



2009

Philosophy GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Compared with previous years, students' performances on the 2009 Philosophy examination were varied. Although most students demonstrated a sufficient grasp of the arguments expressed in the set texts, some did not have an accurate understanding of key concepts or of concepts associated with the texts. This was particularly the case with the Unit 4 texts. Although it was pleasing to see that most students recognised the significance of evaluation, many students struggled to produce arguments for their claims, offering lists of assertions instead.

Students should always make sure that they write the number of the essay question to which they are responding in the appropriate box in Section D of the exam.

Areas of strength and weakness

Strengths

- Many students demonstrated a good understanding of the Unit 3 texts and the major criticisms associated with the arguments expressed in these texts.
- Fewer students confused the directive to 'evaluate' with 'elaborate' and, when answering such questions, many students understood the significance of giving reasons to support their claims.

Weaknesses

- Students often wasted time and space repeating the question in their answer. For example, in Section A, Question 2, some students devoted at least half of their response repeating Callicles' position, when only an evaluation of this position was sought.
- A number of students appeared to struggle with the directive 'include some reference to' and either gave only a description of a particular philosopher's viewpoint or made cursory mention of a philosopher. As such questions require students to demonstrate both an understanding of the set texts and the capacity to 'do' philosophy, neither approach is adequate. Students should instead produce personal responses which draw on the viewpoints and arguments expressed in the set texts to develop their claims.
- Some students lacked an adequate knowledge of the arguments, ideas, concepts and viewpoints expressed in the set texts. A surprising number of students mistook the shift from Ptolemaic to Copernican astronomy as a shift away from a belief in a flat earth, and identified Galileo as the founder of the heliocentric theory of the solar system. Some students identified Armstrong with Behaviourism and cited Descartes as the founder of *qualia*.
- Many students did not provide reasons to support their claims unless explicitly requested to do so. For example, in Section B, Question 1, a large number of students simply provided a list of rules without any reasons for why these rules were selected. Likewise, in Question 2 of the same section, a significant number of students did not develop their view of the good life beyond a list of assertions and opinions.
- Some students did not read the questions carefully enough and did not respond exactly to the question asked. In Section A, Question 1, a large number of students described, rather than discussed, the usefulness of Aristotle's Mean. In Question 4 of the same section, many students evaluated either Murdoch's notion of unselfing or the suggested means through which it may be realised, rather than the assumption of human selfishness.
- Some students did not respond to the **entire** question asked. It was disappointing to read otherwise excellent responses which did not include the required evaluations or examples.
- Some students became confused in their responses. When asked to outline and evaluate an argument it is essential that students evaluate the argument that they have outlined. A student cannot be awarded marks for the evaluation of a different argument.



SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section A

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	17	29	46	2.2

Possible criticisms of the usefulness of Aristotle's Mean include the following.

- Although the Mean provides guidance about the governance of our 'passions,' it does not explicitly tell us the right way to behave in a given situation. For example, I know I must be neither rash nor cowardly to be brave, but what exactly is the brave choice?
- Some vices bear a strong resemblance to their intermediaries, for example, courage and rashness. Although Aristotle suggests that this resemblance can actually aid us in finding the virtue, surely it could be argued that it could also result in us confusing the vice for the virtue.
- As Aristotle notes, we are more inclined to pick the vice that least resembles the virtue. It may therefore be suggested that virtue requires us to push against our natural inclinations and for that reason the Mean cannot necessarily ensure that we will be virtuous unless we are already.
- What appears virtuous largely depends on where we are looking from, for example, to the cowardly, the brave individual appears rash. Thus the efficacy of the Mean is dependent on one's character.
- Not every virtue is a mean, for example, sincerity and accuracy.
- As Aristotle acknowledges, acting by the Mean alone cannot make us virtuous as virtue also requires knowledge, right intent and proceeding from a fixed character. So simply practising the Mean cannot make us virtuous (despite Aristotle's claim that it habituates us to virtue) unless there are other changes within us.
- As Aristotle also notes, it is hard to hit the Mean for it is narrow and precise.

Points in favour of the usefulness of the Mean include the following.

- The Mean provides us with a practical tool for guiding our behaviour in a given situation by asking us to reflect on whether our feelings and actions are excessive or deficient in respect to this or that.
- Through the practice of the Mean we exercise our rationality. Surely rationality is the cornerstone of virtue as it demands that we think things through before we act.
- In relation to the above point and as Aristotle says, by continually practising the Mean we will be habituated to a certain way of behaving. Although the Mean cannot **guarantee** a virtuous life, it is hard to see how the constant practice of virtuous action would not lead to some deeper transformation.

To receive full marks for this question students needed to provide a statement of response to the question (for example, 'very useful,' 'useful up to a point', etc.) and provide reasons for this response. Students who simply stated that the Mean is useful because it allows us to avoid excess and deficit could not be awarded full marks.

Following is an example of a student response. Although somewhat imprecise in its discussion of the Mean's adaptability to context, it is nevertheless a reasonable response.

Aristotle's Mean is helpful as it provides an aim for humans concerning the good life. Aristotle's theory is also reasonable, as he takes into account the subjectivity of how each individual can achieve the mean, and also how it can steer us away from the vices of excess and defect and towards more virtuous behaviour

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	15	24	26	25	2.4

- Socrates first invites Callicles to clarify whether by 'better' he means 'superior' and whether the terms 'superior', 'stronger' and 'better' are synonymous. He then points out that, as the masses are superior to a single individual, they are, according to Callicles' reasoning, the better people. If this is the case, then what Callicles' has thus far referred to as convention is, in fact, a reflection of nature, meaning the view expressed in the question is incorrect and what is right is what is decreed by convention.
- Socrates also uses the technique of *reductio ad absurdum* to demonstrate the ridiculousness of Callicles' claim – doctors should have more food or drink than anyone else, and cobblers more shoes.

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Other possible evaluations included the following.

- Callicles' argument rests on the supposition that what occurs in nature is what is right. Thus he may be accused of committing the naturalistic fallacy.
- Callicles' argument also supposes that what occurs in nature ought to prescribe human values. Thus he may be accused of the fallacy of deriving ought from is.
- It is questionable whether nature does endorse the view that Callicles espouses and whether terms such as 'better', 'worse', 'more capable' and 'less capable' can really be applied to nature.
- Can nature really serve as an accurate or appropriate guide for human behaviour given the myriad of things (civilization, self-awareness, conscience, etc.) which make us different from the rest of nature?

To receive full marks for this question students needed to present a developed evaluation (an evaluative point or points supported by reasons) which included some reference to Socrates' response. Students could not receive full marks for simply repeating Socrates' response to Callicles' argument.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Here Callicles commits the naturalistic fallacy, by stating as something is in nature, so should it be in society. He also fails to initially define 'better' and 'worse' people. This allows Socrates to employ reductio ad absurdum to show Callicles the implications his argument has; that the 'better' person – a cook perhaps, is entitle to more food than those with lesser cooking skills and knowledge.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	9	23	33	31	2.8

- Callicles' hedonistic view holds that the happiest life is one of 'sensual, self-indulgent freedom'. The morality of natural law (as opposed to conventional morality) says that it is right to seek and exert power so that we may indulge ourselves as fully as possible. If morality is understood in this sense, then for Callicles the purpose of morality is to facilitate a happy life. However, if we consider morality as that which is prescribed by convention, then, according to Callicles, the purpose of morality is not happiness, but to keep in check the stronger members of society.
- Socrates does not explicitly discuss the purpose of morality in the text; however, he does draw links between justice, self-discipline and happiness, and claims that a happy life depends on a state of mind which accords with justice and order – with which doing wrong conflicts.
- For Aristotle, happiness (eudaemonia) is brought about by performing our unique function to a degree of excellence. In the field of virtue, in an effort to find the mean between the extremes of vice, we exercise our unique human function. Thus, although the concept of virtue is not synonymous with morality, we could say that because it encompasses the principle of morality, Aristotle would agree that there is a definite link between happiness and morality.
- Aristotle also claims that all actions have an end and the final end is happiness (eudaemonia), so in this sense the purpose of morality must be happiness.
- For Nietzsche, morality may be seen as antithetical to human happiness, for it expresses the deep and widespread herd instinct of obedience, tameness, peacefulness and usefulness to the herd. But other, and indeed higher, moralities are possible. An 'unconditional commander' who adopts such a morality may achieve a 'higher' happiness.
- Nietzsche also talks about happiness as a matter of repose, tranquillity and internal unity – something which is achieved by quelling the warring of conflicting desires and values with dogmas/moralities. This is not, however, what he would consider a positive thing, as it is far more preferable to use this conflict as a stimulus and 'enticement to life'.
- Murdoch does not specifically mention happiness in the text. However, it could be suggested that Murdoch would not agree that happiness is the purpose of morality because she makes a point of goodness for 'goodness' sake' and to achieve a good life we must abandon such attempts at happiness because they serve as obstacles to the real point, which is unselfing.

Although all philosophers were represented across the students' responses, Callicles and Nietzsche were popular choices. To receive full marks, students needed to provide an explicit statement in response to the question and provide an argument or arguments for this response which drew on the relevant philosophers. The best answers integrated the arguments and viewpoints of the selected philosopher(s) into a carefully reasoned, personal response.

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Following is an example of a high-scoring response. This response is particularly notable for the way in which it integrates a personal viewpoint and the viewpoint of a chosen philosopher.

Callicles would argue that 'human happiness is incompatible with enslavement to anyone.' He says the 'weak' use morality as a tool to disempower the 'strong' and this goes against the happiness of the 'strong.' However, if morality is not a convention, but something natural and universal, there is a good possibility that happiness is morality's purpose.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	27	13	17	19	24	2

Murdoch's two basic assumptions are that human beings are naturally selfish and that human life has no external point or *telos*.

Possible evaluations for the first of these assumptions include the following.

- Murdoch claims that we only have to look at the world to realise that humans are naturally selfish; however, it would seem that such observations also yield evidence to support the claim that we are naturally altruistic. A similar critique could be made of the human psyche.
- If, by selfish, Murdoch means self-interestedness, it is difficult to see how this must always be at odds with unselfishness as self-interestedness need not be pursued at the expense of others (for example, keeping yourself healthy).
- One might question whether selfishness is **natural** to us. Perhaps it results from something else, such as our social, political or economic context, or our place in history.

Possible evaluations of the second assumption include the following.

- Murdoch does not (and indeed cannot) offer any real evidence to support this argument.
- As she readily admits, its opposite could also be true.
- Various religious arguments (such as the proofs of the existence of God and religious revelation) dispute Murdoch's claim.

To receive full marks for this question, students needed to clearly identify one of the assumptions and provide a well-developed evaluation. Many students who identified the assumption of human selfishness evaluated the arguments associated with unselfing instead of this assumption. Such responses could only be awarded minimum marks.

Following is an example of a student response. Although the final part of the response has not been completely worked through, it is a very strong answer.

Murdoch assumes that all human beings are naturally – not wholly, but naturally –selfish, and to be unselfish requires that we push against the tide of our nature. This assumption is accurate; if a building caught fire, many people would claim their important possessions and escape, rather than helping their friends – our own survival comes above that of others. However, if one person saved someone else from the fire, he would be glorified, because humans strive to push against their nature and be unselfish. It is for this reason that Murdoch's assumption that humans are naturally selfish is indeed an accurate one.

Section B

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	5	10	11	20	20	29	4.2

Callicles

- Avoid the practice of philosophy as adults, as philosophy renders us incompetent in both public and private forums, makes us look like fools, causes us to avoid 'the thick of the agora' where a man 'earns distinction', and renders us unable to defend ourselves against our accusers.
- Avoid self-restraint and instead give vent to desire, as it is through desire that we are able to experience pleasure, which is synonymous with happiness and a good life.

Socrates

- Don't allow the desires to expand, as a life lived governed by desire is often painful. Also, a life of pleasure is not necessarily a 'good' life, as examples such as the arguments of thirst and the coward and the brave man demonstrate.



- Cultivate self-discipline as it is only through self-discipline that we are able to cultivate the discretion (a 'good mind') that enables us to discriminate between pleasures – a capacity which is the cornerstone of a good life.
- Socrates might also caution against listening to the words of the rhetoricians. Their goal is 'flattery'; therefore, they cannot help us develop the organised, self-disciplined mind which is so central to a happy life.

Aristotle

- Aristotle would also suggest that we avoid giving vent to our desires or 'passions.' In addition to the fact that foregrounding the pursuit of pleasure ignores what makes us distinctly human and reduces us to 'beasts', by failing to govern our passions we do not cultivate our capacity for virtue, which is central to a good life.
- Avoid the extremes of vice and instead learn to cultivate appropriate responses to situations by finding the Mean between these extremes.
- Exercise reason (our unique function) as only by exercising our reason can we hope to have a good life.
- Don't mistake a life of pleasure, moneymaking or honour for the good life.

Nietzsche

- Don't seek answers to the questions of morality in philosophy, as moral philosophy only reflects the experiences and perspectives (the 'creative moods') of the philosophers who produce it.
- Don't privilege reason over instinct, as reason counters instinct, which is life-affirming.
- Don't sedate the warring within by adopting a dogma, but treat it as 'one more stimulus and enticement to life'.
- Beware the morality of the 'herd' which has inverted (perverted) the drives in us that are 'highest and strongest'.
- It could be argued that Nietzsche would not offer any rules for the sign as the notion of rules are antithetical to his philosophy.

Murdoch

- Don't give in to the natural inclination towards selfishness and instead strive to act in accordance with what is right and real (see by the 'light' of the good).
- Avoid indulging in self-consoling fantasies which serve to veil reality.
- Don't deny the emotions (as Kant suggested) but instead find a way to transform or purify them, for in so doing we transform our consciousness – the very background condition for right action.
- Murdoch may also warn against the philosophies of the 'Kantian Man', which tend to cultivate our inclination towards selfishness by making us the sole arbiters of our moral universe.

Responses to this question varied greatly. Some students discussed selected philosophers' views about the nature of the good life without providing any examples of rules, whereas other students provided a list of rules without any further discussion. A small number of students discussed the stimulus in terms of how the selected philosophers might respond to the idea of the sign. Although these kinds of responses suggested that some students may not have read the question correctly, it was pleasing to see that most students observed (and understood) the directive to critically compare viewpoints.

To receive full marks for this question, students needed to provide, within the context of a critical comparison, either an explicit list of rules with some elaboration, or a generalised discussion of the kinds of things philosophers might wish to see on the sign. The best answers provided several examples of rules and rationalised these examples by briefly describing the selected philosophers' views about the nature of the good life, within the framework of a critical comparison.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Callicles, as a hedonist, would argue that satisfying all of one's desires in order to gain pleasure should be a 'do' in the rules to the good life. As such he would maintain that self-restraint and self-discipline are 'don'ts.' In claiming that the pursuit of pleasure through satisfying all one's desires is the good life however, Callicles fails to consider that one may never be content with what they have and hence self-indulgence will only lead to ones desires growing in number, rather than being completely fulfilled. Socrates on the other hand, would argue that self-indulgence and the pursuit of pleasure as a final end is a 'don't' in the good life, and rather self-restraint and self-discipline, leading to the development of an ordered mind, are 'do's.' Socrates, however, fails to take into account that whilst pleasure may not be the final purpose of the good life, it may be a component of it.

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Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	5	13	21	27	32	3.6

This question required students to draw connections between their own views of the good life and the views expressed in the set texts.

Overall, student performance was reasonably strong; however, a large number of students seemed to struggle to integrate the views expressed in the set texts into their discussion and thus mentioned the philosophers in only a cursory way. Other students offered an outline of a particular philosopher's view of the nature of the good life without any personal input, or took the position of the naïve relativist – 'everyone's view of the good life is different'. Many students simply wrote a list of assertions about their good life without offering any kind of rationale for their claims. None of these responses were sufficient to receive full marks as they either misinterpreted the question or did not provide a developed response. The best answers drew upon a set text or texts to produce a developed, personal view of the nature of the good life.

Following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

I agree with Murdoch that central to the good life is an understanding of reality. Human beings too often act without properly pausing to reflect on the reality of their situation. We cloud moral issues with our own need to assert our sense of self and our insecurities in this respect arise from our need for praise. We do not act rightly because we perceive right as such, rather because we have been informed to do so by our culture, time, religion, etc. Embracing reality requires a great deal of courage. I also agree with Nietzsche that morality requires a great deal of isolated contemplation by the individual. However, unlike Nietzsche, I do not believe isolation need be permanent or quite so vigorous. Rather the good life is an attempt to perceive reality as it truly is and, in attempting this, not to rely on the thoughts of others but to consider your own ideas

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	10	19	33	36	2.9

This question required students to state a position ('to what extent') and to provide an argument or arguments for this position. An overwhelming number of students chose to evoke relativism in their response and many referred to the set texts, although they were under no obligation to do so. While there were some strong answers to the question, a significant number of students misinterpreted it and, rather than discussing 'to what extent', they discussed 'whether or not' a person's conception of the good life is a reflection of his or her society or culture. Likewise, many students did not provide arguments to support their responses but instead illustrated them with examples. Although this did not always preclude students from receiving high marks, many students simply stated their position and gave an example with no further discussion, or used examples in a simplistic way (for example, 'people who grew up in Christian households have Christian views'), which often resulted in low marks. The best answers provided an explicit response to the question and a carefully reasoned argument to support this response.

A surprising number of students referred to views of morality rather than referring to views of the good life, once again highlighting the need for students to read the questions closely.

Following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

A person's conception of the good life and of morality is largely based on their society and cultural upbringing. This is easily seen when comparing different concepts of the good life from different parts of the world and even when tracing the development of such ideas throughout a single country's history. For example, a 1950's housewife's concept of the 'American Dream' good life differs hugely to the now popular dream of many women to be equal partners with men in the workforce.

Section C

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	10	22	23	22	17	3

- Many people love beautiful sounds and sights, but philosophers love beauty itself in its 'permanent and unchanging nature,' as well as 'the things that participate in it'. Thus philosophers live, not in a dream world (in which one mistakes resemblance to reality for reality itself, like the lovers of 'sounds and sights'), but in the real world. Thus philosophers have knowledge rather than (mere) opinion or belief.

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- Because philosophers apprehend what is true and real, and because they are lovers of knowledge, they possess all the qualities for good leadership and are less likely to be corrupted by worldly affairs. They do not yearn to be rulers which, paradoxically, makes them the best rulers.
- The simile of the Sun and the analogies of the Line and the Cave are intended to illuminate the nature of knowledge and inform us of the difference between the philosopher and the sightseer.

Possible evaluations of Plato's case for the philosopher-ruler include the following.

- Plato's view is premised on his Theory of Forms. Yet how plausible is this theory?
- How do we (who do not possess the knowledge of the philosophers) know if an individual is a philosopher? Indeed, how does the philosopher know him or herself? And what if a dispute was to arise among philosophers (the very possibility would contradict Plato's idea of the philosophers' relationship to knowledge)? How could it be resolved?
- It is questionable whether the kind of knowledge the philosopher has would be most applicable to statecraft. Likewise, some of the attributes associated with philosophers may not be the best for ruling a state, whereas antithetical attributes – cunning, the desire for power, etc. – may be of use.
- Associated with the above point, although it may be a good thing for society to be ruled by intelligent and knowledgeable people, do we really want to be ruled by Plato's philosophers, who would rather be contemplating the eternal forms and who place little importance on human life? Perhaps empathy, compassion and the substance of worldly affairs are as important to statecraft as is reason.
- Plato presumes that just because philosophers love knowledge they also have knowledge.

A significant number of students provided detailed outlines of Plato's case, but only gave brief, undeveloped evaluations or did not give an evaluation at all. To receive full marks, students needed to provide an outline of Plato's case which, for example, identified the difference between the 'sightseer' and the 'philosopher' and discuss how this qualified the philosopher as the preferred ruler, and provide a developed evaluation of the outlined argument. Students were not expected to include all of the points outlined above.

Following is an example of a student response. Although the argument regarding scientists and politicians could be more fully developed by, for example, discussing how the knowledge they possess makes them possible candidates for rulership, it is nonetheless a strong response.

Plato believes that in order to attain true and absolute knowledge, we must be able to understand the Forms and this only comes from philosophical dialect and the search for truth. Therefore he believes that only philosophers are fit to rule the state because of their love for knowledge and because they do not do so because of a desire for power. However, as far as pragmatic knowledge such as science and politics is concerned, philosophers are not the only ones fit to rule the state. Whilst they may not have knowledge in the purest form, the scientists and politicians have a type of knowledge that comes from the corporeal world and is supported by life experience and an acculation of viewpoints.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	13	12	16	60	2.2

After identifying four pertinent theories, Popper concludes that what distinguishes science from pseudo-science is its capacity to be falsified ('the criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability or testability').

Examples of pseudo-science included in the relevant text are:

- astrology
- Freud's psychoanalysis
- Adler's individual psychology
- Marx's theory of history.

To receive full marks for this question, students needed to explain the difference between science and pseudo-science and provide a relevant example from the text.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	20	16	29	35	1.8

- Kuhn describes the progress of science as evolving through a series of stages: pre-science, normal science, crisis, revolution and new normal science.



- A crisis occurs when the stage of normal science, which is governed by stable paradigms, is affected by anomalies striking at the fundamentals of the paradigm which have resisted many attempts to remove them over a period of time. This precipitates the end of the paradigm and the adoption of a new one.
- Kuhn's main example in the set text is astronomy (the crisis which led to the replacement of Ptolemaic astronomy by Copernican astronomy). However, students may also have drawn upon the theory of light (Newtonian and wave theory) and the replacement of Newtonian physics by Einstein's theory of relativity.

To receive full marks for this question, students needed to describe Kuhn's theory of crisis (the description did not need to be as comprehensive as that given above) and provide a relevant example from the text. Students who did not accurately identify Kuhn's example could not be awarded marks for this aspect of the question.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	12	22	29	34	2.8

This was a challenging question that many students seemed to struggle with. A number of students provided simple, reductive arguments (there is no relationship) which seemed to be based on a glib re-working of Kuhn's arguments rather than on reflective thought. An overwhelming number of students did not first define knowledge and so had difficulty establishing their arguments, and many students did not provide arguments at all but rather a set of assertions. Most students chose to refer to the set texts, although there was no obligation to do so.

To receive full marks, students needed to provide an explicit response to the question ('how strong') and an argument or arguments for this response. The very best answers offered a response supported by a carefully reasoned argument which perhaps incorporated some discussion of what knowledge is.

Following is an example of a student response. It should be noted that although the student has made the claim that there is no relationship between science and knowledge and has drawn on Kuhn's arguments, the response is carefully reasoned and fully developed, and is thus not an example of the glib re-working mentioned above.

Knowledge is usually defined as things we 'definitely know' or as an 'absolute' we know. To borrow Kuhn's definition, science is simply an 'evolutionary process' which attempts to constantly explain an ever changing world. The explanations that science proposes are forever changing, it is a process which is simply 'moving away from primitive beginnings' but has no absolute goal or purpose. Thus, because science offers us explanations about our empirical world based on empirical evidence, it has no relationship whatsoever to 'knowledge' as science offers no 'absolutes'.

Section D

Question chosen	None	1	2	3
%	5	27	21	48

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	6	3	4	6	5	7	8	8	10	7	8	8	7	6	4	2	7.6

This section of the examination also appeared challenging for many students. Although it was pleasing to see that many students had addressed the shortcomings of previous years and provided developed evaluations, this gain seemed to have come at a loss as a significant number of students produced only cursory expositions of the relevant positions/philosopher's arguments.

Most students who responded to Question 1 were able to provide an accurate exposition of Descartes' arguments; however, many struggled to give an accurate interpretation of the wax example. Of those who responded to Question 2, a surprising number discussed only Armstrong's argument for favouring the scientific view of human beings and neglected his main arguments. Some students confused Armstrong for a Behaviourist, and some had an incorrect understanding of Rylean Behaviourism and/or the analogy of the brittle glass. Many students did not address the whole question and, of those who did, students who discussed the implications of Armstrong's position for today's debates appeared to struggle less than those who addressed his discussion of the problem of consciousness. Generally speaking, students who chose Question 3 responded to all components of the question in a satisfactory manner.

It is not possible to anticipate all acceptable responses to essay questions. The questions do, however, imply that all essays will engage at some level in critical discussion of the relevant set texts and produce a reasoned judgment about



the arguments and viewpoints they express. All essays should contain some kind of exposition (either of arguments, viewpoints or concepts), provide evaluations of these arguments, viewpoints and concepts, and use concrete counter-examples.

The criteria with which all essays were assessed and some possible solution pathways for each question are listed below.

Assessment criteria

Expression

- Did the student present the argument in an organised way?
- How clear and precise was the language used by the student?
- To what extent was the language appropriate to philosophy?

Achievement level

- 0 The student had not reached level 1.
- 1 The student expressed some basic ideas but it was not always clear what the argument was trying to convey. The use of language was not appropriate to philosophy.
- 2 The student presented some ideas in an organised manner. There was some clarity of expression, but the argument could not always be followed. The use of language was not always appropriate to philosophy.
- 3 The student presented ideas in an organised way and the development of the argument could be easily followed. The use of language was appropriate to philosophy.
- 4 The student presented ideas in a clear and coherent way and insights were clearly articulated. The use of language was effective and appropriate to philosophy.
- 5 The student presented ideas in a coherent and incisive way, insights were clearly articulated and the argument was focused and sustained. The use of language was precise and fully appropriate to philosophy.

Knowledge and understanding

- To what extent did the student demonstrate knowledge of the philosophical issues?
- How well had the student understood philosophical arguments and concepts?

Achievement level

- 0 The student had not reached level 1.
- 1 The student demonstrated a superficial knowledge of philosophical issues but there was only limited understanding of the concepts used.
- 2 The student demonstrated some knowledge of philosophical issues and there was a basic understanding of the concepts used.
- 3 The student demonstrated a secure knowledge of philosophical issues, and concepts were generally understood.
- 4 The student demonstrated a wide-ranging knowledge of philosophical issues, which were used effectively to support arguments. Philosophical arguments and concepts were largely understood.
- 5 The student demonstrated knowledge which was comprehensive and in depth, and was used incisively to support arguments. Philosophical arguments and concepts were fully understood.

Identification and analysis of relevant material

- How well had the student understood the specific demands of the question?
- To what extent did the student provide relevant supporting material?
- To what extent did the student provide appropriate examples?
- How effectively did the student analyse the supporting material?

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Achievement level

- 0 The student had not reached level 1.
- 1–2 The student showed little awareness of the specific demands of the question and identified relevant material in only a limited way. There was little analysis and few or no examples.
- 3–4 The student showed some awareness of the specific demands of the question and identified and analysed some relevant material. Some appropriate examples were used.
- 5–6 The student showed a good understanding of the specific demands of the question and identified material which was nearly always relevant. There was a sound analysis of the material. Examples were appropriate and gave support to the argument.
- 7–8 The student showed a clear understanding of the specific demands of the question and identified relevant material which was analysed in a thoughtful way. Examples directly supported the overall argument in a persuasive manner. Some counter-arguments were presented.
- 9–10 The student showed a full understanding of the specific demands of the question and identified material which was always relevant. The implications of this material were drawn out in a detailed analysis. Examples were well chosen and compelling in their support of the argument. Counter-arguments were presented in a convincing way.

Development and evaluation

- Did the student develop the argument in a coherent way?
- How well did the student test ideas and arguments?
- To what extent did the student express a relevant, personal response?

Achievement level

- 0 The student had not reached level 1.
- 1–2 The student developed ideas and arguments in a basic way but there was little or no evaluation.
- 3–4 The student developed some ideas and arguments but the development was simple, or was asserted with support or reference. There may have been some basic evaluation of the ideas and arguments.
- 5–6 The student developed ideas and arguments in a sound way and there was a consistent attempt to evaluate them, even if this was not fully developed.
- 7–8 The student developed ideas and arguments from a consistently held perspective. Evaluation of the ideas and arguments was thoughtful and convincing.
- 9–10 The student developed ideas and arguments from a consistently held and well-justified perspective. Evaluation of the ideas and arguments was compelling or subtle with strong evidence of personal reflection.

Question 1

I think, therefore I exist (*Cogito, Ergo Sum*)

Descartes reasons that even if an evil genius is deceiving him in many things, he must at least be thinking or conscious in order to be deceived. Likewise, the very fact of his doubting confirms he is thinking. And if he is thinking, he must exist, at least while he is thinking. As he puts it elsewhere, *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I exist).

Possible points for discussion

- If the evil one can fool him on simple arithmetic such as $2+3$ (as he suggests in the first *Meditation*), couldn't the logic of the *cogito* be vulnerable too?
- Descartes appears to make a logical leap from the observation of thought to the fact of his existence. It could be suggested that the observation confirms only that thought exists, not an 'I'.
- As memory is not to be trusted, can he be sure that the 'I' of which he is certain now is the same as any previous one? If not, just how significant is his new knowledge?
- Descartes is often accused of a tautology. The phrase 'I think' pre-supposes that he exists.

I am essentially a thinking thing

Descartes cannot say with certainty that he has a body. All he knows is that he is a conscious being – a thinking thing ('I am only a thing that thinks').

Possible points for discussion

- Descartes seems to move from 'I know only that I'm a thinking thing' to 'I know that I'm only a thinking thing'. This is fallacious. In family matters, I may know only that I have a sister; does it follow that I know that I only have a sister? Couldn't my essential nature (like my family) contain items of which I am unaware? One such item might be my central nervous system (including the brain). My thinking self, whether I realise it or not, could well be identical to this physical thing as Armstrong believes.



- Descartes claims that ‘thinking alone is inseparable from me.’ There seems to be a contradiction here as elsewhere Descartes appears to posit a self that has thoughts.

The lessons of the piece of wax

Descartes asks, ‘Can I really know myself better than I know bodily things?’ Consider wax. All its sensory qualities change after heating, yet we know the wax remains. Descartes concludes that it must be by ‘purely mental scrutiny’ that we know its nature. This reinforces the claim that he exists and his knowledge of his mind.

Possible points for discussion

- If we’d never perceived molten wax and couldn’t perceive its spatio-temporal continuity, would we be able to recognise it? If not, then this throws doubt on Descartes’ knowledge of his mind.
- If Descartes does perform ‘pure mental scrutiny’ of the wax, can this really give him ‘even more distinct’ knowledge of the nature of his mind, or merely further experience of one of its operations?

Question 2

- Armstrong supports a form of materialism, or Physicalism. It is classically opposed to dualism, which holds that a human consists of two different (even if connected and interacting) things: the physical body and the non-physical (spiritual) mind or soul.
- Armstrong says this view of humans has received great impetus from molecular biology and neurobiology. Opponents of materialism mainly reject it, he says, for philosophical, moral or religious reasons.
- Armstrong therefore champions science. Only in science do we reach consensus. We should, he says, grant a ‘peculiar authority’ to the discipline that can achieve consensus (even though consensus can sometimes be mistaken).
- Armstrong then examines some accounts of mind which accord with the scientific view. One appealing form of materialism is behaviourism, which contends that the mind is not a mysterious inner spiritual substance causing outward behaviour (dualism), but behaviour itself. Anger, therefore, is aggressive behaviour. But Armstrong believes this to be too crude as mental processes can occur without any outward behaviour. An angry person may give no bodily sign.
- A more sophisticated form of behaviourism is the Rylean view that mental processes and states are **dispositions** to behave. Thus anger, understood in these terms, is a disposition or tendency to behave in a certain way when certain circumstances are realised, just as the brittleness of a piece of glass is a disposition to break easily when, for example, the glass is knocked.
- But this, too, is unsatisfactory, for it is clear that something is going on when we experience a particular mental state apart from any outward behaviour or tendency. Armstrong therefore reasons that mental states are not to be identified with behaviour but are instead what lies behind it.
- Mind may therefore be defined as an inner cause for behaviour (and a mental state as a state of a person apt for producing certain kinds of behaviours). This cause could be something spiritual (as Descartes posits) but the verdict of modern science seems to be that it’s the physico-chemical workings of the central nervous system and given the ‘peculiar authority’ science is to be granted, it is the preferable explanation (Armstrong’s view – that mental states are identical to states of the central nervous system – is now commonly called Identity Theory or ‘central state materialism’).

Possible points for discussion

- Science may have more consensus than other areas but, according to Kuhn, this could be a contrived situation, with scientists studying the same texts and problems.
- By looking to the scientific account of mind, Armstrong is already pre-supposing that the mind is physical (that it can be explained by science).
- Consensus does not necessarily make a theory right or preferable. History is full of examples of consensus (including scientific consensus) that have been incorrect. So it is questionable whether an explanation should be privileged on the grounds of consensus.
- Armstrong says we cannot directly observe the minds of others, only our own. However, if we are physico-chemical beings, then surely scans and other observations should be able to show us the mind (of course this could be counteracted by the claim that just because we haven’t been able to observe all the workings of the mind yet, does not mean we won’t be able to in the future).
- Others might see or hear evidence of our mental states (words or actions, an encephalograph, etc.) but can they ever have the direct experience of our thoughts as we have? Contrast this with physical states, for example, a cut on your finger. Others can see this just as well, and just as directly, as you can. This suggests that physical



states (at least in principle, public state) and mental states (essentially, private) are different things, even if causally related.

- What of paranormal phenomena (ghosts, accounts of reincarnation, near death experiences, out-of-body experiences, etc.)? Such phenomena challenge Armstrong's description of our 'inner arena'.

The Problem of Consciousness

After Armstrong posits his view of mind, popular objection is tackled – the problem of consciousness. As Armstrong points out, materialism seems satisfactory as a third-person account, but not as a first-person one. We're aware of the state of our own mind, unless we're in such a condition as that of the 'automatic driver'. But this can be reconciled with a physicalist account. Consciousness can be seen as the scanning of one part of our central nervous system (CNS) by another, and the perception of our own mental state, like other perceptions, is an inner state giving a capacity for selective behaviour.

Possible points for discussion on how Armstrong addresses the problem of consciousness

- Can Armstrong's theory account for the *qualia* of mental states (in other words, what it is **like** to have a mental state)?
- Armstrong commences his essay by saying that he is attempting to find an account of mind which coheres with the scientific view, but it is questionable whether his account of consciousness is particularly scientific.
- Armstrong could be accused of falling prey to an infinite regress – what is the part of the mind that is aware of self-awareness?

The implication of Armstrong's position for today's debates

- Can we still maintain our sense of superiority over other beings (including machines) when we are just physico-chemical mechanisms with no spiritual substance?
- This account of human beings cancels out an afterlife.
- It poses particular implications for the treatment of illnesses associated with the mind and for notions of legal responsibility.
- It also has implications for how we think about traditionally mysterious emotions such as love and infatuation.
- It opens the possibility of external control by, for example, drugs or in a *Matrix* style situation.

Question 3

Armstrong's case for materialism

See the outline provided above for Question 2.

Descartes' case against materialism

- Having proved that he exists, Descartes asks what kind of thing he is. His senses have the capacity to deceive him so he cannot know that he has a body. All he knows is that he is a conscious being – a thing that thinks – and this is all he can know with any kind of certainty.

Possible points for discussion in relation to Descartes

- The presence of thought may confirm that Descartes is a thinking thing, but it does not confirm that he is in turn a spiritual substance (indeed, how is it that a spiritual substance thinks?). Perhaps thinking is simply a property of the brain (as Armstrong would suggest).
- Although it is possible to contend that our bodies do not exist, is it plausible? And is self-reflection an adequate tool to prove the existence of something? It could be argued that physical evidence (that the body is real for we can observe it) is stronger, despite the fact that our senses can be unreliable.
- As noted in Question 1, the move from 'I know only that I'm a thinking thing,' to 'I know that I'm only a thinking thing' is fallacious.

Other points for discussion against materialism

See the points for discussion provided above for Question 2.