

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01

Introduction to Philosophy and Theology

General Comments

Most answers were detailed and analytic and showed good time-management. Candidates were clearly very well prepared, and the level of technical knowledge was frequently outstanding. There was evidence of wide background reading, particularly for **Questions 2 and 3**. A few candidates spent too much time describing the theory underpinning the subject-material for each question, with the result that critical analysis was sometimes weaker than it might have been. On the whole, candidates' responses this year again showed a thoroughly commendable level of preparation, development, technical knowledge and wide-ranging critical enquiry.

Comments on specific questions

1 Critically examine Plato's theory of Forms.

There were few, if any, weak responses; but some essays gave too much detail about the Forms – so much so that critical assessment was occasionally confined to a concluding summary. The discussion ranged over Plato's rationalist assumptions contrasted with Aristotelian empiricism; the coherence of the theory of metatheses; the potential infinity of the Forms; Plato's metaphysical assumptions, and so on. It was interesting to see that many candidates eschewed the popular rejection of metaphysical assumptions and offered a powerful defence of a modified doctrine of the Forms.

2 'To have authority, belief must be backed up by strong rationalist arguments.' Discuss.

Most candidates interpreted this question in terms of the debate between rationalism and fideism, hence much of the debate centred on the question of what, if anything, constitutes a 'properly basic' belief. Defences of fideism were interesting, with several candidates making appropriate use of Plantinga, Barth and William James, for example. Some defended Pascal's pragmatic approach to belief. Most pointed out the classical weaknesses in reformed epistemology, often on the basis of an analysis of 'Wittgensteinian fideism'. Some liked rationalism but disliked the 'strong' version. Most candidates focused on the authority of *religious* belief, which was fine, although the question did not demand such a focus. It is important to read the question carefully, the question was about the *authority* of belief.

3 'Moral duty is defined solely by God's commands.' Critically assess this claim.

Divine command theory (DCT) was exceptionally well known, although as with Plato's theory of Forms, it was possibly *too* well known in leading some candidates away from critical analysis. Just about all candidates attacked DCT by referring to Euthyphro's Dilemma, and nearly all found at least one neat way out of that dilemma, although it was interesting that very few of these referred to Aquinas' argument that God is not a moral agent. Incidentally, the most-quoted commandment was the prohibition of murder, which was more often than not rendered inaccurately as, 'Do not kill'. Most candidates suggested that moral duty can more coherently be defined by theories such as Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, Kantian Ethics, and so on. A few defended ethical non-cognitivism, and did so rather well. The best essays dealt specifically with the word, 'solely'.

4 'Soft determinism is the only theory that offers humans the genuine possibility of free will.' Discuss.

Responses to this question were sometimes hindered, and occasionally made unintelligible, by inaccurate knowledge of soft determinism. Some were confused about Locke and others about Hume. Most began with a review of libertarianism, determinism and soft determinism, laced with further clarification about compatibilist and incompatibilist positions. Those who were not certain where soft determinism fits into the

framework generally claimed that the genuine possibility of free will comes (by definition) only from libertarianism, although some took the opposite line, and argued that the evidence for determinism is so strong that there can be *no* possibility of free will. The most coherent answers for the most part got their teeth into Hume's compatibilism, and used that as the basis for analysing different possibilities. Quite a few appealed to folk psychology and defended the view that whereas soft determinism is a horrible fudge, the possession of human free will is, in most important respects, a common-sense assumption ... 'Otherwise', said some, 'Why are we trying to answer this question?'.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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

General comments

Answers to both text-based and general questions were excellent, showing in-depth knowledge and extensive reading. Some candidates, though, had a tendency to make *general* comments on the *specific* text questions.

Comments on specific questions

Topic 1 Epistemology

Section A

Extract from **David Hume: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*: Section X**, 'Of Miracles'.

1 (a) With reference to this passage, explain Hume's main argument against miracles.

Most candidates gave an accurate explanation of Hume's inductive argument against miracles. All candidates picked out the focus of Hume's argument in his well-known suggestion that, "A wise man ... proportions his belief to the evidence". Most candidates explained this on the basis of empirical observation, where all judgements are based on probability (because we cannot do every observation of a particular phenomenon to be 100% sure that it always occurs *thus*). A few branched out into Hume's subsidiary arguments, which were more appropriate to **Question 1 (b)**.

1 (b) Critically assess Hume's arguments against miracles.

The focus of most answers was Hume's 'subsidiary' arguments against miracles, e.g. that reports of them come from 'ignorant and barbarous nations'; that miracles are part of the psychology of belief, and so on. Most acknowledged the force of Hume's arguments but pointed out that Hume left no room for the identification of a genuine miracle, and the latter cannot be ruled out either on inductive or on deductive grounds. Some suggested that miracles were inherently improbable, not because of Hume's arguments, but because they point to a selective and immoral God.

Section B

2 Critically assess coherentism.

Candidates compared coherentism as a theory of justification with reliabilism and foundationalism. Knowledge of the theory was accurate and detailed. Most judged that coherentism makes sense as a theory of knowledge but cannot stand as a single theory of knowledge. Some suggested that the problem of justification is therefore insoluble, since foundationalism in turn cannot be justified.

3 'It is impossible to uphold a realist theory of perception.' Critically examine this claim.

Few candidates answered this question, so comment would be inappropriate.

Topic 2 Philosophical and Theological Language

Section A

Extract from **Basil Mitchell**: *The Philosophy of Religion*: I: 'Theology and Falsification. A symposium' (Anthony Flew, R.M. Hare, and Basil Mitchell): 13.

4 (a) Explain how Anthony Flew uses the principle of falsification to attack the idea that religious statements are meaningful.

Candidates had a good knowledge of Flew's use of Wisdom's Parable of the Gardener, and most used it to illustrate Flew's claim that religious statements 'die the death of a thousand qualifications'. The best responses tended to be those which illustrated Flew's claims with reference to the assertions of the father of the child dying of inoperable throat cancer, since this particular scenario enabled candidates to illustrate Flew's position that to know what negates an assertion is to know its meaning, so if there is nothing that an assertion denies, then there is nothing it asserts either.

4 (b) Critically assess either the contribution of Hare's concept of *bliks*, or Mitchell's parable of 'The Stranger', as a response to Flew's attack.

Hare's concept of *bliks* was sometimes over-generalised, with some candidates claiming simply that religious assertions are views about the world that cannot be falsified but are meaningful to the believer. Stronger answers looked at Hare's example of the candidate with a *blik* that all university dons were out to kill him. Some candidates wrote about Flew's response that believers do not take their beliefs to be non-cognitive. All cognitive religious claims need to explain what might falsify them, otherwise they are meaningless. Some accepted this; most referred to some form of counter-argument, not least Mitchell's Parable of the Stranger.

Mitchell's Parable was dealt with reasonably well, with most giving a good account of Mitchell's position that religious belief is meaningful cognitively on the analogy of trust (in God). Most knew Flew's counter-argument: the Stranger is human, whereas God is omnipotent and omniscient, so there is no excuse for God's failure with evil. Evaluation of all this generally took the line that the existence of evil *potentially* falsifies religious belief, which still allows religious statements to be meaningful using Flew's criteria. Some took the line that the falsificationist attack on religion is the counterpart of the verificationist attack, and is no more successful than the latter.

Section B

5 Examine the view that 'good' is non-cognitive.

Answers to this were straightforward, competent and analytical. Some answered the question through a straightforward meta-ethical approach, contrasting ethical cognitivism (naturalism and non-naturalism) with ethical non-cognitivism (usually of the Ayer/emotivist variety). Others focused their answers on the debate between relativists and absolutists, often claiming that the failure to show an absolutist basis for ethics (for example using a Kantian or a Natural Law approach) suggested implicitly that relativism is true, and so non-cognitivism is true also. Some took a different approach and attempted to justify some form of objectivism, claiming that 'good' means 'improving the human condition', and 'bad' means the opposite, and that as human criteria these are objective and measurable.

6 How far can the terms: *omnipotent*, *omniscient*, and *omnibenevolent*, be applied coherently to God?

The best answers pointed out that there are problems with each of these three central characteristics of God. With omnipotence, the main issue is whether or not God can do the logically impossible; with omniscience, the problem centres on whether or not God's knowledge is causal or acausal; with omnibenevolence, there are a clutch of problems concerning God's moral status, the problem of evil, and so on. Most answers tended to look at some of these problems in isolation; the best answers tended to be those which asked whether or not a coherent picture of God can be built up which encompasses all of God's attributes.

Topic 3 Philosophy of Religion

Section A

Extract from **John Hick**: *Evil and the God of Love*: 264-267.

7 (a) (i) Explain briefly the reasoning of the free-will defence, and

The question did not require candidates to refer to the passage from Hick, and some candidates spent too much time simply paraphrasing Hick's text. All that was required was a 'brief explanation' of the free-will defence (FWD). In practice, most gave this at some point.

7 (a) (ii) with reference to this passage, show how Hick attempts to prove that it would be logically impossible for God to "have so made men that they would always freely do what is right."

On the whole, candidates concluded that Hick's attempted proof has (roughly) three main elements. First, even God cannot do the logically impossible, and 'making men always freely do what is right' would be logically impossible. Second, the idea of the creation of personal beings who are not free to choose wrongly as well as rightly is self-contradictory, so would be logically impossible for God to do. Third, God could have created beings with no freedom to make wrong/bad choices, but he has chosen to create persons, and we can only accept this decision as basic to our existence, and treat it as a premise of our thinking.

7 (b) Examine critically Hick's defence of the free-will defence.

Responses were varied. One of the most successful approaches came from those who recognised (in Hick's language) Mackie's rejection of the FWD. Expositions of these ideas were sometimes superb. More general answers focused on the extent of human freedom, and many such answers were competent.

Section B

8 'The only success of the ontological argument is that it supports the faith of those who already believe in God.' Critically assess this claim.

The level of technical knowledge here was not always as high as in other questions, although most answers were competent and displayed an in-depth knowledge of the ontological argument. The best responses were generally those which took their departure from Barth's discussion of Anselm's presuppositions in formulating the argument, or (for example) from Norman Malcolm's claims that the argument has anti-real force - some made good use of Wittgenstein's theory of language games in this connection. Some asked why those who already believe in God would need the dubious support of the ontological argument. Some considered that Kant and Hume had demolished the argument, so that it has no success of any kind. Nobody was prepared to defend the argument as a philosophical proof of God's existence. The very best answers considered carefully the words "the only success".

9 'Religious experiences can tell us only about religious belief. They tell us nothing about God.' Critically assess this claim.

The best answers tended to focus on the analysis of non-cognitive accounts of religious experiences, particularly William James' claim that God gives humans non-cognitive experiences that are characterised by an uninterpreted four-point phenomenological core. Stronger answers pointed out from the start that the problem with religious experiences is that of verification, particularly in so far as there are alternative explanations for the phenomena of religious experiences that are at least as explanatory as 'God'. Weaker answers talked in very general terms about religious experiences, limiting the discussion to an analysis of the different types of religious experiences. Candidates wrote fluently and well.

Topic 4 New Testament: The Four Gospels

Few candidates answered this section, so comment would be inappropriate.

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

- To score full marks on the Key Text question candidates need to read the specified passage carefully and answer the question in relation to the set passage.
- It is helpful for the candidate to outline an ethical theory and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding before attempting any evaluation of it in relation to the question set.

General comments

The candidates for this paper had been exceptionally well prepared and the scripts were outstanding with even weaker papers offering competent responses to the questions set. Some candidates needed to respond to the part **(a)** of the text based question with closer reference to the text and to use the passage as a spring-board from which to demonstrate wider knowledge. Some candidates would have scored more highly on **Section B** by systematically demonstrating their knowledge of the ethical theory. Examiners cannot make assumptions about what is not written or grant marks by inference.

Time management was very good and candidates generally divided their time appropriately between the questions.

There were no questions which attracted answers which were typically weaker or stronger than any others.

Comments on specific questions

Topic 1 Philosophy of Mind

Section A

Extract from **Derek Parfit**: *Reasons and Persons*: 245.

1 Parfit refers here to the “Reductionist View” of mind.

1 (a) (i) Explain briefly why Parfit’s view of mind is reductionist.

Candidates had clearly enjoyed reading Parfit, and wrote enthusiastically in response to his ideas. Most explained the nature of reductionism as a philosophical approach. Most then explained that Parfit’s view of mind is reductionist because his claims about the physical criterion of personal identity (PI) and the psychological criterion of PI do not presuppose the identity of persons over time.

1 (a) (ii) Using one of Parfit’s thought experiments, show how Parfit uses the idea that the brain might contain “two separate spheres of consciousness” to support his reductionist view of persons.

The focus was, then, on Parfit’s examination of the physical criterion of PI and the psychological criterion. Most illustrated Parfit’s views with reference to the conjectured experiences of the two halves of an individual’s brain into the bodies of two fatally brain-damaged brothers. The strongest responses had a complete grasp of the details of Parfit’s thought experiments, whereas weaker responses tended to rely on generalisations.



- 1 (b) Critically assess Parfit's view that with persons, what really matters is not personal identity, but psychological connectedness.**

The in-depth knowledge of Parfit was continued in responses to this part of the question. Answers were wide-ranging, interesting, and displayed a very creditable level of reading and thinking around the subject. Some found it difficult to explain the precise nature of 'psychological connectedness', although most found no difficulty here, using examples such as Reid's 'Brave young ensign' paradox, or the connectedness of a river. Some defended Parfit by using a version of mind-brain identity theory; others preferred to question Parfit by referring to what they perceived as the stronger explanatory claims of substance dualism, for example, arguing that the assumptions we make about ourselves and our experiences require use of the strong term 'personal identity' as opposed to 'psychological connectedness'.

Section B

- 2 'The explanatory weakness of substance dualism means that it fails as a theory of mind.' Discuss.**

Most explained the main claims of Cartesian substance dualism (SD), and gave a full and accurate defence of the theory. The weaknesses of the theory were also well known, most referring to the inveterate problem that Descartes left unsolved. The best responses explored a number of advanced questions, e.g. the issue of how one mental state causes another – how does one non-physical state bring about another non-physical state?; SD asserts that mental substance is conscious, but offers no theory of consciousness; some discussed Hume's problem of 'counting souls' – the list was long and varied, and some claimed that the sheer weight of evidence in this case argued against the success of SD as a theory of mind. Some offered a robust defence of SD using Swinburne's probability arguments; others suggested that quantum theory offers some support for dualist claims about the mind, although much of what was said was rather tenuous. The general claim was that SD cannot be said to 'fail' as a theory of mind since materialist explanations of mind are beset with equally formidable problems.

- 3 Critically assess functionalism as a theory of mind.**

Few candidates answered this question, so comment would be inappropriate.

Topic 2 Ethics

Section A

Extract from **Jean-Paul Sartre: *Existentialism and Humanism*: 62-63**

- 4 (a) Examine how Sartre defends his theory of choice in this passage.**

Marks were awarded to candidates who successfully identified and discussed Sartre's key points in the passage. Weaker candidates did not read the text in detail and offered general commentary on the nature of existentialism. Strong candidates provided detailed commentary on the passage, wrote about the broader philosophical context and also provided mature evaluative commentary. Sartre's case study of the candidate was helpfully expanded upon in many of the stronger responses.

- 4 (b) 'No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do.' (Jean-Paul Sartre: *Existentialism and Humanism*: 43)**

Evaluate this claim with respect to the general rule of morality against killing the innocent.

This question was answered well with many candidates extending their ideas to good effect. Weaker responses tended not to go beyond Sartre, with some seeing this as an opportunity to write out all they knew about the set text. Typically these responses would include a final paragraph about the general rule of morality against killing the innocent, whilst higher level responses kept the precise question in mind throughout the essay. Responses ranged from those who evaluated a number of attempts to formulate a general rule of morality before reaching a conclusion, to those who not only understood the precise nature of the challenge presented to Sartre, but also could

detail and evaluate his response in the knowledge that the charge of nihilism was a motivational factor in the writing of the text.

Section B

5 Consider the view that virtue ethics is the most useful ethical theory when considering business ethics.

This question proved challenging for those who attempted to answer it without outlining, however briefly, the features of virtue theory. In general candidates did not demonstrate full understanding of virtue theory and were challenged when asked to compare it with other ethical systems. Strong responses considered Aristotle as well as modern formulations of virtue theory and gave examples to illustrate how virtue theory was useful/useless by way of comparison with other theories. Some candidates understood modern developments in virtue theory and evaluated in the light of that. Some responses made evaluations based upon the intellectual integrity of the system, whilst others placed more evaluative focus on the practical application in business. High scores were awarded where the candidate demonstrated good knowledge of virtue ethics and applied it evaluatively to the world of business. There were a number of successful approaches for achieving top marks on this question with those doing so evidently well prepared and in complete control of the material.

6 Critically examine Kant's attempt to put forward a theory of morality based on reason.

This question was very well answered with most candidates able to focus on whether 'reason' alone is an adequate tool for morality. Candidates had a firm grasp of Kant's ethical theory and were able to use their knowledge well in the service of the question. Few candidates demonstrated any understanding of the distinction for Kant between theoretical (pure) reason and practical reason, but were nonetheless able to evaluate successfully in many colourful ways. Most responses praised Kant for displacing happiness (acquired ends) from the centre of moral concern but went on to question whether reason alone was a sufficient test of morality. Most appreciated Kant's attempt to separate duty from desire as well as his attempt to establish fixed moral rules based on reason. Examples such as the axe murderer (Kant), the father who plays with his son out of duty (P. Winch) and the accidental killing of a child by a truck driver (B. Williams) were all well used to illustrate the limits of these attempts. Top scoring responses evaluated Kant's success by comparison with other attempts to put forward a theory of morality based on reason.

Topic 3 Old Testament: Prophecy

Few candidates answered this section, so comment would be inappropriate.