

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS

Cambridge Pre-U Certificate

MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2015 series

9774 PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

9744/01

Paper 1 (Introduction to Philosophy and Theology),
maximum raw mark 75

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|--------|---------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Page 2 | Mark Scheme | Syllabus | Paper |
| | Cambridge Pre-U – May/June 2015 | 9774 | 01 |

- 1 Consider the view that Plato’s theory of Forms is ‘too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good’.** [25]

This form of words is sometimes related to Paul in 1 Corinthians 3–4, although there is no need for candidates to know the presumed source of the quotation. The allegation is that Plato has invented an entire metaphysical universe so that we now have to deal philosophically with two worlds rather than one. Those who consider Plato to be misguided (or simply wrong) argue that the existence of the world of Forms is the result of his doctrine of antitheses (opposites), and that he derived the idea of a metaphysical universe from the incorrect supposition that a physical universe must have a real opposite in a metaphysical one: hence Plato’s contrast between the latter as the home of universal and perfect / non-physical ideas and the former as the home of particular and imperfect / changing physical things, bridged by philosophy, maths and metaphysics. Nietzsche spent much time and energy suggesting that Plato’s search for truth in a world beyond this one has perverted the whole course of philosophy ever since in its presupposition that our ideas about goodness and truth cannot possibly originate in this world. The doctrine of opposites is arguably flawed, since not all entities have opposites but are instead part of a scale: for example heat theoretically has no upper limit but there is an absolute lower limit of 0 on the Kelvin scale.

Some might defend Plato through a metaphysical concept of mathematics, or on the grounds that metaphysics cannot be dismissed as easily as empiricists would like, or on the existence of perfect ideas which can have no physical counterpart, for example. Although it can be difficult to defend Platonism, for the higher levels candidates should at least offer reasonable grounds for considering the possibility of the existence of a world approximating to the Forms, e.g. through a theory of consciousness.

- 2 ‘If there are no moral absolutes, then morality is pointless.’ Evaluate this claim.** [25]

Candidates are likely to begin with an account of moral absolutism in one or more forms: e.g. Plato and the Form of the Good; Natural Law Ethics; Divine Command Theory; Kant’s Categorical Imperativism. The common factor is the view that some moral commands are absolute, either in relation to God or in relation to reasoned, universalisable judgements and the like. This is likely to be contrasted with the view that ethical values are relative. This might be advocated in a number of ways, e.g. the incoherence of DCT (Euthyphro’s Dilemma); the problem of free will and absolutes; cultural relativism; meta-ethical relativism; virtue theory, and the like.

Consideration of whether or not ethics is pointless might arrive at any point in the discussion. With religious absolutes, the point of ethical behaviour is to access heaven and to preclude hell, since the force of God’s moral commands is such that to deny them even through reason is to deny God’s just authority. The claim that morality is pointless might be raised in connection with relativistic ethics, since if all ethical judgements are relative, then there can be no compulsion to obey them. There might be practical examples here. Against this view, some might take an existentialist line such as that of Sartre or Kierkegaard, arguing that morality makes sense only through human choices and human definition, irrespective of whether or not there is a God. Accept all relevant lines of argument.

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|--------|---------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Page 3 | Mark Scheme | Syllabus | Paper |
| | Cambridge Pre-U – May/June 2015 | 9774 | 01 |

3 'A non-propositional view of revelation undermines religious truth.' Discuss. [25]

Candidates are likely to begin by contrasting the non-propositional view of revelation with the propositional view: the latter being that God revealed facts / truths about herself / himself in propositional form through the writers of texts / scriptures; the former being that scriptures are reflection by individuals who experienced God personally. On the non-propositional view, faith might be seen as 'belief in' rather than 'belief that'. The propositional view has the strength that for the believer it offers a factual basis for religion and offers truths / facts for acceptance or rejection. Its weakness is the conviction that truths about God can be conveyed in ordinary language and that the truth or falsity of religion turns on whether or not certain propositions are true. The non-propositional view avoids this problem by arguing that truth is ineffable / experiential, and it can deal with the obvious problem that to take scripture as being factually true can be seen as nonsensical by believers as well as by non-believers.

The question of religious 'truth' is likely to be approached in a variety of ways: accept all that are valid / relevant, e.g. that all truth is relative / that scientific truth is of a different order from religious truth, so religious truth does not have to hang on propositional views of revelation / that scientific truth in terms of quantum physics is elusive / that religion is a language game in which truth is defined by the user / that truth is an anti-real concept anyway. The discussion should not stray too far from the non-propositional view of revelation, e.g. the question of whether, if religious writings are a reflection of personal experiences, such writings can offer believers a form of religion that can be meaningfully held to be true.

4 'Humans are free.' Critically examine the debate between libertarians, hard determinists and soft determinists about this issue. [25]

This is a wide-ranging subject area, so expect a wide-ranging methodology in dealing with it. Credit all relevant responses. Libertarians hold that humans have free will so determinism is false. Historically, the most popular libertarian thesis has been mind / brain dualism, where a non-material mind (or soul) exists alongside the physical brain and acts as the causal agent for thought and decision-making in a way that overrides the physical causality entailed by the laws of physics. Candidates might be aware of any one of a number of libertarian variants, so these must be checked as they occur. Hard determinism rejects the possibility of human freedom, including the freedom of moral choice. Candidates will probably present hard determinism in the form of physical determinism, where both past and future are determined by the laws of physics, so the possibility of free will is precluded. Soft determinists hold the compatibilist thesis that determinism must be true in order to allow a measure of freedom, namely the freedom to act in accordance with one's desires.

Candidates are at liberty to make of these theories what they will. Judge by quality of argument in relation to the question. Some might refer to quantum mechanical indeterminism as the basis for finding a measure of free will, e.g. in the Copenhagen Interpretation, where the existence of an observer is required to collapse the wave-function of quantum-mechanical probabilities into 'hard' reality, although the CI is denied by other interpretations, such as the deterministic 'Many Worlds' view. Some might be aware of experiments in which the brain's conscious awareness of making a choice happens up to 7 seconds after neuronal activity is detected electronically, which might be taken to show that the consciousness of free will is not a reality: merely a mental device to sustain the illusion of it. Note that candidates are not required to reach a conclusion about whether or not humans are in fact free at any particular level. Some might conclude that whether or not we are free depends on the definition of 'free': for example the compatibilist / Humean understanding of free will understands that concept in a very different way from libertarianism. Some might argue that all we can have are presuppositions based on religious and ethical values, for example.