

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01

Introduction to Philosophy and Theology

Key Messages

As in previous years, most candidates gave informed, analytic responses to the questions they attempted. To achieve the higher Levels it is important that candidates, in their essays, should consider more than one point of view.

General Comments

Some of the best answers to all of the questions appeared in Centres where all four questions were covered – i.e. where candidates had been encouraged to learn and revise widely. Candidates should see the Specification as an organic whole, since this leads to a fruitful synoptic approach to essay writing. Conversely, revising subject areas with a narrow focus is generally less productive.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

Knowledge of Plato was often encyclopaedic, and was applied to the question very well. Some could have gained more marks by applying their knowledge to the question as set. Those who did apply it to the question came up with a variety of interesting answers. Some argued that there is a parallel in Plato's thinking with the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* – the suffering, anxiety or feeling of distress caused by the desire to stay in the sensory world, and by hanging on to things in the world that are constantly changing, hence Plato was an incipient Buddhist and had every right to be heavenly minded. For some reason most candidates declared that Plato, as a rationalist, was behind the times, and that he would have done better to be a good empiricist like Aristotle. Some became so insistent on this that they forgot one of the points in the Key Messages above – that to achieve the higher levels, candidates should develop more than one point of view. Some defended Plato by pointing out the virtues of the theory of universals. Others suggested, rather neatly, that complete empiricism is too earthly minded to be any good; in which context yet others offered the further interesting thought that Berkeley, the 'arch-empiricist', was even more heavenly-minded than Plato.

Question 2

The claim that if there are no moral absolutes, then morality is pointless, led to some of the best writing in the paper. Some began with the suggestion that in terms of meta-ethics, there is little agreement about the meaning of 'good' itself, let alone whether good is absolute or relative. At some point in their essays, most candidates admitted to being stuck between the Scylla of wholesale absolutism and the Charybdis of absolute relativism, which in view of the discussion was a rather nice metaphor. There was no shortage of such moral conundrums: for example, some suggested that Kant's absolutist theory of the categorical imperative appears to say that what is non-contradictory is morally right, but 'acting in a contradictory manner is right' is not contradictory, so Kant got it wrong. This appears to conflate ethics with epistemology, nevertheless it was symptomatic of the growing perplexity with which many candidates made valiant attempts to grapple with the issues. Some could have gained more marks by resisting the temptation to write everything they knew about ethics, and concentrating instead on the question as set. Some reasonably good essays could have been improved by paying some attention to the key word, 'pointless'. Most concluded that morality would never be pointless regardless of the circumstances, because the moral systems we have are the only things that separate us from existential chaos.

Question 3

This was the least-favoured question, possibly because even those who answered it were sometimes rather unsure about the nature of both propositional and non-propositional revelation. Some took the question to be concerned with the debate between fideists and rationalists. To some extent that debate was made relevant, since the different understandings of revelation give rise to different conceptions of faith; but the focus of the question was on that part of the Paper 1 specification, in **Section 1(d)**, which asks candidates to consider “Revelation: propositional and non-propositional”. Most answers followed the debate in John Hick’s *Philosophy of Religion*: the propositional view of revelation is that revelation is given to humans as a body of truths expressed in statements or propositions, which is accompanied by an understanding of faith as the acceptance of these divinely revealed truths. By contrast, the non-propositional view understands revelation as God himself coming within the orbit of human experience – the *heilsgeschichtliche* view of God acting in human history – and from this point of view, theological propositions are not revealed, but are human attempts to understand the significance of revelatory experiences. Those who knew the debate described it in these terms and did it very well. Most used Karl Barth’s allegedly neo-orthodox approach as a compromise, although some pointed out that even this suggests that *something* is true (and is thereby propositional).

Question 4

The claim that humans are free was generally rejected, although some pointed out that such a conclusion led to some interesting observations about why they were answering this particular question. Some could have gained more marks by being rather more specific in their definitions of libertarianism, determinism and compatibilism. For example, some definitions of determinism were confined to religious determinism based on the concept of God’s omniscience. As an area for discussion in itself this is unexceptional, but the determinist debate hangs on a lot more than the idea that’s God’s omniscience is causal, since for a start such a view takes for granted that God exists, so more detailed answers accordingly dealt also with causal determinism in physics. A number of candidates were unclear about compatibilism, attributing all sorts of strange ideas to Hume. Libertarianism was not exempt from some equally strange comments, including the idea that libertarians are not influenced by any events in the world. Some focused entirely on Sartre’s account of libertarianism, which was somewhat limiting, particularly where the debate became defined entirely in terms of moral freedom. There was, notwithstanding, much elegant analysis and debate. Some invoked verificationist principles to attack determinism, arguing that the claim, ‘every action is subject to cause and effect’ is unfalsifiable, so must be meaningless. The majority nevertheless were determined that they were determinists of some kind or other; although some conceded that the discussion between free will and determinism always risks feeling one-sided owing to the difficulty in measuring freedom in comparison with measuring determinism through cause and effect. Most of those who did not embrace determinism embraced compatibilism instead, mainly because they liked the notion of having the best of both worlds, despite William James’ pejorative labelling of what he dubbed ‘soft determinism’ as being a ‘quagmire of evasion’.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/02

Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy and Theology 1

Key Messages

It is important to have sufficient knowledge of how the given 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.

It should be remembered that in questions requiring critical analysis, and in order to reach the higher Levels, candidates are required to develop different points of view, as opposed to giving a monochromatic defence of, or attack on, particular philosophical or theological ideas.

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

The extract for this Topic was from John Hick: *Evil and the God of Love*: Ch. XV, 'Suffering'.

Question 7

- (a) Although most answers were detailed and well crafted, some candidates could have gained more marks by beginning with a summary of the essential components of the extract and then broadening it out to include further explanation of Hick's argument. Those who did this generally began with Hume's question of why God does not intervene to eradicate evil. Some of the best answers referred in specific terms to the passage and referred to the mystery of suffering.
- (b) Some candidates could have gained more marks by not repeating what they had just said in response to part (a). Others could have gained more marks by focusing on the command words in the question: 'Critically assess ...' as opposed to giving detailed explanation of Hick's thesis without offering critical comment. The question was an open one, so candidates were free to discuss some or all of the points raised in Hick's chapter on suffering and to draw on themes found elsewhere in *Evil and the God of Love*. Most challenged Hick's 'frank appeal to the Christian value of mystery', seeing it as an evasion: it seems too easy to explain what we cannot understand just by saying that it is mysterious. Some supported Hick, however, arguing that it has to be a mystery, since anyone who claims to *know* the nature of the universe or the mind of God is probably delusional. Some attacked Hick on all fronts, but candidates should remember the second of the Key Ideas mentioned above: that in order to reach the higher Levels, candidates are required to develop different points of view, as opposed to giving a monochromatic defence of, or attack on, particular philosophical or theological ideas. Some focused on the debate between Mackie and Hick as to whether God could have made humans so that they always made free, good choices. Most concluded that this would involve God doing the logically impossible, which would be absurd. Quite a few focused on Hick's discussion of animal pain, to which Hick's response is the appeal to mystery and the necessity of maintaining the epistemic distance, which was judged to be a very weak appeal. Some argued that a concept of universal salvation cannot be squared with the biblical concept of salvation history; others said that the concept is necessarily deterministic, which makes a nonsense of Hick's understanding of freedom. Many answers could have been even more

impressive had they displayed awareness of the fact that Hick acknowledges that there may be many and different levels of existence after this one before reaching the likeness of God. Some defended the general trend of Hick's arguments but suggested that they make more sense when removed from their Christian context.

Question 8

This question was more popular than **Question 9**, and displayed a wide range of approaches and conclusions. The general methodology was to begin with Aquinas and Copleston, then to broaden things out with the Kalam argument, a bit of Leibniz and a bit of Swinburne; the opposition being represented at appropriate points with comments from Hume, Russell, Dawkins, *et al.* Weaker responses tended to give a general overview of the argument without offering much by way of critical analysis. Some could have gained more marks by reading the question carefully, since the wording specified cosmological arguments (in the plural), so discussions based solely on the First Cause argument, however erudite, were self-limiting. Some were very insistent that cosmology and quantum mechanics have disproved all versions of the argument: the allegation being made generally on the back of some very odd interpretation of quantum mechanics in particular and of cosmology in general. The best use of the science was generally seen in essays which pointed out that for every theistic / deistic cosmological argument, there is a scientific counter which offers an explanation of the same phenomena in terms of physical processes that exist timelessly and uncaused. Most candidates concluded that at best the cosmological argument is based on probabilities, and by definition cannot offer a proof of the existence of God; equally no counter-argument can constitute a disproof, since all relevant data are capable of being interpreted in support of any position that theologians or philosophers might take. Higher-grade answers could sometimes have been better still by a more careful analysis of some of the material that was thrown into the discussion, primarily to get it down on paper rather than to make any effective use of it. This applied particularly to discussion of Leibniz, whose modal argument received little in-depth analysis.

Question 9

There were few really weak answers to this question. Many focused on Freud, and some could have gained more marks by having a more in-depth knowledge of what Freud said. There were many generalisations to the effect that God is an invention of the mind because humans fear death and need a Father-figure to take away that fear; but as often as not there was little grounding of this claim in the writings of Freud. Well-informed answers offered accounts of Freud's views in writings such as *Totem and Taboo*, *Moses and Monotheism* and occasionally *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud's musings sometimes being taken as literally as Freud took them, not least those on Oedipus. Most agreed that religion has something to do with the psychology of fear and guilt, but to say that religion *derives* from fear and guilt does not follow. More sympathy was shown to Jung's theory of religious archetypes, but most concluded that human mentality in this respect could very well derive from God as an external reality rather than as an embedded feature of the human mind. Most discussion that did not involve Freud and Jung centred on Marx or Nietzsche, from which some concluded that religion has a socio-psychological origin, although few argued that this gives a complete explanation of religion. One astute observation was that even if we accept that an existent God is the origin of human religion, it must still be inevitable that religion must be interpreted and expressed through human psychology and human social organisation.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/03

Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy and Theology 2

Key Messages

It is important to have sufficient knowledge of how the given 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.

It should be remembered that in questions requiring critical analysis, and in order to reach the higher Levels, candidates are required to develop different points of view, as opposed to giving a monochromatic defence of, or attack on, particular philosophical or theological ideas.

General Comments

Very few candidates answered the questions on Topic 3 (Old Testament: Prophecy) so comment here is confined to Topic 1 (Philosophy of Mind) and Topic 2 (Ethics).

The Philosophy of Mind topic, and examination questions, revealed the topic requires critical awareness and a clear understanding of the central debates surrounding consciousness. Whilst some candidates had a strong awareness of the central theories in relation to the nature of mind and the relationship between mind and body, a large number wrote a historical overview of the topic. This type of historical sweep, whilst showing some awareness of the contributions of Parfit, Searle and other key scholars, failed to show real understanding of philosophical positions and reasoning for such views.

Ethics was by far the most popular topic on this paper. The quality of answers on **Section A**, Utilitarianism, produced a good range of responses. With the optional questions the vast majority of candidates chose the question on existentialism and abortion and euthanasia. The quality of the answers covered a wide spectrum, with some candidates being able to show full understanding of both areas of the essay and the links between the areas, while other candidates struggled to do justice to either part of the question. Few candidates opted to answer the question on the environment and existentialism, though there were some very competent answers produced, showing that these areas of study had made an impact on at least some of the candidates. Not many candidates produced essays on the Sermon on the Mount. Those who were familiar with the text were able to offer many insightful comments. Unfortunately some candidates simply latched onto one or two basic gospel quotes, some of which appeared in the Sermon on the Mount, and produced superficial answers.

Comments on Specific Questions

Topic 1 Philosophy of Mind

The extract for this Topic was from Derek Parfit: *Reasons and Persons*: Ch.12, Section 89.

Question 1

- (a) Many candidates, and most notably in this question on Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* (**Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**), gave an overview of who Parfit was and his contributions to the field of Personal Identity (PI) with little or no reference to the text and question set. At the other end of the spectrum, there were several candidates who clearly understood the purpose of the text within the context of Parfit's overall argument within the book, the ethical implications of his work and indeed a full understanding of his philosophical contributions.
- (b) This question saw the introduction of more illustrative examples from the candidates and many engaged with the central PI debate. However, many candidates repeated information used in **Question 1(a)** and seemed to know very little about the criticisms Parfit faced. A number of

candidates misunderstood his reductionist position altogether. The need for clearer definitions and more secure understanding of the theories was very apparent; without such foundations for candidates to anchor themselves upon, incorrect views and scholarly links abounded. However, several candidates made astute reflections on what may be viewed as Parfit's inadequate view of the self and made impressive links to 'the personhood debate' and third-person perspectives. It was also good to see accurate understanding of the current developments in neuroscience and how this influences the debate.

Question 2

This question revealed some misunderstandings in relation to the functionalist position. Many candidates reverted to producing a history of ideas within Philosophy of Mind. Whilst illustrative examples and scholarly arguments can be excellent for revealing understanding and critical engagement, and many candidates used them to good effect, far too many candidates misapplied references to Searle's Chinese Room argument. Reference to the Turing Test, Chinese Room and Strong A.I. is undoubtedly fundamental, but candidates need to explain these arguments rather than just list them. Many candidates gave muddled and contradictory definitions, of functionalism and indeed other positions, which therefore led to incoherent responses and lines of argument.

Question 3

There were not sufficient papers presented to allow a valid report to be produced.

Topic 2 Ethics

The extract for this Topic was from John Start Mill: Utilitarianism.

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates were able to explain how the extract was part of Mill's defence against criticism of utilitarianism, particularly of the utilitarianism propounded by Bentham. Mill's comparison of the principal of justice for all concerned, not just of the individual, to the golden rule taught by Jesus, enabled Mill to defend utilitarianism against attacks from those who claimed it was an atheistic approach. Most candidates were able to show how Mill called for all aspects of society, including education, to be used in the interest of all people, not just a few. Candidates recognised that the call for everybody to respond as a disinterested and benevolent spectator would have a major effect on the whole of society, if utilitarianism were ever to be fully implemented. The majority of the candidates were able to hone in on the central issues and made some very valid and insightful comments. There were some candidates who limited themselves to moving from one part of the extract to another, sometimes doing little more than linking various quotes together. While this approach might show some understanding, the better answers not only showed how the ideas expressed in the extract reflected Mill's thoughts on utilitarianism but also placed Mill in the wider context of this ethical approach.
- (b) Candidates took a wide range of attitudes over this question. Some took the line that utilitarianism was a very simple ethical procedure, while others claimed that some forms were simple and others were very complicated. It was interesting to see how each approach was justified by the proponents, showing that the candidates had thought carefully about the topic and were able to present their reflections in the examination. The majority of candidates argued that trying to use the hedonic calculator would not enable a person to make a quick decision. Others argued that Mill had made utilitarianism even more complicated by the use of higher and lower pleasures. Candidates were able to avoid the pitfall of simply presenting utilitarianism as a single approach. Those who brought in rule utilitarianism and who showed how a build-up of experience would allow a person to make a suitable decision, were able to present utilitarianism as a simple ethical approach. Many were able to show how rule utilitarianism could be the general approach with a back support of the hedonic calculator or awkward cases. Most candidates were able to show how trying to predict the outcome of any action was fraught with difficulty, but many candidates pointed out that this was also a failure of many other ethical approaches, so utilitarianism had some advantages over other ethical systems.

Question 5

There was a range of possible approaches to this question on the Sermon on the Mount but all approaches demanded some detailed knowledge of Matthew 5-7. This knowledge was lacking in a number of the answers of the candidates who attempted this question. Those candidates who showed that there were different types of ethical teachings contained within the Sermon were able to compare the practical aspects with more idealistic aspects. The call to be holy as God is holy might seem to be beyond human capacity, but other teachings like not being hypocritical and striving to apply a higher standard in one's personal life, while being challenging, are not impossible. Some candidates presented a few quotes from the Sermon and showed how they might apply to other ethical systems. While it is true that the call to show agape love appears in the Sermon, those candidates who used this as a springboard to present their essay on situation ethics did not score highly. It is valid to show how the Sermon can link in with other ethical approaches, but this must not detract from the fact that the essay title is centred on the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount itself.

Question 6

Some weaker candidates limited their answers to presenting factual material about abortion and euthanasia, though some omitted one or other of these topics. This is not a sufficient approach to the study of ethics. It is essential that all practical ethical arguments are placed in the context of detailed ethical theory. Since abortion and euthanasia are both connected with the termination of existence, there are many points that could be made that apply, in slightly different ways, to both topics. The stronger answers made this link and showed how existentialism might apply. Many candidates ended up by saying that existentialism was too vague an approach to help an individual make a decision. This was a valid position to end up in, as long as the material had been properly examined beforehand. A number of candidates latched onto the idea that existentialism just demands that a person makes a choice and sticks by that choice. Only the better answers brought in the issue that, for Sartre, when an individual makes a choice they are also setting a standard for other people. The feeling of anguish of having to make a choice, and the realisation that not choosing is itself a choice, can often affect the nature of the decision process, particularly in stressful times like the abortion and euthanasia scenario. Most candidates included Sartre's teaching that essence precedes existence and raised the issue of when a foetus becomes a person. Some took the line that this did not apply to existential ethics as the foetus was not out in the world so it could be ignored. Those who focused exclusively on the right of the mother failed to recognise Sartre's idea about potential. While it is true that a person is the sum total of his actions for Sartre, there is also the question whether anyone can deprive a person of the chance to fulfil his / her potential, whether it is in the context of abortion or euthanasia.

Those who chose to answer this question in relation to environmental ethics tended to stress the need for a person to make a choice but did not always follow through with the importance of examining the consequences of that choice. Again this should have included a study of Sartre's idea that by acting an individual is setting a standard for other people. People cannot abandon making a choice. Existential ethics would probably take into account future generations and the fact that people need to be aware of how their current actions are affecting the future, not just as an individual but also as a standard-setter. People must accept the consequences of their decisions, not only for themselves but for others. Not many candidates found existentialism a helpful ethic in the context of the environment, but there is sufficient material to examine and to make a thoughtful essay.