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Understanding the Assessment OCR A Level Religious Studies Exam Feedback 2019

OCR CPD 2019-20



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Welcome and Introductions

- Your trainers:
- Hugh Campbell
- Chris Eyre
- Stu Bowman
- Sarah Garcia de Bustos
- Libby Ahluwalia

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Housekeeping

- Packs and memory sticks
- Register
- Lunch and refreshment breaks
- Toilets
- Fire exits
- Mobile phones

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- 9.45 Registration
- 10.00 Introduction
- 10.15 Session 1 – Philosophy of Religion
- 11.15 Break
- 11.30 Session 2 – Religion and Ethics
- 12.30 Lunch
- 13.30 Session 3 – Developments in Christian Thought
- 14.30 Break
- 14.45 Session 4 – Delivering the course
 - i Planning for linearity
 - ii Sharing successful practice
- 15.45 Plenary
- 16.00 Close

OCR
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- Feedback on A level exams 2019 – Philosophy of Religion, Religion and Ethics, Developments in Christian Thought
- Delivering the course

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Assessment and marking

- Best responses demonstrated that no matter how much they had learned they knew examiners were assessing their ability to select the relevant material from that learning - or to put it another way:

- They answered the question.

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Assessment and marking

- In all my years of marking the one word which separates the best responses from the mediocre is:

- "Engagement"

- Those who engaged with the question in front of them rather than stating the exciting things they have learned **will** succeed

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Assessment and marking

- It is also more effective to know where an essay is going before you start it.

- A brief (**very brief**) plan makes that easier. I understand many candidates want to get straight into the question but.....

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Assessment and marking

- Very good / excellent responses are like a **tapestry** where the evaluation is woven through the knowledge and understanding.
- The best candidates keep in mind that 60% of their mark is for evaluation.



Assessment and marking

- Examples of possible linking phrases to aid evaluation:
- *X makes a convincing argument when.....*
- *Y contributes coherently to this when she says.....*
- *It is important that certain cases are not generalised and thus become universals.....* (eg Freud's research)



Assessment and marking

- Evaluation and not comparison or juxtaposition are key in the best responses.
- Candidates did not just say X said or Y said therefore Y is better.
- Instead they assessed the weaknesses in X and the strengths in Y as they go along before coming to their conclusion.
- A valid conclusion may be - 'Having assessed all the information available it is not yet possible to arrive at a conclusion.'



Assessment and marking

- So while demonstrating an understanding of relevant scholarly views (not lists of scholars) on any important views and issues, taking a view /stand on their positions is what gets essays into the higher levels of response at AO2.
- Scholarship is about identifying positions that scholars take – not necessarily remembering lots of names. In a high pressure exam ‘Scholars say....’ ‘it may be argued’ can take the pressure off.



Assessment and marking

- While introductions and conclusions do not have to be long, they are important ‘bookends’ for the best essays.
- An introduction can demonstrate that the candidate knows where they are going.
- A conclusion should **come out of the argument** in the essay and should help the candidate make sure they have ended where they expected to when they started.



Assessment and marking

- Text books often give extraneous information for background.
- Examiners do not need to know that a candidate knows about Kant’s daily walking habits or Bentham’s body still being a glass case at University College London.
- Again rather - **Engage with the question.**



Session 1

Philosophy of Religion

Component 1

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General Comments

- PE comments on this paper are all covered by the previous slides:
- **Best**
- Embedded evaluation
- Focus on question
- Knew where they were going
- Selection
- **Poorest**
- Everything I know approach
- Argument by juxtaposition

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Session 1 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

How successfully does the language games concept make sense of religious language?

- Engagement in critical dialogue with Wittgenstein produced the best responses.
- There seemed to have been a great deal of cognitivist and non-cognitivist in terms of language games - though the examiners report did not mention that the games are both.
- Effective evaluations included whether language games allowed for interfaith dialogue, was prone to fideism or exclusivity or whether it was possible to escape from language games.
- Some thought that any language game was valid if a group agreed to use it.

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Session 1 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

Critically compare the logical and evidential aspects of the problem of evil as challenges to belief.

- A complex question with many strands which could be addressed.
- The critically compare aspect of the question was handled well in many excellent responses.
- Weaker responses seemed unprepared for evidential and logical aspects in the same question.
- Some made very good use of the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus when they applied their knowledge to the question.
- Little credit could be given to those who simply wrote out the scholars views.



Session 1 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

Analyse Aristotle's four causes.

- Analysis was seen either in depth by discussing each cause in turn or using a broader approach to evaluate Aristotle's empiricist based theory.
- Responses in levels 5 and 6 explored why Aristotle took an empirical approach through reliance on the senses and a posteriori knowledge, using Plato's a priori rational approach as a comparison.
- Poorer responses failed to explain all four causes and often misunderstood the formal cause.
- Some wrongly thought the formal cause was similar to a blueprint, design or telos.
- Others spent too long explaining Plato's views rather than using them to assess Aristotle.



Session 1 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

'The world was created by chance , not by God's design.' Discuss.

- Popular question with most correctly identifying the teleological argument exploring: Aquinas, Paley and Tennant.
- Hume's criticisms were used to good effect.
- Some used Dawkins blind watchmaker critique
- Kant's view that human experience imposed apparent order was effectively used by some.
- Douglas Adams use analogy of the puddle's thought on the hole was also introduced to responses.
- Some confusion with the cosmological argument appeared and could only be credited, in a limited way, if responses explored then idea that a designer God initiated creation.



Session 1 – Task 1

How successfully does the language games concept make sense of religious language?

- Look at the indicative mark scheme and the levels of response.
- Read the response and decide what level you would put it in.
- Top or bottom of that level?
- Discuss with the teachers near you.
- Who is brave enough to suggest a mark



Session 1 – Commentary 1

- These are in a separate booklet and you will receive them at the end of the day.
- If you need to leave early please remember to collect one and leave your evaluation.



Session 1 – Task 2

- Critically compare the logical and evidential aspects of the problem of evil as challenges to belief.

- Look at the indicative mark scheme and the levels of response.
- Read the response and decide what level you would put it in.
- Top or bottom of that level?
- Discuss with the teachers near you.
- Who is brave enough to suggest a mark



Session 1 – Commentary 2

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Session 2

Religion and Ethics

Component 2

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General Comments

- Better answers showed engagement and were AO2 driven.
- Use of introductions and conclusion to show where the essay is going and what has been shown respectively
- Less successful answers could be very long and unstructured not focusing fully on the question.

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Session 2 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

'Natural law provides the best approach to sexual ethics.' Discuss.

- Popular with most making at least a reasonable attempt.
- The best responses place NL within the context of the 4 tiers of law and were able to go beyond 'primary precepts = reproduction'
- Biblical material was used well in term of divine law but some did not fully tie this in. Catholicism and Natural Law were synonymous for some candidate
- Many suggested that NL had difficulties when making decisions about sexuality – weaker answers just focused on the caricature that it is old fashioned and religious.
- Good use of Mill's non-harm principle, situation ethics and critique of the idea of telos (e.g.) from Sartre were pleasing



Session 2 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

Assess the view that utilitarianism does not help with business ethics

- Very mixed standard on this question
- Many suggested the shallow assumption that profit = happiness
- Better responses broadened their responses to include environmental and global issues, Whistleblowing was also constructively used by many candidates
- CSR was used but not always clear that candidates understood the concept
- Many thought Friedman was a Utilitarian - better responses understood his view as more political than ethical
- **Comparison rather than evaluation** was a common error



Session 2 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

The terms good, bad, right and wrong reflect only what is in the mind of the person using them.'

Discuss.

- Least popular question
- Danger here was giving a pre-prepared overview of all things meta-ethical
- Sometimes this led to good descriptions of theories but no significant development of AO2.
- Naturalistic Fallacy, the Is-ought gap and emotivism's tendency to render ethical debate insignificant were all used to good effect in better responses



Session 2 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

To what extent is Freud's psychological approach to conscience the most helpful approach?

- The 'right to roam' was seen across this question
- Some stuck to Freud (contrasted with Aquinas) and produced excellent answers. (Some felt a bit formulaic and pre-prepared but worked on the whole)
- Freud was on the whole understood reasonably well - good to remember most of the mark is for evaluation.....
- Dawkins evolutionary conscience was popular along with the views of Fromm and Piaget. Here again it is important to note that 'what is included' is less important than 'how the candidate uses it'
- Some used other thinkers superbly to illustrate their arguments, others wandered off the question and lost focus



Session 2 – Task 1

'Natural law provides the best approach to sexual ethics.' Discuss.

- Look at the indicative mark scheme and the levels of response.
- Read the response and decide what level you would put it in.
- Top or bottom of that level?
- Discuss with the teachers near you.
- Who is brave enough to suggest a mark



Session 1 – Commentary 1

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Session 2 – Task 2

Assess the view that utilitarianism does not help with business ethics.

- Look at the indicative mark scheme and the levels of response.
- Read the response and decide what level you would put it in.
- Top or bottom of that level?
- Discuss with the teachers near you.
- Who is brave enough to suggest a mark



Session 2 – Commentary 2

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Session 3

Developments in Christian Thought

Component 3



Session 3 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

- Successful candidates tended to show:
- A clear line of argument
- Paragraphs starting with engagement with the question (not the topic)
- Economical use of AO1 to aid AO2, including 'enough' mention of academic approaches, rather than over-peppering with scholar's names, views or quotations.

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Session 3 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

- Examiners felt that many candidates needed to demonstrate a clearer understanding of:
- The significance of Christianity throughout history.
- An overview of the history of salvation found in the bible
- Ideas about Redemption through the life and death of Christ.
- Recognition that the Church was not a *fait accompli* after the resurrection.

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Session 3 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

'Humans have an innate knowledge of God.' Discuss.

- This question allowed candidates to approach this question from several relevant angles.
- Philosophically questioning what 'we can know' for some while others took more scriptural approaches.
- Calvin's views were often used as a contrast both to secular views or to other parts of the specification.
- Some candidates did not understand the word 'innate' which made it difficult for examiners to find creditable material.
- Candidates choosing to introduce pre-christian scholars in this sort of essay need to be careful to apply them relevantly to the issues.

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Session 3 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

Discuss the view that the idea of purgatory makes more sense than hell.

- Candidates demonstrated very good knowledge of biblical passages in their evaluation here (e.g. Sheep and goats or the rich man and Lazarus).
- Although particular scholarly views were not required candidates made good use of the views of scholars such as Hick, Hume and Dante.
- Some responses showed little or no understanding of present day RC teachings on purgatory.
- There was some excellent evaluation on the issue of whether discussions on the afterlife should be considered symbolic or literal.
- Some candidates were so focused on what purgatory might be that they forgot to assess the idea of hell.



Session 3 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

'Inter-faith dialogue strengthens Christian communities.' Discuss.

- Candidates demonstrated an excellent understanding of the two set texts on this part of the specification.
- While cumbersome some responses validly assessed if an exploration of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism leading to interfaith dialogue could strengthen a Christian community.
- The concept of Christian Communities was interpreted broadly by examiners, however at times markers wondered whether they were really looking at answers about Christian communities or interfaith dialogue in general.



Session 3 – A Level Examiners Report Headlines

'For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church'. (Ephesians 5:23) Critically assess this teaching for 21st century family life.

- Candidates demonstrated a good understanding of feminist writers which allowed them to use their knowledge to produce excellent evaluations of the issues.
- Some outstanding essays pointed out that biblical writings have nuances which make not difficult to write it off as sexist or outdated.
- This was a long question which led to some spending too much time talking about women in general rather than 21st century family life.



Session 3 – Task 1

- ‘Humans have an innate knowledge of God.’ Discuss.
- Look at the indicative mark scheme and the levels of response.
- Read the response and decide what level you would put it in.
- Top or bottom of that level?
- Discuss with the teachers near you.
- Who is brave enough to suggest a mark



Session 3 – Commentary 1

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Session 3 – Task 2

- Discuss the view that the idea of purgatory makes more sense than hell.
- Look at the indicative mark scheme and the levels of response.
- Read the response and decide what level you would put it in.
- Top or bottom of that level?
- Discuss with the teachers near you.
- Who is brave enough to suggest a mark



Session 3 – Commentary 2

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Session 4

Delivering the course

Content and teaching

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Session 4 – Delivering the course

- Start with the end in mind – we are aiming to develop knowledge and skills over 2 years – so that students can show understanding and argue positions on around 28-30 different topics – only 9 of which will come up.

The Challenges

- There is just so much content...
- Results show gaps in knowledge – stronger and weaker topics
- Need to focus on skills and essay practice – but so little time
- Having to do more life coaching/resilience work as students are finding linear A levels more demanding

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The learning rainforest



- Tom Sherrington's Learning Rainforest
- **Establish conditions** – expectations about attendance, private study, notes, deadlines, essays
- **Knowledge** – the first thing is to develop knowledge and understanding of the topics (we do 18/28 in the first year!) We revisit many of these in the second year
- **Skills and possibilities** – exam technique, writing skills need developing too – some of this comes naturally as knowledge increases. Students start to take control of the process

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A two year plan – knowledge and skills

Term	Topic	Skills Focus
	Philosophy BLUE Ethics RED DCT - GREEN	
Autumn 1	Induction (1 week) Ancient Philosophical Influences (7-8 lessons) Jesus Augustine and Human Nature (6-7 lessons)	Base line A01/A02 skills on subject tracker Induction: Mindset, Change Curve, expectations, organisation (planners) Brief Guide to Thinking Skills Presentations - Augustine Note taking and reading (myx5; + JW ch. 2)
Autumn 2	Knowing God: Reason and Revelation Soul, Mind and Body Utilitarianism	Progress Point 2 feedback A01/A02 - Shorter Paragraphs BUG the question - Burgers vs Pizzas Soul - jigsaw essays + ch. 3 Utilitarianism - modelling WAGOL - past scripts
Spring 1	Natural Law Situation Ethics Moral Principles: the Bible Euthanasia	A01 - Developing Explanations using key terms A02 - Developing Arguments JW - Utilitarianism example

- 2 weeks of lessons on each topic
- What can you flip?
 - What must they finish off?
 - Are there topics that can be done (in part) independently to save time?
 - Eg) we set part of the Euthanasia topic over Feb half term. Bonhoeffer is done as a project over summer hols.

AIM – all content done by middle or March in year 2

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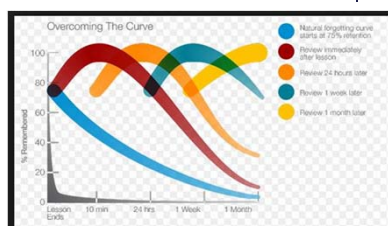
Year 2

- Year 1 is mainly about content
- Year 2 interleaves past topics for 30-45 minutes – 'past topic of the week' (*italics below*) is prepped and quizzed.
- Longer free writing and more essay practice as we get past Christmas

W/ b	Class topic covered	Deadlines/ Skills Development	KEEP UP/WRITE UP Learning outside class	CHECK UP Topics to review	BULK UP Aspiring A/A*	What I actually did (highlight, map, annotated and add notes to the text books)
1/9	Bonhoeffer review		Review class work (1 hour) READING: Buffa Buff Write Up Bonhoeffer (3 hours)			
9/9	Death and Afterlife	Notes: Bonhoeffer	Review class work (1 hour) Write Up Bible and Ethics (3 hours)	Review Bonhoeffer/Jesus for essay (2 hours) Cue checker notes, notebook or <i>Blindfolded/Rebels</i>		
16/9	Liberation Th. Problem of Evil	Essay: Bonhoeffer or Jesus	Review class work (1 hour)	Review Bonhoeffer/Jesus for essay (2 hours) Check Up: Problem of Evil (2h) Cue checker notes, notebook or <i>Blindfolded/Rebels</i>	Read and make notes on the extension materials on myx5	
23/9	Liberation Augustine		Review class work (1 hour)	Check Up: Business Ethics, Augustine (2h) Cue checker notes, notebook or <i>Blindfolded/Rebels</i>	Read and make notes on Extension theology in Alkervilla and Benie	
30/9	Gender Arguments		Review class work (1 hour) Write Up Liberation Theology (1.5 hours)	Check Up: Arguments (using class notes (2) Cue checker notes	Listen to <i>Pagebreak</i> podcast episode 47 - Christianity: Gender and	

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Overcoming the curve

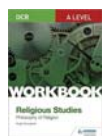
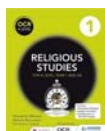


- Ebbinghaus forgetting curve – key to linear learning is regular review of past topics and content

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Resourcing the course

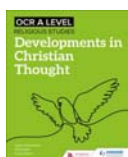
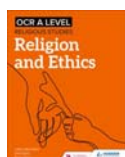
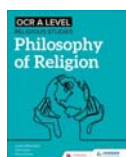
- The endorsed textbooks from Hodder (Wilkinson & Wilcockson) and OUP (Ahluwalia & Bowie)
- The My Revision series from Hodder by Eyre and Waterfield
- Workbooks from Hodder by Campbell and Dean



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New textbooks coming from Hodder in Summer 2020

- New textbooks – Waterfield, Eyre & Dean (coming July 2020) – aiming to be accessible and AO2 focused



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What else are people using?

Books

- Books produced for the old spec still useful!
- 'Religion and Ethics for OCR' (Coffey & Brown)

Podcasts

- Panpsycast series
- Philosophy Bites + In our Time also good.

Youtube

- 'I think therefore I teach' has a video on each topic.

Over to you: what else are people finding useful?



Plenary

- Please complete the feedback forms
- Further Questions?
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