

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
Religious Studies**

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/02 Summer 2025 series

Contents

Introduction 3

Paper 2 series overview 4

 Question 1* 6

 Question 2* 9

 Question 3* 10

 Question 4* 12

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 [Teach Cambridge](#).

Would you prefer a Word version?

Did you know that you can save this PDF as a Word file using Acrobat Professional?

Simply click on **File > Export to** and select **Microsoft Word**

(If you have opened this PDF in your browser you will need to save it first. Simply right click anywhere on the page and select **Save as . . .** to save the PDF. Then open the PDF in Acrobat Professional.)

If you do not have access to Acrobat Professional there are a number of **free** applications available that will also convert PDF to Word (search for PDF to Word converter).

Paper 2 series overview

The Religion and ethics paper introduces candidates to a range of both religious and secular ethical theories as well as looking at some key debates within the field. The paper assesses knowledge and understanding (40%) and analysis and evaluation (60%).

Candidates' responses to this year's paper as ever demonstrated a full range of marks. The questions seemed to facilitate some excellent responses that showed sophistication and nuance, while also being accessible enough to make sure that less successful candidates were able to gain a creditable mark.

Most candidates completed three full questions within the time with only a very small number of candidates answering only two questions. That said, it seemed that more candidates than usual were pressed for time during their third essay. This meant that a lower score for this third essay (in turn skewing the overall total) was not uncommon.

Candidates overall seemed to display a high level of subject knowledge and drew on a wide range of material, some of which was from beyond the specification. There was evidence of engagement with the subject and a lot of extra reading particularly in meta-ethics, but equally other candidates used only the named thinkers and covered them well. Some candidates attempted to bring in a wide range of material from beyond the specification but were not secure enough in their understanding or were trying to do too much in the time allowed; in these cases, it may have been better to keep to standard material that they were more secure on.

Selection and Application

Selecting relevant material and using it well on essays written in under forty minutes is a key skill in this assessment. Often this is as much about what is left out as it is what is put in. Candidates may have learned a vast amount of material on each topic. As they briefly plan their answer to the specific question asked, they need to consider which material works best and which material to leave out.

Most candidates were able to satisfy the need to show both AO1 and AO2 in their responses. There were several different approaches that candidates used to achieve this end depending on their natural writing styles and any structuring advice they had been given by teachers. Generally, these were helpful, particularly in enabling candidates who might otherwise struggle to achieve a stronger mark. On a few occasions overly elaborate phrasings and formulaic writing frames hindered candidates from fully expressing themselves.

Many candidates showed confidence in bringing in relevant material from other topics and units to address the question, particularly using ideas from Developments in Christian Thought. Equally, for some candidates introducing ideas from other areas meant that their essay lost focus. 'Is this helping to answer this question?' should be the main deciding factor for whether a candidate chooses to bring in material from elsewhere.

Generally, candidates focused their answers to the set question, but a few answers seemed pre-prepared and presented similar material which was not always fully focused on the question. This tended to be more noticeable on Question 1.

Question 4 was by far the most common question attempted. Although Question 3 was perhaps the least popular question, those who attempted it generally answered this question very well.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• were able to write in a focused way that specifically addressed the question set throughout the response • showed a depth, skill and nuance in their understanding of key ethical ideas and arguments • were able to select and apply a wide range of appropriate and relevant material to demonstrate understanding and further their evaluation • presented coherent and developed arguments throughout their essays where points were clearly considered and logical conclusions reached • were able to cope well with the format and timings of the exam, delivering 3 full essays in the time allowed.	• tended to write in a more general way where at least some of the sections of the essay were not addressing the precise question • presented a more broad-brush approach to ethical ideas which, although not incorrect, did not show any depth or precision • tended to try to fit too much, less relevant material into answers and/or were unable to show how the stated idea was relevant to the question • argued by assertion or by juxtaposition: presenting an alternative view does not in itself demonstrate the truth or falsity of the original idea • produced a significantly less successful and/or shorter 3rd essay due to either timing issues or lack of preparation.

Question 1*

1* Critically assess the concept of telos in natural law.

[40]

There were some very strong responses to this question, but for many candidates this response was less successful than their responses to other questions. While knowledge of a range of ideas was often strong, candidates struggled to direct these ideas precisely towards the question.

There was often very good knowledge of the ideas of Aquinas on telos and the link to primary and secondary precepts. Some candidates were able to explain telos in the work of Aristotle's ideas including eudaimonia and show how these ideas were then developed by natural law. The four causes from Aristotle and the use of telos as part of Aquinas' teleological argument were also relevantly deployed, although some candidates did not always link these ideas back to natural law.

Candidates who struggled on this question tended to miss one of the key terms in the question and either provided a philosophical discussion of telos without focusing on natural law or provided a general discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of natural law without being particularly focused on telos. In the latter case, candidates did not always see how the different aspects of natural law connected to the idea of telos and provided standard strengths and weaknesses of natural law without really linking these to the question. A small number of candidates seemed to be attempting to turn this question into last year's question about the importance of primary precepts compared to other aspects of the theory.

In terms of evaluation, better responses focused the discussion on a number of theological, scientific and philosophical issues around the use of telos in natural law (see extract 1 for a good example of a section on scientific criticism): Augustine's and Barth's criticisms of the use of reason, Dawkins' ideas that evolution explains apparent purpose in the universe, and the idea of the Naturalistic Fallacy were typical of each of these types of approach. There were also some strong discussions of Sartre's existentialism as a response to telos, but equally there were other candidates who had been taught to include Sartre but didn't really seem clear on why his ideas were significant to the issue.

Less successful evaluation tended to be provided by candidates who were not sufficiently focused on telos. General arguments around procreation, same-sex relationships, the theory being outdated or lacking flexibility were credited appropriately where these were clearly linked to the question rather than presented as a generic issue with natural law.

While most candidates understood that the discussion was around 'telos' in natural law, several candidates included other teleological and deontological systems such as Kant's 'universalisability' and attempted to tie this to telos. This was almost always unsuccessful. Some of these essays seemed to have a common structure which perhaps has its origin in a common online source.

Assessment for learning



BUG the question (**B**-ox command word, **U**-nderline key terms, **G**-lance through again) is one strategy for decoding exam questions. This would make sure that a candidate is less likely to miss the need to focus on both telos and natural law in this question.

Exemplar 1

		In a modern day scientific perspective, the
		concept of the telos is as a foundation
		of the natural law theory has no
		grounding, and thus, a mere assumption.
		Enlightenment Emerging from the enlightenment
		period, Francis Bacon underlines the telos
		as unscientific and grounded in nothing but
		an outdated interpretation. Sean Carroll further
		develops from this, arguing that the
		telos is not built into the 'architecture'
		of the universe or human nature. the Mankind,

then, is solely socially conditioned by external forces of nature, via brain processes, stimuli, and products of our environment. Dawkins coherently furthers ~~this~~ this argument, articulating that we are 'survival machines' of evolutionary processes and natural selection, and aligns with Freud ~~also~~ highlighting the mere 'wishful thinking' and absurdity of such epistemological claims. Yet, Polkinghorne crucially underlines that science can never and will never be able to explain the ~~the~~ 'why' and only the 'how'. Aquinas argues that humans are drawn by inclination and God-given eudaimonia ('to do good and avoid evil') and thus, only divinity can account for why there is this pull toward God and the precepts of eudaimonia. However, Dawkins follows his argument, stating that science will eventually be able to explain all things through 'bytes and 'bytes of digital information, or, that we have to accept the universe as a 'brute fact'. Aquinas's telos, rebuffed from Aristotle's metaphysical claims are far scientifically outdated, and thus, Olcham's Razor shows us that the simplest and most coherent explanation is modern-day science, which finds nothing concerning a God-given telos.

Exemplar 1 is an AO2 section from a top Level 6 essay. The candidate fully unpacks the scientific criticism of telos using a range of thinkers. Points are discussed and a well-supported judgement is reached at the end of the section.

Question 2*

2* 'God is present within the workings of the conscience and the super-ego.' Discuss.

[40]

Most candidates approached this question through Aquinas and Freud, often taking a comparative approach with varying levels of success depending on the extent to which the presence of God was addressed. Other thinkers such as Piaget and Fromm were also often used well; other candidates used Butler, Newman, Augustine, Bonhoeffer and Barth to varying degrees of success.

Candidates generally showed good knowledge of the key ideas of Aquinas and Freud. Concepts such as ratio, synderesis and conscientia were typically understood and candidates were able to explain how vincible and invincible ignorance may lead to moral mistakes despite God's presence for Aquinas. Freudian ideas of id, ego and super-ego were generally understood although some candidates referred to these as parts of the conscience for Freud or mixed up what each aspect did. Less successful responses had some simplistic understanding of Aquinas (voice of God) and conflated his views with other religious views of the conscience, but this did not seem as widespread as in previous sessions.

Despite most candidates showing at least a reasonable amount of knowledge, discussion and evaluation was noticeably less successful for some candidates on this question with attempted discussion of each thinker appearing as a 'bolt-on' at the end of a paragraph. Among candidates who attempted more developed evaluation, a number offered an Aquinas versus Freud comparison which lost sight of the question arguing that Freud is more convincing than Aquinas without really considering the role of God. Some candidates offered the claim that Aquinas was wrong because he was 'out of date' without further justification, or that Freud was better because Aquinas relied on God, which seemed to slightly beg the question.

Some candidates challenged the view that God was present in Aquinas' view of the conscience as God, having given us ratio and free will, was only very indirectly involved in the actual workings of the conscience, while others argued that as we were created in the image of God that God must be present in the workings of the conscience. Both were argued well at times. A few candidates made the interesting argument that God, as an idea of an authority figure, was in a sense present in a Freudian superego.

Candidates also made use of the experience of guilt and discussions of the possible existence of shared moral values to support or reject a God-given conscience. There were some interesting examples around changing social behaviour over time, cultural variations and psychopaths.

Some candidates who had previously answered the telos question were keen to repeat some of the same material again in this question- not always in a successful manner. Some candidates consistently used the word 'consciousness' instead of conscience; sometimes this was just an incorrect term, on other occasions serious confusion was revealed.

Misconception



A common argument on this question was that God cannot be present because people are now more secular and don't believe in his existence. This confuses two questions: just as the earth has always been round regardless of individuals changing their beliefs, so too if God were to exist, he would logically exist for all people including those who do not believe in him.

Question 3*

3* To what extent is intuitionism correct in stating that good is self-evident?

[40]

Although this was slightly less popular than the other questions on the paper, those who attempted this question tended to do well. Some candidates approached the question via the three theories named on the specification, using them to discuss the statement. Other candidates focused their discussion more narrowly by just addressing intuitionism. Both approaches were valid and could be deployed well.

The knowledge and understanding of the key theories as well as their application to the question was typically strong. G E Moore's ideas that goodness was self-evident and not able to be defined was often explained clearly via his Open Question argument and the example of the colour yellow. Some candidates went beyond G E Moore and included other intuitionists such as Pritchard and Ross, even if their ideas were not always fully understood.

Less successful responses contained some significant misunderstandings of Moore or gave a more colloquial account of intuition not really extending beyond Intuition as a gut instinct or special feeling. Linked to this, some candidates conflated emotivism and intuitionism. Some candidates confused the idea of something being self-evident with the idea of empirical evidence in naturalism.

Candidates produced a range of ideas to support their evaluation. J L Mackie's arguments on the relativity of moral values and his argument from 'Queerness' were often deployed effectively to counter the idea that moral ideas are self-evident. The problems of conflicting intuitions, including how Pritchard or Ross might respond to this criticism, and the difficulty of the potential vagueness of the concept of intuition were also generally well used.

Where evaluation was less successful, candidates sometimes resorted to outlining all the meta-ethical theories at length, sometimes adding prescriptivism and error theory to the ones named in the specification without really focusing on the precise question or using the ideas to provide an evaluation in response to the question. Better responses sometimes had very similar content but skilfully deployed this material using the relevant aspects of these theories to move the discussion forward.

Exemplar 2

		Whilst across the world there seems to be universal
		moral agreement that actions such as murder and
		stealing are wrong, this arguably does not sufficiently
		evidence the claim that good is self evident and
		an objective fact: Cross cultural moral agreement
		can arguably better be explained by social conditioning
		and evolution as it can be observed that in
		societies in which acts such as murder are prohibited
		function optimally and thus murder is 'bad'.
		This view is strongly supported by Bentham's hedonic
		naturalism which reasonably argued that what
		is good can be known by observing what actions
		lead to more pleasure over pain. This view is arguably
		more successful than intuitionism's claim that
		good is self-evident by intuition. and was strongly
		supported by Foot who argued that good and bad
		can be known by observing consequences of
		actions, for example one can observe that a saving
		a stopping a child from crossing the road and being
		run over has positive consequences, such as the
		prevention of suffering and thus we can know
		based on a-posteriori knowledge that this is good.

Exemplar 2 is a good example of an AO2 led paragraph from a Level 5 essay on meta-ethics. The candidate focuses on how cross-cultural moral agreement might support intuitionism before discussing alternative explanations of the phenomena. While the final section on Philippa Foot might not be totally clear, it is a solid developed section of discussion.

Question 4*

4* 'Quality of life is the only relevant concept in decisions regarding euthanasia.' Discuss. [40]

This question proved extremely popular, and candidates generally showed a good understanding and engagement with the topic even if the focus on the precise question was not always present..

Some candidates explored what might be involved in the idea of quality of life in detail using ideas such as Singer's criteria of personhood, the absence of pain, or freedom to live as one wishes, as suggested criteria. Several other candidates, despite writing in considerable detail about various concepts in the topic, did not really explore what quality of life is beyond a one sentence description.

Candidates typically contrasted quality of life with sanctity of life which they linked to Aquinas and Biblical teaching. This was often successful depending on how well the evaluation was tied to the question. Some candidates wrote more generally outlining the approach of natural law which was linked to sanctity of life and situation ethics which was linked to quality of life. To some extent this addressed the question by default but often lacked the precision and focus to access the higher levels. A few less successful responses presented four paragraphs applying each of the ethical theories to the topic of euthanasia but without really engaging with the precise question.

There were often sophisticated discussions of personhood using Singer and autonomy using Mill's non harm principle. At times candidates used these as part of the concept of quality of life whereas other candidates treated them as concepts to be evaluated separately. Either approach worked well provided the candidate was clear and consistent. Some candidates also made good use of ideas of weak sanctity of life and right to life versus right to death.

In terms of the arguments around quality of life, many candidates addressed deficiencies in alternatives such as sanctity of life, which was held to be focused on irrelevant religious ideas, and autonomy, which provides less help with regards to involuntary euthanasia. Candidates made good use of the slippery slope argument against quality of life and were aware of Helga Kuhse's defence against this. At times, Kant's views on treating persons as ends were used relevantly to support both quality of life and sanctity of life. Some candidates tended to argue based almost exclusively on case studies that were often long and overly descriptive.

Some candidates were aware of current developments in the UK debate on assisted dying and issues raised by the MAiD system in Canada and were able to deploy this material to further their argument. Other candidates seemed to have no awareness of the current debates or represented them inaccurately.

Exemplar 3

		Firstly, the sanctity of life argument is based on religious concepts with roots in Christianity, whereas quality of life is more associated with a secular notion (however this isn't limited strictly to non-religious people and vice versa). Quality of life advocates, in particular Peter Singer, author of 'Rethinking Life and Death', argue that a person's life and right to die should be evaluated in the context of the quality they are living within. For example, Singer uses the example of disabled babies who have limited time and will spend their lives in constant unimaginable pain to illustrate his point; is it really humane to force these babies or any person in a similar situation to live a life of misery simply because "life is sacred"? It is an illogical and frankly inhumane notion to force people to live in this way, and it is a compelling argument to assess how animals are euthanised in dire situations but autonomous and free-thinking humans aren't.
--	--	--

The Exemplar 3 response has provided some depth to their explanation of quality of life using the ideas of Peter Singer.

OCR support



A very helpful [blog](#) has been written by the OCR Religious Studies Subject Advisor in collaboration with some of the senior examiners to explain further what makes for good Religious Studies essay writing under examination conditions.

Supporting you

Teach Cambridge

Make sure you visit our secure website [Teach Cambridge](#) to find the full range of resources and support for the subjects you teach. This includes secure materials such as set assignments and exemplars, online and on-demand training.

Don't have access? If your school or college teaches any OCR qualifications, please contact your exams officer. You can [forward them this link](#) to help get you started.

Reviews of marking

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our post-results services. For full information about the options available visit the [OCR website](#).

Access to Scripts

We've made it easier for Exams Officers to download copies of your candidates' completed papers or 'scripts'. Your centre can use these scripts to decide whether to request a review of marking and to support teaching and learning.

Our free, on-demand service, Access to Scripts is available via our single sign-on service, My Cambridge. Step-by-step instructions are on our [website](#).

Keep up-to-date

We send a monthly bulletin to tell you about important updates. You can also sign up for your subject specific updates. If you haven't already, [sign up here](#).

OCR Professional Development

Attend one of our popular professional development courses to hear directly from a senior assessor or drop in to a Q&A session. Most of our courses are delivered live via an online platform, so you can attend from any location.

Please find details for all our courses for your subject on **Teach Cambridge**. You'll also find links to our online courses on NEA marking and support.

Signed up for ExamBuilder?

ExamBuilder is the exam paper builder platform for a range of our qualifications. [Find out more](#).

Free for all OCR centres with an Interchange account, it allows unlimited users per centre. We require an [Interchange](#) username to verify your centre's users for ExamBuilder.

If you do not have an Interchange account, please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username.

Once you have an Interchange username, use the form on [this page](#) to sign up for ExamBuilder, or ask an existing user at your centre to create an ExamBuilder account for you.

Active Results

Review students' exam performance with our free online results analysis tool. It is available for all GCSEs, AS and A Levels and Cambridge Nationals (examined units only).

[Find out more](#).

Tell us what you think

Your feedback plays an important role in how we develop, market, support and resource qualifications now and into the future. We want you and your students to enjoy and get the best out of our qualifications and resources, but to do that we need your honest opinions to tell us whether we're on the right track or not.

You can email your thoughts to resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk or visit our [feedback page](#) to learn more about how you can help us improve our resources.



Designing and testing in [collaboration with you](#) and your students



Helping young people develop an [ethical view of the world](#)



Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) are [part of everything we do](#)

Contact the team at:

☎ 01223 553998

🖥 ocr.org.uk

To stay up to date with all the relevant news about our qualifications, register for email updates at ocr.org.uk/updates

Visit our Online Support Centre at support.ocr.org.uk



OCR is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

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

We operate academic and vocational qualifications regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA as listed in their qualifications registers.

We are committed to providing a fully accessible experience across all our products, platforms, and websites. Find out more about our [accessibility standards](#).

© OCR 2025. All rights reserved. We retain the copyright on all our publications. However, our registered centres are permitted to copy and distribute our material for their own internal use, in line with any specific restrictions detailed in the publication. Find out more about our [copyright policies](#).

We update our publications regularly so please check you have the most up-to-date version.

We cannot be held responsible for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and do not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

When we update our specifications, you'll see a new version number and a summary of the changes. While we do our best to reflect these changes in all associated resources on [Teach Cambridge](#), if you notice any discrepancies, please refer to the latest specification on our website and [let us know](#).

Our resources do not represent any teaching method we expect you to use. We cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions in our resources.