

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE Religious Studies 6RS04

Paper 1C

Buddhism

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## Paper Introduction

### General introduction

1. It was fundamentally important to examine the passage itself. All the level descriptors in the indicative mark scheme for AO1 begin with reference to the passage. There are a variety of ways this may be done. Some candidates presented a detailed exposition of the passage. This has much to commend it, including those who used this technique to explore the context of the wider source. One possible drawback was that this could become a simple comprehension exercise. This can be overcome by placing the passage in a context and showing an understanding of a detailed analysis of the more important terms and ideas. Another popular method was to present an overview of the whole source from which the passage was derived in order to examine the key points from within the passage. This method was useful in enabling candidates to show their understanding of the ethos of the passage. However, a potential weakness was that such an overview may be completed without sufficient focus on the passage itself.
  
2. Similarly, it was essential to answer the full demands of the AO2 part of the question:
  - do you agree with the idea(s) expressed
  - justify your point of view
  - discuss its implications for understanding religion
  - discuss its implications for understanding human experience.

It was important that these demands were addressed in an explicit manner rather than implicitly.

3. This unit is the synoptic part of the GCE RS course. In that respect candidates are expected to link their answers to related parts of their studies. Sometimes this may be achieved by relating work to one or more of the other sources in the anthology and also by drawing on material from any of the other three units. This enabled some candidates to compare and contrast a variety of possible responses.

## Question Introduction

AO1 features of good quality

Candidates:

- presented well-informed answers focused on the passage. Those candidates who referred to the source as a whole or to related ideas managed their answers in such a way as to demonstrate their understanding of the passage. There was effective use of scholarship.
- structured their answers in a coherent manner, with evidence of analytical thought across the answer.
- were clear about the synoptic features of this unit relating their answers to other sources and related material in other units.

AO2 features of good quality

Candidates:

- displayed effective use of argument
- referred to scholarly opinion
- displayed a thoughtful evaluation of alternative views
- were explicit in their material on implications for understanding of religion and human experience
- constructed well-justified arguments leading to a coherent conclusion.

AO1 features that require improvement

Candidates:

- tended to present a basic examination of some ideas but the answers were not well-focused on the passage. Some treated the passage like a simple comprehension exercise.

- sometimes had a problem with unsatisfactory allocation of time, related to the two parts of the question. For example, some candidates spent too much time on part (b) in spite of the mark allocation. There were a few candidates who combined (a) and (b) but with those who did there was a tendency to have insufficient material given the range of demands in AO2.
- presented a generic account of the whole source from the anthology or a general account of related teachings at the expense of a focus on the selected passage.

#### AO2 features that require improvement

##### Candidates:

- presented basic points of view with limited use of argument.
- displayed limited explicit focus on implications.

##### Observations from the scripts:

##### Part (a)

Candidates took a number of approaches when answering this question. Some focused specifically on the passage selected and explored its key issues. Others reviewed the main ideas in the whole article by de Silva as a way of more detailed analysis of the passage. Although this was done well by many candidates a few paid insufficient attention to the details in the selected passage itself. An additional technique was to examine key features of Buddhist ethics as a means of a more detailed analysis of the passage. However, a generic examination of Buddhist ethics without adequate attention to the passage was unsatisfactory. Similar issues apply to a focus on the life of the Buddha or an account of Ashoka. These may be useful means to an end but the passage must be of central importance.

Karma was the main focus for a number of candidates. Many displayed a sophisticated understanding of karma with Buddhist traditions and its unique features in these contexts. Weaker scripts showed confusion concerning key features of karma. Many candidates showed a thorough grasp of the role of morality in the Magga and especially in undermining of the three fires and replacing the unwholesome states with the wholesome ones in the mind. There was effective use of some of the set texts in 6RAS03, including the Questions of King Milinda.

Some analysed the categorization of Buddhist ethics against Western ethical theory. Candidates discussed the extent to which Buddhist ethics could be described as Utilitarian, Kantian, or a form of Virtue Ethics. Some candidates developed this into part (ii) in which they assessed the merits of this categorization.

Many candidates used a wide range of scholars who have contributed to the debate about Buddhist ethics. Most notable were Harvey, Keown and Peacock and Saddhatissa.

#### Part (b)

There was a wide variety in the quality of answers to this part of the question. Some candidates offered a range of robust arguments, both supporting and challenging aspects of Buddhist morality and the points made by de Silva. Some interesting arguments included criticism of karma as a form of social control. Some questioned the Buddhist motivation for leading a moral life, arguing that it was in fact selfish, aimed at attaining personal enlightenment or a better rebirth. Others questioned if consequences of an action was required when assessing the moral worth of an action.

More positively, some candidates praised the focus on the virtues of Buddhist ethics, rather than a rule-based ethic. This was seen as being more effective as it came from the individual and was presented as a form of self-development. Some scripts made a comparison between the Middle Path and Aristotle's Virtue Ethics. Candidate identified the variation in practice and approaches amongst some Buddhist Traditions, including Pure Land and Zen schools. Some wanted to argue that the classification of Buddhist ethics depended upon upaya. For example, if an adherent were aiming for a better rebirth, then Buddhist ethics took on a utilitarian character, if they were on the bodhisattva path, it became more like virtue ethics. Thus it was argued that Buddhist ethics was beyond simple classification in a western sense, since it was only part of the Path.

## Exemplar

This script gains high marks across both (a) and (b). In part (a) the candidate displays an overview of key themes in Buddhist ethics and uses this method to focus on significant ideas in the passage. For example the candidate pays careful attention to ethics as practical concern and liberation from suffering.

Part (b) is commendable for its scholarly debates and discussions about Buddhist ethics and ethical theories.

a) Although there is no direct translation of the word ethics into 2701a  
buddhist vernacular, De Silva claims that ethics is in fact 1801b  
core to the buddha's teachings. He claims that ethics runs  
throughout the teachings of the buddha, such as that of the  
3 marks of existence - anatta, anicca, dukkha - and the four  
noble truths, or the four truths of the noble ones as it is more  
accurately translated.

The word normally used to describe ethics using a  
buddhist vernacular is 'sila' which actually means  
morality. Sila forms ~~the~~  $\frac{3}{8}$ ths of the Magga, which is  
the middle way that the buddha taught, and encompasses  
right speech, right action and right livelihood. Right  
speech refers to actions such as not lying or gossiping,  
right action refers to actions such as not gambling or  
abstaining from misuse of drugs and right livelihood  
includes actions such as not working in the arms  
trade.

According to Harvey, "moral virtue is the foundation of the  
spiritual path", meaning that people often begin by  
cultivating sila. However it is not a case of cultivating  
sila, then prajna and then samadhi - as Pauling suggests,  
we should think of the path as a flower, each petal can  
open alongside the opening of other petals. Despite this,  
as sila is the easiest thing to focus on, it is generally  
the focus of the lay community, whilst prajna and  
samadhi are generally the focus of the monastic community.

or the sangha. <sup>Not only is</sup> ~~the~~ Sila ~~is~~ the easiest to cultivate, but it also brings about <sup>an</sup> instant ~~reduction~~ ~~of~~ ~~dukkha~~ decrease in dukkha, as it reduces the guilt we feel after acting immorally. It also decreases the ~~in~~ papa that we accumulate, reducing bad karmic consequences.

The buddha's "analysis and insights into ethical issues" that brought about his teachings on dukkha, were brought about by his experiences of the two extremes of luxury and asceticism. He lived through great luxury in the palace with a harem of dancing girls, ~~a beautiful~~ beautiful gardens and a palace for each of the <sup>3</sup> seasons, before deciding that he ~~had~~ had to leave this life to go and become an ascetic which entailed him putting his body through atrocities such as burning ~~his~~ himself in the sun. He only realised the Magga after these two periods, understanding that you needed a middle way to ~~survive~~ become enlightened. This is embodied in the instrument analogy where "if the strings are too tight they will snap, but if the strings are too loose, they won't <sup>even</sup> play".

The first of the buddha's discourses ~~are~~ was called the Deer park ~~sermon~~ sermon where he taught about the 4 truths of the noble ones. These truths teach the truth about dukkha, how it is everywhere and about how we need to follow the Magga in order to destroy it; the main focus of liberation. According to the buddha, dukkha is of extreme importance as he

said "I teach dukkha and the cessation of dukkha". There are three types of dukkha - dukkha dukkha, ~~meaning~~ meaning plain, ordinary suffering, Sankhara dukkha, meaning suffering due to anicca, and viparinama dukkha, meaning ~~the~~ ~~dissatisfaction~~ ~~or~~ ~~is~~ ~~a~~ dissatisfaction due to conditioned states.

In terms of the practical concern of buddhist ethics, laymen and women have a duty to practice the dharma. They must also adhere to the sigala vada sutta, which are the pieces of advice given by ~~or~~ ~~near~~ the buddha to a man named ~~sigala~~ ~~sigala~~ sigala. ~~These~~ This advice included respect for elders, teachers and pupils and the respect for how money is used. This demonstrates how important the relationships amongst a family are in buddhism.

Ashoka promoted the practical side of ethics during his reign as buddhist king. He did this through adhering to the buddhist concept of ahimsa, non violence, by banning animal sacrifices, ~~and~~ ~~even~~ spreading vegetarianism, planting trees and building wells for travellers and even, according to ling, banning the death penalty.

Many buddhists comment that buddhist ethics is of practical concern today in the modern world. These buddhists include Sivaraksa, who comments that the idea of aulekha in the four noble truths should

be applied to social structures today - he says that consumerism is a modern personification of greed. In this way, the ethics of buddhism should be applied to human rights issues as the human rights of sentient beings, according to Keown, flows from our tathagatagarbha.

The extract also comments on the ethical path to liberation from suffering. As has already been mentioned, 3/8ths of the Magga is constituted by sila, ~~the~~ however the other two parts of the Magga are samadhi and prajna. ~~Sama~~ Samadhi means meditation, though Rahula comments that the best method of translating meditation is bhavana meaning "to make real real". of meditation, Keown says it is the "principle buddhist strategy of making oneself what one wishes to be" There are two types of meditation in buddhism namely samatha, calm abiding, and vipassana which is insight meditation. Samatha includes exercises such as breathing exercises ~~etc~~ and an analogy to describe samatha is muddy water in a glass - when the glass is still, the mud settles and you can see clearly. Vipassana meditation includes meditating on concepts such as anatta, anicca, dukkha and shunyata. Indeed one can meditate on anicca when thinking about how a flower will one day wither and cease to be beautiful. Another form of meditation which is also particularly ~~useful~~ relevant withing the concept of ethics are the brahma viharas, which are the meditations on love. These

are metta, karuna, mudita and ~~uppekha~~ ~~uppekha~~ uppekha and they focus on sending out loving feelings to the universe.

The other section is prajna in which one gains more knowledge of the ideas of the 3 marks, and other related doctrines. In gaining more understanding of the buddhist concepts one will ~~begin~~ begin to destroy the three fires which are tanha, craving, avesa, hatred, and avidya, ~~the~~ ignorance. Once one has perfect realisation of these things one can progress ~~to~~ <sup>along</sup> to the spiritual path.

Liberation from suffering in buddhism comes in the form of nirvana which means blowing out or extinguishing which relates to the blowing out or extinguishing of the 3 fires. It is difficult to understand what nirvana is, so many analogies are used to try to comprehend it such as 'just as seeds do not grow on a mountain-top the seeds of passion do not grow in nirvana'. Indeed many suggest it's like describing colour to a blind person. Some scholars even describe it as "totally other".

To conclude, therefore, ethics is particularly important to buddhism as it forms an integral part of the teachings of the 8fold path and other of the buddha's teachings. His ethical analysis of the way things really are is particularly crucial, for me, to the entire buddhist tradition.

b) Thus, it has already been mentioned that sila is particularly important to buddhism, though its importance is heightened once we see that it also plays a large part in the Mahayana 10 stage path as it is present in the paramitas, most notably ~~the~~ dana<sup>(generosity)</sup> and karuna (compassion). ~~Thus~~ Therefore one can ~~only~~ suggest it is important throughout the path - Harvey says that "the path begins with sila and ends with sila and prajna"

The extract talks of an emphasis being put on the path to liberation in the buddhist ethics, which could be compared to utilitarianism. ~~But~~ DeSilva suggests that it is ~~a~~ ~~like~~ most like a consequentialist ethic because great weight is put on the consequences of actions. In fact, Rhys Davis claims "the buddha was a hedonist" due to the fact that there is a large emphasis put on becoming happy and eliminating suffering.

Keown, however, disagrees as he says what is really important in buddhist ethics is the *cetana* of an action as this is what causes karmic consequences. Also, <sup>Keown points out that</sup> in utilitarianism the act is good or bad because the consequences are good or bad, whereas in buddhism the consequences are good or bad because an act is good or bad.

De Silva also mentions that buddhist ethics may

resemble deontology in its social ethics. This is because we must all adhere to the laws of the dharma. Keown comments that in early texts ~~of buddhists~~ there was a large emphasis put on many acts not being done in any circumstances, such as killing.

However, the ~~the~~ buddha encouraged us to think for ourselves in these situations and not just follow blind faith; he said "be a refuge unto yourself". Keown also points out that the dharma is not obligatory as it is possible in some circumstances to not adhere to the precepts. For example, a bodhisattva may kill a would-be murderer to accumulate their papa, or a Japanese lay buddhist may become a fisherman if the situation dictates he must.

Despite this Keown also comments that the dharma obligations are still there, even if we don't adhere to them. ~~He~~ He says "go bad ~~to~~ karmic consequences will follow a misdeed regardless of whether or not one has formally taken the precepts".

The final theory that could relate to buddhist ethics is virtue ethics - in the extract it talks of ethics as a way of life. Keown believes that this is the most like buddhist ethics as it focuses on changing one's behaviour for the better. Buddhist ethics is all about cultivating the kusala motivations of benevolence, understanding and non-attachment.

in order to undermine the akusala virtues which are the 3 fires. Prethip agrees saying that it is not about "adherence to external rules" rather it is about "expressing the perfected motivations".

Though the extract said the buddha showed an interest in ethics for the path towards liberation, one can suggest that this relates to only one of the 3 of Atisa's motivations. Williams cites Atisa's motivations, showing that there are multiple goals for different buddhists. The first is getting something out of the religion, the second is liberation from samsara and the third is attaining enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. This then shows that the way of life for a buddhist can be different depending on their goal.

However, misconceptions of ethics can occur when we consider that, in fact, the translation of ethics into sila is actually incorrect. Sila means morality which are the moral codes of a ~~being~~ that we must adhere to, whereas ethics is the critical analysis ~~is~~ of these moral codes.

~~Indeed~~ Indeed, buddhist ethics did not come about until the 1960s when a "nascent discipline of buddhist ethics" <sup>arose</sup> appeared upon its journey to the west. Leoun attributes the fact that ~~it is not~~ ~~a~~ buddhist ethics had not been breached, to the fact that Buddhism

lived under predominantly non-democratic political structures so no kind of ethical debate had ever arisen.

Misconceptions often occur when we try to apply our knowledge of to buddhist principles. It means that certain parts of what is a vast and complex religion may be left out. Not only this but the translation of other words may be incorrect such as "dukkha" which is translated as suffering, but more accurately means dis-ease.

To conclude, ~~the~~<sup>ethics</sup> is particularly important in buddhism, even if ethical debate did not begin until the 1960s. Though it is difficult to compare western theories to buddhism, it seems to me that buddhist ethics is most like virtue ethics, due to the similarities in both of the cultivation of virtues.

## Paper Summary

There are four aims in the Religious Specification. This paper encourages students to:

- Develop their interest in a rigorous study of religion and relate it to the wider world. To succeed in this paper candidates must show evidence of a thorough study of the selected passage and fulfil the demands of A02.
- Treat the subject as an academic discipline and this paper requires specialist study, drawing on their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Adopt an enquiring and critical approach whereby they may reflect on all their previous units.
- Develop their own values and views in the light of their learning. A02 in particular enables candidates to engage in this creative process.

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