



**General Certificate of Education  
January 2012**

**Philosophy**

**PHIL1      An Introduction to Philosophy**

***Report on the Examination***

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## PHIL1

### General Comments

There was a relatively large entry for this paper, similar in size to previous January entries, with over 75% of the entry taking an examination in Philosophy for the first time. Not surprisingly, perhaps, some students did not appear to be particularly well-prepared to address examination questions at this level.

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

Responses to this question generally fell into three categories:

- A minority of students were able to explain and illustrate both introspection and the tautological.
- The majority provided accurate explanations and illustrations of one term – typically, but not universally, the tautological. Large numbers referred to both terms just in case their explanation and illustration of the tautological also covered introspection.
- A minority of students were not able to explain either term but earned some marks through, for example, providing a relevant illustrative example without saying what it was an example of or through providing a general account of different approaches to epistemological issues which possessed some tangential relevance to the question.

#### Question 02

This question also generated a full range of marks and, in general, it was answered fairly well.

Many responses were broadly similar and some were sufficiently general to function as a broadly accurate approach to any essay question on this theme. The tendency was to identify the claim as an empiricist position, provide an account of or explanation of the mind as a *tabula rasa* at birth, move on to the claim that all of our ideas and knowledge were derived from experience and, from here, to a consideration of some ideas, concepts, capacities and knowledge claims that seem to pose problems for this position.

Stronger answers were characterised by:

- A sustained focus on innateness.
- Awareness of reasons supporting the claim that the mind is a *tabula rasa* at birth.
- 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:

- Make few references to innateness.
- Concentrate on empiricist accounts of the acquisition of simple and complex ideas.
- Lack detailed and precise development and analysis of points selected for discussion.
- Include tangential discussions of e.g. sensory error, the missing shade of blue etc.

Having said this there were few very weak responses. There were fewer references to breathing and suckling babies than usual – and when these appeared they were, generally, also dismissed – and some references to different ways of approaching innateness. Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Chomsky and others featured fairly regularly although detailed and precise accounts of their arguments were less common.

## The Optional Themes

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

A number of issues continue to prevent students from reaching high marks. These are:

- A failure to identify, explain and/or illustrate two points where two points are required and/or a failure to focus on one point where one point is required.
- Neglecting to illustrate a point where an illustration is required.
- Providing an alternative to a view rather than a criticism of a view when a criticism is required.
- A failure to differentiate adequately between exposition and illustration.

### Question 03

The main trends here were:

- Some responses were poorly focused and outlined the view that legitimate government does require popular approval rather than a criticism of it.
- Some of the more focused responses struggled to clearly identify and illustrate a criticism of the view: for example, some candidates made the reasonable point that a government might be legitimate without obviously possessing popular approval but also assumed in illustrating it that any victorious party in an election must have at least 51% of the vote which tended to undermine the point they were making.
- The majority focused on critiques of democracy via both Mill and Plato but the latter proved to be very much easier to both explain and illustrate.

### Question 05

The main issues here were:

- The tendency to assert that self-interest is relevant to morality.
- The tendency to describe two alternatives to the view in question rather than two criticisms of it.
- The tendency to assert the same point twice – typically that we are all egoists.
- The tendency to neglect illustrative examples.

Most identified the view in the question as Kantian and those that concentrated on providing two criticisms of Kantian ethics were generally also able to illustrate both points. Again, a minority of responses were poorly focused and outlined the view in question rather than criticisms of it.

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**Question 07**

The majority of students were able to explain the view that God is eternal. However:

- Some were not clear on how to distinguish between 'eternal' and 'everlasting'.
- Many were not able to sustain a focus on one difficulty with the view so that references to several attributes were frequent.

The best answers were clear and maintained a focus typically concerning either acting or knowing in time.

**Question 09**

This was reasonably well-answered but, as in previous examination series, it isn't always 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 diminution or an illustration of it. Also, some were less than clear on what is meant by diminution.

**The Optional Themes****30-mark questions: 04, 06, 08 and 10**

There were relatively few very weak, fragmentary or entirely tangential, responses to any of the 30-mark questions. Similarly, however, there were relatively few exceptionally strong responses. Most were able to select relevant material for discussion although many responses were limited either in scope or understanding and many lacked detailed and precise development. Not surprisingly, some are more comfortable when describing positions and evaluation is frequently under-developed. The best responses were focused, detailed and precise. However, even where analysis is present and occasionally penetrating it is only rarely developed into a strong and sophisticated line of argumentation.

**Question 04**

Students' generally focused on one of two types of response – both of which were catered for in the marking scheme – either rooting their answers in civil disobedience or contractual theories of obligation. Both types of response were generally founded on a secure knowledge base but many were largely descriptive, lacking in depth and in the development of detailed analysis. The best responses compared non-violent and violent protests in some detail and reviewed the consequences of each before considering grounds for possible justification. Some equated violent protest with rioting and some were less than secure on what Hobbes or Locke 'would say' about this. Accounts of Rawls' position on civil disobedience were generally more accurate.

**Question 06**

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

The best responses typically began with Hobbes and considered criticisms of the Hobbesian view before addressing other contractual theories, such as those offered by Rawls or Gauthier, and critically assessing these. However, the vast majority outlined Hobbes' account of our motivation to enter into a social contract before describing the views of Aristotle, Kant and occasionally Hume. Such accounts frequently included critical discussions of, for example,

Kantian ethics but it wasn't clear how such discussions were connected to the question on the paper.

As usual, a considerable number of responses simply asserted that egoism (and, particularly, psychological egoism) is true.

### **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'. Similarly, while most candidates were aware of arguments given by, for example, Gaunilo and Kant these were sometimes developed in detail and with precision and sometimes stated briefly and/or vaguely. In short, the same material tends to be employed but sometimes it indicates a sound understanding of issues and sometimes a partial and less than clear understanding.

### **Question 10**

This was also reasonably well answered and addressed in different ways. Some arguments for the view in question got there via critiques of physical continuity; some arguments against the view in question argued that it was necessary but not sufficient (physical continuity was needed as well) and some compared identity unfavourably to survival.

Many responses were characterised by lengthy descriptions of thought experiments. The differentiating factor was that some understood what the point of the thought experiment was while others were quite confused about what it was supposed to show.

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