



**General Certificate of Education
January 2011**

Philosophy 1171

PHIL1 An Introduction to Philosophy 1

Report on the Examination

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PHIL 1

General Comments

There was a relatively large entry for this paper, similar in size to the May 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 the last question attempted were clearly rushed or unfinished.

A sizeable minority of students did not attempt to answer both of the questions on one or both of the themes studied – this wasn't obviously due to poor time management.

The Compulsory Theme: Reason and experience

Question 01

Candidates' either knew what induction is or they didn't, consequently answers to this question were fairly polarised.

- Top-band responses generally explained induction and provided an illustration of an inductive argument before identifying a problem with the conclusion drawn. The problem identified varied from 'the conclusion could be false' (where weak inductive arguments were selected) to 'the conclusion cannot be known with certainty'. Many contrasted induction with deduction in order to make either point.
- Mid-band responses tended to be characterised by accurate accounts of a problem with the conclusions drawn from inductive arguments but imprecise explanations or inaccurate illustrations of what an inductive argument is.
- Answers in the bottom level didn't know what induction was. Some ignored the term 'inductive' and wrote about 'the problems caused by arguments', some described deduction and some described fallacies (typically modus ponens or modus tollens).

A number of candidates did not attempt the question.

Question 02

Ironically, given previous experience of answers to questions on this theme, most candidates focused on the acquisition of knowledge.

Many responses were broadly similar. The tendency was to identify the claim as an empiricist position, provide an account of or explanation of mind as tabula rasa, move 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. Critical points tended to focus on rationalism, innate ideas, capacities and knowledge.

Stronger answers were characterised by:

- The range of points raised and the level of detail and precision in which points were developed and analysed.
- Awareness of reasons why the mind might be characterised as a tabula rasa (rather than merely a description of the view).

- A grasp of different ways in which innateness might be characterised and how this applies to ideas, concepts, capacities and knowledge.
- Clear argumentation.

Weaker answers, in contrast, tended to be brief, lacking detailed and precise development and analysis, descriptive rather than analytical and, occasionally, overly focused on instinct.

Having said this, there were few very weak responses.

The Optional Themes

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

A number of issues prevent candidates from reaching top-level marks. These are:

- Identifying, explaining and/or illustrating two points where two points are required.
- Illustrating a point where an illustration is required.
- Differentiating between exposition and illustration.

Question 03

Two of the above issues were detectable in responses to this question:

- A number of candidates provided two versions of the same justification for dissent (generally, two versions of a moral objection to the law).
- Frequently, where two distinct reasons were identified both were clearly explained but neither was illustrated.

Question 05

The main issues here were:

- Identifying which criticisms of virtue ethics generally were relevant to this particular question.
- Constructing illustrative examples which were convincing (it isn't obvious, for example, that all thieves or drug dealers are happy and flourishing individuals).

Question 07

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

- Some provided two versions of the same point (typically the problem of evil).
- Some provided one relevant point and one tangential point (typically focused on the incoherence of characteristics attributed to God).

Question 09

This was reasonably well-answered. However:

- Sometimes it isn't clear which part of an answer is explanation and which part is illustration. For example, references to dementia were both frequent and appropriate but it was less clear whether they constituted an explanation of why being a person is a matter of degree or an illustration of why being a person is a matter of degree.

The Optional Themes

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

Question 04

This was reasonably well-answered. The majority of candidates responded to the quotation provided and constructed appropriately evaluative responses. Some denied that the idea of a social contract is a fiction, arguing that an explicit act of consent isn't necessary for the idea to apply in reality and that notions of tacit or hypothetical consent suffice; some argued that the idea of a social contract is a fiction but it is a useful way of determining rights and obligations; some argued that it is a fiction compounding another fiction (a state of nature) and not one that we actually need.

Question 06

Previous examination reports on this theme have highlighted the fact that candidates construct similar answers in each examination series regardless of the question on the paper. Sadly, this examination series was no different.

Unlike responses to question 04, the vast majority ignored the reference to 'genuinely moral' in the quotation provided and addressed the issue of whether our only motivation to perform a moral action was that the action is moral. Consequently, the vast majority considered a range of possible alternative motivations *without* assessing whether such alternatives were moral motivations.

Also, a considerable number of responses seem to equate right action with altruism and reasons for acting with egoism (and, particularly, psychological egoism). This leads them to argue either that there is no such thing as a moral action or that there is but only because we can reconcile morality with self-interest. This type of approach may be well-suited for some potential questions on this theme but will be completely tangential for others.

Question 08

This was reasonably well-answered. However, while responses were generally well-focused, a large number lacked detail and precision so that Anselm's ontological argument was frequently indistinguishable from Descartes' and/or references to Descartes' 'trademark' argument frequently neglected the argument itself. Similarly, while most candidates were aware of arguments given by Gaunilo and Kant these were frequently stated briefly and/or vaguely.

Question 10

This was also reasonably well-answered but, again, a number of responses would have been better had they avoided the following:

- A tendency to make inflated claims for what the Turing Test is designed to do.
- A tendency to focus solely on computers and, generally, on what computers could (or could not) do roughly 30 years ago.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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