

**AS LEVEL**

**Examiners' report**

# **RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

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**H173**

For first teaching in 2016

**H173/01 Summer 2024 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 responses is 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.

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## Paper 1 series overview

H173/01 is the AS Paper on the Philosophy of Religion. The paper consists of three essay style questions, of which candidates answer two. Responses are marked according to both AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and AO2 (Analysis and Evaluation) level descriptors with fifteen marks available across five levels for each assessment objective, giving a paper total of sixty.

Generally speaking, candidates performed well on this paper, demonstrating a good level of knowledge, which they used confidently and accurately. Question 3 was by far the most popular, with almost all candidates attempting this question. Of the remaining two, Question 1 was less popular and candidates were generally less successful with this material.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrated detailed and accurate knowledge that was relevant to the question</li> <li>• related their response to the question closely throughout, with a conclusion that gave a clear response to the question</li> <li>• used scholarly views accurately and in a way that added to the discussion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gave more generalised responses that were not closely related to the question</li> <li>• wrote all they knew about a general topic rather than selecting material that was relevant to the question</li> <li>• wrote substantial detail in response to one question before changing their mind and attempting a different question</li> <li>• described alternative arguments for the existence of God rather than engaging in detail with the one the question asked for.</li> </ul>

## Question 1\*

1\* 'Aristotle's understanding of the Prime Mover is incoherent.' Discuss.

[30]

This was the least popular question on the paper and generally the least successfully answered. Most, although not all, candidates who attempted this question were able to accurately describe the Prime Mover, in varying degrees of detail.

The question asks about the coherence of Aristotle's theory, rather than whether it is correct or incorrect: in other words, whether it is a logical position. Very few responses addressed the issue of coherence directly, concentrating instead on whether Aristotle was correct, particularly in view of more modern evidence concerning the origins of the universe.

Many candidates made use of Plato's theory of Forms in their response, but they rarely did this effectively. While they were able to describe Plato's theory in detail (usually in more detail than they were able to describe Aristotle's) they did not explain why it might make Aristotle's views less coherent.

Less successful responses often offered alternative arguments for the existence of God (typically the argument from design and Paley's Watch), describing them in great detail, but again they did not explain why this might make Aristotle's Prime Mover incoherent or less likely to be correct. The assumption was that it was incoherent because other arguments aiming to prove the existence of God existed.

A more successful approach was to compare Aristotle's Prime Mover to the Christian idea of God, pointing out key differences. Again, however, few went on to explain why this might make Aristotle's ideas incoherent, even to Christians.

Candidates tended to confuse the Prime Mover with Aquinas' Unmoved Mover and so concentrated on the issue of infinite regress, which was not a concern to Aristotle, who believed in pre-existing matter. Many responses also concentrated on the weaknesses of the idea of the Prime Mover as the efficient cause of the universe, which is something that Aristotle did not propose. More successful responses focused on the Prime Mover as the telos of the universe, causing things to move from potentiality to actuality. These responses often questioned the idea of a universal telos. The majority of candidates gained Level 4 for AO1 although this was more evenly divided between Level 3 and Level 4 at AO2.

## Exemplar 1

		However, the concept of the Prime Mover may
		not be popular with <sup>most</sup> Christians as the Prime
		Mover doesn't fit the same qualities. Swinburne
		would argue this as the Christian God is able
		to intervene within the universe due to his
		benevolence and omnipotence, but the Prime
		Mover is incapable of acknowledging the universe,
		so isn't really befitting with Christian belief.
		Despite this, some Christians may find the Prime
		Mover somewhat viable as it shares certain characteristics
		with God, such as being transcendent and eternal.
		Whilst this may also be true, modern science would
		reject both arguments, as neither <sup>could</sup> <del>could</del> have been
		eternal due to the Big Bang, which suggests that
		the universe has a starting point and couldn't have
		anything else to influence the event. This is a

This is a good example of a response that is focused closely on the question, considering why the idea of the Prime Mover might be incoherent to Christians. It also makes good use of argument and counter-argument to develop the discussion.

## Question 2\*

2\* Evaluate the view that Gaunilo's criticisms of the ontological argument are weak.

[30]

This was the second most commonly answered question on the paper and the majority of candidates who attempted it did well. Most understood the basis of Anselm's argument that God is the greatest thing that can be imagined, and since existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind only God must exist in reality. Most also explained Gaunilo's counter-argument about a 'greatest island' effectively. Some candidates became less confident when dealing with the issue of 'necessary existence' although some candidates handled this very effectively indeed. There did seem to be a common misunderstanding that Gaunilo was an atheist who was arguing against the existence of God, rather than pointing out weaknesses in Anselm's reasoning. Few candidates went on to address Gaunilo's second criticism about gossip.

Many candidates argued that Gaunilo's criticisms were weak because they did not consider the difference between a contingent island and 'That than which greater cannot be conceived' but suggested that Kant's criticisms were stronger since they attacked the whole idea of necessary existence. This approach was successful. However, many candidates gave an overview of scholarly debate about the ontological argument including Descartes and Kant and tended to drift off the point of Gaunilo and his particular criticisms. Surprisingly few attacked Anselm's premise in the form of his definition of God. Less successful responses took a similar approach to Question 1 and simply described alternative arguments for the existence of God without tying them into the question. Again, these typically included the argument from design and Paley's Watch.

There was more consistency on this question between the marks gained in AO1 and AO2 with most candidates gaining Level 4.

## Question 3\*

**3\*** 'The evidence of suffering in the world demonstrates that God does **not** exist.' Discuss. **[30]**

This was by far the most popular question on the paper with nearly all candidates attempting it. The question was focused on the evidential problem of suffering rather than the philosophical/logical problem of evil, and the less successful responses did not take this into account.

Most candidates were able to give a good account of the Irenaean and Augustinian theodicies. Many also tied this into Question 1 (even if they had not answered Question 1) by concluding that the existence of suffering argued against the Christian God, or the God of the Inconsistent Triad, but not necessarily against a God such as the Prime Mover. Stronger responses used scholarly views effectively, particularly those connected to the seemingly excessive amount of innocent suffering.

There was a tendency to evaluate the theodicies themselves, rather than tie evaluation to the question. The most successful responses concentrated on the evidence of suffering and showed how scholarly arguments could be used to respond to it, using ideas in a critical manner. For example, that a benevolent God would allow suffering for the purpose of soul making; just as a parent allows their children to climb trees with the knowledge that they may get hurt, humans must live in a world where suffering is a genuine possibility to develop morally good characteristics.

At AO1 there were many candidates at both Level 3 and Level 4, with a stronger tendency to Level 4 at AO2, demonstrating a good level of discussion and debate in answers to this question.

### Assessment for learning



Read the question carefully.

In this question, as in all the others, it is important to read the question carefully and respond to the exact question asked. For example, in this question the focus is on the evidential problem of suffering rather than the logical problem of evil. Responses that concentrate on suffering specifically, rather than ideas such as evil as a privation of good, will get higher marks. Resist the temptation to write everything you know about a topic.



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