

Philosophy GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2002 examination saw a marked improvement compared to the 2001 results. This was due to:

- 2002 being the first examination where students who completed VCE Philosophy Units 1 and 2 were examined at the 3 and 4 level
- improved teacher confidence with the material
- teachers being more successful in covering all components of the course
- good attendances at support sessions offered by the VCAA, LaTrobe and Melbourne Universities.

Generally, responses to Section A and B questions were accurate, detailed and very well expressed. Fewer students felt the need to give large tracts of irrelevant material (usually biographical). Compared with 2001, fewer students left sections of the paper unanswered, or responded with 'we did not study him'. The responses in the evaluation and analyses parts of Section B were a substantial improvement on 2001. Students need to have thought about and be 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 getting students to give brief answers in Section A and develop more detailed responses in Section B; however, the main difficulty were the essays in Section C. It was evident that many 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.

Some students still answered all five questions in Section B where the clear instruction is to do **any three out of five**. Students are not awarded extra marks for answering more questions.

Section A

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

Apart from incorrect responses, some answers were so brief or poorly expressed, that it was difficult to assess what students actually knew. Answers are supposed to be brief, so long as they are clear and unambiguous.

Question	Marks	%	Response
Question 1	a		What does Sartre mean by his claim that existence precedes essence?
	0/3 1/3 2/3 3/3 (Average mark 1.85)	25 12 18 46	• man turns up, man exists • afterwards he defines himself • man is nothing else but what he makes of himself Quite well answered. Most students had a basic understanding of Sartre's reversal of Aristotle's claim that essence precedes. Often, the first point was given as an answer. Though rewarded, it is insufficient.
Question 2	b		What reasons does he give for this claim?
	0/2 1/2 2/2 (Average mark 1.0)	40 19 41	• there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive it • therefore there is no fixed or given human nature Students often responded to this question with 'there is no God'. The second part of there being no fixed human nature is an important (and essential) part of the answer.
Question 2	a		Why does Callicles think philosophy is suitable for a young person, but not an older one?
	0/3 1/3 2/3 3/3 (Average mark 1.54)	20 27 33 21	• in the young, it opens the mind and neglect of philosophy condemns one to a low estimation of oneself • in the old, any two of: - out of touch with human nature - incapable of undertaking practical activities - little participation in public life (limits development) - unable to defend themselves in court Usually answered well, but for 3 marks, students needed to mention three points.

	b 0/2 31 1/2 37 2/2 33 (Average mark 1.02)	How does Socrates defend philosophy? By posing important moral and practical questions: - What sort of person should one be? - What should we do when we are young and when we are old? - How thoroughly should I devote myself to my occupation? - Disharmony, or conflict within the self, can be resolved by philosophy? Students often floundered with this question. Many answered with the phrase that 'it was good for you', without any specifics. Vagueness was not rewarded.
Question 3	a 0/3 2 1/3 7 2/3 39 3/3 52 (Average mark 2.42)	Which three of the following does Aristotle include in his conception of eudemonia? (i) friendship (ii) activity of the soul (iii) great wealth (iv) virtue (v) beauty Answer: (i), (ii), and (iv) Students who did not achieve full marks often gave beauty as an answer. Aristotle says that, though desirable, beauty is neither essential nor necessary for eudemonia.
	b 0/2 26 1/2 25 2/2 48 (Average mark 1.22)	Outline one of the kind of lives Aristotle rejects. Give one of his reasons for rejecting it. One mark for a way of life, 1mark for his reason for rejecting it: - honour is too superficial as it depends on those who bestow it rather than the honour of those who receive it - possession of excellence could be compatible with inactivity or misfortune in which case it could not be associated with happiness - wealth is merely useful and for the sake of something else - slaves cannot perform virtuous acts as they are under the control of a master - rejects amusement as valuable to a good man as it is a strange end - rejects pleasure as it's less than human (bovine). Many answered this question quite well. The range of options made it relatively easy to find some examples.
Question 4	a 0/2 10 1/2 38 2/2 52 (Average mark 1.42)	In 'The Phaedo' what does Socrates say happens to the soul after death? - soul is immortal and lives on unharmed and is imperishable, or - soul makes a journey to the next world (transmigration) Generally, few problems or misunderstandings were evident in this question.
	b 0/3 31 1/3 28 2/3 24 3/3 17 (Average mark 1.27)	According to Socrates, why is it important to have a 'pure soul'? - as the soul is immortal it carries with it the misdeeds of one life into the next - hence, death is no escape from evil - only being good is Some students confused this question with Socrates defence of philosophy, and thus responded by saying that it is important to have a pure soul to do philosophy.
Question 5	a 0/1 32 1/1 68 (Average mark 0.68)	What does the Turing Test mean? - an agent which passes the test can be thought of as a thinking thing, or - fooling a human being into thinking the machine is a human being Most students answered this question correctly. A common mistake was that the test signified that men are machines.

	b 0/4 33 1/4 12 2/4 15 3/4 14 4/4 25 (Average mark 1.85)	Outline two potential objections to the Turing Test that Turing raises. For each of these objections state one response made by Turing. Any two of the following objection/response pairs: - theological objection: thinking is a function of man's God given soul. Machines have no souls 'Heads In the Sand': the thought of machines with minds is too awful to contemplate. An emotive rather than rational position - Goedel's Theorem: that large logical systems cannot prove some statements that are formulated by that system, therefore some questions may fail to get a response from the machine, or elicit an incorrect answer. But humans also exhibit these qualities - consciousness lacking: a machine must be self aware. Conscious of having written something, not just of having written. It also demands that the machine have feelings. But this is a solipsist's view. We use behaviourist principles in looking for other minds in people, why not machines - disabilities: machines can't enjoy strawberries, tell right from wrong. But some human activities are not important for a machine. Machines can be subject to their own thinking in that they can help to make their own programs - Lady Lovelace Objection: machines cannot do anything innovative or original. This collapses into a solipsist argument - continuity of the Nervous System: a discrete state machine can't imitate the behaviour of the nervous system. But both machines could give the correct answer, so they can't be distinguished - informality of Behaviour: If men had rules to live their life by, they would be machines. There are no such rules, so men are not machines. But this is the error of the undistributed middle. If we substitute 'laws of behaviour' for 'rules to live your life by', then these laws would also be difficult to determine - ESP: can't logically ignore this objection, but we can make the test ESP proof - other, e.g. chess playing (is Deep Blue more than the sum of its programmers?) Most students gave at least one objection and response of Turing's. Apart from not knowing two objections and responses, the common mistake was to give their (or someone else's) objection, not Turing's.
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Section B

The questions in this section require students to display more detail and depth of understanding than in Section A. The most common area of concern was answering part c) of each question. 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 are not clear or good ones, the fact that students have given some thought to the views of a philosopher will be rewarded with some marks.

In most part b) and c) questions, a mark was given for the expression and/or persuasiveness of the response.

Question 1	'What nature approves and sanctions ... is this: the only authentic way of life is to do nothing to hinder or restrain the expansion of one's desires, until they can grow no longer.' Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> , 491e–492a	What desires does Callicles identify as virtues? luxury, excess (pleasures) and licence (freedom) are virtues and happiness; a sensual hedonism. Everything else is mere convention. The main difficulty was that the virtues listed were often examples of pleasure at the expense of mentioning freedom or luxury.
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	b 0/6 13 1/6 13 2/6 12 3/6 13 4/6 12 5/6 16 6/6 21 (Average mark 3.32)	Outline an argument that Socrates uses to counter Callicles' claim made in the quote above. i) the argument of qualified pleasures (the catamite) or, ii) argument of appetite and thirst, or iii) the leaky jar simile – the general argument is: want and desire are painful; the sating of desire brings pleasure; hence pain and pleasure are together therefore good not identical with pleasure, or evil with pain, or iv) coward feels more pleasure than the brave at the retreat of the enemy. If pleasure is the good, then this makes the coward very good. This seems a perverse thing to say. Most students responded with a satisfactory description of a relevant argument, but the problem was that the details of this argument were often lacking. Vague, general answers attracted fewer marks.
	c 0/6 13 1/6 10 2/6 15 3/6 15 4/6 14 5/6 15 6/6 18 (Average mark 3.25)	Compare and evaluate Callicles view of the good life to Nietzsche's view. - similar in both Nietzsche and Callicles in that both thought that excesses and pleasure (material or sensual) should be indulged, but Callicles argues for a strict Hedonism and social Darwinism - with hedonism, 'pleasures' may have morally reprehensible consequences - no valuing of social responsibilities - no privileging of any moral framework by Nietzsche. Most students answered that both would hold very similar views. Whilst correct, there was little in those answers that would indicate clear knowledge or some prior thinking on the student's part. Some details on the position of each in the student's comparison were essential.
	Question 2 'Our states of consciousness differ ... And if quality of consciousness matters, then anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected with virtue.' Iris Murdoch <i>The Sovereignty of Good</i> , p. 84.	
	a 0/5 9 1/5 16 2/5 11 3/5 19 4/5 20 5/5 25 (Average mark 3.0)	What argument does Murdoch use to justify the role of art as a means to virtue? - art is connected with beauty - the necessary role of authority and hierarchy - it is through beauty that one experiences a selflessness, an ability to conceive transcendent values because one experiences transcendence - selflessness is the path to virtue Students who attempted the Murdoch question often had a good understanding of her argument. It was the level of detail, and the logical order, in describing her argument that often determined whether a student was awarded high marks.
	bi–iii 0/6 15 1/6 7 2/6 14 3/6 17 4/6 18 5/6 12 6/6 16 (Average mark 3.18)	What similarities, if any, can you make between Sartre and Murdoch in their positions on: a) the origin of moral values b) responsibility to others c) the role of emotions in moral decisions - both see man as the origin of moral value - neither believe in a God or teleological system - both have social responsibility/element as part of their ethical systems (man chooses for all men: Sartre). Murdoch is more explicit - both insist that emotions are essential in making moral decisions (Sartre's example of the student and his conflicting duties) Most students gave an answer to some of the above, but not with sufficient detail to warrant full marks, e.g. direct examples from the text would be useful in a question such as this. Phrases 'like emotions are important' were common (correct, but too vague to be of any value).

	c 0/4 14 1/4 16 2/4 21 3/4 22 4/4 27 (Average mark 2.33)	Who do you think has the better guide for a moral life, Sartre or Murdoch? Why? • Murdoch outlines a means to a transcendent set of values. Sartre makes no such formulation • Sartre's description for a good life is less prescriptive than Murdoch's and so is 'realistic' • Murdoch gives beauty a transcendent nature. How can this be reconciled with aesthetic theories and personal experience that lends weight to the argument that beauty is an inherently subjective concept/experience? • Murdoch can also be seen as 'realistic', i.e. our experience seems to confirm that morality is from a/some external source/s. She also assumes that we are selfish • is recognition of authority and hierarchy essential for an experience of beauty? The emphasis in this question was on what the student thought and why. It was common for the second part of the question to be completely ignored. An answer to a question such as this that lacks reasons is practically worthless. Whether a student prefers Murdoch's or Sartre's guide is of secondary importance. It is their reasons for doing so which is the important issue.
Question 3	'The European disguises himself <i>in morality</i> because he has become a sick, sickly, crippled animal, who has good reasons for being 'tame', because he is almost an abortion, an imperfect, weak and clumsy thing ...' Nietzsche, <i>The Joyful Wisdom</i>, p. 352	
	a 0/3 14 1/3 19 2/3 29 3/3 38 (Average mark 1.89)	According to Nietzsche, what is responsible for man becoming '... a sick, sickly, crippled animal.'? • the taming of the 'beast of prey' is responsible; only social man has a need for morality because it experiences anxiety and ennui • it creates modes of life that have unattainable ideals and man punishes himself for not meeting them • European morality suppresses the will to life or power, and extols humility, selflessness and compassion. Nietzsche views these values as weakness. A lack of detail marred some student's responses. By giving examples of the type of morality, or the impossible ideals that man lives under, rather than just say 'the suppression of the will to power', then students would demonstrate clearly to examiners that Nietzsche's claim is understood.
	b 0/8 4 1/8 8 2/8 12 3/8 18 4/8 14 5/8 14 6/8 13 7/8 9 8/8 8 (Average mark 4.19)	Why is Nietzsche excited by the claim that God is dead and what does he say about the role of religion in moral systems? • with God dead, then Man is free from the burden of having to believe in a version of morality based on Christianity • exciting possibilities: the re-evaluation of all morals • Religions (Christianity) have been the major influence on European morality. They (religious leaders/prophets) recognise that Man needs a system of belief; one that rejects all other systems and holds them as 'bad' or 'evil'. Religions have made the following contributions to the practice of morality: • they have used routine to dull the mind and natural instincts and reflexes • religion (the desire to belief) is a manifestation; a weakness of will • the role of the priest as a protector and wounder of the herd, ie. that religions have created an ideal man, one far removed from the real man that is on earth • the creation of guilt in and for man is also one of the consequences of modern religions. We distrust man • religions also foster the belief that truth is divine; so divine that we recognise the great lie we have told ourselves for 2 millennia: that there is a God • morality is now about self denial, selflessness, modesty and chasteness. A question which required a substantial degree of detail and accuracy to be awarded full marks. The question has two parts, and often students would feel that in answering the first, they had somehow answered the second, i.e. because of the liberation from the constraints of morality based on religion (death of God), then religion can offer nothing to man. This is clearly a misreading of the question.

	c 0/4 18 1/4 17 2/4 21 3/4 22 4/4 22 (Average mark 2.13)	From your description in part b), what conclusions can you make about Nietzsche's attitude toward social responsibility? - Nietzsche argues for a re-evaluation of values such as compassion, pity etc. To prescribe a guide to social responsibility would be an anathema to Nietzsche - this suggests that a type of social Darwinism might prevail; in fact it could be argued that, for Nietzsche, this form of social organisation or set of values are the only moral values that could be permitted. A few students suggested that Nietzsche has a high regard for social responsibility, i.e. 'I am my brother's keeper.' This is clearly incorrect based on the text for study. Most who did not achieve full marks fell into the trap of a too brief response, e.g. 'He did not value it.' An extra sentence or two explaining why (from the material mentioned in part b) would have improved their answers.
Question 4	'We know that man is made for the stars, created for the everlasting, born for eternity. We know that man is crowned with glory and honour, and so long as he lives on the low level he will be frustrated, disillusioned and bewildered.' Martin Luther King, <i>What is a Man?</i>, p. 26	
	a 0/3 10 1/3 12 2/3 25 3/3 53 (Average mark 2.2)	Plato's view of human nature is that we all have a material body and an immaterial mind. Does King agree or disagree with this view? Give reasons for your answer. - King agrees because man is a physical, rational, and spiritual being who sins. He is a dualist, and though concepts of mind and body may vary between he and Plato, they both hold a similar position on Man - King claims the current valuing of mind over body is wrong as it denies our nature as physical beings. Quite well answered. The difference between partial and full marks was the fact that King did not over-emphasise the importance of the mind at the expense of the body (unlike Plato).
	b 0/6 8 1/6 12 2/6 17 3/6 18 4/6 18 5/6 12 6/6 16 (Average mark 3.25)	Outline Martin Luther King's description of Man. What does Martin Luther King mean when he states that Man 'lives on the low level ...'? - the dualism of King is supplemented by his belief that man's moral state is a consequence of his relationship with God - man is a sinner and until he recognises this, his frustration will continue - for King, man has misused his freedom. Modern man seeks everyone to blame but himself ie. biological/social factors - man is a rational agent and is free to choose his actions, therefore he is responsible for his actions - King also recognises the dichotomy in Man's personality: Augustine's plea to be good, but not just yet, or Plato's simile of the charioteer - he also makes the point that Man is not meant for evil ALL his life; the parable of the prodigal son shows that if Man 'comes home' (to God) then he will be forgiven. Most students correctly outlined King's description of Man, but had real problems in explaining his phrase that Man 'lives on the low level ...' For a number of students, King's <i>What Is Man?</i> is a text studied with a brief acknowledgment of the philosophical assumptions of his description of man, and why Man is a sinner.
	c 0/6 14 1/6 17 2/6 19 3/6 15 4/6 14 5/6 11 6/6 10 (Average mark 2.68)	Do you think that Martin Luther King is justified in using religion as a source of moral values? Why? Yes – as a psychological comfort to explain suffering even if God does not exist, belief in transcendent values is important for social cohesion, justice and fairness. No – without a scientific/material basis; why would a loving God allow the innocent to suffer? Any other reasoned response; use of Murdoch, Sartre or Nietzsche to justify or amplify their response. Answers that were exclusively religious, e.g. 'God's law is the one true law.' were not accepted. Reasons, not dogma, are essential in answers to philosophy questions. Many students said that King was justified in using religion as a source of moral values purely because he was a Christian, and therefore if he believed it, he was justified. This retreat into a simplistic moral relativism must be avoided.

Question 5		'Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting point of every choice and aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule to judge every good thing.' Epicurus, <i>Letter To Menoeceus</i>
a		What does Epicurus mean by pleasure?
0/3	18	pleasure is the absence of pain and trouble in the soul.
1/3	16	It was essential to the answer that the trouble in the soul component be mentioned.
2/3	31	This part was often omitted.
3/3	35	
(Average mark 1.83)		
b		Outline at least three important pieces of advice given by Epicurus to Menoeceus on leading the good life.
0/7	10	Three of the following (with some detail in explanation) are necessary:
1/7	7	seek wisdom because it is good for the soul (reflection)
2/7	12	always direct yourself toward happiness
3/7	12	God is an immortal and blessed being; what must be worshipped is his immortality and blessedness
4/7	11	death is not to be feared by the wise
5/7	13	no terror in life for those who feel no terror in ending life
6/7	13	healthy body and security of mind lead to a blessed life
7/7	21	sober reasoning and moderation in pleasures is necessary for a happy life
(Average mark 4.06)		DO NOT accept friendship: not in the advice given to Menoeceus by Epicurus, but is in the Alain de Botton video. The last point was the most common error in this question. Overall, this question was answered quite well. There was a reasonably good understanding and recalling of Epicurus' advice to Menoeceus.
c		Does Epicurus' advice provide a good guide to leading a good moral life in today's society? Give reasons for your answer.
0/5	10	the criteria of pleasure seems relevant in the current value of moral subjectivism
1/5	11	the critique of excess is relevant to modern capitalism
2/5	14	Students were also rewarded for using relevant examples from their own experiences to justify their argument/opinion.
3/5	17	In part c) the emphasis is not on the persona; but the reasoned response of the student. Their experiences and ideas are important, but as material or reasons <i>in the service of</i> their position (a <i>considered</i> opinion) as to the value of Epicurus' ideas.
4/5	21	
5/5	26	
(Average mark 3.06)		

Section C

(Average mark 4.0/Available marks 10)

The answers are suggested ones only 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.

This was the section where most students had trouble. The main reasons were:

- students ran out of time
- students wrote a summary of ideas without examining the question.

A solution to the first problem can be to attempt the essay question first, then Section B, then Section A. If a student has difficulties with managing their time, then it might be better to sacrifice some marks in Section A than up to 20 marks in Section C. As for the second issue, planning and addressing the question are essential elements in a philosophy essay.

Question 1

The view known as dualism holds that the mind (or soul) and the body are two different things, though they may be somehow related. Outline and critically evaluate one or two arguments for dualism.

Possibilities include the following:

- Descartes' argument from doubt and certainty
- 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)
- the argument from psychic phenomena
- Platonic concept of soul (tripartite nature, immortal and imperishable)
- the Turing Test; can machines think/possess a mind?

Questions/Criticisms:

- Solipsism of the cogito
- Materialism/empiricism as basis for mind (Armstrong)
- reductionism of science
- distinction between animals, men, machines
- interactionism: the problems of substance dualism
- example of computers in confirming materialist/reductionist view of mind.

In this question, the main problem was the lack of **evaluation** on the part of students. Sometimes, dualism was referred to as if there were only one type, and not as varieties of the basic idea of mind/body. A lack of subtle understanding indicates a lack of critical reading and thinking on this issue. It makes it difficult for a student to make sophisticated and intelligent evaluations of arguments if their understanding is elementary and limited.

Question 2

Outline and evaluate (a) Armstrong's particular version of materialism, and (b) his arguments in support of materialism.

Answers should cover the following:

- scientists favour materialism
- science is more credible than philosophy and religion because it yields consensus
- science converges on the truth as an explanation of consensus.

Questions/Criticisms:

- explanatory gap between possession of brain (and its physical states) and the experience of these states subjectively ie. why should I experience melancholia if synapse A is activated?
- support for Armstrong's materialism
- example of computers in confirming materialist/reductionist view of mind
- Kuhn's alternative explanation of consensus in Science (guided by community).

This was not a particularly popular question, but those who answered it did quite well because the question had clear requirements, and most students found it easy to write a relevant response; one that addressed the two parts of this question. They understood Armstrong's case for materialism (i.e. why we should treat this argument seriously) and then, **his** version of materialism. This distinction is important. One critical mistake by some students was that they said that Armstrong accepts materialism without reservation.

Question 3

To what extent does science give us knowledge? Answer with reference to the views of at least two of the following: Plato, Newton, Popper, and Kuhn.

Answers should include the following as relevant points:

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, the Line and the Cave.). Knowledge as justified true belief.

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?

Newton – the science of mechanics is not necessarily inexact and imperfect, but potentially as accurate and rationally demonstrable as geometry.

Critical question: Do observations of the world (of 'gravity, levity, elastic force', etc.) really allow the same degree of objectivity and certainty as the abstractions of geometry?

Popper – a theory is scientific only if it is falsifiable, i.e. there are conceivable observations which 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 which 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?

This was the most popular essay question. There was enough material in this question for students to concentrate on just two different philosophers. A common problem was that students tried to cover too much ground and ended up giving a summary of Plato’s, Popper’s, Turing’s, and Kuhn’s ideas. These ‘essays’ were little more than four long paragraphs that were not tied together with an argument or considered opinion. The question asks if science gives us knowledge. A good place to start is if indeed this is true. The next part is to show (demonstrate) why this is so (or not). The material used is only as good as the argument it is supporting.

More successful essays usually contained a good comparison between the empiricism of science, and its subsequent characteristic that truth is not permanent, and Plato’s concept of knowledge as infallible and timeless.