicking on the ‘Like’ or ‘Dislike’ button you can help us to ensure that our resources work for you. When the email template pops up please add additional comments if you wish and then just click ‘Send’. Thank you.

Whether you already offer OCR qualifications, are new to OCR, or are considering switching from your current provider/awarding organisation, you can request more information by completing the Expression of Interest form which can be found here: www.ocr.org.uk/expression-of-interest

OCR Resources: the small print

OCR’s resources are provided to support the delivery of OCR qualifications, but in no way constitute an endorsed teaching method that is required by OCR. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the content, OCR cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions within these resources. We update our resources on a regular basis, so please check the OCR website to ensure you have the most up to date version.

This resource may be freely copied and distributed, as long as the OCR logo and this small print remain intact and OCR is acknowledged as the originator of this work.

Our documents are updated over time. Whilst every effort is made to check all documents, there may be contradictions between published support and the specification, therefore please use the information on the latest specification at all times. Where changes are made to specifications these will be indicated within the document, there will be a new version number indicated, and a summary of the changes. If you do notice a discrepancy between the specification and a resource please contact us at: resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk.

OCR acknowledges the use of the following content:
Square down and Square up: alexwhite/Shutterstock.com

Please get in touch if you want to discuss the accessibility of resources we offer to support delivery of our qualifications: resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk.

Looking for a resource?
There is now a quick and easy search tool to help find free resources for your qualification: www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/find-resources/

www.ocr.org.uk
OCR Customer Contact Centre
General qualifications
Telephone 01223 553998
Facsimile 01223 552627
Email general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

OCR is part of Cambridge Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge. For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored.

© OCR 2018 Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England. Registered office The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA. Registered company number 3484466. OCR is an exempt charity.