

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01
Introduction to Philosophy and
Theology

General comments

It was pleasing to note that at the top end of the spectrum, responses were accurate, covered a wide range of material with detail and precision, and advanced insightful positions which were both consistent with and supported by various points selected for critical discussion. Lower down the scale, responses typically covered a range of points, but with less precision, or were too narrow in their scope. Positions were sometimes argued for with limited support, or support was given without a final judgement being reached. At times it was apparent that this was because candidates had simply run out of time, which needs emphasising.

Lower end responses were often characterised as being overly descriptive in character, so that evaluation was at best implicit within a juxtaposition of competing accounts. Responses typically covered a range of points, but with less precision. There was also evidence of rehearsed responses.

Regardless of how well a candidate understood the topic in hand, where there was no explicit evaluation of the material selected for discussion, such responses rarely attracted above satisfactory marks.

Key comments

There are three key comments this year:

- 1 One particular instance of the lack of explicit evaluation is that there was a marked tendency for candidates to make unsupported and empty assertions. In particular, the unsupported phrase, 'It is my view that ...' was fairly commonplace.
- 2 Several candidates wrote lengthy and uninformative introductions to each essay, often including such phrases as:
 - 'This is a debate that has spanned countless centuries, with many philosophers debating ...'.
 - 'This question asks me to do X. I am going to do X (etc.)'.

Whilst writing such comments does not lose marks, it does carry the self-imposed penalty of wasting time.

- 3 There was a fair amount of evidence of rehearsed responses which, despite being erudite, often failed to reach higher marks, largely due to a failure to address the specific demands and nuances of the question. This was particularly prevalent in **Question 4** (psychological understandings of the conscience), where responses often analysed a range of theistic accounts (Augustine, Aquinas, Butler, Newman *et al.*), arguing that given the failure of various theistic interpretations, psychological analyses must follow by default. This is clearly not the case. This was also apparent with answers to **Question 1** (Aristotle's understanding of the Good) – see the specific comments on **Question 1** below.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Responses to this question tended to fall into two camps: metaphysical analyses of Aristotle's account of the Good (usually via the four causes, prime mover, sense and source of *telos* etc.) and virtuosic ones (the

doctrine of the mean, virtue theory, his archer analogy and modern formulations of Aristotle's account). Both approaches were capable of attracting full marks. Some responses managed to combine the two which was impressive.

Often (usually via metaphysical analyses), the issue of 'the Good' was lost sight of, usually through an overt focus on Aristotelian cosmology (his prime mover argument and the Russell/Copleston debate etc.), so that an understanding of how Aristotle's metaphysics dovetailed with his account of eudaimonic flourishing was either referred to obliquely or was lost sight of entirely.

There were many apparently 'rehearsed' responses that often prioritised Platonic metaphysics and Plato's virtue theory over Aristotelian conceptions of the Good. Such responses inevitably lacked focus. In many of the responses to **Question 1** the amount of content devoted to Plato was as much as, or more than, that devoted to Aristotle.

Question 2

To give a selection of the many comments that could be made here:

At the top end, again, responses were impressive, displaying a thorough understanding of Platonic, Cartesian, Leibnizian and more modern (usually the nativist accounts tendered by Chomsky, Caruthers *et al.*) formulations of the view that not all knowledge enters the mind via the senses. Arguments put forward by Aristotle, Locke, Hume, and occasionally Berkeley, were appealed to for the case against. The respective positions of Kant and Leibniz were sometimes used effectively to argue 'middle-ground' positions for why reason and experience might be seen to co-operate, but were more commonly asserted with limited evidence of candidate understanding of what each view entailed.

Platonism was often criticised for being too metaphysical in character, and Plato himself was often charged with offering no argumentation or evidence (empirical or otherwise) for the existence of Forms. The former point is not in and of itself a criticism, and the latter point is incorrect on both charges. It also needs mentioning that, were Plato to offer such evidence, he would be undermining the very legitimacy of what exactly it was he was arguing for.

It needs noting that empiricists accept that we can have a priori knowledge of necessary truths and deductive arguments. What they deny is that such knowledge is 'substantive' (i.e. tells us something new about the world) and/or innate. Rationalists, on the other hand, argue that we can have innate, a priori knowledge which is substantive in character (i.e. tells us something new about the world – Descartes' wax etc.) and that such knowledge can be obtained independently of experience.

Question 3

This was the least popular question, although it produced some very interesting responses. Again, to pick out a selection of points:

At the top end, responses were well focused and offered detailed critical analyses of the view that 'fideism is the only sure route to truth', usually via the 'university debate': Flew's 'invisible gardener'; Hare's '*bliks*'; Mitchell's 'Partisan'/parable of 'the stranger'; Clifford's 'ship', and Hick on eschatological verification; together with Tertullian ('I believe because it is absurd'/ 'what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?') etc.

Candidates need to display a clear grasp of which position (fideistic or non-fideistic) Clifford's 'ship' analogy was used to defend, so that it was often used to support 'faith' in the vessel, which was not correct.

Pascal was often used as an effective 'middle-ground' position between rationalism and fideism.

Some candidates could have achieved higher marks by avoiding giving responses that were purely descriptive in character. Responses at the top end almost always addressed the issues of 'only' and 'sure' identified in the question stem.

Question 4

There was fairly widespread evidence of 'rehearsed' general responses to an expected question on the conscience covering religious and other understandings. Such responses were inevitably not well focused and often were significantly lower when no clear psychological account was given.

The best responses displayed an excellent critical understanding of psychological understandings of the conscience, usually via Freud (and often Kohlberg, Piaget, Fromm *et al.*) and his analysis of the inter-relatedness of the ego, super-ego and id (and the respective problems it posed and/or resolved). Well-constructed analogies were often drawn between Freud's account and the Platonic 'charioteer'/tripartite analysis of the soul.

Less erudite answers tended to blur psychological accounts together, or else tended to make generalised references to 'guilt', 'parents' and 'society', without assigning such concepts to specific psychologists/psychological accounts of the conscience.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/02
Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy
and Theology 1

Key messages

- 1 Repetition is unnecessary for the text-based questions. If a critical analysis is to be offered later, and a candidate wishes to draw attention to this, a simple 'see response to question x' is all that is required.
- 2 **Part (a)** responses do not require evaluation.

General comments

Over all there were some excellent answers. The questions were well executed with confidence, knowledge and depth. Those candidates who required improvement tended to be unclear in their argument and tended to blur either those theological or philosophical arguments they were dealing with. Some candidates were unclear about answering said questions and there seemed to be some overlap between questions; for example **Question 7(a)** with question **(b)**.

Chronology is important. Not just in the sense that Aquinas, taking all responses into consideration, would have lived for almost 2000 years in various regions and under a range of religious denominations. Candidates should not make the mistake of Plato responding to Aristotle; Hume responding to Descartes; Mackie to Plantinga.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a)** It was pleasing to see many candidates display a clear, detailed and insightful understanding of Humean compatibilism, often critically mapping out his position against other accounts of 'soft-determinism' and incompatibilist (libertarian & deterministic) accounts of metaphysical necessity.

Some candidates referred to Hume's distinctions between liberty of spontaneity and indifference and his account of 'hypothetical' liberty in order to shed light on his account of moral culpability. It was pleasing to see illustrations of 'forking paths', brain chips, locked doors, drug addiction and hypnosis were often helpfully employed to illustrate and/or critique the above positions.

There were clear areas where candidates needed to improve. For example Hume's stance on compatibilism and more specifically the 'could have done otherwise principle' / 'principle of alternative possibilities' (CDO and PAP) – neither of which is really discussed by Hume himself in Section VIII, part 1 – was often misunderstood.

It was clear that some candidates misunderstood Hume's stance on compatibilism.

- (b)** Many candidates focussed on the key implications of Hume's ideas, that being ethics. It was interesting to see many candidates leaning towards a liberation account. There were candidates who suggested Hume was too timid to embrace casual determinism and so made do with compatibilism as a 'miserable subterfuge', although one has difficulty in thinking Hume as in any way timid.

Section B

Question 2

This question was well addressed with a wide variety of material being drawn upon to judge whether or not global scepticism was the only reasonable answer to our lack of understanding about the world. Responses almost always concluded in the negative.

Those candidates who achieved the highest marks tended to detail arguments put forward by the Pyrrhonists. References to Gorgias and Carneades were also present which was impressive. More often global scepticism was associated with Cartesian 'hyperbolic' doubt and Putnam's 'brain-in-a-vat' hypothesis. Some could have gained more marks by checking the precise wording of the question, which deals with global scepticism rather than scepticism in general.

It should be noted that candidates who referred to Descartes as a sceptic produced satisfactory answers but better responses analysed Cartesian foundationalism as a response to the sceptical issue (usually via reference to his cogito, clear and distinct ideas, wax and God). Some candidates turned his method of doubt against him (questioning, for example, the move from thought to self and whether Descartes' thinking was consistent – he did not, for example, subject his own methodology to philosophical scrutiny nor the language used to express it). Those candidates who were able to do this achieved the highest marks.

Few responses considered Wittgenstein's contribution to the debate as advanced in, for example, *On Certainty*.

Question 3

Few candidates attempted a response to this question, which was surprising, but those that did were usually excellent, evidencing a detailed understanding of Berkeley's position, his critique of both forms of realism (naive and sophisticated), his denial (via various lines of argumentation) of the primary/secondary quality distinction, his 'master-argument' and his (controversial) 'defence' of idealism over 'atheism and scepticism'.

It was pleasing to note that most candidates saw Berkeley's immaterialism as an attempt to rescue God (rather than vice versa) although this position was often conceived of as self-refuting. Arguments in favour of Berkeley prioritised the sceptical immunity and the 'utter irrefutability' of his account. Middle-ground positions tended to couple this judgement with an account of its 'utter absurdity' and its ultimate descent into solipsism. Certain candidates appealed to Russellian arguments for sense data theory as a more suitable alternative to Berkeley's account.

A minority of candidates mounted successful defences of various 'sophisticated' direct realisms (including arguments put forward by Kant, Austin and MacDowell) which were very impressive indeed, often dismantling certain dubious assumptions in Berkeley's reasoning as they did so.

Question 4

(a) It was interesting and pleasing to see a full range of responses seen for this question. At the top end, detailed and accurate accounts of Mackie's rebuttal of 'fallacious' attempts to resolve the problem of evil and why Mackie regarded such attempts as fallacious; coupled with an account the extent of God's omnipotence and benevolence.

Candidates needed to go beyond simply discussing the inconsistent triad and detail specific criticisms and arguments discussed by Mackie. Those candidates who only gave satisfactory answers tended to give general accounts of the free will defence and soul making theodicies.

(b) There were some candidates who were clearly confused as to whether Mackie was attempting to resolve the logical or evidential problem of evil (or both). Likewise, Plantinga's account was sometimes unfairly dismissed on similar grounds. Plantinga, for example, was not looking to justify the existence of evil, but rather to show existence to be logically compatible with the existence of a God with certain 'divine attributes', most notably his omnipotence.

Many candidates focused on Mackie's contention that theologians are not clear on many of the issues they discuss not least that of whether or not God can do the logically impossible. Some candidates picked up on the subtlety of Mackie's contention that God could have created (at least) one being who would always make free, good choices.

Section B

Question 5

At the top end, responses displayed a detailed understanding of the scientific arguments for falsification as advanced, for example, by Popper, and were able to show why it constituted a more suitable alternative to the verification principle as advanced by the logical positivists in the earlier half of the twentieth century.

Candidates needed to remain focussed and explicit in their understanding of falsification; some candidates lost sight and therefore could not achieve top marks.

To improve, candidates needed to avoid descriptive accounts of the above debates which seemed rather commonplace. It was at times difficult to tell whether a candidate was addressing **Question 5** or **6** but fortunately, these responses were in the minority.

Question 6

High-level responses offered a detailed, critical analysis of Aquinas' account of analogical language. It was pleasing to see that the analogies of attribution and proportion were well addressed and suitably illustrated, usually via his example of bull's urine (and its subsequent implications). Aquinas' position was often analysed as offering a superior, 'middle-ground' alternative to its univocal and equivocal counterparts (given standard objections).

It was very pleasing to see that some candidates went on to consider whether symbolic, mythological or Wittgensteinian accounts offered a more plausible explanation to the one given by Aquinas, and, when these were well-argued, were capable of attracting full marks.

Candidates needed to go beyond simply giving descriptive answers that tended to be restrictive in their answers. Where Aquinas' account of analogy/religious language was limited to comparison with the verification and falsification principles, such answers were at best basic.

Question 7

(a) Please note responses to (a) and (b) frequently overlapped, so that the answers to each question were assessed after considering the whole response. Therefore candidates need to be explicit when answering either the (a) part or the (b) part of the question.

Credit was given to candidates who were able to illustrate Polkinghorne's themes and link them over several chapters. It was pleasing to see that many candidates gave excellent accounts of Polkinghorne's ideas though with varying degrees of accuracy. Those candidates who gave an account of Polkinghorne's views precisely as given in the question received the higher marks. The kind of world so described reflects the kind of God who is not the organiser of the divine clockwork universe of Newtonian physics, but is being who opens the world to constant innovation in its process and possible dangerous/precarious outcomes. Those who got to this point usually achieved only mid-range marks.

(b) Some argued that a God who facilitates but does not coerce is preferable to a God who orders all things, particularly if we understand evolution as an example of such facilitation. Against that, other argued that the kind of God whose open-ended processes can lead to the major extinctions shown in the evolutionary record bears scant resemblance to the God of Christian theism. Those most impressive writing suggested that there is so much Polkinghorne that might be true, but equally erudite conjecture

Section B

Question 8

The reference to 'faith' in the question was dealt with in two main ways. Some candidates took it to refer to Barth's fideistic understanding of Anselm's argument. Other candidates took it to mean that the argument does not work, so you can only believe it if you have faith in God.

Candidates need to be wary of simply writing rehearsed answers. Moreover candidates, to improve, required precision. For example candidates tended to blur Anselm's accounts and gave imprecise analyses of the Cartesian formulation. Candidates who gained higher marks were able to take in to account that Malcolm's formulation of the argument and demonstrate that God's existence.

Question 9

Question 8 proved significantly more popular than **Question 9** and those that attempted a response this latter question tended, perhaps tellingly, to be polarised.

High-level responses displayed an understanding of the difference between a defence and a theodicy. It was a trend for candidates to lay out Mackie's account given in *Evil and Omnipotence* of the 'traditional' four options each of which he himself rejected. Alternatively, Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies were appealed to in order to explain such evils. Plantinga's free will defence was also brought into play to show why the existence of both suffering and divine attribution weren't mutually exclusive. At the top end, such material was analysed critically, lower down, candidates tended to describe alternative positions. If this was done accurately and there was at least some attempt at critical engagement, these usually made mid-range marks.

Candidates needed to assert a clear grasp of what the concepts of 'defence' and 'theodicy' referred to and interpret the question as asking whether or not we have free will. Those candidates who were unable to do this were often only able to achieve few marks.

Questions 10–12

Very few candidates answered the questions on Topic 4 New Testament: The Four Gospels.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/03
Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy
and Theology 2

General comments

There were some excellent answers this year. The general standard of essays continues to be very impressive. It was pleasing to see that most able candidates had a clear understanding of the questions asked and were able to provide wider relevant material in their answers. Those candidates who only gave satisfactory answers tended to respond with descriptive answers. At times it was difficult to ascertain whether these answers fully grasped the context or significance of the question they are answering.

Key messages

- Those candidates who simply gave descriptive answers were generally unable to demonstrate any wider reading
- Candidates need engage with wider reading but not only that, understand the material in-depth and how to apply it to an answer with confidence
- It needs to be noted that answers require explicit critique by candidates.

Question 1

- (a) Most responses to this question were well argued and evidenced a solid understanding of Searle's view that 'human brains do not function like computers'. Many responses displayed an understanding of 'wider' relevant material that came before, after and outside the passage so that references were made to, for example, Leibniz (who compared the brain to a Mill); Freud (who compared it to a hydraulic system) and more contemporary responses that compared it to a telephone switchboard (amongst others) which made it clear that Searle's point (that it is no coincidence that we now compare it to computers and robots) was well understood.

Candidates often referred to the difference between 'as if' intentionality (possessed by computers) and genuine/intentional rule following (possessed by persons alone). Various illustrations were given to shed light on why such a distinction was significant. Lower down the scale, responses tended to stick purely to the passage, so that, whilst often accurate, it was not clear whether candidates had fully grasped the context or significance of what Searle was arguing for.

- (b) Critical responses to Searle's claim tended to focus on his own arguments (in particular the Chinese Room) and replies ('systems' and 'robot' responses) and some tried to turn Searle's arguments against him (how it was that biological processes could give rise to the 'rich wine' of consciousness. Arguments for 'cognitive science' (which Searle acquaints with functionalist analyses of consciousness) tended to focus on the usual suspects such as liberalism and artificial intelligence with some, usually at the top end, arguing for a current pessimism (computers haven't reached an appropriate level of complexity) but a future optimism about machine intelligence/sentience.

Lower down the scale, responses tended to list alternative accounts to functionalism and/or biological naturalism and these were not well-focused.

Section B

Question 2

Excellent responses tended to fall into one of two camps. Those that stuck firmly to the confines of the question, but offered a detailed critical analysis of the various arguments put forward by Descartes in *Meditations I and II* (and sometimes *VI*), usually arguing that, via standard criticisms (location, interaction, soul-counting and the problem of other minds).

Cartesian dualism explains nothing about the nature of mind. Those candidates who were able to take into account positive aspects of his position along the way scored higher marks than those candidates who didn't do this. Alternatively, some candidates wrote about the central features of Descartes' account and rejected alternative accounts usually via arguments for materialism, including property dualism, which succeeded where Descartes' account failed. As long as candidates and their arguments remained focused on the question they could achieve good marks.

Lower down the scale, responses tended to juxtapose general, dualistic and materialist accounts of mind. Where these were purely descriptive candidates could only obtain a satisfactory mark.

Question 3

Not enough candidates attempted a response to pass judgement.

Section A

Question 4

(a) Those candidates who gave excellent responses to the (a) part question remained focused on Sartre's explanation of the role of anguish. These answers were often embedded in the wider literature so that references were made to Kierkegaard's account of the 'anguish of Abraham' and other examples within the text; this was pleasing to see. Candidates who were able to discuss the issue of good and bad faith did this with clear explanation, with the latter analysed as being attributable to those that refused to accept the absolute responsibility that such freedom demands.

Those candidates who only received satisfactory marks tended to blur the concept of anguish with abandonment and despair so it was not clear that they fully grasped the implications of what Sartre was arguing for. Therefore candidates need to be explicit when writing about concepts and arguments of thinkers.

(b) The (b) part question prompted a full range of responses. At the top end, candidates remained focused on the question so that an internal critique of Sartrean arguments took place. Suitable comparisons were drawn between Sartre's existentialist and Kantian duty-based ethics, the latter of which, given its avoidance of any emotional connotations in the moral decision making process, was often argued for as being superior/less pessimistic.

Candidates needed to go beyond simply trotting out alternative accounts of normative ethics, often without relating these to the question so that the issue of anguish was omitted.

Section B

Question 5

The majority of responses to this question, as would be expected, were excellent. Detailed accounts were given of Natural Law ethics, often rooted in Aristotle and Aquinas' interpretation of his final cause; his account of the primary and secondary precepts; his principle of double-effect (usually recognised as a strength, but at times a weakness) and the deontological/absolutist nature of his ethics, discoverable via the God-given faculty of reason.

Candidates did well by addressing the issue of 'value' identified in the question, so that Natural Law ethics was analysed in a positive light on account of its offering a universal ethic (thus avoiding moral subjectivity); a purpose to human existence; its being grounded in nature).

Alternatively, negative responses tended to focus on issues such as moral relativism; the singular and collective coherence of the primary precepts; whether his principle of double-effect was morally sound and/or whether alternative moral theories offered a more satisfactory account of moral purpose (if it exists) which was fine as long as it was made relevant to the question.

Candidates needed to go beyond descriptive answers.

Question 6

Responses to this question were polarised. Candidates either knew what they were arguing for or they didn't.

At the top end, responses were excellent, often taking the debate into the twentieth century via reference to modern formulations of Virtue ethics (most notably Anscombe, Foot, Macintyre and Hursthouse) – it needs noting that both ancient *and* modern accounts ('developments') are identified in the specification – and how each might address the range of concerns that embryo research and genetic engineering give rise to.

Those candidates who argued that Virtue ethics has 'little to say on the issue' without explaining why and then went on to list alternative normative accounts, often without explaining either embryo research or genetic engineering were unable to achieve high marks.

It was pleasing to see responses applying a Aristotle's concepts to explain what he *might* have said about the issue given concepts such as *telos* and flourishing (should embryos be treated as persons; be given the right to achieve eudaimonia? Does genetic engineering play 'God' with nature; would it be morally right to 'tweak' our essence? Could we create 'virtuous neonates'?)

Certain responses tended to treat embryo research and genetic engineering (for example, designer babies) as a single issue so that the practical implications of Virtue ethics were slightly blurred and it was common for responses to refer to 'modern accounts' without explaining what such accounts amounted to.

Whilst embryo research and genetic engineering are obviously complicated issues, candidates are not required to have a detailed scientific understanding of each, but a basic philosophic one, it needs noting, is essential.

Topic 3 Old Testament: Prophecy

Question 7 - 9

Given so few candidates answered Topic 3 (Old Testament: Prophecy) comment would be inappropriate.