



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2012**

**Philosophy**

**PHIL1**

**(Specification 2170)**

**Unit 1: An Introduction to Philosophy 1**

***Report on the Examination***

---

Further copies of this Report on **the Examination** are available from: [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

**Copyright**

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges 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 schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the school/college.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).  
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

## **PHIL1, An Introduction to Philosophy 1**

### **General Comments**

There was a relatively large entry for this paper, similar in size to the January entry. Consequently, trends were broadly similar. Some optional themes (The Idea of God and Why Should I be Moral) were more popular, although all four optional themes were attempted in fairly large numbers.

Answers to questions were generally of an appropriate length, although there was some evidence of poor time management where responses to questions on the compulsory theme were very lengthy, leaving less time to address questions on the optional theme selected.

On a positive note, there seemed to be far fewer very poor, brief, fragmentary and sketchy responses to questions on this paper.

### **The Compulsory Theme: Reason and experience**

#### **Question 01**

This was generally well-answered. The majority of students demonstrated a clear, if not always detailed, account of the role of a conceptual scheme in making experience intelligible.

The best responses typically focused on Kant – those that were focused on the Sapir-Whorf model tended not to address the intelligibility of experience – and many were able to provide a fairly detailed and illustrative account of the role of various categories such as unity, substance and causation in rendering experience intelligible. Many provided a clear and detailed illustration to demonstrate their understanding. However, a significant number simply referred briefly to analogous examples (typically ‘purple sun glasses’ and ‘filing systems’ in libraries or offices).

Some provided an exposition that was broadly Kantian, emphasising that a conceptual scheme is universal, together with an illustration of cultural relativity thus conflating two different approaches. The weakest responses tended to focus more generally on innate ideas. However, these were a minority and generally the standard of response was good.

A couple of minor quibbles concerning accounts of Kant’s position are:

- Space and time are not categories.
- There are not 12 conceptual schemes.

#### **Question 02**

This was less well-answered. Although most responses were lengthy and fairly detailed, many struggled to maintain a focus on the question and some did not refer to ‘what exists’ at all. For example:

- A large number of responses began well by identifying the claim as an empiricist position and providing an account of the mind as a tabula rasa at birth before moving on to the acquisition of simple ideas through experience and from here to complex ideas or concepts and their relevance to the acquisition of empirical knowledge. However, in doing so, many included discussions of how we gain the idea of a golden mountain and/or of shades of blue that we’ve never seen and lost sight of the question on the paper.

- Similarly, critical discussion tended to focus on rationalist arguments for innate ideas, capacities and knowledge and, while some relevant material was selected, it was not always clear how it related to ‘what exists’ or to where it exists.

Stronger answers included one or more of the following lines of argumentation:

- An account of Hume’s ‘fork’ and the view that relations of ideas provide no substantive knowledge about the world.
- An account of the synthetic *a priori* (sometimes repeated from the previous question) together with the view that this is significant to any claim concerning empirical knowledge.
- An account of ideas and knowledge that do not seem to be derived from experience and the view that some arguments, for example those concerning God, constitute significant claims about what exists.

The best answers also subjected these accounts to some critical scrutiny.

Some students take a mechanical approach to analysis and evaluation, for example, ‘this is a good argument because...’ or ‘this is a weak argument because...’ in a way that frequently contains little by way of evaluation, or is unconvincing, and which rather adds to the impression of a descriptive and list-like response. Also, some students would benefit from a firmer grasp of terminology, for example, when discussing Hume’s fork it was frequently suggested that propositions were ‘either meaningless but true or meaningful but false’.

## The Optional Themes

### 15-mark questions: 03, 05, 07 and 09

All 15-mark questions on the optional themes generated a range of marks. A number of issues prevented some students from reaching very high marks and these tended to vary according to the question attempted.

#### Question 03

A number of responses to this question earned less than 10 marks, for one of two reasons:

- Either one term was clearly explained and illustrated, typically the idea of tacit consent with Socrates featuring heavily in illustrations, but the other term was not clearly explained or illustrated so that the difference between tacit and hypothetical consent was not clear.
- Or, both terms were clearly explained but neither was illustrated.

#### Question 05

In general there was a noticeable improvement to responses to the 15-mark question on this theme in this examination series, with a considerable number identifying and illustrating two criticisms of contractual views.

However, the main issues here were:

- Providing two versions of the same point: typically two alternatives to contractual theories of ethics both effectively making the point that this is not what morality consists in.
- The failure to illustrate one or both of the points made.

### **Question 07**

The majority of students were able to make two points. However:

- Some provided one relevant point and one partial point (typically incorporating omniscience into ‘the inconsistent triad’ but then devoting time and space to how benevolence and omnipotence are inconsistent with evil).
- Some struggled to illustrate points and, clearly, any illustration of an intention, desire or rational action would have served to illustrate a potential tension between omniscience and free will, for example, when this point was offered.

Also, a number of responses were evaluative – focused on how a difficulty might be resolved – but there are no marks for evaluation on 15-mark questions.

### **Question 09**

A number of students found this question challenging.

- A considerable number of responses did not convey an understanding of survival either because they were only vaguely expressed, for example survival is ‘staying alive’ – or wrongly equated with physicality, for example continuing to breathe.
- A number demonstrated a partial understanding of the issue typically by blurring survival and identity in places.
- Illustrations of the difference were also, typically, less than clear.

### **The Optional Themes**

#### **30-mark questions: 04, 06, 08 and 10**

#### **Question 04**

This was well-answered. The majority of students responded to the quotation provided, although some focused purely on legitimacy and ignored the reference to popular approval. Those that agreed with the quotation were worried about minorities and tended to argue that legitimacy requires approval from everyone: those that disagreed tended to uncritically side with Plato claiming that being ruled by an intellectual elite was in everyone’s interests whether they realised it or not. Most responses were focused and reasonably detailed, few were strongly evaluative.

#### **Question 06**

It was encouraging to see that most responses to this question were more focused than in previous series, although some found it difficult to sustain relevance.

Some students thought that the view in question invited a discussion of Kant’s ethics, demonstrating a very partial grasp of Kant’s position. This became particularly clear when Kant was criticised for disregarding our freedom and autonomy. Stronger responses tended to identify the view with contractual theories – particularly with Hobbes – and, typically, constructed a fairly sustained outline and critique of this position.

Many found it difficult to sustain a focus on the question: while the relationship between moral motivation and self-interest was not irrelevant, a number of students allowed it to become the main focus. However, responses were better than they have been in previous examination series.

### **Question 08**

Responses were generally well-focused and detailed (if not always precise). Typically, Descartes' 'trademark' argument was contrasted with a range of material drawn from Hume, Feuerbach, Freud, Dawkins, Marx and Durkheim. Stronger responses incorporated some critical discussion of the views considered; however, this was not always convincing. A number of students did tend to describe what different writers had said.

### **Question 10**

This was reasonably well-answered, typically in one of two ways:

- Some students linked an impressive range of research on the cognitive capacities of non-human animals to attributes of personhood. They typically focused on the higher primates but also referred to dolphins and elephants. Some were able to name specific animals and specific researchers. However, this type of response tended to be descriptive: Kanzi can do this, Washoe can do that etc. Moreover, where evaluation was present, despite pointing out a range of cognitive capacities most agreed with the view in question without supporting the view.
- Others focused more on philosophical views, typically Descartes and Hume, and these were generally more evaluative although argumentation was not always convincing. Descartes, for example, was rarely subjected to critical scrutiny. The main problem with this type of response was the tendency to focus on the same animals that Descartes, Locke and Hume discuss. However, it is not obvious that dogs and birds are the best students for personhood in non-human animals. Consequently, again most agreed with the view in question.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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

**UMS conversion calculator:** [www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)