

# PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01

Introduction to Philosophy and Theology

## General Comments

The quality of responses was remarkable. Some scripts were simply outstanding and even the weakest displayed clear strengths. Time management was generally very good.

There were no questions that produced answers that were noticeably weaker or stronger. Candidates were equally well prepared in all aspects of the papers and those who taught them deserve full credit.

No one question was more popular than any other.

### **1 Critically examine the view that all knowledge starts with the senses.**

It was interesting to see that there are lots of rationalists among the candidate body. Most candidates grounded their discussion in the debate between Plato and Aristotle and the various schools of thought that followed them. A common starting point was the assertion that Aristotle's epistemology was built on the strong foundation that at birth the mind is *tabula rasa* and that all knowledge comes to it through experience and perception. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the treatment of rationalism was the common claim that the mind is able to introspect and extrapolate in a way that seems to go far beyond mere sense experience, for example in its ability to investigate the quantum world. Most candidates hedged their bets and suggested that mental events and brain states are two aspects of the same thing, so knowledge has both a rational and an empirical basis.

### **2 'It is obvious that morality is relative.' Critically assess this claim.**

Nearly all candidates took an extended tour of descriptive / cultural / normative relativism, in the process of which they dug out some very interesting data about the various habits of humans throughout the world. Most liked the idea that if it is absolutely true that all morality is relative, then relativism has a nicely paradoxical absolutist basis. The result was a collection of essays that were a pleasure to read. One candidate articulated the paradox well, 'If there is *anything* obvious about morality, then it is obviously that *nothing* is obvious about morality.' It was interesting that Pojman's version of objectivism (as opposed to relativism or absolutism) was hailed as a sensible way out of the moral morass.

### **3 Critically assess the claim that without evidence, religious belief is worthless.**

There has clearly been some deep thinking about the rationalist / evidentialist divide. Quite a few candidates started their essays with some epistemology, looking first at the definition of knowledge as 'justified, true belief', then looking at foundationalist, coherentist and reliabilist understandings of knowledge and how these relate to religious belief. The general perception was that Wittgenstein was responsible for a coherentist understanding of religious belief, but that language-game analysis did not hold all the answers since some people have coherent sets of beliefs that appear worthless to others, not least when they advocate mass murder and the like. All sorts of belief-patterns may be coherent, but they can also be completely wrong. Conversely, belief that amounts to knowledge is either impossible or deluded, at least in so far as religion is concerned, since any supposed knowledge of God puts the created on a par with the Creator. Pascal received much attention (and considerable disparagement), as did Aquinas and Natural Law, although for completely different reasons. Some comments were quite scandalous, but with appropriate supporting argument were no less interesting for that.

### **4 'Conscience cannot be defined.' Discuss.**

Many candidates instantly agreed with the assertion and then went on to produce a lengthy definition of 'conscience'. This question perhaps attracted more middle-of-the-road answers than **Questions 1-3**, primarily because of a tendency to explain theories of the conscience in order to answer the question. The



best responses were often those that examined the word 'defined' - some suggesting that, in terms of mechanical definition, 'conscience' obviously can be defined because many have done so. However in terms of accurate definition, the fact that the conscience can have religious, psychological and evolutionary explanations suggests that a correct definition may be hard to find. Some proposed that 'definition' can be satisfied by seeking a common denominator, such as 'a faculty that regulates moral behaviour', which seemed to work quite well since it included no requirement for people's moral behaviour to be identical.

# PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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Paper 9774/02

Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy and Theology 1

## General Comments

The quality of responses was remarkable. Some scripts were simply outstanding and even the weakest displayed clear strengths.

Some candidates needed to respond to the part **(a)** of the text based questions in greater depth. For future reference, candidates should know the specific focus of each chapter of a text, and should be able to respond both to the specific context of the text and to its broader background in the book as a whole. While many candidates were able to do this, some were not.

Time management was generally very good. Despite the previous comment about answers to part **(a)**, a few candidates wrote disproportionately lengthy responses. Such detail was commendable, but not good exam technique since the **(b)** question, which was worth more marks, sometimes received comparatively scant attention.

There were no questions that produced answers that were noticeably weaker or stronger. Candidates were equally well prepared in all aspects of the papers and those who taught them deserve full credit.

General comment of candidates' answers is given for the options chosen by a significant number of candidates. Very few candidates opted for **Topic 1 (Epistemology)** or **Topic 2 (Philosophical and Theological Language)** and there is no general comment on these.

As a general point, some candidates used the technique of writing an explanatory essay followed by a concluding evaluation. Although this worked cogently enough, for some it meant that the body of the essay was factual rather than analytical. Evaluation and analysis should be built into the structure of an essay rather than added on at the end.

## **Topic 3: Philosophy of Religion**

**7 (a) With reference to this passage [from John Polkinghorne's: 'Science and Creation. The Search for Understanding': 1-2], explain why Polkinghorne sees natural theology as being crucially important for understanding the world.**

On the whole candidates handled this extract well, usually beginning with Polkinghorne's annoyance with 'armchair theologians' who write at great length on the subject of creation without referring to the scientific evidence that relates to question of the origins of the universe. The essence of the design and cosmological arguments is that the universe must necessarily display something of the nature of its creator, so that observing, recording and analysing its data should be an essential part of the theologian's stock-in-trade. Science is the most profound context for answering questions about both the macro and the micro-universe. In any event, theology has to take a total world view or else open itself to ridicule. The converse is true also: science that is confined to pure physical description is barren; the theologian is best equipped to handle matters of meaning and interpretation. Candidates expanded on these and related themes to good effect, although sometimes responses became evaluative and thereby rather irrelevant to the concerns of part **(a)** which only required an explanation of Polkinghorne's views about natural theology.

**7 (b) Assess critically Polkinghorne's attempt to lead physics to theology,**

There was much interesting discussion about the concerns of the weak anthropic principle (the WAP) as opposed to its strong counterpart (the SAP). Whereas the SAP generally leads to theistic conclusions, the WAP merely notes that the universe is fine tuned to an extent that is sufficient to have produced intelligent observers. One frequent comment about this, discussed by Polkinghorne, is that there is nothing remarkable in the fact that the universe has exactly those boundary conditions needed to produce intelligent observers, since otherwise there would be nobody to comment upon the fact. By contrast, Polkinghorne believes that it is amazing that the world is intelligible at all. Many candidates agreed with Polkinghorne, using Swinburne's 'card shuffling machine' in support; however most challenged Polkinghorne's Christian interpretation of this intelligibility, particularly his sometimes obscure use of 'logos theology'. They also challenged Polkinghorne's 'dual aspect' theology of the soul, arguing instead that the universe is equally susceptible to materialist explanations. On the positive side, most agreed that natural theology works well if you are a rationalist. Some espoused reformed epistemology instead, condemning all forms of natural theology as 'pie in the sky' in the face of an omnipotent being who cannot be known.

**8 Does the fact that something exists rather than nothing mean that there is a God?**

Most interpreted this as a question on the cosmological argument and waxed enthusiastic about the various forms in which it comes, from Aquinas to Swinburne and beyond. The general answer was 'Who knows?', a response usually derived from Bertrand Russell's observation that the universe is a 'brute fact', and that if the level of explanation has to stop somewhere, then it is best to stop at the universe itself rather than to go one step beyond. Others interpreted the question (quite legitimately) as inviting them to discuss the various arguments for the existence of God, ranging through the theistic proofs and usually including the ontological argument. On the whole, most candidates who took this line justified the inclusion of all their material by arguing that 'There is a God because the cosmological argument does not stand alone.' A few weaker responses descended to the merely descriptive by listing arguments with little analysis. Some talked about the nature of time; others about the nature of infinity; yet others about what 'something' really is, suggesting, for example, that Berkeley's idealism shows that what there is a mental construct held in existence by God: all very interesting indeed.

**9 'The concept of life after death is incoherent.' Critically assess this claim.**

Not many candidates made anything of the emphasis on the word 'after' in the question. The point of it was to focus on the incongruity between 'life' and 'death', where the 'life' is alleged to occur after an event which by definition signifies the end of life. As an alternative, several candidates answered the question as if it read, 'Examine theories about life after death', and so discussed ideas about reincarnation, resurrection, near-death experiences and so on. In most cases this worked well enough, although some put the emphasis on describing the theories as opposed to examining them. Most were sceptical about any claims to a post-mortem existence, citing a number of authorities such as Hume, Nietzsche, Marx and Freud. One common misunderstanding was to cite John Hick's three scenarios of 'Mr X' as an example of what Hick thinks happens when we die, whereas Hick intended those thought experiments rather as a demonstration that resurrection is logically possible.

**Topic 4: New Testament: The Four Gospels**

**10(a) Examine the significance of this passage [John 1: 1-18] for an understanding of who Jesus was.**

This question was completed competently by the majority of candidates who had clearly learnt how to do close textual study. Most candidates made detailed comment on John's Jesus. The less well prepared stopped at analysis of the text whilst the best responses made reference to John's high Christology, being able to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the prologue in relation to the synoptic tradition and the consistency of it within the Johannine tradition. Some candidates seamlessly threaded their responses with reference to the significance of John's understanding which included commentary on John the Baptist and conflicts within the early church.

**10(b) 'The synoptic gospels are concerned with the "Christ of faith" not the "Jesus of history".' Discuss.**

Many candidates placed a focus on the quest for the historical Jesus debate and revealed wide ranging knowledge of the four gospels. As anticipated in the mark scheme the strongest candidates were able to identify both the Jesus of history and Christ of faith in the gospel genre. Weaker candidates drew on a few

examples from within the synoptic tradition whilst stronger candidates demonstrated wide ranging knowledge. The best candidates were able to structure their answers effectively and were proficient in the art of essay writing. The scholarly movement behind the quest for the historical Jesus was not widely addressed but some candidates wrote exemplary pieces, with full referencing and which were deeply impressive.

**11 Assess what place and importance the apocalyptic teachings of Jesus have in the New Testament.**

Candidates demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the traditions within the Gospel material. Few were able to show how the earliest apocalyptic traditions evolved but a good assessment of the place and importance of the material was evident. Weaker candidates worked with parables and miracles and did not, on the whole, deal in detail with the little apocalypse in Mark or move beyond the synoptic gospels. The better candidates drew on a very wide range of information and evaluated its place and importance within the gospels as a whole.

**12 'Jesus was a law-breaker not a law-maker.' Discuss.**

Candidates appeared to enjoy answering this question and many were able to do so with great creativity and flair. Examiners were impressed by the range of material drawn upon under the pressure of examination conditions and it is fair to say that no two answers were alike. Weaker candidates tended to answer the question at the outset and then use their essay to offer supporting material. The most effective responses examined each part of the question in some detail before reaching their conclusion. Many candidates were able to develop detailed analysis, demonstrating sound understanding of the distinction between Torah and tradition. Reference to John's gospel, which would have been useful, was rarely made.

# PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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Paper 9774/03

Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy and Theology 2

## General Comments

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Time management was generally very good. Despite the previous comment about answers to part (a), a few candidates wrote disproportionately lengthy responses. Such detail was commendable, but not good exam technique since the (b) question, which was worth more marks, sometimes received comparatively scant attention.

There were no questions that produced answers that were noticeably weaker or stronger. Candidates were equally well prepared in all aspects of the papers and those who taught them deserve full credit.

General comment of candidates' answers is given for the options chosen by a significant number of candidates. Very few candidates opted for **Topic 1 (Philosophy of Mind)** and **Topic 3 (Old Testament: Prophecy)** and there is no general comment on these.

## **Topic 2: Ethics**

**4 (a) Examine and explain the ideas about Bentham's philosophy which Mill addresses in this passage [from John Stuart Mill: 'Essay on Bentham' in 'Utilitarianism': 99-100].**

Marks were awarded to candidates who successfully identified Mill's ideas about Bentham which were discussed in the text. It was evident that some candidates found difficulty with the completion of this type of exercise under examination conditions, but most were able to identify key ideas. Weaker candidates did not read the text in detail and recorded instead Mill's well known objections to Bentham. Better responses made close reference to the text quoted and developed in detail the particular ideas dealt with by Mill. Many commented that the extract gives only Mill's view and some candidates went so far as to challenge Mill's reading of Bentham, offering scholarly arguments in support. This level of achievement was very pleasing indeed.

**4 (b) 'Mill's Utilitarianism is preferable to that of Bentham.' Critically assess this claim.**

This question was completed well, with many candidates able to extend their ideas and take a wide ranging approach. The best candidates presented well structured, evaluative responses. Most candidates tended to agree with the question and explored both the problems of Bentham's Utilitarianism and what they saw as the strengths of Mill's adjustments. The most capable candidates challenged the question and brought a great many colourful arguments forward in support of Bentham rather than Mill. There were many thoughtful, diverse, well argued themes.

**5 Consider the view that Fletcher's Situation Ethics is not a Christian ethical system.**

This question proved challenging for those candidates who attempted to answer it before outlining, however briefly, the features of Fletcher's Situational method. Weaker candidates offered only a summary of Situation Ethics and did not engage with the question set. In general candidates did not demonstrate full understanding of agape and were not able to compare Situation Ethics with other Christian ethical systems. Many worked creatively with the example of Jesus himself and this was one worthwhile approach. Better

candidates understood the historical context and evaluated Situation Ethics in the light of this, making close reference to existentialism, Natural Law and Church teachings. Many lacked the overview necessary and few drew upon the examples used by Fletcher in support of his method.

#### **6 Critically examine religious approaches to environmental ethics.**

More complete responses to this question made reference to non-religious approaches to environmental ethics. Utilitarian and other secular approaches were included in responses by a number of candidates. Those who, by way of demonstration, were able to compare these secular approaches with religious approaches produced very good answers, whilst those who did not overtly demonstrate that they knew these to be secular approaches did not. The use of case studies and examples by some candidates was exemplary and the best responses, without exception, made close reference to specific environmental issues. Many candidates were able to quote the work of modern day scholars on this subject. The best candidates wrote well structured responses in which the strengths of religious approaches were identified and then compared with secular approaches. Many concluded that religion is so divisive that the risk of failing to achieve agreement and action are increased by the use of religious ethical perspectives. Others argued that religion has a positive contribution to make. Some candidates made interesting use of radical religious groups who desire environmental catastrophe and the end of the world.

