

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/01

Introduction to Philosophy and Theology

Key Messages

Most candidates gave equal treatment to three questions, displaying good time management and excellent control of the material. A few candidates could have reached higher levels by paying more careful attention to critical analysis as opposed to summative evaluation.

General Comments

On the whole, essays were carefully constructed and showed an in-depth knowledge of the subject-matter for this paper. Where this was not the case, candidates appear to have looked too closely at past papers, in so far as some answers would have been more appropriate to previous questions than to those set.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

The strongest answers to this question were consistently evaluative. Some used very apt quotations, such as Santayana's comment that Plato's views are 'not the reality but the faultless ideal'. The general consensus was that the Aristotelian concept of the relationship between body and soul was more realistic / more empirical than that of Plato, being based on a need for two 'equally contributing entities'. The discussion was wide-ranging, delving frequently, for example, into the modern philosophy of mind. Weaker responses tended to be descriptive, and could have achieved higher levels by having a clearer focus on issues of analysis rather than a simple description of theories.

Question 2

As with **Question 1**, knowledge of the subject area was generally thorough, contrasting the ideas of a wide range of rationalist and empiricist philosophers. For a defence of rationalist approaches, a number of candidates focused on Leibniz's view that since ideas are clearly immaterial, it is unfeasible to suggest that we acquire them through the physical. Rationalists insist that the content of our concepts or knowledge goes beyond the information provided by sense experience, whereas the empirical thesis holds that knowledge arrives through the senses, and experience accounts for all the privileged information claimed by rationalists. The strongest essays dealt carefully with the words 'too much', with many suggesting that some kind of balance needs to be struck between rationalist and empiricist claims. Most argued that it was difficult to be sure about what kind of balance this might be. Weaker responses tended to be very didactic in defending either rationalism or empiricism, often running consecutively through the arguments for each, but not coming to a conclusion.

Question 3

Most candidates recognised that this question was aimed at the issue of whether or not it is rational to have faith without evidence. The strongest responses took a variety of different and valid approaches, based on analysing the work of scholars such as Barth, Alston, Kierkegaard, Freud and others. Some took a Freudian line, that rationalism is superior to fideism because it can explain fideism as a mere product of the human psyche: in other words, fideism is neurotic and infantile. Some invoked Atkins' view that the 'why' questions which appear so attractive to a religious understanding of life are simply invented. Others used Wittgenstein's ideas to argue that for the religious, the 'why' is a necessary part of the world view: fideism and rationalism are simply separate language games, and issues of inferiority or superiority simply do not arise. Weak responses sometimes made the error of assuming that the question was about the epistemological debate raised in **Question 2**. The general conclusion was that rationalism has a better

explanation of fideism than fideism has of rationalism, so rationalism is superior at least to that extent. Some attempted a strong defence of fideism through reformed epistemology, arguing that since we cannot demonstrate certain knowledge of anything in empirical terms, the certainty of religious experience must have something going for it.

Question 4

Responses to this question were less convincing than those for **Questions 1-3**, it was important to have a very clear idea of the difference between Augustine's view of the conscience and that of Aquinas. Some answers made statements to the effect that both Augustine and Aquinas saw the conscience as the voice of God. The best answers were fully aware of the differences between the two: for Augustine, conscience is innate, aided by God's grace, motivated by the love of God and informed by Church rules. For Aquinas, what is innate is not God's voice but the God-given faculty of reason aided by the synderesis rule. Stronger answers were differentiated from weaker ones also by the use of alternative views of the conscience, e.g. from sociology, psychology and evolution. Good answers related these views to the question of what is a 'reasonable explanation'; weaker answers listed different views of the conscience.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Paper 9774/02

Topics and Key Texts in Philosophy and Theology 1

Key Messages

Although many responses were detailed and analytic, some lacked sufficient knowledge of the relevant text. Candidates do need to have a good summary knowledge of a text in order to be able to respond convincingly to the questions set. Those who had such knowledge responded convincingly.

General Comments

Very few candidates answered the questions on Topic 1 (Epistemology), Topic 2 (Philosophical and Theological Language) or Topic 4 (New Testament), so comment here is confined to Topic 3: Philosophy of Religion.

Comments on Specific Questions

Topic 3: Philosophy of Religion

Question 7

- (a) Candidates could have gained higher levels by complying with the command word in the question, to 'explain' points of contrast and agreement between Augustinian and Irenaean types of theodicy. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase. One feature which marked out stronger responses was the articulation of points of agreement between the two types of theodicy, where the best essays explained how both approaches accept that creation as a whole was good; that evil is ultimately the responsibility of God; that the end product justifies the existence of evil; and that theodicy as a process involves a logical self-restriction of God's ability to control evil.
- (b) High-level answers really engaged with the question, providing an in-depth analysis of Hick's Irenaean-type theodicy. The general consensus was that Hick's account owes something to wishful thinking, since there is an inevitable tension between his insistence that all will be saved and the claim that humans must freely come to choose God. The discussion took many twists and turns, with some expressing a reasoned preference for Process theology, arguing that the problem of evil still has no satisfactory explanation to satisfy all believers.

Question 8

This question was rather more popular than **Question 9**, although on the whole answers to it did not reach the same degree of excellence. The most satisfactory answers to **Question 8** usually managed to refer to two or more different versions of the moral argument for the existence of God, although, the Kantian argument was sometimes passed over in a sentence or two in favour of arguments from Taylor, Sorley, Lewis and others. Nearly all candidates concluded that the best the moral argument can do is to support the design and cosmological arguments, which were assumed to be more powerful. Dislike of the argument was founded on dislike of Kant's notion of the *summum bonum* and the difficulties posed by Euthyphro's dilemma. In addition, most argued that morality is more easily seen as having an origin through human psychology or biology rather than through God, since some form of relativism seems inescapable, although a few were prepared to defend Natural Law. Most argued that no inductive argument can offer proof, so as Swinburne says, we are down to probabilities only. Weaker essays lacked this range, and in particular made use of a technique which led to much irrelevance, namely arguing that although the moral argument does not prove the existence of God, the other theistic proofs perhaps do. This was valid to some degree, but where a question puts its main focus on the moral argument, then responses should do so too.

Question 9

One feature of the best responses to this question was the depth of knowledge of scientific theories about the origin of the universe and of life on earth. Many dismissed arguments based on the Anthropic Principle, despite Polkinghorne's championship of it. Conversely, some advocated intelligent design theories, seemingly unaware that these fall largely into the creationist camp that most candidates were rejecting as being simplistic and unscientific. Many echoed Swinburne's dictum that evolution is a description and not an explanation of life on earth, and so rejected Dawkins' belief that evolution is the panacea for all things religious. A few were aware of the cosmological implications of M-theory. Some candidates' answers could have been improved in two ways: first by having a better acquaintance with the scientific theories – it is difficult analysing a theory which is only partially understood; second by avoiding reliance on religious texts offered (without explanation) as if they were themselves scientific proof of divine creation.

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Paper 9774/03
Topics and Key Texts in
Philosophy and Theology 2

Key messages

- Candidates need to read the specified passage carefully and explain in their own words the key points.
- Candidates need to be familiar with all the set texts.
- The application of ethical theory to practical issues is a valuable written skill for this paper.
- Evaluation of ethical theory arises naturally out of its rigorous application.

General comments

Candidates responded particularly well to the text based question and understood the connection between the two parts of the question. In **Section B** candidates needed to systematically demonstrate their knowledge of the ethical theory before trying to apply it. It is important for candidates to study the full range of texts and topics so that their performance is not limited. Outstanding candidates drew on an impressive range of knowledge and were in complete control of their essays.

The text-based question attracted a vast range of excellent responses this year. **Question 5** was generally weaker with candidates not always able to demonstrate knowledge of the texts.

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 1 (Philosophy of Mind)** and **Topic 3 (Old Testament: Prophecy)**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 4

- (a) Candidates needed to successfully identify and discuss Sartre's key points in the passage. Strong answers offered detailed commentary on the nature of existentialism, using the passage as stimulus. Many provided detailed commentary on the broader philosophical context and offered mature evaluative reflection on whether atheistic existentialism must, as a matter of logical necessity, reject the idea of human essence existing prior to existence. Others were able to identify 'freedom' as the key to Sartre's existentialist thinking, rather than a rejection of essence being prior to existence. Candidates need to do more than rely on quotations from the passage, and they need to offer commentary and explanation.
- (b) This question elicited original thinking and philosophical creativity. It was answered well with many candidates able to recognise and write cohesively about the apparent tension. Some candidates identified a range of issues which made the existence of God, or not, highly relevant to Sartre's existentialism. It was possible to score full marks on this question without commenting on other forms of existentialism. Others noted that this second part question did not limit them to Sartre's existentialism and offered an impressive review of Christian Existentialism before concluding that the apparent tension was insubstantial. Candidates who had recognised 'freedom' as a distinguishing feature of existentialist thought were very well equipped in their evaluation with many concluding that human freewill and choice remain, whether or not there is a God. Those who understood the question simply as an opportunity to establish the relevance of God's existence to an atheist found it difficult to develop their ideas.

Section B

Questions 5

Candidates were expected to make informed reference to both the Sermon on the Mount and Paul's letter to the Romans for the higher levels. Candidates did need to identify teaching from the text before assessing its relevance to modern day ethical issues. Therefore candidates needed knowledge of the texts. While "love your neighbour" and "turn the other cheek" are clearly relevant to this task, the complex relationship between the spiritual and the moral was not usually acknowledged or seen as having something to contribute to modern ethical debates. Some candidates made reference to Situation Ethics and argued, from its Biblical base, for the relevance of the Bible to modern day ethics. Others performed well by arguing that the Bible was one of many tools open to Christians when addressing modern ethical debate. Some answers were one-sided and usually dismissed the Biblical narrative as dated and too full of exegetical issues to be reliable, or for its lack of relevance in secular society. Those who understood this question as an opportunity to argue for and against the existence of God limited their opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the specification requirements for this paper.

Question 6

Those candidates with knowledge and understanding of the just war tradition were very well prepared for this question and had something by which to measure the success or otherwise of other ethical theories. Many understood that Christian principles, such as absolute respect for the dignity of human life, were critical in the formulation of modern ethical approaches and in the formulation of, for example, the Geneva Convention and the United Nations Charter. Some were able to draw on their study of The Sermon on the Mount and Paul's letter to the Romans in their explanation of what is at the heart of modern ethical approaches to war and peace. Those without grounding in the Christian heritage of Just War theory could score well when they applied other ethical theories systematically. Many candidates drew upon a range of excellent examples by way of illustration. Those who argued that war is a non-moral issue succeeded if their approach was critically evaluative, as did those who placed their focus on arguments surrounding pacifism.