

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/02 Summer 2022 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers are also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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Paper 2 series overview

The questions were understood by candidates with a clear expectation of which areas they were expected to cover in responding accurately to their focus. There was not a clear favourite question among candidates as experienced in previous examination sessions, with responses spread across the three questions reasonably evenly.

More candidates this year than in previous sessions did not complete the full assessment, with a significant number not completing the second response and leaving essays partially completed. It is assumed that this is a result of lack of exam practice and experience on the side of candidates.

Assessment for learning



Practice timed essays in class to help candidates with their timing in the exam.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:

- focused on the question asked
- used exemplifications as part of their analysis and used diverse examples.

Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:

- wrote generally around the topic
- told lengthy stories about the examples they used.

Question 1*

In all your responses, you should:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of ethical thought and teaching
- analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and/or belief (in an ethical context), including their significance, influence and study.

1* Assess the view that the primary and secondary precepts of natural law are **unhelpful** in moral decision-making. **[30]**

Generally, this question was well answered with candidates being able to demonstrate an effective understanding of the primary and secondary precepts as well as other elements in natural law theory that were linked into the precepts such as real and apparent goods and the synderesis rule.

Arguments were presented to show both claims of the precepts being unhelpful or helpful depending on the viewpoint of the candidate. More successful responses were able to fully participate in a meaningful discussion on both claims before arriving at a conclusion, whereas less successful responses tended to present a simpler and more one-sided viewpoint.

Some candidates appeared to read the question as helpful, rather than unhelpful and assessed it as such. There was also a tendency for some candidates to attempt to turn the question into an examination of the wider strengths and weaknesses of natural law theory – it was in these responses that there was an indication of candidates reproducing pre-prepared essays.

The most successful responses focused their examination onto moral decision-making and were able to reflect the role of the precepts directly onto this. Other candidates showed a tendency to forget or ignore this element of the question, and this was often what made the difference between specific levels.

Exemplar 1

		<p>However, Aquinas' Secondary Precepts may be arguably flexible when making moral decisions, as cultures or societies are given the ability to interpret primary precepts in their own ways. This adaptable trait of Aquinas' Precepts mean that they may be a helpful method of moral decision making - as they provide a structured basis for moral decision making, while allowing humans an element of free will in their own adaptations. Aquinas' Primary Precepts are also clearly outlined as guiding principles, and are arguably centred around morally good intentions, being therefore his Precepts provide a more helpful way of moral decision making than leaving moral clients to rely on their own personal opinions.</p>
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This response successfully addressed the question and was able to consider the success or otherwise of the secondary precepts as opposed to the primary precepts.

Question 2*

2* 'In moral decision-making, act utilitarianism is the most useful form of utilitarianism.' Discuss. [30]

The majority of candidates who answered this question were able to show a good level of knowledge and understanding of act utilitarianism and how it functions in moral decision-making. Some responses conflated the different utilitarian theories and did not differentiate between them. Some candidates also identified Joseph Fletcher as a utilitarian thinker, some effectively while others more as an act of confusion.

However, a number of responses were able to show a broader knowledge of utilitarianism and include other thinkers – most notable references were made to the preference utilitarianism of Peter Singer which was most often presented as the superior form of moral decision-making.

Otherwise, there were discussions around the principle of utility, the hedonic calculus and the contrast with rules, the harm principle, and higher/lower pleasures from Mill. Use was made of the tyranny of the majority as a criticism, however there was less use of the swine ethic criticism than might have been expected.

There was also less use of quotes generally by candidates this year in supporting their argument.

Misconception



Candidates conflated utilitarianism and situation ethics in Question 2.

Question 3*

3* 'Quality of life is the **only** important issue when making decisions about euthanasia.' Discuss. [30]

The majority of candidates were able to enter into a meaningful discussion over the relative merits of quality of life as opposed to sanctity of life in dealing with decisions around euthanasia. Most candidates were clear on what each element of the question referred to, with more strength around the concept of quality of life which tended to be discussed in more specific detail than its opposite sanctity of life approach. Some responses even considered the difficulty in considering the quality of life as it is not unique to each individual person.

Many responses used specific cases to illustrate different forms of euthanasia – cases used tended to be the now classic cases of Tony Bland, Daniel James, Diane Blood and Tony Nicholson, however there was some use of more recent cases from news media such as Archie Battersby.

There was a tendency among some candidates to conflate quality of life with utilitarianism and/or situation ethics and for sanctity of life to simply be presented as natural law theory, with some candidates attempting to rewrite the question into a more general contrast between these two theories. This was another area where there was some evidence of candidates attempting to rewrite pre-planned responses to fit the question.

Exemplar 2

3	<p>Quality of life is not the only important issue when making decisions about euthanasia, as it is extremely difficult to quantify and therefore risks devaluing certain members of society. Therefore, an a consideration of Catholic teaching would indicate ^{suggest} a consideration of the sanctity of life ^{is most important.} However, perhaps the best approach is that which combines consequentialist and weak sanctity of life, such as Fletcher's situation ethics, and helps to find a middle ground.</p>
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This exemplar illustrates from the beginning that the quality of life is a very personal issue, varying from person to person.

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