



General Certificate of Education

Philosophy 2171 *Specification*

PHIL3

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.

PHIL3

General comments

There were very few responses which missed the general thrust of the questions and the great majority were able to demonstrate what relevant knowledge they had and had a pretty clear sense of what they were being asked to argue about. There was a good number of very impressive and lengthy responses which dealt with a range of material in good detail and sustained a clear critical case.

The slightly weaker responses tended to roll out a series of relevant positions and arguments without turning this information effectively to the nuances of the question. Candidates appear to have found questions containing a quotation harder to deal with, often producing generic responses and rarely commenting on the quotation itself. Some responses of this nature could also stray from the focus of the question and it may be that some candidates could benefit from keeping an eye on the question as they write and ensuring they explain the pertinence to it of each point they make.

The weakest responses betrayed lack of understanding of relevant positions and arguments, or simply didn't know the material in sufficient detail.

01 This was the less popular of the two Philosophy of Mind questions, but was generally done better than question 02. Most candidates had a reasonably good grasp of eliminativism, and the stronger responses explained and defended it in detail as well as offering clear arguments against it. A good number, though, betrayed some misunderstandings about the position, and many could find very few evaluative points to make, or were only able to outline or gesture at critical points without demonstrating an understanding of them. Many responded by contrasting eliminativism with other theories of mind and the weaker ones would fail to keep focus on the question and offer a generic essay on the strengths and weaknesses of different theories. A minority of weaker responses had a very superficial or confused understanding of the position itself. A minority were also confused about the distinction between reduction and elimination, some slipping into discussion of the identity theory.

02 This was a popular question, but the quality of the responses varied considerably. The better responses focused on the issue of causal interaction and looked at different accounts of it in good detail. Many of the better responses were able to gain good marks by focusing on just a few theoretical accounts of how interaction takes place without attempting to look at the full range of theories of mind on the specification. The majority, however, trawled through a good many different theories of mind in varying degrees of detail, sometimes discussing their pros and cons, but often failing effectively to direct the material at the issue of causal interaction. For example, behaviourism would often be discussed and dismissed, but without directly explaining how it purported to solve the problem of mind-body interaction. Most responses of this sort were pretty formulaic and the weaker ones often betrayed lack of detailed grasp of the positions described. Much of the conceptual terrain is difficult, and weaker candidates tended to reproduce positions and arguments which they appeared to have little genuine understanding of. Biological naturalism often figured as the preferred account of mind-body causation, although, again, weaker responses tended to describe this position but found it harder to provide arguments for it.

- 03** Political Philosophy proved to be a popular option and this was the most popular question on the paper and was generally done competently. Most responses saw the need to clarify the concept of liberty and usually distinguished positive and negative with varying degrees of precision. Most candidates identified the position expressed in the quotation with liberalism, and many then approached the question by working through a series of ideologies (anarchism, conservatism, Marxism) and examining how much interference in individual liberty each recommends, the weaker ones losing sight of the focus of the question or becoming descriptive rather than evaluative. Accounts of Marx in particular lacked depth and argument. Judgements tended to recommend a balance between positive and negative liberties, but lacked detail and sophistication.
- 04** Few candidates elected to do this question and in many cases it was done quite poorly. Many candidates struggled to come up with reasons for thinking natural rights exist, other than Locke's claim that they are bestowed on us by God. Few examined in any detail attempts to ground rights in natural properties of human beings, although Kant was sometimes used to argue that humans have intrinsic moral worth as ends in themselves. Rather prosaic juxtapositions between Locke and Bentham were common. Stronger responses included discussion of Mill, Hart, and Dworkin.
- 05** Neither question in Section C was popular, and it appears that the majority of centres are choosing not to teach this theme. Very few candidates dealt thoroughly with the implications of the question. For example, it was extremely rare for candidates to identify or critique the fact that the quotation involves moving from instances of error to global scepticism. Most examined a few sceptical arguments in limited detail but found the broader issue about the possibility of knowledge difficult to address. Many candidates began by defining knowledge as justified true belief and then focused on Gettier problems but without linking them to scepticism.
- 06** Responses were often short on detail. Most candidates read the question as asking for an evaluation of the claim that realism is false, and so a good many approached it via Plato's theory of forms and offered general arguments for and against, assuming that by rejecting Platonism the only option left was that universals exist 'only in the mind'. Some responses did distinguish nominalism and conceptualism although few knew any specific arguments against conceptualism. Nonetheless, some responses were able to access good marks while focusing on arguments for and against realism.
- 07** Moral Philosophy was one of the most popular themes with both questions attracted comparable numbers of responses. Many responses took the reference to moral truth as an invitation to discuss the merits of non-cognitivism generally, often delivering prepared essays on this topic but with little reference to cultural relativism. However, those that maintained focus on relativism generally did well.
- 08** Almost all candidates answered this question by evaluating Kant's theory and normally went on to contrast it with utilitarianism and virtue ethics. Knowledge of all these positions ranged from being precise and detailed to rather sketchy and basic. Stronger responses were able to focus on the significance of both motivation and duty to moral

actions, weaker responses simply gave arguments for and against Kantian ethics, Utilitarianism and Virtue ethics, often losing sight of the question in the process. Many offered virtue ethics as their preferred position, but without giving clear reasons why.

- 09** This was the less popular of the two Philosophy of Religion questions. Some spent a good deal of time cataloguing different sorts of religious experience with the help of James, Aquinas, Otto, etc. but knowledge of relevant philosophical arguments was generally not as good. Few candidates picked up on the quotation or found it useful as a way of contrasting hallucination with religious experience or the scientific with the religious point of view. Prosaic responses which blurred miracles with religious experience, e.g. by taking Hume's attack on miracles to be an attack on religious experience, were also quite common.
- 10** Most candidates recognised the need to define 'miracle' and usually referred to Hume, and often also to Hick or Swinburne. Although Hume would usually figure, his arguments were not always well understood, or were explained rather prosaically. Some blurred miracles with religious experience, e.g. talking about them being transient, ineffable etc. but most candidates had a reasonable grasp of the terrain, and many centres had clearly written on the topic and candidates were able to trot out pre-prepared answers which were mostly solid although varied in precision and detail.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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