



**2003**

**Philosophy GA 3: Written examination**

### GENERAL COMMENTS

Responses to Section A and B questions generally were, accurate, detailed and clearly expressed. Irrelevant material (usually biographical) was virtually absent this year. As with 2002, few students left sections of the paper unanswered, or responded with 'we did not study him'. Responses to the evaluation and analyses parts of Section B, though not perfect, were generally pleasing. Many students offered their opinions, though sometimes without adequate reasons. Examiners want to see that students have thought about and are engaged with the arguments and ideas studied and not just offer a neutral assessment or the phrase '... is justified in his arguments because he believes he is'.

Teachers were generally successful in advising students to give brief answers in Section A, and to develop more detailed responses in Section B; however, the main difficulty was the essays in Section C. Though a minority, some students either did not know how to write a philosophy essay, or had spent too much time on Sections A and B, and as a consequence, had little time to develop their essays in Section C.

Another major problem noted in this section was the way in which students addressed the question. It was clear that in the essay questions students had rehearsed answers to previous questions. Many students did not answer the question that was asked. Though there is similarity between the essay questions from year to year, the specific requirements do change and students must address these. The other tendency in this area was that some students wrote a description of different philosophical positions relevant to the question, but without framing these descriptions in a position that actually addressed the question. These essays were more like summary of ideas, and not a considered and consistent response to a claim made in the question.

Other concerns were:

- Many students do not have a clear understanding of what a philosophical argument is. It is not a contention. An argument is made in order to support or undermine a contention. The problem that students have with this distinction was evident in Question 4 of Section A.
- Many students do not have a clear understanding of the term 'valid'. In the examination it was a term that was magically employed to justify a claim or argument. Many students wrote a description of a philosophical position and then confidently stated that '... X's claim seems valid' without any analysis.
- Detailed knowledge of the texts in Section B.

### SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Section A

The questions in this section are short-answer. In some instances a single sentence answer is sufficient for full marks. Section A is concerned with the details of the texts. It does not ask for any analysis or evaluation of the arguments or claims made in the texts. Section A is also the only section where every question is compulsory.

Apart from offering an incorrect response, the main difficulty in this section was that some answers were so brief or poorly expressed, that examiners had difficulties in assessing what the student actually knew. Answers are supposed to be brief, so long as they are clear and unambiguous.

#### Question 1

**a**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	26	30	31	13	1.30

**According to Epicurus, what is philosophy? In his view, what is the value of philosophy for (i) the young and (ii) the old?**

Philosophy is the seeking of wisdom:

- in the young so they may have no fear in the things to come
- in the old, so they may still be young at heart.

The common error was not to answer the first question on Epicurus' thoughts on what is philosophy. Students either did not know the answer, or did not recognise it as a question.

**b**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	14	23	63	1.48

**According to Callicles, when should we do philosophy? What is Aristotle's view?**

- Callicles reserves philosophy for the young.
  - Aristotle says that the older person benefits more from philosophy, though it is of value at any age.
- Apart from the responses that were factually incorrect, there were no problems evident in the answers to this question.

## Question 2

**a**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	16	33	51	1.34

**What does Nietzsche mean by 'freedom of the will'?**

- self determination or autonomy

or

- letting go for the wish for certainty

A common mistake was that students were vague in their answer. Many responded with '... freedom is the will to do anything' which does not answer the question.

**b**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	35	43	14	1.62

**According to Nietzsche, how do religious people deny themselves freedom of the will?**

- desire to be commanded rather than command
- attachment to a single point of view
- demand by the weak for certainty or a support or prop

The first two points were necessary for the 3 marks. Most students who answered this question had at least the first point in their answer. Some students responded with 'those with a slave morality'. Whilst correct, it lacks the precision of the suggested answers.

## Question 3

**a**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	41	25	34	0.92

**What is the relationship between the Good and knowledge in the *Republic*?**

- the good is the source and provider of knowledge and truth

or

- the good is responsible for everything that is right and fine

A few students did have the relationship the wrong way around (goodness 'higher' than knowledge), but few problems were evident in other responses.

**b**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	16	10	21	53	2.11

**Identify what the following represent in Plato's allegory of the Cave:**

- the prison cell
- the upward journey of man to the entrance
- the sun.
  - region which is accessible to sight (false images of 'reality')
  - the mind's ascent to the intelligible world
  - goodness; that which makes knowledge intelligible.

Answered quite well by most students. There were few examples of gross misunderstanding or error.

## Question 4

**a**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	17	41	42	1.25

**What two ways does Descartes use to distinguish humans from animals?**

- lack of language in animals
  - therefore, lack of reason in animals
- The first point was usually mentioned, but the second point was often omitted.

**b**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	23	25	28	24	1.53

**What two arguments does Descartes use to distinguish between animals and humans?**

- animals do not have language and cannot show what they are thinking

- inconsistency in actions
- therefore lack of a guiding intelligence

This question was poorly answered. Many students just repeated their responses to 4a). What was required was an elaboration of the points made above; what are the premises that lead Descartes to say that humans are distinct from animals?

### Question 5

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	40	19	41	1.01

**What is Armstrong's definition of a mental state?**

- a state of a person apt to producing certain ranges of behaviour

Usually well answered. Students either knew the answer to this question or did not attempt it.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	34	15	27	24	1.41

**What reasons does Armstrong give for rejecting Behaviourism as an explanation for mental states?**

- materialism is unsatisfactory because it doesn't recognise that mental states are the inner causes of behaviour and dispositions
- mental states are to be defined as such causes, and they happen to be physical states of the central nervous system, or examples used in the point above

Many students provided the first answer and gave an example to clarify and amplify their answer. Very few students responded with the second point.

## Section B

A general concern was with the overall performance in Section B in 2003. The questions this year were more directed and so the responses necessary for full marks required detailed knowledge of the texts. Students were found wanting, particularly in the Aristotle (B3) and Epicurus (B5) questions. Knowledge of all the arguments is an essential requirement for the course. Answering part c of each question is still a problem for some students. In most cases, these parts are either i) a comparison with another philosopher, or ii) an evaluation of the philosopher's position. When offering an opinion as to the value of an idea or argument, one suggestion is for students to frame their responses by 'I think X's view on the good life is valuable because ...' Even if the reasons may not be clear or good ones, the fact that students have given some thought to the views of a philosopher will be rewarded with some marks. It should also be noted that in most of the part b and c questions, there is a mark given for the expression and/or persuasiveness of the response.

### Question 1

*'Human nature, as opposed to the natures of other hypothetical spiritual beings, has certain discoverable attributes, and these should be suitably considered in any discussion of morality' (Murdoch, p. 78).*

a

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	19	24	31	14	12	1.75

**What concept of human nature does Murdoch have?**

- humans are naturally selfish (essential point)
- reluctant to face unpleasant realities
- constantly seek consolation
- humans have a consciousness that protects the psyche from pain

This question elicited two types of responses, the fluent and the ignorant; there was little middle ground. Many students answered with the first point, but did not mention the others.

bi-ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	11	8	9	13	14	22	13	10	3.78

bi

**How does Murdoch's conception of human nature relate to her vision of the good life?**

bii

**What similarities and/or differences does Murdoch's concept of human nature have with Martin Luther King's concept of human nature?**

Human nature provides a context for virtue; it is a 'background' condition.

Correct action is influenced by:

- the state of our consciousness
- the quality of our attachments

- the kind of discernment we have available.

Though Murdoch has a secular view, and King has a religious/theological view, both say that forces within us work to steer us away from the Good Life. King says we are sinners and are frustrated; Murdoch would agree.

The comparison between Murdoch and King was handled well by most students, but few students received full marks for the first part. Most correctly identified human nature as the context for virtue, but could not give the other details for the Good Life.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	16	30	21	23	2.30

**Do you agree with Murdoch that understanding human nature is essential in determining the good life? Give reasons for your answer.**

Though Murdoch may be correct in her description of human nature does it mean that anything necessarily follows from this?, i.e. a doctrine of human nature may be irrelevant to an analysis of the Good Life. The contrary could be argued; for example, Murdoch's (or another's) conception of human nature is correct, and it is the framework or context for any moral understanding.

The main difficulty was that students did not answer the question. Many responded with criticisms or analyses of Murdoch's concept of human nature, rather than focus on whether the issue of human nature needs to be understood, which in most respects is an easier question.

## Question 2

*'... by Existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity' (Jean Paul Sartre, Existentialism Is a Humanism, p. 419).*

a

**Sartre identifies two meanings of subjectivism.**

ai-ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	24	30	26	20	1.41

ai

**What are the two meanings?**

aii

**Which one does Sartre claim is the essential meaning of Existentialism?**

- the individual chooses and makes himself
- it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity
- it is the second meaning that is the essential one in Existentialism.

The most common problem in this question was that many students confused humanism with subjectivism. Sartre is arguing that existentialism is a type of humanism, and subjectivism is an essential element in his conception of both.

b

**Sartre claims there are four charges made against Existentialism**

bi-ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	25	8	11	7	12	6	11	4	16	3.48

bi

**What are the four charges?**

bii

**How does Sartre defend Existentialism against each of these charges?**

The four charges are:

- invites people to remain quiet
- dwells on human degradation
- ignores the possibility of human solidarity
- denies the reality and seriousness of human undertaking (rejects God's commandments, and this just leaves caprice).

Apart from the last criticism, his defence of Existentialism is the axiom of existence before essence. He applies this to each criticism and students should address each criticism separately to achieve full marks, i.e. existence before essence leaves man the possibility of choice so i) they can remain quiet if they wish; ii) they can have hope and optimism for the future; iii) they can join in collective action. For point iv), Sartre replies that because human experience and values are at the heart of his project, existentialism is necessarily engaged in human reality and the undertakings of humans.

Few students received the full 8 marks for this question. Many who attempted this question did not know all four charges, but most provided Sartre's defence of existence before essence without addressing the points in any detail with this defence. For 8 marks, it was essential that each point mentioned in part i) be addressed in part ii) separately.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	28	17	18	16	21	1.85

**Would Plato agree with Sartre's concept of a morally good life?**

No, because it lacks a strict prescription for action, and leaves it to the individual. Plato would not agree with Sartre's conception of the Good Life.

This lack of prescription is its weakness; does existentialism advocate a crude form of moral relativism, and allow hedonism?

The most common problem with this question was that an opinion was offered without any supporting reasons or comments. Some students argued that Sartre and Plato would agree because they shared the same concept of human nature.

### Question 3

*'It is thought that every activity, artistic or scientific, in fact every deliberate action or pursuit, has for its object the attainment of some good. We may therefore assent to the view which has been expressed that 'the good' is that at which all things aim' (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1094a).*

a

**Aristotle says that the Good Life is mainly a matter of fulfilling our function.**

ai-ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	36	16	9	10	12	17	1.98

ai

**What does Aristotle think our function actually is?**

aii

**How does he reach this position?**

- an activity of the soul in accordance with reason/rational principle
- our function must be unique to us
- we share nutrition and growth with plants and animals, and perception with animals
- so, what is unique is our rational activity

Many students who answered this question made the mistake of paraphrasing the prompt as an answer, i.e. our function is to pursue the Good Life. It therefore meant that their later answers were also incorrect, or partially relevant, at best.

bi-ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	32	21	15	10	10	4	8	1.88

bi

**What are his reasons for thinking that we must have a function?**

bii

**Are his reasons sound?**

- Carpenters, for example, have function, so man as such must have one
- eyes, hands, for example, have functions, so the whole person must have one
- carpenters, for example, have their function because of social need and interests; does this apply to humankind as such?
- does what holds true for each part hold true for the whole?, e.g. a round mosaic made of square tiles.

Many students who scored well in the first section, faltered in the second because they had no opinion or criticisms to offer.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	21	33	23	11	12	1.60

**Do you think Aristotle's overall argument about the function of humans is reasonable?**

- why does our function (and the nature of the good life) have to be unique to us?
- what if Martians or dolphins are as rational as us?
- what if something else instead of rationality were unique to humankind, e.g. cruelty?

Few students were willing to support their opinions with some evidence from the text or from their own thinking.

### Question 4

*'Political power within communities should be in the hands of people with these characteristics, and right consists in them ...' (Plato, Gorgias, 491d).*

a

Callicles holds that some moral rules are a matter of convention, and some are to be found in nature.

ai–ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	14	19	22	45	1.97

ai

What kind of morality does he favour?

aii

What reasons does he offer for his preferred position?

- the natural sort; the one found in nature
- weak second rate people who form the majority make rules to serve their own interests but by looking at nature, it tells us that it favours the strong.

Overall, students performed quite well on this question on Callicles and Socrates.

bi–iii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	8	10	18	17	15	32	3.17

bi

In the early part of the discussion, what does Callicles think that his preferred morality says about how superior people should treat inferior people?

bii

What does Callicles initially mean by the term ‘superior’?

biii

What unwelcome consequences of Callicles’ position are then pointed out by Socrates?

- the superior should dominate the inferior

and

- they should have more material goods than the inferior.

By superior he means stronger. The masses are collectively stronger than any individual therefore as the ‘strongest’ they would have right on their side

Most students scored at least 1 mark for this question. The main problem was in the amount of detail in answers. In most cases, full marks were not awarded because not all points were made.

ci–ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	11	16	17	15	13	10	9	9	3.12

ci

What is Callicles’ final view about the sort of people who should rule the community?

cii

Do you favour Callicles’ initial position or his final position on who should run a community? Give reasons for your answer.

- those who have political cleverness AND courage
- initial position criticism: what happens in nature tells us what does happen, not what ought to happen; those who favour this position need to argue against this criticism
- latter position: mentioning skill in politics seems a reasonable requirement for running a community, as is the need for courage in making unpopular decisions.

Many students did not include ‘courage’ in their answers to part i). There were some good responses to the final part. Most students had coherent reasons for accepting or rejecting Callicles’ view on political leadership.

### Question 5

*‘But men in general sometimes flee death as the greatest of evils, sometimes long for it as a relief from the evils of life.’ (Epicurus, Letter To Menoeceus).*

a

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	12	12	17	59	2.22

Later in the text, Epicurus claims that ‘death is nothing to us’. How does he argue for this claim?

When we are, death has not come and when death has come, we no longer are or, whatever causes no annoyance when it is present, causes only a groundless pain in the expectation.

This part of Question 5b was answered quite well.

b

Epicurus also says that 'pleasure is the end and aim' – but not all pleasures should be chosen.

bi–ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	9	13	20	18	19	21	2.88

bi

Why not?

bii

Which pleasures does he think should be chosen?

- some pleasures bring greater pains or annoyance, while some pains yield pleasures. The pleasures we should seek are the less risky ones AND those that avoid or prevent pain, e.g. plain fare and wisdom.

The most common problem in this question was the absence of the point about the pleasures we seek being also those that avoid or prevent pain.

c

Epicurus claims that the wise person scorns fate and it is better to accept the legends of the Gods than the necessity of the naturalists.

ci–ii

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	24	13	16	13	10	10	8	6	2.59

ci

What are his reasons for this?

cii

Do you think they are sound? Give reasons for your answer.

- one should scorn fate because only some things happen of necessity, some happen by chance, and some by our own agency. So it is better to accept the legends of the Gods because it gives us some hope of escape (unlike the necessity of the naturalist)
- what if natural necessity is providing something good?
- what if we are honouring the wrong Gods?

This question was poorly answered. It was evident from the responses that few students were sufficiently familiar enough with the text to answer this question. Though it is a bad argument, one is made, and an opinion of the student was then sought.

## Section C

(Available marks 30)

The answers in this section are suggested ones as the questions are deliberately left open and general; students may focus on one particular argument and may not have covered all of the criticisms mentioned.

### Question 1

Examine and evaluate the dualist's claim that all human beings consist of a separate mind and body. In your response refer to the views of at least one of the following: Plato, Descartes or Armstrong.

In this question, students are expected to discuss the proposition that humans are of distinct properties or 'substances', though it is not expected that students will necessarily adopt the usual Cartesian position. It is hoped that other types of dualism, and/or its usual opposing theory, materialism, are discussed.

Some points relevant to the discussion on the mind:

- Descartes' clear and distinct ideas of mind/body means there must be distinct mind/body
- Descartes' argument from divisibility and indivisibility.

Arguments for the non-physicality of mental states:

- e.g. their essential privacy, and their intentionality (they can be about things)
- platonic concept of soul (tripartite nature; immortal and imperishable)

and

- responsible for the retention of knowledge from one life to the next), compared to a degenerating, corrupt body.

Materialism/empiricism as basis for mind (Armstrong) and the obvious presence of a body:

- example of computers in confirming materialist/reductionist view of mind
- does a concept of mind necessarily entail that its possessor exhibit rational behaviour?, i.e. if animals and plants possess a body, can either/both possess a mind in the way a human can if the mind is a non-spatial substance?
- the Turing Test; can machines think/possess a mind in the way humans can?

Questions/Criticisms:

- the Cartesian conception of a mind trapped in a body leads to the problem of solipsism
- how do two distinct substances like mind and body, spatial and non spatial, material and non-material, interact?



- scientific/materialist explanations of mind offer no explanation for our self consciousness or for the subjective nature of personal experience
- support for Armstrong's materialism/Turing's machine model.

A common mistake in this popular question was in describing metaphysics as fundamentally opposed to materialism. Metaphysics, in post-Cartesian philosophy, is concerned with the features of an ultimate reality, what really exists. Most students selected Descartes and/or Plato as the exemplars of dualism. A common error was in attributing Descartes and Plato's dualism to their religious beliefs. Descartes and Plato are not dualists because they are deeply religious. They have arguments that support their claims, and these need to be addressed.

## Question 2

**Examine and evaluate the claim that the mind is a machine. In your response refer to the views of at least one of the following: Plato, Descartes, Turing or Armstrong.**

The focus of this question is on the material by Turing and Armstrong. Counter examples could be from Descartes and Plato.

Some positions that are relevant if the mind is a machine are:

- scientists favour materialism, the results of Science are more credible than philosophy and religion
- mental states are to be defined as such causes, and they happen to be physical states of the central nervous system
- Turing's model of mind as a machine.

Questions/Criticisms:

Explanatory gap between possession of brain (and its physical states) and the experience of these states subjectively, i.e:

- why should I experience melancholia if synapse A is activated?
- what is the programme that 'runs' the mind?

Any one of Turing's objections and responses:

- behaviourism is one materialist view, but it is unsatisfactory because it doesn't recognise that mental states are the inner causes of behaviour and dispositions
- does the machine model make a distinction between human and non-human minds?

This question did not generate many good responses. The most common problem was in misunderstanding materialism (Armstrong's, or others). The other main problem was the way students addressed the question. Many had separate paragraphs on what different concepts of mind were, often without once mentioning or describing what a 'machine' might be. In many cases, discussion of the question whether the mind is a machine was totally avoided.

## Question 3

**Explain and evaluate the claim that without science, anything we claim to know of the world is just speculation. In your response refer to the views of at least one of the following: Plato, Popper or Kuhn.**

Some critical questions inferred by this question are: do observations of the world (of 'gravity, levity, elastic force', etc.) really allow the same degree of objectivity and certainty as the abstractions of, for example geometry? Is it the method of science that gives this objectivity? Is it science alone that is responsible for progress?

Answers could include the following, as relevant:

**Plato** – True knowledge concerns the permanent and unchanging realm of reality, accessible only to the intellect, rather than the world of the senses. (Refer to one or more of the images of the Sun, Line and Cave.)

Critical questions: Can the existence of this realm be established? What does it contain? How are we to be sure that we understand it correctly?

**Popper** – A theory is scientific only if it is falsifiable, i.e. there are conceivable observations that would show it to be false. Einstein's theory of gravitation passes this test; astrology and the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Adler do not, for whatever happens is claimed to fit the theory. Unfalsifiability is not a strength in a theory, but a weakness. Confirming evidence should count only if it results from risky predictions, i.e. ones that are improbable apart from the theory.

Critical questions: Does Popper's account allow the establishment of positive scientific knowledge, as opposed to the negative knowledge that a given theory is false? What is confirmation, and is it the same as proof? Is the qualifying rule for confirming evidence too restrictive?

**Kuhn** – The emergence of a new scientific theory is often due to a crisis – the persistent failure of puzzles to be solved in the terms of the old theory. New theories involve the replacement of previously standard beliefs or procedures – a paradigm shift. Examples include Copernican astronomy, Lavoisier's oxygen theory of combustion, and Einstein's theory of relativity. When puzzles under the new paradigm become intolerable, a new shift may be required. Scientific progress is a matter of evolution, but not toward a fixed truth.



Critical questions: Aren't some scientific theories true, or at least truer than others? Does Kuhn's view really allow for scientific progress, as distinct from mere change?

There were some very good essays written on this question. The connection between empiricism and knowledge of the external world was clearly identified as the issue for discussion, and the focus was kept on this issue. However, there were still many essays that were just descriptions and summaries of different arguments, without an attempt to link or integrate these ideas into a coherent framework.

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