

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01

Introduction to Philosophy and Theology

Key Messages

Most candidates gave informed, analytic responses to the questions they attempted, and most candidates were able to give equal weighting for all three questions. Some candidates could have reached higher levels by a greater degree of sustained evaluation as opposed to summative analysis.

General Comments

One clear distinguishing factor between responses was the precision of knowledge displayed. Candidates working at the higher levels had a detailed knowledge of the subject area and not just a good *general* knowledge of it.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

Knowledge of the subject area was generally thorough in so far as most candidates displayed an in-depth knowledge of rationalism and empiricism. A few candidates assumed that the juxtaposition of induction and the concept of the mind as initially *tabula rasa* meant that these terms were from opposing epistemologies. Just about all candidates gave a reasonable account of the *tabula rasa* concept, but knowledge of induction was not so evident. The strongest answers knew that inductive arguments have a wide range of forms, such as: arguments about causal relationships, reference to statistical data, past experience, evidence, and so on. Some candidates could have improved their essays by taking the time to give a simple definition of induction, for example by saying that inductive arguments are those in which the premises support the probable truth of the conclusion, and that inductive arguments can never be logically certain. Most got to the central issue of Hume on induction, although some could have improved their essays by looking more carefully at precisely what Hume said. It was interesting that the majority of candidates assumed (usually on the authority of Chomsky) that innate ideas are now proven to exist, although arguments to demonstrate that assumption were in rather short supply.

Question 2

The strongest answers to this question were consistently evaluative, giving a careful and detailed analysis of the work of Freud, Fromm, Kohlberg and Piaget ranged (so to speak) against Augustine, Aquinas and Butler. Knowledge of Butler was sometimes inaccurate, or else his ideas were quickly glossed over. The strongest essays were generally those which took the time to consider what a 'complete' explanation of the conscience might look like. Most concluded that in real terms there can be no such thing, since no understanding or definition of the conscience commands universal acceptance; nevertheless many argued convincingly that any of the scholars considered could be seen to offer a complete explanation in their own terms. Some (clearly thinking of Nietzsche's disparagement of Kant) suggested that the conscience is at least as elusive as Kant's supposed 'moral faculty'. This kind of analysis made interesting reading. Some could have improved their answers by resisting the temptation to list all the definitions of the conscience they could think of.

Question 3

There was no shortage of candidates who were prepared to defend divine command theory, generally along the lines that a view of ethics in which people elect to follow God's moral commands is likely to lead to a just society. Some linked the general thrust of divine command theory to Kant's view that God is, morally, a postulate of practical reason. An equal number rejected this vigorously on the grounds that no theory of morality with God at the centre can leave the moral agent with any degree of autonomy. Where there is no autonomy there can be no morality; so if God's commands are absolute, then there can be no morality beyond the basic freedom of whether or not to obey the rules in face of the possibility of the punishment of hell. Most candidates gave a clear definition and analysis of the various ramifications of Euthyphro's dilemma, and some decided reluctantly to embrace the horn of that dilemma which accepts that God could issue immoral commands that would paradoxically become morally good. Some expressed the hope that God would issue no such commands. Others focused on moral relativism. On the whole, there were as many disagreements as there were candidates who answered the question, which was not a bad thing. A few candidates could have improved their answers by giving a critical analysis of the most important parts of the debate.

Question 4

This was the least-favoured question in terms of the number who answered it, possibly because there was some confusion about the difference between propositional and non-propositional revelation. A number of candidates decided to present Roman Catholics as 'complete' Propositionalists and Protestants as equally complete non-propositionalists for whom scriptural truths are either self-authenticating because they come from God or else they are authenticated by the conscience. The question focuses on the propositionalist's claims, and candidates were well informed and fluent in detailing objections to these based on text, literary, form and redaction criticism: it is difficult to be emphatic about scriptural propositions when we cannot be sure what the text is saying. In this context, many preferred to think of scriptural truths as 'inspired' humanity trying to make sense of a personal encounter with God. Most argued for the non-propositional approach on the grounds that it seems less didactic. Some preferred still to think of revelation as being grounded in written propositions given by God, since any other view could arguably be seen as an attack on the status of scripture. Although this question was not as popular as the other three, the critical analysis to which it gave rise was often of a high quality.

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Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy and Theology 1

Key Messages

Many responses were superbly detailed and analytic, although some required a more sufficient knowledge of how the extract fits into the general pattern of what the author has to say. Those who had such knowledge responded convincingly; those who did not generally paraphrased the extract.

General Comments

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

Comments on Specific Questions

Topic 3: Philosophy of Religion

Question 7

- (a) In line with the general comment above, a number of answers tended to paraphrase, whereas much of what Polkinghorne says in this section of 'Science and Creation: The Search for Understanding' deals precisely with that: the issue of *understanding*. Polkinghorne is emphatic that scientists do not study the world in order to tell pretty stories about what they observe but to gain a deeper understanding of it. Commensurately, Polkinghorne insists that it is remarkable that the world is intelligible to humans whereas it might easily have been otherwise. Based on this kind of comment, it seems clear that Polkinghorne must embrace the Anthropic Principle – there is something special about the world of anthropic possibility. Given that science cannot explain its own laws, it seems very likely that there is a higher-order explanation of these laws (an argument used in much the same way as Swinburne's argument from temporal order, which insists that evolutionary theory is merely a description: it explains nothing beyond its own parameters). Comments such as these give the substance of Polkinghorne's 'evidence' for thinking that to say 'it just is the case' is an insufficient explanation of our ability to understand the world.
- (b) High-level answers gave an in-depth analysis of Polkinghorne's claim that the reason why we can understand the world, and why the world can be understood by us, is that both are the creation of a rational God. In support of Polkinghorne, candidates made excellent use of Polkinghorne's comments on quantum mechanics, for example his view that the radical indeterminacy of quantum events is a physical sign of the freedom God gives to the universe itself: the balance between chance and necessity. Here also, Polkinghorne is entranced by the fact that mathematicians are often the driving force behind modern physics rather than physicists. It does seem beyond coincidence that mathematical intuition and description can take us to String Theory and M-Theory, for example. Candidates acknowledged the persuasive nature of Polkinghorne's ideas in this respect, but were less persuaded by other aspects of his argument. To give two brief examples, both of which were used to good effect by candidates: the inference to God from the Anthropic Principle is probably negated by the multiverse theory predicted in turn by M-Theory, where the postulation of something like 10^{500} universes, the vast bulk of which are likely to be chaotic, makes the appearance of this ordered universe less remarkable. Second, Polkinghorne is not satisfied with theism or deism, but espouses a thoroughgoing Christian philosophy, which many described as far-fetched, not least because of its unashamed anthropomorphism. Some candidates could have gained more marks by having a better general knowledge of Polkinghorne's central arguments.

Question 8

This question, on Hume's rejection of miracles, was considerably more popular than **Question 9** (the suggestion that to know there is life after death would solve the problem of evil). Most candidates were aware of Hume's subsidiary arguments against miracles (for example that they are the product of ignorant and barbaric nations; that there are no properly attested miracles by men of integrity and intelligence; that humans are naturally credulous; and that miracle stories in any one religious tradition are debunked by conflicting stories in other traditions). The critique of these arguments was fairly solid; however Hume's main inductive argument was not dealt with so well. Some could have put themselves more firmly on course by recalling Hume's terminology, thus avoiding confusion between the terms 'volition' and 'violation'. The inductive argument from witness testimony is a superb piece of philosophical engineering by Hume: a miracle by definition is the least likely of all events, so it must always be more likely that the witnesses are lying or mistaken than that a miracle has occurred, which Hume fondly described as a proof "as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined". Many pointed out that Hume's argument is hoisted by the petard of his own critique of induction: no inductive argument can ever be more than probable, so Hume's rejection of miracles is at best probable and may well be false. Support for Hume was quite common, principally endorsing Wiles' view that a God who performs miracles selectively cannot be omnibenevolent. Candidates produced a range of relevant arguments, although others referred erroneously to a long list of anecdotes about miracles, ranging from the unheralded arrival of gold teeth in the morning to pictures of divine figures appearing in fruit and vegetables and (misinterpretations of) Holland's scenario of the child on the railway line.

Question 9

Hick presupposes that God's omnibenevolent nature will lead to universal salvation for the whole human race; so many candidates suggested that this was as good as knowing that there will be life after death, although that is not quite what the *question* presupposes. Some could have improved their answers by not going through every theodicy they could think of, but by focusing on in the question requirements. More fruitful was the line taken by some that there is a fault in the logic of the question, since to know that there is life after death would seem to suppose that humans would receive this information through some metaphysical/paranormal/divine information channel, which would seem to be a very odd way for God to behave. A few candidates recognised that such a presupposition was just about as bad as Pascal's wager: Pascal's approach (they said) was abject and unlikely to deceive God; whereas knowing somehow that there is life after death seems too good to be true. Most candidates eventually realised that knowing that there is life after death would not necessarily tell you what form that existence will take. If it still entails the concepts of heaven and hell, then we are still left with Hick's rather telling view that the concept of eternal punishment in hell would constitute *the* main aspect of the problem of evil.

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Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy and Theology 2

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)**.

Comments on specific questions

Topic 1 Philosophy of Mind

Question 1

- (a) Candidates were generally familiar with this passage from Parfit, and the quality of the answers generally showed a deep interest in the kind of questions being raised by the teletransportation thought experiment. Some were familiar with the description of the first scenario as the 'Main-Line case' and of the second as the 'Branch-Line case'. In connection with the Branch-Line case, some raised the interesting question of why a civilisation possessing teletransportation technology should find itself unable to deal with the comparatively simple case of impending cardiac failure, but after all, it is only a thought experiment! The general conclusion was that Parfit sets the scene well for a consideration of whether or not questions about personal identity should be replaced by questions about psychological continuity.
- (b) Candidates showed a good understanding of Parfit's reductionism, illustrated in the main by a comprehensive survey of the various thought experiments. The most popular choice here was 'My Physics Exam', where the prospect of a candidate being able to divide his mind so as to simultaneously review two different calculations before reuniting his mind to write up a fair copy of the best result, was evidently viewed with a certain wistfulness by the candidates sitting *this* exam question on Parfit. Responses were good, focusing on the one hand on the reductionist's difficulty in reducing the mind's intentionality and on the other on the strength of Parfit's objections to belief in Cartesian-type souls. Some candidates could have gained higher levels by evaluating the information presented.

Question 2

Most candidates answered **Question 2** rather than **Question 3** on the computational theory of mind. Most used Searle's well-known critique of CTM as a way into the question, although interestingly some were aware that Searle appears to have changed his mind about free will, probably because a mind that operates in strict accord with causal law sounds suspiciously like a robot. Most went on to focus on the functionalist issue of the multiple realisability of mental states, pointing out that strictly speaking, multiple realisability does not rule out a metaphysical basis for the mind, however unlikely that might be. Some could have gained higher levels by sticking more closely to the question.

Topic 2 Ethics

Question 4

- (a) Nearly all the candidates were able to give a good outline of Sartre's idea of 'abandonment', with many focusing on elements from the text that show the sense of isolation experienced when people accept that there is no God or other form of absolute guide-line for action. Candidates needed to show what effect this had on a person's morality. Those who fully appreciated Sartre's idea that God does not exist and has never existed were able to bring out the links that the individual is the source of their own morality. They have nothing to base actions on but themselves. The common human condition might enable people to feel that there is a sharing in morality, but this is vague and does not easily lead to specific actions. A number of the candidates misread part of the

passage and presented the thoughts of the French professors as if these were Sartre's own ideas. This led to some of the candidates producing contradictory statements within their essays. These contradictions limited the level achievable. The best answers focused on the relationship between 'abandonment' and morality.

- (b) Most candidates gave clear, detailed explanations of subjectivity, with the majority showing the links with anguish, bad faith, abandonment and despair. The idea that man is the sum total of his actions was usually well-developed. Most brought out the relationship between subjectivity and inter-subjectivity well and how people have to find themselves in a basically hostile world. Many candidates made the link with the quote from *Huis Clos*: 'Hell is other people', showing that they were aware of Sartre's other works that reinforce his ideas. To achieve the higher levels candidates' needed to evaluate the importance of subjectivism. There is a major difference between expressing someone else's ideas and expressing personal opinion on those ideas. Good candidates were able to question the idea of an individual making a decision in total isolation from external guidelines and the examples and expectations of other people. Good candidates showed their ability to examine how an individual can choose to act in an almost abstract way, to assess whether the example of the candidate having to choose between his mother and his country was a valid example to use, and to evaluate how useful Sartre's moral approach was.

Question 5

Most of the cohort of candidates answered this question. They showed a good understanding of Kant's theory of duty. Most expressed the importance of the categorical imperative, with some unnecessarily examining in detail the difference between the categorical imperative and the hypothetical imperative. Most candidates clearly examined the nature and relevance of the precepts like the universal law and never treating others as means to an end. There were good examples used to bring out the limitations of these precepts, with most candidates raising concerns about a person's ability to act from purely unbiased motives. The inability of people to differentiate between the intention and the outcome was well assessed, with most candidates being able to appreciate the intentions behind Kant's ideas, without them accepting the end teachings. The majority of the candidates wrote clearly, fluently and in depth about this topic, though some candidates restricted themselves to simply reproducing a basic explanation of Kant's categorical imperative, with no evaluative content.

Question 6

This was the less popular alternative question. Most of the candidates who attempted this question linked in the idea of Situation Ethics, with its focus on doing the most loving thing. There was reasonable examination of how a person can make a choice in a situation without knowing what the outcome of any choice would be. Better responses also brought in the idea of agape love, linked to the teachings of Jesus and St Paul on love. Those candidates, who used realistic situations, like the possible euthanasia option for a parent or an abortion situation, were able to examine the idea of the suffering that love entails. There were many generalised statements which, while valid in themselves, gave the candidate very little material to discuss. This question could have been tackled from many valid angles with a lot of potential for discussion.