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General Certificate of Education
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Philosophy 1171

PHIL1 An Introduction to Philosophy 1

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The entry for this paper was slightly larger than the January entry although trends were, again, broadly similar. Some optional themes – The Idea of God and Why Should I be Moral – were slightly 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 rushed and finished in note form.

The Compulsory Theme: Reason and Experience

Question 01

The vast majority of candidates began by explaining, and illustrating, what an analytic proposition is. Most limited themselves to one illustration, typically 'a bachelor is an unmarried man'. Not surprisingly, perhaps, there was a tendency to link analytic propositions to rationalism, necessity and the *a priori*. However, in doing so many lost sight of the question.

- The majority of top-band responses included an explanation of the difference between analytic and synthetic propositions within a more general explanation of the differences between *a priori* and a posteriori knowledge and/or the differences between necessary and contingent truths so that the question was answered in the context of a more general discussion.
- Mid-band responses tended to be characterised by accurate accounts of analytic propositions but, due to the links made to necessary truths and/or *a priori* knowledge, the difference between analytic and synthetic propositions was then neglected. Responses were usually fairly detailed but focused on contrasting *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge and/or necessary and contingent truths.
- Some responses in the bottom level couldn't explain what was meant by either analytic or synthetic; some demonstrated a broad grasp of the terms before providing illustrations which undermined this; some focused on arguments rather than propositions and contrasted deduction with induction.

Question 02

Many responses were broadly similar. The claim was identified as an empiricist position and further elaborated through an account or explanation of the mind at birth as a tabula rasa and a Lockean and/or Humean account of the acquisition of ideas and knowledge through sense experience. Discussion was focused on the strengths of empiricism and the weaknesses of rationalism or vice versa according to whether the claim was accepted or rejected.

Once again stronger answers were characterised by:

- The level of detail and precision in which points were developed and analysed.
- Awareness of specific arguments linking the development of ideas and substantive knowledge to sense experience.
- Analysis of these arguments and of alternative accounts of the source of certain ideas, concepts, capacities and knowledge.

- Clear argumentation.

Weaker answers, in contrast, tended to:

- Lack detailed and precise development of points. Frequently a wide range of points were made but not described or developed in any detail at all. Such essays tend to read like an outline of what could be discussed (but isn't).
- Alternatively, provide a relatively detailed but entirely descriptive response. These typically read like a list of who said what without any explicit analysis of what their reasons for saying it were.
- Assert a preference in the final paragraph (I agree with Locke, or Plato or Kant) rather than support an argument throughout.

There are a number of fairly persistent confusions in responses to questions in this theme. Two of the most persistent confusions concern imagination and language.

1. The fact that we can imagine winged horses and golden mountains (i.e. things we haven't experienced) is not a rationalist critique of empiricism. Similarly, references to the imagination in Locke and Hume are not part of an empiricist rebuttal of rationalism. Rather, they are employed to support the empiricist thesis. Locke simply notes that once the mind has acquired simple ideas 'it has the power to repeat, compare and unite them, even to an almost infinite variety, and so can make at pleasure new complex ideas'. Hume also acknowledges that 'nothing is more free than the imagination of man… it has unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating and dividing these ideas, in all the varieties of fiction and vision'. Hume, however, claims that the imagination cannot 'exceed' an original stock of ideas and Locke claims that it cannot 'invent or frame one new simple idea in the mind'.
2. The claim that words are not the names of private objects (as indicated, for example, by Wittgenstein's 'beetle in the box') is not directed purely, or even primarily, at empiricism and should not be employed to suggest that empiricists can't talk to each other. Wittgenstein's view that an inner process requires outward criteria applies equally to Descartes. How was Descartes able to name the processes of doubting, affirming, denying, judging etc.? Classical empiricists were working with an architecture bequeathed by Descartes and while it is the case that Locke claims that words stand for 'the ideas in the mind of him that uses them' he also claims that this provides a 'secret reference' to 'ideas in the minds… of other men with whom they communicate' otherwise we would 'talk in vain and could not be understood'. While it may be the case that Locke's position is inadequate he does, at least, address the issue.

AS Level students would be well-advised to avoid discussions of signification and/or the indeterminacy of meaning altogether. The most able students struggle to make a relevant or convincing point and the majority misunderstand the point of Wittgenstein's argument.

These are not the only confusions: for example, an idea of the missing shade of blue is not an innate idea; neither did Hume argue that we couldn't conceive of the missing shade of blue; the ability to grasp the properties of a chiliagon is not the ability to 'picture' a chiliagon. However, confusion concerning the imagination and language is more damaging given that candidates' frequently devote several paragraphs to such points.

The Optional Themes

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

A number of issues prevent candidates from reaching top-level marks. Typically, these are:

- Not identifying, explaining and/or illustrating two points where two points are required.
- Not illustrating a point where an illustration is required.

Question 03

Responses to this question were typically detailed, but:

- A large number of candidates devoted so much space to describing dimensions of power (power to, power over, control theory, effect theory etc.) that a contrast with authority was frequently lost.
- Even where the difference between power and authority was clear the amount of space devoted to exposition meant that illustration was neglected.

Question 05

The main issues here were:

- Providing two versions of the same point. Typically, how self-interest may prevent us from performing moral duties.
- Constructing illustrative examples which were convincing (it isn't obvious, for example, that we would walk past an elderly person lying in the street in order to get to a newsagent before they sold the last newspaper).

Question 07

The majority of candidates knew what immanence was and were able to suggest conflicts with three other attributes. Typically, these were transcendence, eternity and one of omni benevolence, omniscience and omnipotence. However:

- Some dwelt on the problem of evil and, while several attributes were referred to, it wasn't always clear which were in tension with immanence or what the tension was.
- Some provided only one or two relevant points rather than three.

Question 09

There were a large number of mid-band answers to this question for two main reasons:

- Most referred to Parfit and/or to the claim that survival through time is all we have or all we need but, typically, without clarifying how survival differs from identity.
- Illustrations (which were invariably provided) were not the most appropriate ones to use. Most employed either Reid's General (to make a point about overlapping memory) or a version of 'Brownson' (to make the point that Brown survives). There were also imprecise attempts to link the latter to fission.

The Optional Themes

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

Question 04

The majority of candidates began by explaining and describing the concept of a 'state of nature' in Hobbesian terms. Their accounts were, typically, detailed and accurate. Some were able to contrast Hobbes' view with the views of Locke and/or Rousseau in similar detail although many struggled to do so. The main issues, however, were:

- Many described the positions of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and sometimes Rawls without engaging in any critical discussion and concluded by simply asserting a preference for one of them.
- Where critical points were raised there was a tendency to rely on a limited range of arguments and the *ad hominem* fallacy.
- Some lost sight of the question after the opening paragraphs and focused on the nature and extent of our obligations to the State.

A number of candidates employed evidence concerning the extent of criminal activities occurring in the absence of authority due to e.g. natural disasters to support Hobbes' view of life in a state of nature; others used examples of natural disasters to find evidence of man's natural sympathies to support a more positive view. Few used examples like this to compare and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of alternative views.

Question 06

Responses to this question were generally better than responses provided to the question on the January paper, mainly because the majority were able to maintain a focus on the question. The tone of most responses was similar to trends noted in previous examination series: the vast majority accept that our motivation to act, including our motivation to act morally, is always self-interested. However:

- The majority of candidates do not draw any distinctions between different versions of egoism.
- Consequently, few are able to construct a specific criticism of e.g. psychological egoism or ethical egoism.
- There is a tendency to view virtue ethics as a version of enlightened egoism so that e.g. both Aristotle and Hobbes are employed to support the position that is being argued for.
- Weaker responses are characterised by the absence of any references to philosophical positions and the presence of a series of mundane examples such as the choice between helping one's mother to tidy the house and going out with friends (both of which turn out to be self-interested).

Very few are prepared to argue that a motivation to act may not be self-interested. The Kantian view is often dismissed as 'silly' or 'obviously wrong', although some are persuaded by Humean sympathy.

Question 08

Responses to this question were, generally, of two main types.

- One type of response offered a descriptive account of a number of philosophical, sociological and psychological positions typically incorporating Hume, Feuerbach, Marx and Freud. Durkheim and Dawkins were also referred to but less frequently. Better versions of this type of approach contrasted such accounts of the origin of our idea of God with Descartes' trademark argument. However, while responses were generally well-focused, a large number lacked detail and precision, particularly on Marx and Freud. Also, there was a tendency to conclude by either asserting a preference for e.g. the Freudian view or with the claim that a discussion concerning the source of our idea of God is philosophically insignificant.
- The second type of response selected a narrower range of sources, typically Hume, Marx and Freud, and subjected these accounts to some critical discussion. While it was frequently the case that both exposition and critique were crude in places, analysis was present and also employed to advance a position. Consequently, such responses tended to score higher marks on two of the three assessment objectives.

Question 10

This difficult question was reasonably well-answered. Many responses began with definitions of necessary and sufficient conditions, proceeded to identify some attributes of personhood and employed material concerning e.g. diminution, the loss of certain attributes, whether some non-humans possessed the attribute and, if so, whether it was either necessary or sufficient for personhood. Even where candidates made no explicit reference to necessary or sufficient conditions an argument was usually implicit e.g. in claims that a certain attribute was possessed by non-persons.

The main issues candidates' faced seemed to be:

- Running out of time: either because this was the last question attempted or, more usually, through engaging in a detailed discussion of each attribute identified. Consequently, many provided a good response to whether any attributes were necessary followed by a last paragraph assertion that none were individually sufficient. Nevertheless, such discussions were typically good.
- A few candidates argued that the concept of a person is primitive and cannot be broken down in this way – before eventually claiming that it would have to be.
- Some discussed attributes of personhood without addressing the issue of whether a given attribute was either necessary or sufficient.
- Some linked necessary and sufficient conditions to personal identity through time and answered a different question.

On the whole, it was pleasing that the majority of candidates were prepared to employ a range of material to grapple with the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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