

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/01 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 1 series overview

H173/01 is the GCE AS Level paper that focuses on the philosophy of religion. There are three questions of which candidates are required to answer two. Each question is marked out of 30 giving a total for the paper of 60.

Each response is marked against two assessment objectives, 50% of the available marks being allocated to each assessment objective. AO1 is concerned with knowledge and understanding and AO2 with analysis and evaluation. Candidates are therefore required to have good knowledge of the topic, including the main arguments and scholars associated with it, and to be able to use that knowledge confidently and effectively to construct a coherent argument, in order to reach the higher marks. Candidates should also evaluate the arguments they present rather than simply stating different arguments without further comment. For example, candidates could suggest a counter-argument to the one they have just given or suggest why an argument is weak or strong. There was some evidence that candidates had been taught a 'formula' which tended to include phrases such as 'this is a strong/weak argument because...' or, 'however my argument is still valid because...'. These can be useful, but only if what follows is actually a reason why the argument is strong or weak. Sometimes what follows is an unrelated point or something such as 'because everyone is entitled to their opinion.' These phrases can be useful in supporting candidates to give a critical and evaluative response, but their use does not guarantee a high AO2 level.

On the whole candidates seemed to be well prepared for the exam and many did very well indeed. Most candidates appeared to be able to complete the paper comfortably in the time available and very few did not attempt two questions. There were a small number of rubric errors where candidates attempted all three questions. In these cases, the best two marks were given, but obviously candidates who did this had shorter and less developed responses to each question and so tended not to achieve high marks. Question 1 was the least attempted, but those who attempted it generally did well, mostly arguing against the value of mystical experiences as proof of the divine.

Where candidates did not achieve highly the most common reason was that they did not focus on the question set, but rather on the general topic. For example, a significant minority of candidates focused on Plato rather than Descartes on Question 2 and on Descartes/Kant rather than Anselm on Question 3.

On the whole the quality of work this year was very encouraging, and the disruption of the last two years due to Covid-19 did not appear to have had a significant impact on the quality of work, which is very much to be commended.

Pay Attention to the Rubric

In this paper candidates choose two out of three questions to answer. Attempting to answer all three will reduce the detail and development in each response and result in a lower mark overall.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• focused closely on the specific question that had been asked• gave detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge• had a good balance in their responses between AO1 and AO2• constructed a clear argument that considered and discussed a variety of viewpoints before coming to a clear and reasoned conclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• answered on the general topic rather than the question asked• concentrated on a different aspect of the topic to the one that was asked about• attempted all of the questions• gave very descriptive responses that concentrated on knowledge rather than on constructing an argument• stated arguments for and against the stimulus but added no further comment or argument on them.

Question 1*

In all your responses, you should:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religious and philosophical thought and teaching
- analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief (in a philosophical context), including their significance, influence and study.

1* Critically discuss the nature of mystical experience.

[30]

This was the least popular question on the paper, however where it was attempted, candidates performed as well as they did on the other questions.

AO1 - Unlike the other questions on this paper, this question did not explicitly direct candidates towards a particular scholar or philosopher, meaning they had a good degree of freedom in deciding what was or was not relevant to the question, and most dealt with this well. The great majority of candidates used William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* as a starting point, and this was a sound approach. Candidates generally discussed Swinburne, Dawkins, and James in their responses, with reference also being made to experiments that seem to reproduce the effects of mystical experience by directly stimulating the brain. Some also referenced Freud's psychological explanations. Knowledge was generally good and detailed, although there was some confusion as to which scholars said what on occasion. Some candidates discussed the different types of experience, such as individual or collective, and this was fine, as mystical experiences can be either. Candidates gave valid examples, such as the Toronto Blessing, Teresa of Avila or the Marian visions at Medjugorje.

AO2 - One misconception that seemed to appear quite often was that James' characteristics of an experience (passive, transient noetic and ineffable) were criteria that he applied to an experience to determine whether or not it was veridical. Rather they were descriptions based on many accounts which allowed him to identify the core aspects of very different experiences. Based on this, candidates argued for whether particular examples could be classed as evidence for God or not, based on whether they had these characteristics or not, which somewhat missed the point of James' ideas. More successful responses applied the theories of the various scholars to the examples in order to discuss how convincing they were. Candidates who did less well tended to state arguments on each side with little further development, and then gave a very short and simple conclusion such as 'therefore mystical experiences are not convincing.' Those who did better compared and critiqued the various arguments throughout the response, coming to a reasoned judgement. Some concluded that while mystical experiences could not be taken as proof on their own, they became convincing in the wider context of evidence and argument.

Question 2*

2* Evaluate Descartes' solution to the mind/soul and body problem.

[30]

This was the most popular question with the majority of candidates attempting it.

AO1 - There were some excellent responses to this question. The most successful responses had a firm grasp of substance dualism as it related to the particular ideas of Descartes. They were able to give an accurate and detailed account of what Descartes meant by *cogito, ergo sum*. Many candidates, however, while aware that Descartes was a substance dualist could not go much beyond this, and some even suggested that this meant he thought the body and the soul were the same substance, which tended to cause the rest of their response to be somewhat confused. Some were confused by the mind/soul in the wording of the question and spent much of the discussion focusing on a distinction between mind and soul that is not really a part of Descartes' thinking. Many were aware that Descartes located the soul in the pineal gland but could not identify his specific thinking on the soul much beyond this. The best responses had a firm grasp on what is meant by hyperbolic doubt and how it affected Descartes' thinking. Some candidates, unable to give a clear and developed account of Descartes' ideas on the soul, focused instead on the teachings of Plato where they were more confident, and this affected the mark they were able to achieve.

AO2 - Candidates who focused on Plato for their response often limited their evaluation to his arguments and this affected the level they were able to achieve. It is possible to use Plato's theories as part of a wider discussion on the success of Descartes' theories and some candidates did so very well, although they were in the minority. Arguments against substance dualism were generally handled much better, with candidates generally confident about the ideas of Ryle and Dawkins in particular. There was some confusion over the ideas of Aristotle with many unclear as to what exactly he taught. Less successful responses often focused on disproving the pineal gland as the seat of the soul to the exclusion of all other parts of the debate. Another issue that seemed common on this question was to merely state the conflicting arguments with little or no further comment or debate. The strongest responses were thoughtful and considered, often concluding that Descartes is not entirely successful, but countering this with the idea that the materialist reductionism of Dawkins also fails to fully account for human and religious experience.

Assessment for learning



Candidates must make sure that they read the question and focus on that particular question. Many candidates here focused on Plato rather than Descartes, but the question was specifically focused on Descartes' theory about the relationship between the soul and the body. Candidates could only reach the highest levels if they focused on this.

Exemplar 1

		<p>Descartes' theory of substance dualism is derived from an observation that physical things can be broken down into constituent parts, but the mind and soul of a person could not. He found humans could imagine thought without a body, but not bodily animation without thought. From this he ascertained humans have a non-physical, out of body soul, which is responsible for mental events. From this the personality of a human can continue after death in a non-bodily resurrection. He also thought the soul interacted with the body through the centrally located pineal gland in the brain. From his a priori, simple logical</p>
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The candidate has displayed a clear, detailed, and accurate grasp of Descartes' reasoning in formulating the *cogito, ergo sum*, and so has established a firm foundation for the rest of the response. Because they have a clear and detailed understanding, they can present clear arguments for and against Descartes' position.

Question 3*

3* 'Anselm's ontological argument is **not** persuasive.' Discuss.

[30]

There were some outstanding responses to this question. The strongest responses had a clear and confident grasp of Anselm's thinking and of the nature of contingent and absolute existence. Many, however, struggled with these ideas.

AO1 - The strongest responses were able to state both forms of Anselm's Ontological argument clearly and accurately, showing confident understanding. However, many appeared confused, often stating that God is the greatest thing that can be imagined and therefore exists, without showing a clear understanding of the argument that connects those two ideas, namely that it is always greater to exist in the mind and in reality, than just in the mind. How well candidates understood and explained the initial argument tended to impact greatly on how successful the remainder of their response was. For many, Gaunil's counter-argument was obvious and conclusive, but they were less able to explain Anselm's rebuttal of it. Necessary existence was not a concept that was generally well understood. A small but significant number of candidates clearly had limited understanding of Anselm and dealt with this by suggesting that the cosmological or teleological arguments were stronger, and went on to focus on these almost exclusively in their responses, thus seriously limiting the number of marks they could access.

AO2 - The quality of argument varied widely, largely depending on how firm an understanding candidates had of Anselm's arguments. Many were aware that the argument was not intended to convince an atheist but was, rather, 'faith seeking understanding'. Some of the best responses concluded that ultimately the argument was quite successful in its initial purpose, to encourage those who already believed, but was far less successful as an argument to support the existence of God generally. It was possible to use the teleological and cosmological arguments effectively in this discussion, in order to assert that *a posteriori* arguments were better than *a priori*, and some candidates did this very effectively. Others, however, devoted much of their response to an evaluation of these arguments, largely ignoring the ontological argument, and so did not reach a high mark.

Many candidates seemed more confident with Descartes' version of the ontological argument and Kant's objections to it and were able to discuss these with confidence. Again, this worked well if used as part of a wider discussion of Anselm. Taken as a whole, the ability of candidates to deal with the issues raised in this question was encouraging.

Assessment for learning



In AO2, the highest marks come from a reasoned argument that flows throughout the response followed by a conclusion that reaches a reasoned judgement. Less successful responses state the different arguments with little further comment or discussion, often ending with a conclusion that is just a brief statement with no support. More successful responses evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments they use.

Exemplar 2

		<p>Anselm has no basis or logical meanings for his arguments - they aren't backed by any proof. However, Aquinas developed his own philosophical argument with a 'basis for each of his 'trains of thought'. The cosmological argument differs from the ontological as they aren't based on the same things. Aquinas had 6 ways or ideas his ideas could be interpreted or explained and for later philosophers or researchers to further understand & correct or oppose his argument. Contrastingly, Anselm and his ontological argument didn't convince other philosophers for his ideas points</p>
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Here the candidate has not provided a clear statement of Anselm's argument, and there is no evidence that they are familiar with Anselm at all. By contrast they have moved into the Ways of Aquinas, which, while they would be useful in brief as part of a discussion about the comparative merits of a *a priori* and a *posteriori* arguments, are not a basis for a complete response to the question. The candidate bases their entire response on the strengths and weaknesses of Aquinas' arguments and in so doing almost completely ignores the question.

Exemplar 3

		The first formulation argues that God's definition
		is "that to be which nothing great
		there is nothing greater" - he is the greatest possible
		being to exist. at Theists understand this as much
		as atheists, so he he is in everyone's mind.
		To exist in reality is for greater than to exist
		in the mind, and it would be contradiction for
		him to exist in only the mind as he would not be
		the greatest. Therefore God exists in ^{reality} reality
		and exists. Some Philosopher Gaunilo would
		dispute this erroneous idea as he argues
		that Anselm's is false internal logic is flawed.

By contrast, this candidate has provided a detailed and accurate account of the first formulation of Anselm's argument in the *Proslogion*. This provides a firm foundation for the rest of the response and allows the candidate to build up reasoned arguments about the validity of Anselm's argument.

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