



A-LEVEL

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

7062/2A – Study of religion and dialogues: Buddhism
Report on the Examination

7062
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General comments

There were some outstanding scripts and there were full mark answers to every question for this component. Few, if any, appeared to have difficulty completing the paper in the time available, although it was obvious that the handwriting deteriorated in the final question attempted on a number of scripts. There were some scripts where handwriting was a major issue, but on the whole the answers were legible. As is always the case under examination conditions, attention to the exact wording of the question varied considerably so answers were more or less relevant accordingly. For example, on AO2 questions, some students lost sight of the issue they were supposed to be evaluating. Many students used technical terms accurately and effectively, but there were some errors which led to considerable confusion in the answers. The new-style dialogue questions appeared to cause no particular problems for most. The way these questions were approached varied considerably and some of those strategies were much more successful than others as will be evident from the comments below.

Section A: Study of Buddhism

Question 1

Part 01.1

There were some excellent answers to this question. Many students were clearly well-informed about this fundamental Mahayana belief and were able to explain the key ideas about the three bodies of the Buddha. Some muddled the names of the three bodies, but that did not always impact of the explanation they gave, some could do little more than give the meaning of each of the three terms. A minority of responses confused the term Trikaya with a term used for the three baskets of Buddhist scripture (tripitaka), although that term does not appear on the specification. As a result, these responses were irrelevant, although credit was given for any material that did happen to be relevant to the question set.

Part 01.2

There were some excellent answers that considered whether the claim that there is 'little' agreement matched the evidence, or whether it would be more accurate to claim that there is no agreement or general agreement. However, other answers were mostly summaries of a wide range of different Buddhist beliefs and, while such answers were often well-informed, they did not always address the issue. Some simply completed their summary with a statement such as 'this shows there is little agreement', others did not actually state a point of view. The maximum reward possible for an answer which simply explains reasons / presents evidence to support one point of view is Level 2. An answer which does not state a point of view can achieve a maximum of Level 1, which gives credit for awareness of relevant information but recognises that the response has demonstrated no AO2 skills.

Question 2

Part 02.1

There were excellent answers which clearly focused on reasons why there are different views and supported the ideas with evidence and examples. As expected, most answers wrote exclusively on

women in Thai Buddhism and some were familiar with the Mae Chi tradition and the work of Dhammananda. There were references to the story of the Dragon King's daughter. There were also many answers that described different views, but paid little, or no, attention to the reasons for them, and that limited the marks that could be awarded. Some of the explanations of those different views were very detailed, and the answers would have taken a good while to write, but unless the answer focused on the question asked it could not be highly rewarded.

Part 02.2

Excellent answers to this question were well-informed about different attitudes to these issues and applied that information to the thesis stated. There were specific references to views expressed by the Dalai Lama and to the tradition that Buddha ruled out ordination for intersex and/or homosexual individuals. Others, however, simply summarised arguments in support followed by arguments against: such responses could only be awarded a maximum of Level 3. Some answers were almost wholly one-sided and did little, or nothing, more than explain reasons for one point of view which limited the marks that could be awarded to Level 2. A very few answers made minimal, or no reference to transgender people.

Dialogues

There were many excellent answers to these questions. Some wrote separate AO1 and AO2 sections. This was a perfectly valid approach but it resulted in quite a lot of repetition, because some of the information was then needed as evidence for the AO2 section. Also, the AO1 material, when presented separately, tended to be rather general and broader than required and was not always focused enough to be useful for AO2. Some took a 'write all you know approach', and did not select what was relevant to the issue. Better answers tended to combine AO1 and AO2. There were some signs of planning, which was often very effective. A minority of students did these questions first. This was another perfectly valid approach and seemed to have no impact on their ability to complete the whole paper. On the whole, weaker answers tended to have the same weaknesses as answers to the structured questions in Section A such as a failure to develop and support the AO1 content and a failure to critically analyse and evaluate the arguments presented, and, overall, the standard of work on dialogue questions was similar to the standard on the structured questions.

Section B: The dialogue between philosophy and Buddhism

Question 3.1

There were some excellent answers to this question. Most limited their discussion to the authority of Gautama Buddha, which was perfectly acceptable but not necessary, and recognised that his authority, in part, depends on the authenticity of the enlightenment experience; his teaching about rebirth and Nirvana were also often considered. Some also considered the authority of visions of heavenly Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In many answers, the way in which philosophy challenges the authority of these experiences was then discussed and evaluated with particular reference to the problems of subjectivity, interpretation and alternative natural explanations. There was some useful discussion of Swinburne's principles of credulity and testimony, and clear and accurate references to the research work of Persinger and Ramachandran. Some also approached the question by discussing whether the experiences matched the definitions offered by Stace or Otto, for example. This was also a valid approach, but often did no more than establish that the recorded experiences could, or could not, rightly be called 'religious', it did not establish whether they do, or do not, have authority. Some attempted a very complicated argument that implied, or in some

cases stated, that religious experiences were basically Christian and that they challenged Buddhism by proving the authority of Christianity and/or by converting people to Christianity. Credit was given where this was made relevant but where this was the only approach used in the answer it meant that there was little or no dialogue between Buddhism and philosophy which was the focus of the question. Many concluded that the more Buddha's authority was seen to depend on the authenticity of his visions during the enlightenment, the more philosophy could undermine it but that when his authority was based on verifying the truths of his teaching through normal experience, insights into the nature of religious experience had little relevance.

Question 4.1

There were some excellent answers to this question, but also some which could only discuss Christian miracles and made little or no reference to Buddhism. A common mistake was to assume that Hume's definition applied only to acts of God, but he specifically includes the possibility that the miracle is brought about by, another, invisible agent which allows discussion of all those 'miracles' said to result from karma generation or devotion in Buddhism as well as those associated with Gautama Buddha. Many referred to the Buddha's apparent ability to walk and talk at birth, for example. Had the cave rescue in Thailand happened before the exam, one might have expected many references to that since the reaction of many was to pray / offer devotion in the hope of influencing the outcome. The best answers tended to pitch Hume's arguments against these claims that miracles happen, with analysis and evaluation of those arguments, along with a discussion of different Buddhist views about miracles. As with question 3.1, some tried to argue that miracles proved the superiority of Christianity and credit was given where relevant. Some students did not distinguish between miracles and religious experiences either here or in 3.1. This approach generally did not help them and led to some very muddled discussions. Some were clearly intent on bringing in everything they knew about miracles but this was neither necessary nor, in some cases, helpful. It was, for example, very difficult to make a discussion of the theological difficulties of accepting that God is an interventionist relevant to a discussion of miracles in Buddhism. Most did explain both realist and anti-realist views of miracles, but the latter were not always well understood, and the ideas not always applied in the rest of the answer.

Section C: The dialogue between ethics and Buddhism

Question 5.1

This was by far the more popular of the two questions in this section. There were some excellent answers that were clearly very well-informed about, and had an excellent understanding of, Aquinas's views on animals and the application of ahimsa to animals in Buddhism. They were able to compare and contrast views about the superiority of humanity over animals with reference to the use of animals to serve the needs of humanity as subjects of experiments, sources of donor organs and as food, for example. Most cited rejection of blood sports as a clear similarity between the two and meat-eating as a clear difference, but their understanding of Buddhist attitudes to the latter was occasionally rather limited. Those who wrote separate AO1 and AO2 sections often introduced their answers with a general explanation of natural moral law, and, occasionally, of the Buddhism's five precepts, which was not directly related to the question. Some understanding of natural moral law was quite confused. In particular, some assumed that for Aquinas, 'the protection of innocent life' required the protection of animal life and that made it very difficult for them to find any contrast between the views of Buddhism and those of natural moral law. On the whole, however, it tended to be the understanding of Buddhist views that was rather limited, with many apparently assuming, for example, that ahimsa simply rules out using animals in experimentation and as sources of organs for transplants.

Question 6.1

While this was the less popular question in Section C, there were some excellent answers from students who were clearly aware of current issues within Buddhism and the ‘pros and cons’ of freedom of expression in multicultural society. Answers were generally well-informed about Bentham’s utilitarianism and how it would weigh up the possible consequences of religious expression before making a decision. They then discussed whether Buddhism would use the same method of measuring consequences, based on karma or karuna, or whether there were matters of principle to be considered by Buddhists which would either rule out or require freedom of expression. In some answers, there were excellent references to the situation in Myanmar to support the discussion. Many reached and justified the conclusion that unlimited freedom had many possibly negative consequences but that imposing limits had many dangers. Some considered the limits of tolerance in Buddhism and whether imposing limits on others was a sign of unhealthy attachment to one’s own views. In contrast there were answers that had only a limited understanding of ‘religious expression’ and a general view that Buddhism was tolerant of everything.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.