



General Certificate of Education

Philosophy 1171

PHIL1

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June 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.

PHIL 1

General Comments

All questions on the paper generated a range of responses. As always the best responses were very impressive and weak responses demonstrated limited familiarity with philosophical arguments. All four of the optional themes were attempted, in roughly equal numbers, and answers to questions were generally of an appropriate length.

There were few rubric infringements and there was little evidence of too much time and space being devoted to Questions 01 and 02 at the expense of the response to questions on the optional theme selected.

It was rare to find candidates devoting too much time and space to the 15 mark questions, although some candidates continue to provide unnecessary background material, or evaluative comments, and fail to illustrate points when this is required by the question.

Theme: Reason and experience

01 This was generally answered quite well. The best responses were full, clear, precise and well-illustrated. The majority of responses were at least partially accurate. Some students focused on the acquisition of knowledge (the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction) but in doing so also managed to clarify differences between necessary and contingent truths. Some partial responses were accurate on necessary truths but tended to blur contingency with skepticism or the problem of induction (so that illustrations provided tended not to be truths). Weaker answers either confused the terms, or described necessary and sufficient conditions, or provided non-philosophical accounts (so that e.g. a necessary truth was something we needed to know).

02 Most students were able to contrast the Kantian position with the notion of the mind as a *tabula rasa* at birth, but many did not advance any further discussion. A few also considered the implications of synthetic a priori knowledge for empiricism. Many of those who did develop further discussion tended to either appeal to linguistic or cultural relativism as a way to preserve empiricism or to argue that empiricism does provide an acceptable account of concept acquisition (typically drawing from Hume on causation). Either way the notion of an innate conceptual scheme was not seen as especially damaging.

Nevertheless, the majority of candidates struggled to address the question in a focused and coherent manner. Many either did not refer to any of the categories referred to by Kant or provided imprecise accounts (frequently blurring Kant and Hume). Some lost sight of 'the implications for empiricism'. Some employed Sapir-Whorf without any obvious direction or as a crude knock-down of the Kantian position. Some thought that the mere hint of conceptual schemes was enough to plunge us all into a private and solipsistic universe. Relevant knowledge, together with some analysis, was typically present in such responses but was seldom well-organised and argumentation was rarely convincing.

Weaker responses provided a general rationalism versus empiricism approach, innate knowledge and/or ideas versus the mind as a tabula rasa at birth. Many of these focused on Locke and Plato.

Theme: Why should I be governed?

- 03** Most responses referred to Hobbes' account of life in the state of nature, usually referring explicitly to the security or protection offered by the State as a reason for submitting to political authority but sometimes leaving the point implicit. This was either coupled with Rousseau (and some notion of progress), Locke (impartial judges), Plato (the wisdom of philosopher kings) or a general point about receiving state benefits.

On the whole, the question was answered well. However, too many candidates failed to reach the top mark band because the points made were rarely illustrated.

- 04** Answers to this question were generally narrow. The majority of responses focused on a critique of theories of consent, explicit, tacit and hypothetical, with varying degrees of accuracy and sophistication. Positions and objections were often briefly listed, lacking in depth, detail and developed analysis. Better responses referred not only to whether we've consented or not but also to the extent and nature of our obligations. Some responses also mentioned legitimate grounds for dissent or disobedience. Weaker answers listed all the reasons we should obey the government, usually repeating material employed in responses to Question 03.

Theme: Why Should I be Moral?

- 05** There were some detailed and illustrated responses, usually drawing from Plato or Aristotle, in which the notion of virtue as its own reward was clear. However, top-band marks were rare, either because no illustration was provided or because the illustration provided was linked to some extrinsic reward (such as others looking up to you). The illustrations employed in better responses generally involved leaking jars and hedonistic lifestyles, although even here the point that virtue is its own reward was sometimes only implicit. Some students focused on egoism rather than virtue ethics, providing examples of e.g. charitable donations making one feel good about oneself.

- 06** Many students answered this without any reference to the statement in question at all – rather they described why morality couldn't be separated from self-interest. These responses weren't tangential but at the same time it was difficult to read them as engaging with the question. Where the view was outlined accounts of morally right actions, and their separation from self-interested motivations, were frequently vague and there was rarely a well developed critique of Kantian deontology. Where analysis was present, it usually involved the axe murderer example and conflicts of duties. Many students juxtaposed Kant with Hume on sympathy, sometimes this was used in support of the question and sometimes against depending on whether acting on sympathy was interpreted as acting in self interest or not. Weaker answers tended to describe and juxtapose contractual theories, virtue ethics, egoism etc.

Theme: The Idea of God

- 07** This was a straightforward question and there were some good, clear, detailed answers. Descartes' 'trademark argument' was frequently employed, with varied levels of detail and accuracy, and contrasted this with an alternative account based on the idea of God as a human construction (although some answers gave two contrasting accounts of the latter, for example one social and one psychological). However, many accounts lacked detail and precision whether describing Descartes, Hume, Marx or Freud. Some were obviously pleased to see this question and provided three, four or five accounts of how we obtain the idea.
- 08** This was generally well answered with most responses following a common pattern, usually Anselm's ontological argument, followed by Gaunilo's island and a response; then Descartes' ontological argument and Kant's point that existence is not a real predicate. Some students followed this format with sophisticated answers that were awarded high marks. However, a large number of responses provided partial outlines of an ontological argument or, as frequently, blurred two versions together; also, critical points were sometimes vague and implicit or imprecisely stated. Positions were not always well developed and assessment varied from basic assertion to full and detailed appraisal.

Theme: Persons

- 09** Again, this question was well answered. The concept of a person was clearly distinguished from that of a human being, usually via references to some characteristics of personhood. Sometimes the two reasons provided were two aspects of a single point – typically that not all humans are persons – illustrated with references to foetuses (potential persons) and coma patients (ex-persons). Sometimes only one reason was provided and illustrated. However, many candidates provided two clear reasons and, unlike responses to some of the other 15-mark questions, developed illustrative examples to support the reasons provided.
- 10** This question produced a range of responses. A few good responses demonstrated the difference between survival through time and identity through time, generally arguing in favour of the former because conditions for the latter couldn't be met. Occasionally this was tempered by some concerns about the implications of giving up on identity or about the concept of survival itself. However, many students left the difference between identity and survival implicit. Examples like 'Brownson', Reid's critique of Locke and teletransportation were common, but not all students drew out the implications for identity through time. In such accounts survival tended to be linked to changes in personality. Weaker responses didn't seem to be aware of this area of the specification and, typically, equated survival with 'staying alive' – some described the importance of 'our survival' as a species.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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