



General Certificate of Education

Philosophy 1171

Specification

PHIL1

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2010 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

PHIL1

General Comments

There was a relatively large entry for this paper, similar in size to the June 2009 entry. Consequently, trends were broadly similar. Although some optional questions (Questions 3 and 4) were more popular than others, all four of the optional themes were attempted in fairly large numbers. Answers to questions were generally of an appropriate length and there was little evidence of too much time and space being devoted to Question 1 at the expense of the second question.

Responses to part (a) questions were, once again, generally disappointing. While it remains rare to find candidates devoting too much time and space to part (a) questions, many continue to provide unnecessary background and/or evaluative comments. The main issue, however, concerned candidates' ability to identify, explain and illustrate one or two relevant points.

In contrast, all part (b) questions on the paper generated a range of responses from brief and relatively uninformed to lengthy and detailed answers.

Theme: Reason and experience

Question 1

- (a) Almost all candidates could explain, and develop, the claim that at birth the mind is a tabula rasa. However, very few could provide a reason for holding the view. For example, many made the point that the mind is blank, without innate ideas or knowledge, but couldn't provide a convincing account of why no ideas are innate. Rather than providing a reason supporting the view, the general tendency was to further develop the implications of the view.
- (b) Many responses were similar to those seen in June 2009. The tendency was to identify the claim as empiricist, provide an account of mind as tabula rasa, move on to the acquisition of simple ideas and from here to complex ideas or concepts. Once again, despite the question, knowledge was rarely mentioned in the exposition. Critical points tended to focus on solipsism, frequently connected to a poorly understood point about meaning, sceptical arguments and innate ideas. Typically, parts of a critique were relevant to the acquisition of knowledge although many candidates would benefit from the idea that a criticism of some empiricist views can be given without adopting a rationalist standpoint. Conclusions were mainly focused on Kant although some also questioned whether the word 'all' in the question was appropriate. Most were prepared to argue a case but a large number of arguments were focused on contrasting the acquisition of ideas through experience with innate capacities and, too frequently, instincts. Nevertheless, responses were typically full, generally accurate if not always relevant and argumentation was quite detailed.

Theme: Why should I be governed?

Question 2

- (a) There were few very good responses to this question. Most understood what the question required but many attempted to answer it by referring to, and illustrating, illegitimate power. Also, many responses that were focused on notions of authority and legitimacy frequently struggled to identify and explain *one* difficulty. The best responses either focused on problems with the notion of consent, or popular approval, or on the idea that legitimacy is a myth.
- (b) Answers to this question were mixed. Given the content specified for this unit, there were some odd interpretations of the question (perhaps motivated by recent events) in which the focus was abuses of power by the powerful. Most focused on social contracts, political obligations and grounds for dissent generally – so, typically, dissent was linked to the removal of governing bodies with some arguing, generally unconvincingly, that dissent was never justified. A few good responses also referred to civil disobedience and, less frequently, more violent forms of direct action: familiar examples tended to be given and, generally, only non-violent disobedience was seen to be justifiable.

Theme: Why Should I be Moral?

Question 3

- (a) Good responses to this question tended to focus on enlightened egoism and virtue. Most candidates were able to make one reasonable point, typically focused on the benefits accruing to the agent who helps others. There was a tendency to make this point twice. Illustrative examples were given but tended to be mundane. Many candidates struggle to differentiate between different forms of egoism.
- (b) Most responses to this question seemed to be well-rehearsed treatments of Hobbes, Aristotle and Kant although, frequently, the reasoning employed in relation to the question was not sharp. It wasn't always clear, for example, whether contractual positions did or did not require us to suppress our inclinations and desires (and whether this involved all of our inclinations and desires) or whether, if so, this was for the benefit of others. Similarly, treatments of Aristotle rarely focused on suppression but generally did argue that there was no conflict between the possession of appropriate desires and social welfare. In contrast, treatments of Kant were focused on suppression but generally not on the issue of whom, if anyone, benefits. Frequently there was little critical discussion of any of these views.

Theme: The Idea of God

Question 4

- (a) Candidates either knew what transcendence means or they did not. Those that did typically contrasted this attribute with immanence although there were some more convoluted responses linking God's transcendence to his eternal nature and using this to question his omniscience. Some were unable to focus on *one* of His other attributes and many did not provide an illustration. Some produced evaluative accounts of how to resolve the conflict.

- (b) Answers to this question were generally focused but rarely detailed responses. Most began with Descartes' trademark argument – although some confused this with the ontological argument – and contrasted this account of how we have the idea of God with one or more of Hume, Freud and Marx. Such responses were relevant but often lacked detail and precision. Critical discussion and argument was limited and, once again, most were content to assert their allegiance to either - Freud or Marx (sometimes both).

Theme: Persons

Question 5

- (a) A sizeable number of candidates seem to equate physical continuity with immutability and, therefore, were inclined to explain, illustrate and argue that we do change physically. Sometimes it was suggested that this is the reason that psychological continuity is more important. However, the majority either suggested that physical continuity wasn't necessary for identity and illustrated this with 'Star Trek' type scenarios or that physical continuity isn't sufficient for identity illustrating the point via a 'Brownson'-type example, although this was more of a struggle. In some mid-band responses the point was implicit in the illustration.
- (b) This question produced a range of responses. There were some discussions of what the criteria for personhood might include which didn't get around to addressing the question on the paper, although these were relatively scarce. Some confined their discussion of the implications of the statement to a consideration of which humans would be affected. There was a tendency here to regard any diminution in personhood as indicating the loss of all rights: not surprisingly, argumentation was generally not in favour of such a position. Others saw the implications as including non-humans. There was a tendency here to regard any sign of sociability, rationality, self-awareness etc. in animals, for example, as generating the same rights as those possessed by most humans (as complex persons). Not surprisingly this wasn't popular either. Some seemed outraged by the statement provided and consequently argued that there are human rights and all humans possess them. Some argued that some humans could not be the bearers of rights and that some non-humans might possess some rights.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.