

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/01 Summer 2025 series

Contents

Introduction

Paper 1 series overview

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

3

4

5

7

9

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 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 any two of their choice. Responses are marked according to both AO1 (knowledge and understanding) and AO2 (analysis and evaluation) level descriptors with 15 marks available across 5 Levels for each assessment objective, giving an essay total of 30, and a paper total of 60.

This paper was well answered with many candidates showing a high level of detailed knowledge. Most candidates were able to apply this knowledge well to the question they had been asked. Most candidates answered Question 1. There was no clear preference for Question 2 or 3, with comparable numbers attempting each. There was no evidence that candidates performed significantly better or worse on any question. There were very few rubric errors, although a few candidates attempted all three questions, often crossing one of them out. Some candidates labelled their responses '1' and '2', regardless of the question numbers they had attempted. There was no evidence that candidates struggled to finish the paper in the available time.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- demonstrated detailed and accurate knowledge that was relevant to the question - related their response to the question closely throughout, with a conclusion that gave a clear answer to the question - used the views of scholars accurately and in a way that added to the discussion - used any quotations in an accurate and targeted way that added to the discussion.	- gave more generalised responses that were not closely related to the question - wrote all they knew about a general topic rather than selecting material that was relevant to the question. - focused their response on a different scholar when the question asked them to discuss a named scholar - did not focus strongly on the specific question asked throughout the response and in the conclusion.

Assessment for learning



Quotations from scholars

These can be very useful, but only if they are used in the right context to add to the argument and discussion. It is more important to have a good grasp of the arguments and theories.

Question 1

1* Critically assess Paley's teleological argument.

[30]

Candidates typically performed well on this question. There was evidence of highly detailed knowledge showing both depth and breadth. Most candidates gave a good explanation of the watchmaker analogy. Stronger responses focused closely on arguments from regularity and purpose, as well as design, often discussing Paley's argument concerning the design of the eye in some detail. Some responses that were otherwise very accurate and detailed did not achieve top marks because they missed the focus on purpose, which is central to the teleological argument. The best responses made accurate use of Aquinas' teleological argument without losing sight of the focus on Paley. Less successful responses listed criticisms of Paley from Hume, Dawkins and Darwin, among others, without fully engaging with them, and others often confused which scholars had made which arguments, leading to some confusion in the line of argument. This was the most popular question, and most candidates attempted it.

Focus on the Question

It is important to focus on the specific question rather than the general topic. This includes where the question asks about a particular scholar, such as William Paley or William James. In this case, most of the response should be about the arguments raised by these scholars.

Exemplar 1

		Firstly, Richard Dawkins, states that we are "survival machines". He believes everything humans are born from, think and survive from is just pure ^{material} consciousness; there is nothing after death, and the concept of a 'soul' is a fabricated ^{ideal} concept. Naturally, this idea undermines religious thinking and dualism - a belief in body and soul as separate. Dawkins goes on to state that the mental functions that one may perceive as a 'soul' are usually chemical imbalances. This idea is known as 'reductive materialism' or 'identity theory', and it explores the idea that everything we may think, feel or do boils down to chemical reactions within the brain. To combat this, Keith Ward in his 1997 book 'Defending the Soul' critiques Dawkins, stating that if we are to live under the impression that we are "educated bags of flesh" we lose sight of any greater spiritual or moral growth, and essential human traits such as justice, love and honour become optional. In this regard, it is arguable that a belief in Dawkins' materialistic body and soul could be harmful to humanity and strips humans of any greater purpose in life than 'survival'. In this regard, materialism reduces us to intelligent animals and diminishes any value in ^{existing} existing forces such as religion or community, failing to explain key mental processes such as love and faith.
--	--	---

Exemplar 1 shows a close engagement with the specific question, focusing on telos (purpose) and the argument from regularity, rather than the more general issue of complexity of design. This keeps a close focus on teleology, which is what the question is asking about, allowing this response to achieve full marks.

Question 2

2* To what extent can materialism be said to be a full explanation for consciousness?

[30]

There were some excellent responses to this question. The strongest responses explained the reasons for the theory that consciousness is rooted wholly in matter, rather than purely critiquing dualist ideas and assuming that materialism must therefore be correct. Some of the more successful lines of argument raised the issue of qualia as a major stumbling block for materialist theories. Less successful responses based most of their argument on dualism, rather than taking materialism as a starting point, as required by the question. Some responses consisted entirely of an explanation of the dualisms of Plato and Descartes, followed by a critique, with no real engagement with materialist ideas. The strongest responses engaged with the scholarly arguments well, comparing them with each other as well as providing a critique on their strengths and weaknesses. Very few responses fully considered the question of what consciousness is, simply assuming it to be the same thing described by the word 'soul' with the only question being that of whether it can be separated from the body.

Exemplar 2

This argument works well as when we observe the world around us we can see evidence of Creation that may point towards the existence of a divine being. F.R. Tennant's 'Anthropic Principle' argues that the universe is 'fine-tuned' for humans to live and we can see this through signs of design-qua purpose and regularity in the world. When we observe nature we can see that plants in nature fulfill their telos by providing habitat and shelter for animal species and providing oxygen for organisms to respire, showing design-qua purpose, and when we see the world behaving different seasons in an ordered manner or the planets in the solar system orbiting the sun in uniform.

it suggests to us that this points towards the existence of a creator who is capable of doing all this, rather than it all being by chance or random. Paley was also obsessed with the human eye as its cognitive functions enable humans and animals to see, hinting that there must be a creator who is able to give us these qualities. This shows why Paley's teleological argument is successful in proving God's existence, as signs of telos and regularity all point towards the existence of a creator.

Exemplar 2 is a good introduction as it focuses on the problem posed by the question. It explains what it means to say that materialism is a full explanation for consciousness and then explains what the implications for this might be and so why it is an important question.

Question 3

- 3* 'William James does not give any helpful insights into the nature and influence of religious experience.' Discuss.

[30]

This question appeared to cause more problems for candidates than the other two, although there were still some excellent responses. The question has two parts, asking about the nature of religious experiences and about their influence. The strongest responses addressed both parts of the question, the first through an analysis of James' criteria for mystical experiences (PINT) and the second through a discussion of conversion. Strong responses also addressed critiques of James from Freud and Persinger as well as a discussion of Swinburne's principle of credulity. Less successful responses discussed religious experience in more general terms, often giving many examples, but without engaging in a critical discussion of the theories or scholarly arguments. Other responses were often confused about the detail of the various arguments, and while most could name James' characteristics of mystical religious experiences, some then struggled to define each one correctly or confused them with each other. The strongest responses included a structured conclusion that specifically addressed the question.

Exemplar 3

		William James identified 4 similarities between religious experiences. These are Passivity, Ineffability, Transience and Noetic quality. Passivity in religious experiences are when you have the experience, you discover such a feeling that you cannot even describe. It is almost like you are speechless. However, this does not seem too convincing in believing a religious experience as it just shows that people are just confused. They may have felt something where they had an illusion or a hallucination and they felt like it was a religious experience. Therefore, this similarity found by William James is not convincing.
--	--	--

The other similarities such as transience, ~~is~~
~~also do not~~ ^{may} seem convincing for the nature
 and influence of religious experience.
 Transience is the feeling of something external
~~to~~ or a spirit ~~inside~~, possibly inside of you.
 This is what people ~~no~~ Christians may
 have felt in church. They go to church (a
 lot of people altogether) experience an external
 being. This seems convincing as many people
 shared this experience which makes it
 unlikely to be false. Another example of
 this is the Toronto Blessing in the 1990's.
 Another similarity is ineffability which is
~~not~~ that all experiences usually last a
 short ~~to~~ amount of time. Also, the other
 similarity is Noetic quality. This is the
 feeling that the experience has life long
 effects on you. This could show how people's
 lives change for the better and how ~~a~~
 a religious experience must have been the
 turning point. This is because for some

In Exemplar 3, the candidate knows that 'passive', 'transient' and noetic' are key terms for William James' theories about religious experience. However, they do not have a sound understanding of what they mean, leading to a confused argument.

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.