

Philosophy

Course Code: PHL315113

Section A

Questions 1, 2 and 3

The strongest responses across Section A gave clear detailed explanations of relevant content without confusing distinctions between such concepts as deduction, induction, a priori, a posteriori, Rationalism and Empiricism. 11% of responders achieved marks in the A range in this section and were more likely to offer specific philosophers and or problems and arguments in an informed manner. Less successful responses, more likely to be in the B range, which accounted for 39% of the cohort, covered the relevant content of this section of the course, but without strong explanation of the concepts. Poorer responses, in the C range (34%) failed to show much understanding of Epistemology aside from identifying it as the study of knowledge and deriding scepticism as pointless questioning that leads nowhere.

Overall, there was a remarkable range of philosophers and problems explored in the responses, and those that received marks mostly in the A range, were varied in their approaches and the content they covered.

Section B

Mostly answers were of a high standard. It was particularly pleasing to see the range of philosophers mentioned by students; these included:

Hume, Locke, Sartre, James, Harris, Dennett, Strawson, Kant and many more.

Better answers had quotes or paraphrasing of philosophers views to illustrate a particularly powerful point; for example a student might use the quote "man can do what he wills but cannot will what he wills", in order to illustrate the "illusion" of free will.

Some students were able to weave the references to philosophers together in such a way as to illustrate both the opposing views as well as the arguments proposed in the free will debate.

Many students included a thought experiment, or more than one, to make philosophical points. These included the locked room, Laplace's demon and Dennett's sphex wasp. Better answers went beyond simply recounting the thought experiment and were able to explain what philosophical point it explained or supported. This was a very important step to take and enabled the marker to reward them on cr2 and cr3.

A number of students used standard form versions of arguments to good effect. Often this enabled students to clearly show the reasoning of a position whilst still allowing time for discussion and explaining the reasoning. Candidates were rewarded for this on cr2 and cr3.

Many students addressed the question directly and this enabled the marker to reward them on cr1. It is important for students to learn the spelling of key terms like Determinism and Compatibilism.

Weaker answers did not answer the question but were still, in some cases, able to include relevant explanation of the key positions and key concepts.

Overall this section was well answered by students, demonstrating that students had been well prepared by their teachers and that most students understood the main concepts.

Overall, students were able to answer this section with a solid understanding of hard determinism, free will and

compatibilism. Both questions 4 and 5 specifically asked for a reference to one or more philosophers. The majority of weaker responses did not refer to a philosopher. Yet some of these students were still able to articulate their responses acceptably by posing questions and following through with analogies. Those students who were able to refer to philosophers often included a wide range, which was impressive. The strongest responses also included analogies, discussion and a conclusion. The stronger responses in Question 5 were able to dissect and contrast the different perspectives of a variety of determinist philosophers. Unfortunately, the majority of responses to Question 5 repeated information already stated in Question 4 to bring forward a comparison of compatibilism and hard determinism. This was rarely done effectively, often with too much loose information at the expense of any direction and conclusion. The poorest answers to Question 5 gave a commentary on the role of punishment in society with barely any philosophical discourse. A minority of students wrote some excellent essays rather than short answers on Question 4, leaving no time to answer Question 5. It was also disappointing to observe a wide variety of misspellings of "compatibilism", despite it being written on the exam paper.

Question 6

70 candidates chose this question in preference to questions 7 and 8.

Question 6 asked candidates what they think is the best explanation for how mind and body interact. Ideally then, candidates should have demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the interaction problem and some of the responses to this problem, alongside their knowledge of the mind/body problem in general. They could be expected to discuss interaction between mind and body in some detail, or failing this, to choose a different option from the questions provided.

Responses that demonstrated understanding of what 'interaction' means in this context were rewarded. Those that also demonstrated knowledge of some of the explanations offered by philosophers, evaluated those explanations and referred to a number of Philosophers were well rewarded. Answering the question that is asked in a way that demonstrates the criteria and your knowledge of the syllabus is the way to achieve rewarding results.

In this light, future candidates would be well advised to:

- Choose a question that you know well if options are provided.
- Attempt to answer the question that is asked, writing everything you know on a topic will not lead to strong results.
- Spell terminology and commonly used words correctly (separate, pineal)
- Avoid creative use of language that may make a correct statement false, e.g. Leibniz was 3 when Descartes died – Descartes may be criticised or supported by Leibniz's Law, he may have foreshadowed it or contributed to it, but it is most unlikely that Descartes was influenced by Leibniz or Leibniz's Law.
- Avoid hyperbolic opening sentences, these rarely improve an essay in this subject. Much better to start with a response to the question and an outline of what you are going to present the marker in the essay to follow.

Question 7

Given that the question asks what arguments are most 'defensible', the best responses detailed one or more arguments, offered counter-arguments and then assessed how damaging these counter arguments were for the argument. Although the question asks which argument is most defensible, students were not penalised if they instead argued that a certain philosophical position (eg. property dualism/eliminative materialism) was strongest. Students who argued that a 'wait and see' approach was warranted were not penalised if this position was clearly justified.

Strong responses rigorously probed their chosen dualist or materialist argument/position with the best possible counter-arguments whilst weaker responses only subjected it to mild scrutiny: for example, not assessing the impact of the problem of interaction on substance dualism or assessing the soundness/validity of Descartes' deductive arguments.

Students who gave detailed explanations of logic and reasoning were rewarded on Criterion 3, especially if they then analysed/explained the method, as opposed to letting the standard form presentation of an argument or description of a thought experiment 'speak for itself'. Responses that identified fallacious reasoning in arguments and linked this to the 'defensibility' or arguments were appreciated and rewarded on Criterion 4.

Students should be particularly mindful of the distinction between property and substance dualism – there was a tendency to use Chalmers/Nagel/Jackson to defend substance dualism – something that the authors themselves may not be happy with!

Question 8

18 Candidates responded to this question, two of these responding to questions 6 and 7 as well. It is important to read instructions carefully!

Most responses were disappointingly indiscernible from responses to question 6. Again, a small number actually recognised the particular 'tack' the question required and responded well. In this case being the issue of consciousness and its identity or otherwise with the mind. The rest relied almost entirely upon their general knowledge of the syllabus and the criteria to effect a suitable result. This was a straightforward question that most candidates should have chosen. See comments for question 6.

Question 9

Many students wrote what they knew about Darwin's theory of evolution and the Argument from Design but in both cases it was usually a convenient moment to write what they knew about science versus the general arguments for the existence of God with a quick summary of Paley. Darwinian theory was slightly better understood. The real concern here was that many students merely described the two theories without ever really coming to terms with the "refutation" required in the question. Some did try to refute the Design argument through both Hume and Dawkins but then did not use Evolutionary theory to tackle Design which was the intent of the question. The best responses showed evidence of knowing a considerable amount about both theories (and being able to choose the most relevant parts for analysis) and were able to carefully pick their way through the logic on both sides. An understanding of Aquinas, Paley, the Anthropic principle, Irreducible Complexity, Intelligent Design and arguments by Swinburne on one side and on the other, Hume, Darwin's theory, Natural Selection, Evolution, and Dawkins, would be helpful in providing a more nuanced response. On the whole, the topic was quite well understood (which accounts for some good marks for Criterion 2) but not always well answered (which accounts for the slightly reduced marks for Criteria 3 and 4).

Question 10

Most responses referred to the statement which was interpreted in a range of ways. All were given credit if they took the form of a critical appraisal however brief rather than an emotional response. Responses used the range of arguments, from both the science and faith based systems: design, evolution, cosmological, big bang and also more general discussions and in varying combinations. While the majority of responses showed evidence of at least a basic understanding of positions, there was still an emphasis on descriptive information rather than weight given to addressing the requirements of criterion 3 and 4.

Question 11

A number of responses ignored the opening statement and developed a discussion comparing the cosmological argument with the big bang theory. While this approach was not significantly penalised credit was given to those responses that gave some critical analysis of the statement. Some responses discussed the design argument rather than the cosmological argument. In these instances the discussions would have been more appropriate as a response for Qu.9. Most responses gave either a detailed description of the cosmological argument as expressed through either the Kalem version or Aquinas's version, or one of Aquinas's 3 ways. Some responses introduced the concept of falsification and did so in a competent way.

Most responses referred to at least two philosophers contributions with accuracy.

Where arguments in standard form were in most instances they were also expressed with accuracy.

Well developed responses made an attempt to show the reasoning behind these arguments and to give some evaluation of them

Question 12

Sophisticated responses noted that the question's assertion that 'in general' love does not lead to happiness actually understates the pessimism of Schopenhauer, who argues that even through aesthetics/asceticism/ethics, the best we can hope for is a temporary escape from the will and suffering, never happiness. Framing one's argument by establishing a connection between happiness and the good life was also a marker of a strong response.

Whilst weaker responses tended to be overly biographical and/or descriptive in nature: explaining what Schopenhauer's views were without explaining how he arrived at them, students who explained the role of the 'will to life' in his theory of romantic love were rewarded on Criterion 3; exceptional responses explained the metaphysical foundations of 'the will' with reference to Kant.

Most students effectively challenged Schopenhauer's pessimistic account of love and were rewarded on Criterion 4. Challenges included homosexual love, deliberately childless couples, loving couples who do not have sex, examples of happily married couples with children, studies from the human sciences measuring happiness and the role that love plays in achieving it, Schopenhauer's exaggeration of suffering and understatement of happiness in human lives, stoicism, substituting the 'will to life' for the 'will to power' and explaining his pessimism through misogyny, biography and disposition. Students who acknowledge support for Schopenhauer's views about love in the form of evidence for biological and psychological determinism in the natural sciences and evidence in the form of increasing rates of depression and divorce from the human sciences were also rewarded.

NB. Students who noted that the sheer existence of people not conforming to heterosexual 'norms' does not outright refute Schopenhauer's theory, but rather, forces us to either reject his argument or pathologise non-conformists as biological aberrations were commended for this rigorous thought.

Question 13

The better/best:

- Some great essays that showed the students' depth of understanding . Good use of aphorisms that were thoroughly analysed and evaluated.
- Some excellent use of personal / contemporary examples to demonstrate a clear understanding of Nietzsche's ideas. Use of these examples to evaluate whether N's ideas are universally applicable or really only relevant to those who can afford the luxury of getting something wrong a few times before they get it right.
- Good connections to Schopenhauer, showing where Nietzsche got his initial inspiration and then showing how he deviated and eventually developed his own vision of the *Übermensch*, struggle, adversity etc.
- Strong students were very good at taking the aphorisms and N's own examples of adversity very figuratively, allowing for analysis and interpretation, leading generally to very solid evaluation.

The weaker/est:

- Told stories about Nietzsche's life without showing how his love of mountain climbing (for example) actually shaped his thinking. On the range of thinking order, these remained at the "describe" stage".
- Immediately veered towards Nietzsche and Hitler / the Nazis, again either as storytelling or as sweeping assumptions, generally based on inaccuracies (e.g. N love war, so that's why Hitler loved Nietzsche!). There was scope for candidates to talk about how loosely Nietzsche can be interpreted, which is why he is often used for negative intent (i.e. the Nazis), but this notion was missed by the weaker students altogether.
- Many weak students tended to take Nietzsche's aphorisms and suggestions for adversity very literally, meaning that evaluation was either poor or non-existent.

- A few very weak students quickly ran out of things to say and so simply wrote a brief, generally descriptive, paragraph about each of the four Good Life philosophers, mostly with no attempt to make any connection, much less evaluation.

Overall, a very pleasing set of essays to read, with clearly some great thinkers producing work that was a true delight to read.

Question 14

Generally answers were of a high standard as most students had obviously engaged with Montaigne and reflected carefully on his writings and observations. Students should, however, adapt their material to the specific question asked rather than just data-dump some, admittedly often very impressive, information.

The best answers critiqued the premise of the question in that Montaigne's aim wasn't to "describe the animal nature of human beings" but, rather, to look at animals as comfort and "lessons in life", particularly in relation to our concerns over bodily inadequacies and natural functions. Many were able to challenge the assertion with an examination of other topics Montaigne considered, particularly wisdom vs knowledge, but, again, that needed to be directed towards the question rather than just included as stand-alone information.

Evaluation was usually better than explanation and most candidates observed that humans were far more complex than animals. Critiques of Montaigne were balanced and informed; some labelled him a misogynist and naïve but even the weakest of answers were aware of his purpose in writing his essays.

Question 15

Generally strong responses, where just about all answers were familiar with Thoreau and could evaluate with authority. Some answers were strong on explanation (and it is worthwhile noting that putting forward at least one standard form argument can really assist in this criterion), although usually criterion 4 received a higher rating than criterion 3. Students should also remember that criterion 2 does have to be explicitly addressed not just implicitly.

Essays were aware of the rationale for Thoreau's connection with the natural world and his championing of the human spirit, the appeal to simplicity and the spirituality that comes from submergence in nature. Most discussed the fact that his was a lived philosophy, deliberate and aware and that we should not be "sleepwalkers". Good students skilfully wove in his views on civil disobedience.

Evaluations were sympathetic but considered, often focusing on his comfortable upper middle-class security blanket, the desire of many for the safety and security offered by technology and questioning when self-discovery becomes self-absorption. Others referred to the fact that life is far more connected now. It was recognised, though, that the message was more important than the messenger and that the message of living simply and in harmony with nature was seen by just about all to be a valuable insight into living a good life.