

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01
**Introduction to Philosophy and
Theology**

Key messages

The general standard of essays continues to be very impressive. What is particularly credit-worthy is the variety of ways in which candidates answer questions, which is indicative of wide reading and deep thinking.

General comments

There are two key messages this year:

- 1 Candidates should remember that to achieve the higher Levels, critical analysis should be sustained. Some candidates knew so much that in the effort to get it all down critical analysis was sometimes overlooked.
- 2 There was some evidence of candidates sticking closely to the text of a prepared answer that did not exactly fit the question. This was particularly evident in answers to **Question 3**.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Knowledge of Plato's analogies was generally sound, although that of the Cave was generally more developed than that of the Sun. Some candidates could have gained more marks by a more balanced approach to the critical analysis, in so far as many went into demolition mode on Platonic rationalism. Some were equally scathing about Plato's 'glorification' of philosopher kings, and some considered the putative appearance of Socrates (in the guise of the liberated prisoner) as an unwarranted intrusion of the philosopher's personal feelings into a philosophical argument. The strongest essays balanced their assessment of the analogies in a number of ways, with some particularly astute comment on the relationship between reason and the Good, and on the status of mathematics.

Question 2

Questions about ethics can prompt some candidates to write very lengthy introductions to ethics. Some candidates could have improved their marks, accordingly, by avoiding this practice, which meant that some essays did not become relevant before the third or fourth page of writing. The main focus was on the Euthyphro Dilemma and its various solutions, knowledge of which was often extremely detailed. There was quite a lot of support for the possible benefits of Divine Command Theory as a stable ethical system based on laws which everybody can understand. Against that, many commented that although most of the laws are straightforward, some are not, and some promote inappropriate attitudes to issues such as slavery, homosexuality and indiscriminate slaughter. Some candidates went through the entire range of ethical theories seeking possible alternatives to Divine Command Theory. The general conclusion was that although the attractions of alternative deontological and teleological systems are clear, there is no one system that convinces us that it alone defines the morally right action. The main issue with Divine Command Theory was generally seen in the fact that it requires absolute moral obedience, yet truly ethical behaviour is generally held to be predicated on the concept of free moral choice.

Question 3

Although there were many truly excellent answers to this question, some answered it by using their own agenda. With questions on epistemology, there appears to be an assumption that any two epistemological roles juxtaposed in the question must come from opposite sides of the rationalist/empiricist divide. A considerable number of candidates made this assumption about deduction and innate ideas, which led to some rather startling claims. Although most candidates made a reasonable job of explaining and analysing the concept of innate ideas, the treatment of deduction was weak by comparison, even by some who did not confuse deduction with induction. As mentioned in the key messages, **Question 3** was often answered by detailing a prepared answer on the debate between rationalists and empiricists, ending with the usual Kantian synthesis, and much of this was not *made* relevant to the precise question asked.

Question 4

This was the least-favoured question, although those who answered it generally made a reasonable job of it. Most argued that the claim of 2 Timothy 3:16, that all scripture is inspired by God, is a circular argument, and so cannot be valid. Some then focused exclusively on selecting particular parts of scripture which they considered questionable because of the content, for example in the Old Testament approach to issues such as slavery and homosexuality, together with those narratives in which God condones wholesale slaughter, using these texts to reject any form of divine inspiration. Others focused on the different theories of inspiration, and made the valid point that the answer depends on what is meant by 'inspired'. A number followed the line of thought seen variously in scholars such as Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, that scripture's inspiration is in God's personal self-disclosure rather than in the written words of the text. The general conclusion was that the claim that all scripture is inspired by God is true or false depending on the model of inspiration one chooses.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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

General comments

As with Paper 1, there were many excellent and outstanding scripts, showing detailed knowledge, while reading, and a willingness to engage with the material.

Very few candidates answered the questions on Topic 2: Philosophical and Theological Language, or Topic 4: New Testament, so comment here is confined to Topic 1: Epistemology and Topic 3: Philosophy of Religion.

Key messages

Some candidates conflated their answers to the two different parts of the text extracts. This had the effect of making the continuity of argument less clear for each part. **Parts (a) and (b)** should be answered separately.

Comments on specific questions

Topic 1: Epistemology

(Extract from George Berkeley: *Three Dialogues*)

- 1 (a) The majority of candidates' responses were very impressive. Most displayed a solid understanding of Berkeley's attack on the primary/secondary quality distinction and his 'master' argument for the inconceivability of unconceived/perceived objects. This was often embedded in the wider literature so that references were made and comparisons drawn between Russell's analysis of sense data and objects. There were occasional lapses in terminology so that, for example, whilst it was clear that certain students had an adequate grasp of Berkeley's position, references were still made to 'veils of perception' and cognates which would, if true, undermine what he was arguing for.
- (b) Candidates displayed a good (and at times outstanding) grasp of arguments both for and against the 'nonsensicality' of Berkeley's position. Many went down the fairly well trodden path of juxtaposing Berkeley's account against Lockean realism and/or the Russellian appeal to sensibilia as being the 'subjective intermediaries' of perception, which was fine. Judgements in favour of Berkeley tended to focus on sceptical immunity, the tenability of solipsistic accounts of mind and/or the logical infallibility of his methodology. Judgements against often made appeal to Johnson's 'refutation', the categorical error in Berkeley's reasoning (that objects cannot be thought of outside the mind does not entail they cannot so exist) or, more often, to Russell's appeal to continuity and coherence (baths filling up, fires burning down & hungry/disappearing cats, etc.) and [abductive] 'inferences to the best explanation'. Middle-ground positions tended to be Humean in character, so idealism was conceived of as being 'utterly absurd' yet 'utterly irrefutable', though not always in those terms. A small number of candidates rooted their response firmly, and successfully, in the 20th century, so that modifications of Berkeley's position were given via appeal to disjunctivist and/or adverbialist accounts of perception.

- 2** **Question 2** was less popular than **Question 3** but those who attempted it displayed a solid understanding of the arguments laid out in Meditations I & II, in particular, the ‘waves of doubt’, the cogito, the knowledge argument and his ‘general rule’. There were occasional lapses of focus so that, for example, analyses of trademark and ontological arguments were given without relating these back to the epistemic implications that underpinned them. At the top end, candidates displayed an impressive understanding of the arguments laid out in the text as a whole: their chronology, interrelatedness and subsequent implications. The incontrovertible nature of Descartes’ first ‘proof’ and his methodology were usually cited as strengths, and conversely, his ‘setting the bar too high’ (just how much can we be said to ‘know’ on Descartes’ account) as weaknesses. At least one candidate argued for a transcendental modification of his account so that, whilst the postulates of reason were unshakable, Descartes unfairly downgraded the role of sensation in acquiring knowledge. References were made to ‘empty’ concepts and ‘blind’ sensations.
- 3** This question was, generally speaking, well addressed. As would be expected, candidates tended to analyse and so to prioritise Locke’s position as being a ‘scientific’ or ‘sophisticated’ response to perceived problems with its ‘naive’ (‘vulgar’; ‘unsophisticated’ &c.) predecessor. A minority of candidates focused solely on Russell, which was fine. Again, perhaps predictably, arguments in favour of the view tended to focus on its scientific and/or sophisticated character, so that philosophical arguments (usually from perceptual relativity, illusion, dreaming/hallucination, deception, etc.) and scientific arguments (physical atomism, time-lags, brains-in-vats, etc.) collectively reinforced the idea that what we encounter in sensation is a mental image/representation rather than an object. The ‘veil of perception’ argument was often employed to undermine Locke’s position so that either some form of idealism offered a more tenable hypothesis or that whilst we cannot seriously doubt the existence of an external reality, its nature remains forever unknown (versions of phenomenalism/transcendental psychology were tacitly implied). As with a minority of responses to 1b, some candidates argued, again successfully, for adverbialist or disjunctivist accounts of perception as a means of recalibrating Locke’s position with 20th-century accounts of perception.

Topic 2: Philosophical and Theological Language

No responses allocated

Topic 3: Philosophy of Religion

(Extract from John Hick: *Evil and the God of Love*)

- 7 (a)** This question was well-handled. Many candidates provided a clear, detailed and precise exposition of Hick’s position and of his belief in ‘the infinite future good’. This was often embedded within a wider theological perspective so that his view was presented as being a ‘forward looking’ response to the ‘backward looking’/‘unscientific’ account of sin present in the Augustinian theodicy. Hick’s response to evil was usually presented via notions of free-will, ‘soul-making’ and God’s ‘epistemic distance’. The nature and role of eschatological verification and ‘universal salvation’ was also well-addressed. Some candidates could have gained more marks by not rooting their response solely within the text itself, where it becomes difficult to discriminate between textual summary and genuine philosophical understanding. Very occasionally candidates offered inaccurate interpretations of certain sections of the passage, so that Hick’s view was construed as a rejection of the belief in ‘the ultimate salvation of all human souls’ in favour of a ‘third option’ of ‘dwindling’ and/or ‘divine annihilation’.
- (b)** Again, most candidates gave a clear, detailed and well-focused critical analysis of Hick’s doxastic abandonment. Arguments in favour of Hick’s position tended to focus on the positive nature of eschatological verification, the scientific/progressive/pluralistic and/or ‘liberal’ nature of his theistic vision, the abhorrent, unfair and (arguably) unproductive analysis of the human predicament expressed by the Augustinian dystopian alternative to Hick’s view, and the consistency of his account with the traditionally conceived ‘avuncular’ God of Christian theology. Free-will and the potential for character development/‘vale of soul making’ were also regarded as positives. As would be expected, criticisms of Hick’s position tended to focus on the anti-canonical nature of his work; the historical success of more traditional Christian theodicies and the moral ‘get out of jail free’ card

gifted by adherence to Hick's 'permissive' universalism. This latter point was usually couched in terms of past, present and future evils (Mandela & Hitler sharing the same seat at God's table, etc.) and the need for and role of castigation and punishment as a God-given prophylactic for iniquity.

- 8** This was a popular question, with the majority of candidates offering a clear, focused and analytical discussion as to whether an acceptance of the ontological argument demanded an abandonment of common sense. Most candidates were aware of a range of distinct arguments and criticisms. These tended to focus on Anselm's various formulations & responses ('fools' and 'islands' featured heavily here) and their subsequent evolution into the Cartesian argument for a God that possesses all the perfections. Specific criticisms of Descartes' tended to focus on Leibniz' appeal to the principle of non-contradiction, Kant's negative analysis of existential predication (and his view that God 'surpasses definition'), and Russell on definite descriptions and existential quantification. Some considered the versions of the argument from Norman Malcolm's and Alvin Plantinga, although these were usually dismissed as being more fanciful than Anselm's formulation. More general criticisms tended to impugn the legitimacy of building 'conceptual bridges to the real'. Some conflated and/or blurred ontological arguments with various versions of the cosmological and/or teleological arguments so that the issue was treated as a question of whether or not God's existence could be established via any form of argumentation. Defences of the sense of the argument for the most part focused on Barth's view that Anselm's version of it concerns faith rather than logic, although most dismissed this as being more nonsensical than any form of the argument.
- 9** Few candidates attempted this question. The best responses were focused and well-balanced, providing a detailed critical analysis of arguments both for and against sociological accounts of religious beliefs, practices and conceptions of God. These tended to focus on Feuerbach ('poor man possesses a rich God'), Durkheim ('society' as 'the soul of religion'), Weber ('religion conveyed as 'a social gospel') and Marx/Engels ('the sigh of the oppressed'/'heart of a heartless world'/'opium of the masses', etc.) and often evidenced an impressive range of wider reading. Occasionally there were references to psychological analyses which, unless otherwise argued, were not always well focused (Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre featured here); however, these interludes rarely distracted from the general content of the arguments being presented, and so were permissible. The weakest responses simply discussed sociological theories of religion without assessing their implications for religious belief.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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

Key messages

General comment of candidates' answers is given for the options chosen by a significant number of candidates. There is therefore no general comment for Topic 3 (Old Testament: Prophecy).

Large numbers of candidates gave informed and targeted responses to the questions attempted.

Some responses were impressively detailed and analytic, although many required a more sufficient knowledge of what the author was stating. Those who had such knowledge responded convincingly; those who did not generally paraphrased the extract.

Knowledge of the Topic areas answered was generally sound, although a greater depth of understanding was needed in order to reach the higher levels. This greater depth would also have been a more effective springboard for more robust and channelled assessment.

General comments

Distinguishing factors between responses was the precision of knowledge displayed and the ability to evaluate the material under review. Candidates working at the higher levels had both a detailed knowledge of the subject area and also the ability able to attend to the 60% AO2 assessment objective weighting.

Comments on specific questions

Topic 1: Philosophy of Mind

Question 1

- (a) Higher level candidate responses to this question were excellent. Not only was a detailed understanding of Searle's original position evidenced, but this was also embedded within the wider literature as a whole. For examples candidates referenced Turing's original article, 'imitation games', 'thinking machines' and evidenced discussions of computational/machine intelligence as found, for example, in the earlier works of Putnam. 'Semantics', characterised as the phenomenologically irreducible ingredient of consciousness unique to persons, was successfully contrasted with 'syntax', which we possess jointly with machines (animals, aliens and c.) so that no analysis of the latter could yield an account of the former without leaving an explanatory 'gap'. Below this top level, responses were clear and accurate, however for candidates to improve they must move beyond the text to display greater depth and understanding. Certain candidates referred to an absence of 'qualia' or consciousness in general rather than semantics or intentionality so that, whilst not inaccurate, the original intention of Searle's thought experiment was lost. A small minority of candidates thought the experiment showed that the man inside the room demonstrated a genuine understanding of Chinese, which was inaccurate.
- (b) Again, at the top end, responses demonstrated an impressive understanding of why functional isomorphism, at least on occasion, fails to secure phenomenological equivalence so that responses went beyond mere intentionality (Chinese rooms and c.) and incorporated arguments put forward by Jackson (what 'Fred' knew but 'Mary' did not), Chalmers (references were made to 'absent', 'fading', 'inverted' and 'dancing' qualia) Block and Dennett ('Blockhead' and 'Chinese minds and brains'). Standard replies including the 'systems' and 'robot' response were considered

with some candidates turning the argument on its head by asking if a person might pass the test! Others included reference to 'weak' and 'strong' versions of AI so that, whilst a present judgement on the issue of machine intelligence would be pessimistic, we nevertheless have grounds for future optimism; particularly with regards the advent of 'quantum' and 'organic' models of computation. Lower down the scale responses were more generalised so that qualia and intentionality (and c.) were often blurred with other features of consciousness and 'cognitive science' was treated as a general term for functionalism and its cognates. Such responses lacked precision. Nevertheless, all candidates were able to demonstrate some understanding of the issues involved in considering whether or not the mind works like a computer, which was pleasing.

Question 2

Responses to this question were good and at times outstanding with the vast majority of candidates displaying a solid understanding of the view that 'states and processes of the mind are identical to states and processes of the brain' – *simpliciter*, mind-brain identity theory. Many candidates were able to discriminate between 'type' and 'token' versions of the view and why empirical issues surrounding multiple-realizability (usually couched in terms of animal sentience rather than neural migration and/or phenomenological covariation) and logical ones surrounding type-identity statements (usually via Kripke) rendered this latter view more attractive. Logical arguments (again usually Kripke) were also used to undermine the legitimacy of token-identity in general so that both versions, on some accounts, were deemed inadequate. Many responses evidenced an impressive range of wider reading with extensive references to the original works of Place, Smart and Armstrong. Arguments for the view tended to focus on the perceived shortcomings of dualist positions and/or the merits of ontological parsimony so that, inasmuch as MBIT circumvented the problems of location, interaction and 'soul counting' associated with the reification of a 'ghostly' Cartesian substance, it had the edge over interactionist models of mind. General arguments against the view tended to focus on 'carbon chauvinism' and/or the 'irreducible' features of consciousness (again via the standard arguments and thought experiments) that are thought to resist ontological reduction. Middle-range responses tended to be descriptive in character with evaluation implicit within a juxtaposition of competing models of mind. A very small minority of candidates had no clear grasp of what the position entailed so that responses were made to materialism in general. These were often coupled with a generalised and descriptive account of dualism so that the question was not well addressed.

Question 3

This question was less popular than **Question 2** so it was difficult to identify any common trends in argumentation. Nevertheless at the top end, responses were excellent, displaying an impressive critical grasp of competing accounts of identity and 'connectedness'. Insightful examples (split-brains, teletransportation, 'fugue' amnesia and c.) were effectively deployed and/or adapted in order to argue that some form of survival and/or causal transitivity (usually via Reid's objection and/or Locke's 'cobbler') offered a more viable alternative to identity, that was not a 1:1 relation but rather a matter of 'degree' rather than 'kind'. Some argued, along Humean lines, that any conception of identity/continuity was an *ignis fatuus* and thus that the self was nothing over and above a 'bundle' of sensations. Again, it was evident that those at the top had read a wide range of texts so that references were made to the original works of Parfit, Williams and Shoemaker amongst others. Candidates could improve by making clear assertions between identity, survival and connectedness. Certain candidates also conflated identity with immutability so that, whilst discussions of how much change an individual can undergo without the destruction of a 'former self' were still pertinent (*Theseus'* ship-type examples such as cell regeneration and transhumanism and c.), the 'loss of a limb', as some argued, would obviously not in itself constitute a loss of identity. Whilst such examples were not inaccurate, they were at best unconvincing. Few references were made to the standard candidates of physical continuity such as blood type, DNA, fingerprints and c. and/or the capacity to map out one's spatiotemporal co-ordinates over time. As with responses to **Question 2**, middle-range responses tended to be descriptive in character so that critical engagement was at best implicit.

Topic 2. Ethics

Question 4

- (a) In line with the Key Message above, a large number of responses tended to paraphrase what Mill says in this extract, rather than attending to the question under review, and revealing a greater understanding of how this extract fits into the general pattern of what Mill is arguing. Mill is arguing all that is of value in this world is peppiness – which he defines as pleasure, broadly construed, so as to include the pleasures of the intellect, which he argues are more desirable and valuable than others, and freedom from suffering. He argues that everything we do can be good or right only so

far as it increases the general happiness of the sentient world, or alleviates suffering. Therefore, by removing the roots and causes of unhappiness and suffering people can then seek to attain happiness. Higher-level responses tended to be clearer, more detailed and thorough when they had this essential grasp of Mill's core message. Full marks were still issued for responses that revealed strong commentary limited to the passage, but naturally this was only possible with this core foundational understanding. Higher-level responses did tend to go beyond the passage to consider Bentham's writings, the distinction Mill makes between higher and lower pleasures and his broader thinking on what makes a life worth living. Lower-level responses tended to stick to the text and this did generate problems for some as certain candidates misinterpreted Mill's 'flame' reference.

- (b) Similarly to **Question (a)**, higher-level candidates naturally had a strong understanding of Mill's conception of happiness to build upon and were able to consider whether happiness can be the 'sole' purpose, as well as grappling with the ideal that it might be considered a rational purpose. There were some superb responses, which built on the fact that Mill, and Utilitarian writers such as Singer, viewed people as both sufferers and sentient beings, but also rational agents called upon to recognise that the 'principle of impartial consideration of interests... alone remains a rational basis for ethics' (Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981, p.109). This b question, with its AO2 objective, actually resulted in very few low-level answers and the majority of candidates were able to grapple with this question in a variety of ways. Some candidates explored happiness and the question more conceptually and without the need to evaluate Mill's framework alongside other ethical theories, although they did often implicitly reference these alternative ethical prisms. The majority of the top candidate responses successfully navigated the question using predominantly Kantian philosophy as a counter view; Kant's trust in reason as a tool to derive moral conclusions, and his argument for a single moral principle, which captures the requirement of universalization, as the principle moral rule. Many candidates had an impressive understanding of the Kantian critique of the quest for happiness and how happiness is a weak duty. Other higher-level answers drew on the Natural Law Tradition and the claim that virtue and happiness coincide with virtue the object of rational desire.

Question 5

Responses to this question were, largely, excellent and it certainly seemed to attract very able candidates. There were some impressively creative responses, which raised the issue of invented and discovered by whom? So that, for example, both horns of the Euthyphro dilemma were employed with middle ground positions arguing 'invented by God and thus discovered by humans'. Other evaluative points tended to focus on the absolutist nature of primary precepts (and alternatives) and the more relativistic secondary ones (so that discovery and invention were not mutually exclusive). The majority of the candidates wrote clearly, fluently and in depth about this topic, although some candidates restricted themselves to a lower level by simply reproducing a basic explanation of Natural Moral Law, with no evaluative content. Higher level responses were able to demonstrate an in depth knowledge of Natural Law and its application and it was this knowledge which allowed for the more nuanced and creative assessment referenced above.

Question 6

This was undoubtedly an extremely popular question choice for candidates and responses were reasonable and generally effective. However, this question resulted in slightly lackluster essays, with few candidates able to set up their responses in such a way as to work through their chosen applied topics to maximum effect. Some candidates did achieve full marks and this was usually due to tighter introductions and structures, robust unpacking of definitions and more precise understanding of how ethical frameworks and applied issues related to the question under review. The vast majority of responses focused on euthanasia and abortion, with occasional reference to just war theory. The breadth of the question could have generated the use of a range of illustrative material and ethical dilemmas by candidates, but the breadth of question seemed to result in lengthy and often listy reflections rather than channeled and creative responses. Many candidates felt they ought to explore the full range of ethical theories studied on their course rather than select effectively in view of their argument (and related counter position therefore). Sartre's existentialism featured heavily, but this inclusion tended to overwhelm and sidetrack the responses rather than channel them.

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