PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01

Introduction to Philosophy and Theology

General comments

Candidates had a very good grasp of the material for this paper, and had clearly read and researched the material in detail. Time management was good, and most wrote three essays of approximately equal length. Questions were interpreted in a variety of ways, and evaluative comment was of a very high order. Some scripts were partially illegible, and candidates should remember that the first criterion of effective assessment is legibility.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Critically examine Aristotle's theory of causation.

Most answers began with an explanation of Aristotle's concept of the four causes, and explained that this was Aristotle's understanding of the way the world is, and why it is as it is: i.e., that material objects have formal, material, and efficient causes, all of which are directed towards a particular *telos*/goal. These ideas were explained with examples, and then usually linked to Aristotle's concept of a First Cause, from which Aquinas derived his concept of God as the First Cause of the universe. Critical analysis looked at Aristotle's necessarily primitive concept of the universe and its structures – for example in the concept that matter cannot move itself. It also examined Aristotle's notion that there has to be a first cause, and that there has to be a purpose or goal that is unique to each thing and to the universe as a whole. Some made a useful comparison with Sartre's existentialism, and the latter's doctrine that existence precedes essence, and moved the discussion into ethics. Level 6 could have been reached by focussing more on causation itself, for example on the ideas of Hume particularly his notions about the relationship between cause and effect.

Question 2

Critically assess the claim that all knowledge is innate.

The general consensus was that knowledge is not innate, but is learned. This was frequently explained through Locke's well-known view that the mind is initially a *tabula rasa*, and that all claims to remembered *a priori* knowledge can be explained more simply and reasonably as forgotten empirical knowledge. The empirical view was illustrated from the methodology and success of science, and from the ability of the mind to link ideas in order to form more complex ideas. There was a general acknowledgement that the claim that knowledge is innate has not gone away: many referred to Chomsky's argument that humans are born with a universal innate grammar, although this was generally rejected, as was Descartes' attempt to show that knowledge of God is innate. Level 6 arguments focused particularly on the word "all", and usually argued that although the claim that all knowledge is innate is not reasonable, the claim that *some* knowledge is innate is perhaps likely, for example the human perception of difference and identity.

Question 3

'There are no moral absolutes.' Discuss.

The most favoured approach to this question was to indicate the persuasive power of the different forms of ethical relativism. Although persuasive, these were generally held to rest upon an unsolved absolutist paradox, in so far as the claim that all moral judgements are relative appears to be an absolute claim, and thus defeats the question by default. Similarly, a claim such as, 'All ethical norms in different societies must be tolerated', appears also to be an absolute claim. Also, notions such as 'moral improvement' have no foundation if all moral judgements are relative, since by definition there can be no improvement where all

social norms are tolerated. Habitually, candidates claimed, we assume that the world does make slow, if painful, moral progress, for example in the moves to abolish slavery and the prevailing tendency to reject cannibalism and child molestation, to name but a few. Conversely, candidates pointed out the difficulties with the alternative view, that morality is absolute, showing the problems with Divine Command Theory, Kantian ethics, and Natural Law. Some of the best essays argued for a middle ground – that ethical values are objective but not absolute.

Question 4

'The view that scripture is inspired by God is unreasonable.' Evaluate this claim.

This was the least-favoured question, although it was generally answered well. Candidates were aware of a variety of views about the proposed inspiration of scripture, rejecting most of them as being undemonstrable and unreasonable. Some argued for a limited view of inspiration, suggesting that some of the biblical writers were inspired to write following a religious experience from God, for example through prophetic inspiration or through a response to prayer. What they wrote was then susceptible to human error, so scriptural interpretation will always be needed. This was demonstrated clearly through a survey of the results of literary, form and redaction criticism, where the errors of copying, transmission and editing in various recensions of the text require an appropriate modification of 'inspiration'. The debate is very technical, and some candidates could have reached higher levels by a closer understanding of that debate and by dealing specifically with the word "unreasonable". It would have been interesting to read an answer to this question based on Buddhism, but nobody attempted that!

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

> **Paper 9774/02**
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> **Topics and Key Texts in**
>
> **Philosophy and Theology 1**

Key Messages

- To score high marks on the Key Text question candidates need to read the specified passage carefully and to make comments which relate to it. Candidates are directed to the specific wording of each question, which in all cases should dictate the nature and content of their responses.
- Candidates need to manage their time between the questions very carefully.

General Comments

Nearly all candidates for this paper answered questions from Topic 1 Epistemology and Topic 3 Philosophy of Religion. There was occasionally an imbalance between answers for the 25-mark questions and those for the 10-mark and 15-mark text questions, where some candidates wrote at disproportionate length on the text sections, sometimes to the extent that each part was the equivalent of the input normally associated with 25-mark questions. All questions, regardless of their parts, have the same demands in terms of time and content.

Comments on Specific Questions

Topic 1 Epistemology

Section A

Question 1

(Extract from Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists:* Cahn 745)

(a)   **Explain Berkeley's use of the idea of God in the *Dialogues*.**

Most began with Berkeley's mantra that 'to be is to be perceived' – knowledge of the existence of material objects is not possible, since all we can know is our perceptions. Since it cannot be shown that the objects of sense perception are held in the mind, there must be a being in whose mind the consistency of sense experience is maintained, i.e. God. The possibility that material objects might have independent existence is precluded: otherwise we should have to accept that unthinking substance can influence or direct the mind of God, which would be to derogate from God's attributes. Answers were reasonably thorough.

(b)   **Critically assess Berkeley's idealism in the *Dialogues*.**

Berkeley's idealism follows from his rejection of realist accounts of the nature and existence of material objects, and candidates were able to show, primarily through Berkeley's analysis of the nature of primary and secondary qualities, that for Berkeley material objects are given systematically and consistently to our perception by God. Some candidates could have gone from Level 5 to Level 6 by a closer understanding of Berkeley's rejection of realism, for example in his treatment of illusion.

Question 2

Examine critically Descartes' use of philosophical doubt in his search for a secure foundation for knowledge.

This was the most popular question of **Questions 2** and **3**, and nearly all candidates showed a thorough knowledge of Descartes' analysis of the nature of sense perception, from which he concludes that true knowledge can only come from reason. Reason, therefore has to take doubt to an extreme in order to find a foundation for knowledge that is indubitable and can serve as the basis for knowledge-claims. Thus candidates arrived at the *cogito*, and proceeded to attack it with intrepidity, primarily from the modern allegation that the claim that there is an 'I' who thinks claims too much. Several candidates progressed with obvious pleasure to 'brain-in-a-vat' scenarios, and argued that no epistemological theory can overcome that objection. One or two referred to the suggestion that Descartes' epistemology relies on a confusion over Leibniz's Law on the Identity of Indiscernibles, which was very impressive.

Question 3

Critically assess reliabilism.

Very few candidates answered this question, so comment would be inappropriate.

Topic 2 Philosophical and Theological Language

Very few candidates answered these questions, so comment would be inappropriate.

Topic 3 Philosophy of Religion

Section A

Question 7

(Extract from John Hick: Evil and the God of Love: 201)

(a)   Explain Hick's reasons for concluding that the Augustinian theodicy fails to resolve the problem of evil.

Most candidates made a reasonable job of this, although only a few were able to develop Hick's reasons beyond the material shown in the immediate context. There was an issue of time management here, in so far as several candidates wrote at great length on Hick's theodicy, which would have been better appearing in answer to **(b)**.

(b)   Evaluate Hick's soul-making theodicy.

There were some superb answers here. It is important to ensure that question responses are specifically appropriate to the question asked, as noted above for part **(a)**. Hick's theodicy came in for general approval, although the chief cause for disquiet about it theologically is its inability to give a proper account of atonement theology in relation to Jesus – if all are saved regardless, then what was Jesus' atonement for, and why is there such an emphasis on the penalties of sin in the New Testament writings? Opinion varied, but the critical analysis was good.

Question 8

Critically assess the claim that the anthropic principle is the strongest form of the design argument.

The design argument was well known in most formulations, and candidates generally gave a good critical analysis of each formulation. Swinburne's (non-anthropic) version of the argument, particularly his argument from temporal order, was most often billed as the best alternative to the design argument. The anthropic principle was itself referred to in different formulations, and most granted the strength of its arguments but pointed out that there is a weak version of the principle as well as a strong version, and that they reach different conclusions about God. Some candidates

could have accessed the higher Levels by being more conversant with that aspect of the anthropic principle which refers to the cosmological constants.

Question 9

Examine critically the implications of psychological understandings of religious belief.

The bulk of the comment and analysis was on Freud and Jung. The treatment of Freud was interesting, most being deeply sceptical of Freud's writings on the subject, particularly *Moses and Monotheism* and *Totem and Taboo*, which were said to bear little relation to any supposed history of the human race outside that in Freud's mind. There was approval for his rejection of religious understandings of the conscience in favour of a psychological analysis, and this was extended by reference to Jung's theory of archetypes. Candidates wishing to achieve Level 6 could have focused on the wording of the question, which refers specifically to the "implications" of psychological understandings of religious belief.

Topic 4 New Testament: The Four Gospels

Very few candidates answered these questions, so comment would be inappropriate.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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Paper 9774/03

Topics and Key Texts in

Philosophy and Theology 2

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Key messages

- To score high marks on the Key Text question candidates need to read the specified passage carefully and to make comments which relate to it.
- Candidates need to manage their time between the questions very carefully.

General comments

The candidates for this paper were well prepared and the scripts were good. Some candidates needed to respond to the part **(a)** of the text based question with closer reference to the text and to use the passage as a spring-board from which to demonstrate wider knowledge. Some candidates could have reached higher levels by sharing their time equally between questions.

The question on Christian Ethics was generally a more popular choice than the alternative on virtue theory, it was important for candidates to comment upon modern developments in virtue ethics.

General comment of candidates' answers is given for the options chosen by a significant number of candidates. There is therefore no general comment for **Topic 3 Old Testament: Prophecy**

Comments on specific questions

Topic 1 Philosophy of Mind

Section A

Question 1

(Extract from John Searle: Minds, Brains and Science: 28)

(a) **Explain why Searle insists that no computer program can ever be a mind.**

This was well done by nearly all candidates, the clarity of Searle's ideas being transmitted to candidates, who discussed them in detail. The essential points given were that brains cause minds; minds have semantic content such as thoughts, beliefs and intentions; no computer program is sufficient to give a system a mind. The brain can be defined in computational terms, but such definition is only trivial, since the computational properties of the brain are insufficient to explain how it functions to produce mental states. Mental states are biological phenomena. In terms of time management, this would have been a good place to stop, since it reaches the subject content of part **(b)**.

(b) **Evaluate Searle's claim that mental states are biological phenomena.**

To reiterate the final comment of **(a)**, the analysis of mental states as biological phenomena is the province of part **(b)**, so in order to reach higher Levels, some candidates could have kept the subject matter for each part in the appropriate place. Most used Searle's Chinese Room argument to show that (at least for the moment) although computers appear to give a machine intentionality and some kind of consciousness, this is merely a simulation and not a reality: machines have a formal content, but still understand nothing. Some moved the discussion forward to claims that Artificial Intelligence might one day produce a machine of sufficient complexity to generate

consciousness and qualia. Answers to this depended on candidates' preferences, but the analysis was good.

Question 2

Evaluate the claim that the 'hard problem' of consciousness has no solution.

Very few candidates answered this question, so comment would be inappropriate.

Question 3

Critically assess the problem of personal identity.

Answers to this made interesting reading, since the subject matter is clearly thought provoking, and in some ways is ground breaking, for example in the capacity for experiments in neuro-science and brain function to one day actualise some of the thought experiments that are considered by the proponents of the various theories of personal identity. Simple brain/body identification was rejected by most as a criterion of PI, on the grounds that both brain and body are, in the end, simply arrangements of material objects that in theory can be replicated. Dualist theories were also rejected, on the whole, on the grounds that dualism as a theory of mind lacks sufficient explanatory power. Most interest was generated by Parfit's view that PI consists in psychological connectedness, and this was discussed in connection with Parfit's own thought-experiments. The discussion was of a very high quality, showing critical awareness throughout.

Topic 2 Ethics

Section A

Question 4

(Extract from John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism: 277-278)

(a)   Examine Mill's understanding of the relationship between the principle of utility and moral rules.

Many candidates had a clear grasp of the text and gave strong clear responses. Those who were able to place the text in its context, as a response to criticisms of the principle of utility, were advantaged. The 'nautical almanac' analogy was explained well by those who had a secure understanding of the text. Some candidates struggled to use the text in service of the question and preferred to make general comments, but the stronger candidates demonstrated clear understanding of the text and its implications.

(b)   Critically examine the claim that utilitarians should always obey the law.

This question was answered well with many candidates extending their ideas to good effect. Some candidates were able to gain very high scores by detailing their full understanding of the work of Mill, whilst others worked on a comparison between different types of utilitarian. Higher level responses worked creatively with the question throughout the essay and reached a well argued conclusion. Less developed responses came from candidates who did not appear to be aware that Bentham and Mill were social reformers with a passionate interest in the relationship between the principle of utility and the law.

Section B

Question 5

Critically examine the claim that Christian Ethics cannot successfully defend embryo research and genetic engineering.

This question was a popular choice. Candidates typically compared a number of different Christian ethical frameworks with the aim of showing that Christian responses to these issues are far from uniform. The fundamental issue of the status of the embryo was usually dealt with successfully and seen as a key issue within the Christian debate. Candidates sometimes demonstrated

understanding of human and non-human genetic engineering and were able to appreciate that the promise of resilient crops made the issue of genetic engineering highly complex. It was important for candidates not to go into too much detail about how other ethical theories could defend embryo research and genetic engineering. Biblical exegesis, when used, was not always done with full awareness of the tradition but key principles were often successfully identified. The balance of these essays generally inclined towards the theoretical, but some candidates were very well informed about the issues.

Question 6

Critically examine modern developments in virtue ethics.

Strong responses considered Aristotle as well as modern formulations of virtue theory and gave clear explanation and evaluation of modern scholarly work in this field. An examination of virtue ethics in general, without reference to modern developments, was reasonably common and candidates were given full credit if the issues identified were generic. Modern questions such as whether a person can be *called* virtuous if they are genetically inclined to *be* virtuous (and vice versa), or whether virtue is culturally relative were not often addressed.

Topic 3 Old Testament: Prophecy

Very few candidates answered these questions, so comment would be inappropriate.