

Examination feedback 2007-2008

PY1005 Reasoning and Knowledge	2
PY1105 Ethical Controversies	4
PY2001 Formal & Philosophical Logic.....	7
PY2003 Ancient Philosophy	8
PY2101 Aesthetics.....	12
PY4601 Paradoxes	13
PY4603 Philosophy of Film.....	15
PY4604 Political Philosophy	16
PY4614 Philosophy of Mind.....	20
PY4638 Philosophy of Religion	23

PY1005 Reasoning and Knowledge

Q1. Explain one theory of the mind-body relation. Explain whether you accept or reject this theory, and provide reasons for your view.

This question was chosen by many students, and whilst most were familiar with relevant material, the main problem was that most included an overview of lots of different theories of the mind-body relation. This meant that there was not enough time/space to give any detailed discussion to *one* of these, as the question asked. Some students discussed idealism and realism under this question, which is not clearly relevant.

Q2. Why does Nagel think that 'Consciousness is what makes the mind-body problem really intractable'? Do you agree with him? Explain your reasons.

This question was not answered by many students, and those who did address it often focussed on explaining Nagel's overall view rather than answering the question posed in the exam, i.e. why in particular Nagel thinks that consciousness makes the mind-body problem intractable. Students who did directly address this were able to give good responses.

Q3. 'Ideas of primary qualities are resemblances; of secondary not' (Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding). What does Locke mean by this claim? What are his grounds for it? Explain and evaluate critically.

Most answers to this question were well-structured and displayed good grasp of the distinction. However there was a tendency for students to offer their own thoughts too quickly before having treated Locke's position in some detail. Most students went on to criticise the Lockean view via Berkeley's arguments.

Q4. The Berkleian idealist ('Philonous' in Three Dialogues) holds that 'there is no such thing as material substance in the world'. What is the meaning of this claim? Are there any persuasive arguments for it? Are there any against it?

A common problem here was failure to address the question properly, by not providing a clear explanation of Berkeley's statement, or of arguments both for and against the view. Instead the responses tended to discuss the issue of realism vs idealism in general.

Q5. What are universals? Are there any good reasons to think that they exist?

This was a very popular question (reflecting the emphasis in lectures). Almost all students who answered had a reasonable understanding of the issues. The best answers discussed both the explanatory function of universals and the linguistic data that is supposed to support realism. Less good answers surveyed all the accounts of properties – universals, tropes, class nominalism etc – rather than focussing on universals as the question required. Recurrent misunderstandings concerned the nature of Lewis's class nominalism (many answers neglected its modal dimension – i.e. the fact that it requires merely possible objects as well as actual ones), and the problem of co-extensive properties.

Q6. What are tropes? Are there any good reasons to think that concrete objects, like tables and chairs, are made up of tropes?

Very few students attempted this question, though there were some good answers. As with question 5, there was an unfortunate tendency to survey all the theories instead of focussing on tropes, as the question required.

PY1105 Ethical Controversies

SECTION A

1. Are we obligated to help those in severe need? How stringent is this obligation?

Most students addressed this question in the exam. Unfortunately, a high proportion of the responses were weak. A good response to this question should have addressed Peter Singer's argument for helping those in need, explaining the argument and considering criticisms (from writers such as Arthur). Stronger students were able to do this, and some also offered original critical analysis.

Weaker answers were those that did not reconstruct Singer's argument accurately, or attempt any criticism. Some very poor answers merely offered vague and unsupported claims based on emotion or confused intuitions; disappointingly, a number of students seemed to think they could show that Singer was wrong by drawing attention to the fact that 'people are selfish' and are not likely to give. This, of course, has no bearing whatsoever on Singer's argument, which aims to show what people ought to do, not what they in fact do.

2. Is there a morally significant distinction between killing and letting-die?

A good response to this question should have argued either that there is a morally significant difference, or that there isn't, supporting the argument with justifications, as well as showing how the killing/letting-die distinction matters in certain applied ethical problems, e.g. euthanasia/global poverty. The stronger answers managed this, drawing on the work of Rachels, discussing the 'equivalence' thesis and counter-arguments. Strong answers also made effective use of examples, such as the 'trolley cases' and the 'drowning nephews'; a few constructed original examples.

Weaker responses failed to engage in any argument about whether there is, or is not, a moral distinction, and merely listed possible examples (sometimes misrepresenting these), without adequately discussing their import.

3. Do moral obligations extend to anything beyond the animal realm? (You should consider EITHER the environment OR artificially intelligent beings in your response).

All students who responded to this question focused on the environment. Good responses highlighted and explicated the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value, and clearly outlined the relevant views discussed during the lectures, notably Routley's 'last man' argument and Leopold's 'land ethic'. They also discussed the issue through responses of specific ethical theories, and generally offered sound critical consideration of the issue.

Weaker answers were those that failed to point out the intrinsic/instrumental value distinction, and/or that 'waffled' about the instrumental reasons for needing to protect the environment. Such essays lacked any real philosophical content.

4. What reasons are there, if any, to think that human cloning is morally objectionable? Are these reasons compelling? (You should consider BOTH reproductive and therapeutic cloning in your answer.)

Many students opted to answer this question, and most were able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the moral and technical aspects of the debate, explaining the difference between the two types of cloning and articulating the moral objections to each, and then critically assessing

these objections. Many engaged with views put forward by Harris, and made effective use of examples. For the most part, these stronger essays concluded that neither type of cloning was morally problematic.

Weaker answers tended to offer only a partial consideration of typical objections to cloning, merely listing possible problems without sufficient discussion of why these might be genuine moral concerns. There were also a number of alarmingly poor answers, some making bizarre claims. These made some or all of the following errors: (i) offering only a string of disconnected and confused intuitive claims, such as that cloning is ‘icky’ and therefore wrong, or that it entails ‘designer babies’ (ii) not distinguishing reproductive from therapeutic cloning; (ii) getting the facts completely wrong (such as claiming that, in therapeutic cloning, a human embryo is cloned and develops into a grown human being, whereupon it is killed to provide spare organs. This is science fiction, not fact. Whoever wrote this must certainly have missed the lecture, and done no reading at all).

SECTION B

5. Does Mill succeed in ‘proving’ utilitarianism? If not, why not?

Most of the students who answered this question were able to provide a clear reconstruction of Mill’s utilitarian theory, and discuss some of the criticisms of it. However, only a small number of these actually addressed the question, which focused on whether Mill’s proof of utilitarianism succeeds. These strong responses discussed what would be required to ‘prove’ a theory, how Mill attempts to do so, and for the most part argued that he does not succeed.

Far too many students took this question as an invitation to discuss more generally whether utilitarianism is correct, or not. Thus, they did not really respond to the question set. Weak responses tended to try and dismiss utilitarianism on the basis of a single example showing that it is counter-intuitive; the weakest responses altogether misunderstood the basic elements of utilitarianism.

6. Why does Kant place duty at the centre of our moral experience?

Not many students chose to answer this question. Of those that did, the strong ones gave a detailed analysis of Kant’s conception of duty and the role it plays in his moral theory, addressing possible criticisms.

Weaker students failed to show a basic understanding of Kant, and did little more than list some key ideas connected to Kantian ethics. As with the Mill question, weaker students interpreted this question as an invitation merely to relate what – if anything – they understood about Kant’s ethics, which often meant trotting out and discussing various formulations of the Categorical Imperative, which was not what the question required.

7. A common objection to virtue ethics is the claim that it fails to be action-guiding. How can the virtue ethicist respond to this criticism?

A high proportion of students answered this question. Good answers were those were able to articulate the action-guidance objection correctly, and considered replies open to the virtue ethicist, notably Hursthouse’s argument to the effect that VE is just as action-guiding as other moral approaches, and that it gives us rules (v-rules). The best answers also illustrated this using original examples.

Weaker answers were those that, again, failed to properly address the question. These tended merely to outline key aspects of Aristotelian virtue ethics and the doctrine of the mean, without considering the objection raised in the question.

8. Moral Luck, Relativism and Emotivism all challenge the enterprise of moral theorising. Which do you think presents the most serious challenge, and why?

Of the students who tackled this question, most claimed that moral luck posed the biggest challenge to moral theorising. The best responses were able to briefly summarise all three challenges, before demonstrating why one was especially problematic.

Many students, however, spent far too long giving a description and comparison of all three challenges, when they should have just focused on discussing one, presenting reasons why it is more serious than the others. A number of people made the mistake of conflating ‘moral luck’ with ‘determinism/fatalism’, which didn’t help. Few students came up with any original examples while discussing moral luck (most relied on the ‘drunk driver’ example from the lecture).

9. What is more important in framing a moral judgement: the consequences that follow from an action, the motivation that prompts it, or the character of the agent concerned?

Some students answered this very well, taking a sample action (such as killing, or stealing) and considering how, and to what extent, evaluating each aspect – agent’s character, motivation, and outcome – affects the way we would form a judgement about that action. Good answers also related these evaluations to the three moral theories addressed in the module, but without losing sight of the question asked.

Weaker answers were those that merely trotted out a potted history and/or summary of Deontological, Consequentialist and Virtue Theories, thus avoiding proper engagement with the question. Also, many weak answers were simply too woolly and vague, making unsupported statements and failing to come to any conclusion.

GENERAL REMARKS

Good essay answers were always well-structured and clearly written, with evidence of having been planned. Such answers provided justifications and support for any claims, and generally provided good arguments, showing sound critical analysis skills. They also showed evidence of having engaged with the course materials and reading.

Weaker essays were unstructured, lacked clarity, and to some degree avoided answering the question set; often these showed only a partial understanding of the issues covered on the course.

Very poor essays failed to show much engagement with the course material and readings at all, and also failed to exhibit any philosophical skills, such as argumentation. A disappointingly large number of essays suffered from very poor spelling and sentence-structure. A few were barely legible.

PY2001 Formal & Philosophical Logic

In the case of logic modules, the examination script itself is usually fairly heavily annotated, at least noting errors, and students are strongly encouraged to consult their script. The following more general points should be noted:

Question 1 (a-d)

Here students performed the best. Most of the points deducted came from problems with providing countermodels in (a) and (d). In particular, more than half the students missed some of the accessibility relations.

Question 2 (a-d)

Most students were able to do (a) and (b) without mistakes or with only insignificant mistakes. Those who had problems with these tasks typically did poorly overall. Discharge of the reflexivity assumption in (c) caused problems for many students, but most found the right strategy for the proof. Few could do the final question (d). Although they've seen very similar proofs before, only a handful of students found the right strategy, and even among them just 2 or 3 managed to get the discharges right. Note that many students confuse neg-introduction with EFQ in intuitionistic natural deduction.

Question 3 (a-c)

(a) Most students had the (i) derivation correct, or satisfactorily with only minor mistakes. Some still have problems with negating the conclusion in the derivation when the premise set is empty. For derivation (ii), too many students fail to appreciate the closing rule for identity. They close the tree prematurely upon finding a identity and its negation.

In the case of (iii), over half the students did not know the rules, the C+ rules in particular being misrepresented frequently. Also, few students realised that a countermodel was called for. About half the students found the correct translation in (iv) ; some used the alternative T-M translation instead. For those who managed the first part of the task, too many forgot to include the derivation in S4.

(b) For both (i-ii) the results were generally good. Those who managed one, often managed both, and again, the students who could not do these exercises typically did below average overall.

(c) As with the earlier assessed exercises, almost no one gets all the points from the semantic proof. All too many students have clearly misunderstood the meaning of the double turnstile. A typical mistake is to assign it a value 1 or 0 for a particular world. Also, even the students who had an idea of its definition usually failed to include talk about models, defining it only in terms of worlds or points. Another problem is that most students failed to see that the exercise only asks them to prove something in one direction.

Question 4-7

Few picked the essay questions. Typically, although students managed to include key terms, names and ideas, they struggled with presenting the arguments in the literature, even as sketches. There was the perennial issue of poor structure and organisation, and lack of clarity.

PY2003 Ancient Philosophy

Section A

1. *Compare and discuss the ways in which Plato distinguishes knowledge from opinion (or: belief) in the **Meno** and in the **Republic**.*

Students tended either to do very well on this question or very poorly. Weaker answers were those that did not adequately address the distinction at the heart of this question (i.e., did not adequately explain what Plato means by ‘opinion’ and ‘knowledge’, did not adequately explain how the former contrasts to the latter, on Plato’s view, and did not really compare the claims and arguments of the two dialogues). Poor answers also tended to involve mention of the images and metaphors associated with these concepts in the dialogues without actually explaining them. Strong answers involved a clear explanation of Plato’s distinction and a critical elucidation of the different ways in which it is approached in the two dialogues. The very strongest ones provided a critical discussion of the problem of how a transition from mere opinion to knowledge (of the same object) could ever be possible, given the very stark manner in which the distinction is developed in the Republic.

2. *Explain and discuss Socrates’ claim in the **Phaedo** that ‘those who practise philosophy in the right way are in training for dying and they fear death least of all men.’*

Many students were good at explaining the central idea, here. Many touched on the notion of the body’s being a kind of prison for the soul, on Plato’s view, and on the separability of soul and body. Stronger students were able both to explain the meaning of this claim, placing it in context of the theory of Forms and Plato’s epistemology, and to provide relevant criticism. A strong answer took into account the immortality of the soul and arguments for it as well as the implications Plato’s doctrine of the forms has for bodilessness. Most students pointed out that philosophers are characterized by Plato as abstaining from bodily pleasures, but the link between death and the goal of the philosopher in particular (i.e., the acquisition of knowledge) was less than clear in many answers. Very poor answers did not pick up on any of the specific arguments in the dialogue and provided only vague commentary.

3. *Explain and discuss (a) the objections of Simmias and Cebes to Socrates’ claim that the true philosopher has no reason to fear death; and (b) Socrates’ replies.*

Not many answered this. There were some fairly good answers, although some could have been more focused. One fairly good answer gave a full account of the Simmias’ harmony-objection and Cebes’ worries that the soul may wear off; Socrates’ counter-arguments were carefully presented, save, perhaps, the third argument against Simmias which turns on the point that if a soul is harmony, then there can be no “mistuned” souls and hence all would be equally good; the student launched fruitful criticism against the arguments.

4. *Explain and discuss the argument by which Socrates in the **Republic** aims to show that the just individual is necessarily better off than the unjust one.*

Not surprisingly, this was (as so often) a very popular question. Very weak answers were those in which there was no attempt to explain what Socrates means by ‘justice,’ even in outline. Weak answers also left things very vague, straying from the actual arguments developed in the Republic and providing generally irrelevant criticism. Some of the weakest answers did not address the actual question, but only enumerated what they remembered from the discussion in Book I where Socrates does say little about his views on justice (and what he says was not always well remembered). Some weaker ones missed the city/soul analogy. Better (but not yet good) answers brought out the

analogy's relevance to Socrates' argument, without, however, mentioning the arguments (about the soul) used by Socrates to support the analogy. Also, the distinction between justice as good in itself and justice as good for its consequences was not always explicit. A good answer included critical, detailed discussion of Socrates' position and a clear explanation of the structure of his argument, making detailed reference to the city/ soul analogy and to the justice/health analogy. The strong essays were well structured: some gave a full and accurate account of Socrates' arguments, some focused more on evaluation of the argument; the strongest students knew how to divide exposition and intelligent criticism and discussion thereof (e.g. Is this the same concept of justice we started with? How would Plato respond? Does the analogy hold?).

5. Explain and discuss the different ways in which, according to Aristotle, the concept of 'necessity' enters into good explanations of natural phenomena.

Though many students identified many of the key terms and examples associated with this discussion, poor answers to this question did not adequately explain them and did not clearly distinguish Aristotle's own position. Strong answers clearly and correctly identified Aristotle's use of this concept in the *Physics* and its relation to the concept of a thing's purpose or end, including relevant and interesting critical assessment of his position. A good answer would have included a discussion of *Phys.* II.9 and the notion of necessity with respect to matter (and form), as well as a discussion of the distinction between absolute and conditional necessity.

*6. Does anything in the natural world really happen 'by chance'? Discuss with close reference to Aristotle's discussion in *Physics II*.*

Weaker answers did not make close reference to the text, nor state Aristotle's reasons for his view that there are some chance events; they were also insecure in terminology; some stronger ones stated Aristotle's arguments correctly, without, however, going into any deeper criticism; no many stated that Aristotle defines chance as incidental cause. One stronger answer clearly identified what Aristotle means by 'chance' and where it pops up in the text. It also identified Aristotle's position and provided good examples to strengthen its explanation, including an interesting critical assessment of this position.

*7. Explain and discuss the conception of 'happiness' for which Aristotle argues in the *Nicomachean Ethics I*. If you wish, you may also refer to his discussion in *NE X*.*

The weakest answers touched on the question set only incidentally, rather they focused on the elucidation of the concept 'eudaimonia' in general Greek use (as opposed to ours); they did not even mention (let alone discuss) the function argument, the argument that there must be a highest good (and the criteria thereof), or that Aristotle tries to capture the truth in other views about happiness. Some poorer answers did not clearly articulate the ingredients of happiness as Aristotle conceives it, in some cases focusing on virtue alone, and providing evidence of some confusion with Plato's view. In the case of most less-than-satisfactory answers, critical discussion was lacking completely. When this question was done well, it included a clear explanation of Aristotle's position and touched on his reasons for arriving at his particular conception of happiness. Strong answers also included a discussion of external goods and how they fit into Aristotle's account of eudaimonia. They also included a critical discussion of this view, focusing, for the most part, on the role that virtue plays in a life well-lived.

*8. Explain and discuss Aristotle's conception of 'virtue of character' in *Nicomachean Ethics II*.*

Poor answers showed evidence of confusion when it comes to what these kinds of virtues are, on Aristotle's view, and how they are to be distinguished from the intellectual virtues. A good answer

was one which provided a clear, detailed explanation of what virtues of character are, on Aristotle's view, how they are acquired, and how they relate to the notion of the 'intermediary' and to practical wisdom. Even the better answers could have improved by providing more detailed, critical discussion of Aristotle's position. A discussion of virtue as a *state* of character (as opposed to a passion or faculty) would also have been à propos.

9. *"Ultimately, it seems all the Hellenistic schools advise us to aim at the same thing – viz. a life as calm as possible." Is this true? Which school has the best account of why the undisturbed life is good? Which of the outlooks is most likely to get me an undisturbed life?*

Poorer answers either tried to cover too much at the expense of clear, relevant explanation, or simply agreed with the quotation and identified preferred schools without providing adequate arguments in support of their claims. Strong students showed why they agreed with the quotation, if they did, and provided both (sufficiently detailed) information about the schools appealed to and a thoughtful defence of their chosen positions. One tutor commented: one problem was that many students failed to realise that this question was actually divided into three sub-questions all of which should have been addressed; some failed to address some questions completely, while others answered them implicitly. Stronger answers were intelligently structured, which enabled them to address all the question. They also showed critical reflection. Surprisingly few answers made the point that the Sceptics are hardly in a position to advise anything.

Section B

10. *Set out the best Sceptical argument against the possibility of knowledge. (Choose just one.) What argument might a Stoic offer in reply?*

Poorer answers tended to sketch (too briefly) the outlines of the Sceptical view rather than developing an argument in support of Sceptical conclusions. They also tended to provide thoughts on what a Stoic might say in reply in the absence of any clear explanation (even in outline) of Stoic epistemology. Stronger ones provided a clear exposition of a chosen Sceptical argument, explained their choice, and explained how it can be seen as a challenge to the Stoic view on the possibility of knowledge; they also provided a brief outline of how the Stoic might respond to the Sceptical argument in question; and a critical defence of one side over the other. The very strong answers made interesting criticisms of both camps and were able to outline the positions concisely.

11. *How do Epicurean epistemology and physics support Epicurean ethics?*

Stronger answers provided a clear but brief explanation of Epicurean ethics, pointing out (in most cases) a) how Epicurean views on the significance and authority of sense perception support their claims about the value of pleasure and pain; and b) how finding out about the nature of our desires, the consequences of their satisfaction, if possible, and the nature of the world more generally both points in the direction of a certain way of life and facilitates the living of such a life. Only stronger answers mentioned that a) Epicurus is a materialist and that b) this supports the view that death is not to be feared. Poorer answers tended to suffer from vagueness; several failed to relate the issue of fearing of god's intervention to the physics.. Many students attempted to cover too much ground without drawing clear connections.

12. *Does the cradle argument tell in favour of the Epicurean ethical view, the Stoic ethical view, or neither?*

Good answers provided a clear explanation of the purpose of the cradle argument, as understood by either school. Strong answers also included a clear, critical evaluation of whether the argument

actually does support one school's ethical view, using argument to ground this assessment. Poorer answers lacked any clear identification of the role of the cradle argument (this was especially the case when it came to the Stoic view on the matter) and lacked critical discussion, merely stating opinion rather than supporting the relevant claim with argument.

13. If there are preferred and dispreferred indifferents, must the Stoic admit that it is correct to feel desire, aversion, pleasure, and pain about these things- to a moderate degree?

Poorer answers seemed to have trouble identifying what indifferents are, on the Stoic view, providing disjointed claims without argument. Stronger ones were able both to provide a clear explanation of what preferred and dispreferred indifferents are and to explain what the Stoics say about their value, compared to the goodness of virtue. Strong answers pointed out the relationship between the pursuit of preferred indifferents and a life lived in accordance with nature, as well as relevant elements of the Stoic conception of the passions. Some answers failed to bring out the point that the passions of soul mentioned in the question were identified by the Stoics as irrational, mistaken judgments. One strong essay picked up on this and was able to contrast the aforementioned passions—which are by definition vicious and immoderate—with the moderate, good states of soul advocated by the Stoics (joy, caution, wish, etc.).

PY2101 Aesthetics

General Comments

The standard of responses to the exam questions was overall lower than for the coursework essays, with considerably fewer marks at the higher end of the distribution. Overall, the impression was that students had prepared reasonably well for the examination, and displayed a good understanding of the subject matter. In particular, the essays tended to demonstrate a more-or-less accurate grasp of the theories covered, and of key historical figures, with essays being generally well-structured.

However, the essays often suffered from a failure to engage with the question, in many cases failing entirely to provide an answer. This was most often the case with the thematic questions. Where the question asked, for instance, what - if any - relation there was between art and morality, candidates tended to take this as an opportunity to display their knowledge of Plato, Tolstoy, etc. No candidate managed to discuss whether, for instance, good judges of art tended to be morally better persons, and the discussions of various philosophers failed to really address the question.

The questions on specific thinkers, in contrast, were generally better, although even here candidates sometimes dumped material which was of limited relevance to the question (discussing Plato where the question was on Tolstoy, for instance). For the most part, candidates appeared to understand the material from Plato much better than the extract on Hume's account of the standard of taste, and had severe difficulties with the question on Tolstoy: whilst the core of Tolstoy's theory was correctly presented, the issue of why his account treats most art as 'counterfeit' was not adequately addressed.

There were several cases where scripts were barely legible, and a thoroughgoing inability (or reluctance) to spell properly, or to use correct grammar.

The most obvious shortcoming was the failure to focus on answering the question set - it seemed that in most cases the examination was treated as an exercise in regurgitation, rather than thought.

There was, however, clear evidence of preparation and engagement with the course material.

PY4601 Paradoxes

Most students did well at setting out the relevant paradoxes but less well at discussing possible solutions. Most students answered questions 8 and 9, and many questions 1 and 6, but none answered questions 2 or 5.

Q1. Carefully rehearse one of Zeno's paradoxes. What if anything does it tell us about space and motion?

This was answered well. Most students picked the Dichotomy or Racetrack. Some students missed the paradoxical nature of the idea of completing an infinite task in a finite time. Better answers brought in material from more recent discussions.

Q3. What is meant by the notion of "indefinite extensibility"? Does that notion provide the uniform diagnosis of the logical paradoxes which Russell sought?

Students provided a reasonably precise characterisation of the notion and made a good attempt at relating the logical paradoxes.

Q4. Is Kripke's approach to solving the Liar paradox successful? Is there a more satisfactory solution?

In general Kripke's theory of truth was not correctly described in any detail. Students tended to also discuss Tarski's theory.

Q6. Describe the response to the Sorites paradox provided by the theory of supervaluations. Is the response successful?

Most answers adequately described the supervaluationist theory, but some did not correctly relate it to the Sorites paradox or exhibited poor understanding of Williamson's argument against the theory.

Q7. Might there be vagueness in the world?

Some relevant examples were given, but there was poor understanding of Evans' argument against vague identity.

Q8. Carefully rehearse Newcomb's paradox. Assess the following claim: it is rational to open both boxes.

This was in general very well answered. Some students were confused over the structure of Newcomb's paradox. Some failed to bring out its paradoxical nature by describing the attractiveness of both options. Few factored probabilities into the table of expected outcomes.

Q9. Assess the following claim in the light of Goodman's "grue" paradox: a generalisation is confirmed by any of its instances.

Some students showed confusion over the definition of 'grue'. Answers tended to require more discussion of the various responses that are available.

Q10. What is a paradox? Is the Paradox of the Unexpected Examination genuinely paradoxical?

The notion of 'paradox' was reasonably well explained. A grasp of the paradoxical nature of the example was not clearly demonstrated.

PY4603 Philosophy of Film

Overall candidates did well: 22% obtained marks in the First range of 17-20, 48% had marks in the 14-16.9 range (2.1), 26% marks in the 11-13.9 range (2.2) and 4% in the 8-10.9 range (Third). Answers were generally clear and well structured, and the great majority of answers were relevant to the question.

Very few candidates showed evidence of reading beyond the material set on the module syllabus, which was an opportunity lost to show some degree of independent work. Often, though, answers discussed films in addition to those shown on the course, which was good.

Answers in the First range all evinced a degree of independence of thought and were rewarded appropriately, even when they showed some minor slips in scholarship or omission of relevant material. By far the biggest problem in the 2.1 range was simply a strong tendency to report (often very accurately) the content of the module lectures and/or the views of the authors of the set readings without engaging in independent critical discussion with the readings or lectures. This does not require originality or disagreement with the set material, merely conveying a sense to the examiners that the candidate has thought through the issues in his or her own terms. Answers in the 2.2 range and below tended to display significant mistakes or omissions without showing any independence of argument or use of one's own examples sufficient to compensate for these defects.

PY4604 Political Philosophy

General Objectives

The course aims to familiarize students with the main concepts and problems of contemporary political philosophy, and to equip them to discuss these issues in a logical and scholarly manner. Students are expected to develop first-hand knowledge of the primary source material and to engage with the secondary literature as they develop their understanding of the key arguments. Students will be expected critically to assess the texts and arguments, they will be expected to construct logical arguments and to defend their interpretations cogently, both orally and in writing.

Essays

1) How does Rawls justify his principles of justice?

Only two students elected to answer this question. Both provided competent summaries of the main points of Rawls' argument. First Class answers would have developed on these details to consider some of the literature that criticises Rawls' arguments rather than his conclusions.

2) 'Taxation of earnings from labour is on a par with forced labour' (Robert Nozick) Discuss.

A popular question. Satisfactory answers provided details of Nozick's entitlement theory and engaged with his conception of self-ownership. First Class answers drew on other aspects of Nozick's thought and engaged critically with the ideas of self-ownership and welfare to support a strong position for/against Nozick's views.

3) Liberal theories of Justice are grounded upon a fatally flawed understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. Discuss.

Another popular choice. Good answers provided a brief summary of Rawls' position before describing the criticisms of communitarians. Better essays focussed on one or two thinkers, particularly Sandel, and explored the seriousness of his charge and Rawls' subsequent endorsement of a strictly 'political' project. Poor answers were poor all round.

4) On what grounds do Oakeshott and Hayek reject social justice?

One student chose this essay and provided a clear summary of the respective arguments. A first class answer would have involved a higher degree of critical engagement that considered criticism of the positions adopted by Oakeshott and Hayek.

5) Was Isaiah Berlin right to distinguish between negative and positive liberty? Was he right to prefer the former?

Another popular choice. When answered well this essay involved a detailed description of Berlin's position and an engagement with his critics in the voluminous literature. Competent answers tended to provide partial accounts of Berlin's main points with serious reflection on the intellectual significance of his project.

6) How convincing did you find Rawls's ideas of Public Reason and Overlapping Consensus?

Not as popular. Good answers covered the main points of Rawls' re-casting of his theory in a 'political' manner. First class answers would have provided detailed descriptions of the context and

the notions of Public Reason and Overlapping Consensus, before moving on to address their convincingness and their status as developments of Rawls' wider project.

Examination

1) *Examine John Rawls's claim that his hypothetical contract argument embodies 'justice as fairness'.*

Competent answers provided a description of Rawls' argument with a consideration of how it was supposed to model intuitions about fairness. Better answers went beyond this to engage with both the detail of Rawls' position and the relative merits of the various parts of his argument.

2) *Why, for Nozick, is it significant that liberty upsets patterns?*

Competent answers described Nozick's objections to re-distribution with special regard to the Wilt Chamberlain example. Better answers went beyond this to engage with the wider significance of the possible tensions between equality and liberty.

3) *Is Rawlsian liberalism based on an abstract and insufficient model of the self?*

A popular question. Solid answers described Rawls' position and then related that of his main communitarian critics. First Class answers went beyond this to consider the wider implications of the communitarian critique of liberalism.

4) *Why do Oakeshott and Hayek characterise Conservatism as a 'disposition' rather than a theory?*

Competent answers provided a description of Oakeshott's main arguments. More sophisticated answers went beyond this to assess Hayek and to question whether he is correctly described as a conservative while fleshing out the details of the conception of conservatism that arises.

5) *'Positive Liberty can, and should, be rescued from the reproach to which Berlin subjects it.'*
(C.B. MacPherson) *Discuss.*

A solid answer described the distinction and noted Berlin's preference for negative liberty. Better answers provided fuller engagement with the issues and took a stronger position on Berlin's criticism of positive freedom.

6) *Why does Rawls re-cast his position as a 'Political' Liberalism?*

Not a popular choice. Good answers invoked the communitarian criticisms of the original theory of justice and then examined Rawls' shift in attention to the pressing concerns of multiculturalism.

7) *Do cultural groups deserve 'recognition' in a just society? If so, then why?*

A popular choice, albeit one that was not particularly well answered. Good answers dwelt on Hegel's influence on Taylor while more superficial answers stressed the Quebec context.

8) *Does Iris Young succeed in formulating a satisfactory 'Politics of Difference'?*

Good answers described Young's position before engaging with her critics. First Class answers provided detailed criticisms drawing on Barry and Kukathas and extending these into their own arguments.

9) *Does Kukathas's theory of liberal toleration inevitably lead to the toleration of the intolerable?*

The main problem here was the students who answered this question devoted insufficient time to explaining exactly what position Kukathas adopts. As a result they tended to focus on Barry's critique and failed to develop their own positions. Better answers focussed on concrete examples of the problem of intolerable practices.

10) *Evaluate Carol Gilligan's view that a feminist ethic of care offers a viable alternative to the established ethic of justice.*

This question was not popular, but was answered well. Good answers detailed the Kohlberg/Gilligan debate before moving on to describe Gilligan's main arguments on the ethic of care. First class answers provided sustained engagement with the notion of an alternative approach to social justice.

11) *Critically assess whether economic inequality or cultural pluralism presents the more pressing concern for contemporary political philosophy.*

Not popular. A good answer would engage with ideas from both parts of the course to build a coherent position. Some attention to the work of Brian Barry would have made for a sophisticated answer.

PY4606 Contemporary Epistemology

The course proved to be quite challenging, in trying to convey a sense of some central debates in contemporary epistemological research. We found that, generally, the class reacted very well to the material taught (which is admittedly fairly hard). This was especially the case for the first (structure of justification), third (contextualism and SSI) and fourth (apriori justification) block. The second block (aspects of Williamson's epistemology) was generally felt to be very demanding, and would probably need some modification in a future repetition of the module (however, some excellent essays and exam questions have been written on this block, and we do believe that Williamson's challenging work—in addition to being a useful model of philosophical argumentation—is important enough as to deserve a place in an advanced undergraduate course on contemporary epistemology).

What was expected in both essays and exam questions was:

- a clear presentation of the different positions about a certain problem discussed in the lectures;
- a demonstration of understanding of how the key arguments pro and against a certain position run;
- an attempt at original thought, critically assessing the force of the arguments in question or even producing new ones in favour or against a certain view.

We found that these requirements were more than satisfactorily met by the large majority of the class, especially the first two expectations. The third requirement is the most difficult of the three, and as should be expected, the students found it the most difficult to accomplish. But we thought that on the whole the students did well with some difficult material, and in trying to work through some trenchant philosophical problems. We are generally very happy about the course.

PY4614 Philosophy of Mind

Before discussing the exam I'll make some comments on the assessment for the module as a whole. Overall I've been very pleased with the work produced by the students on this module; some of the work in both essays and the exam has been of a very high standard. The most unusual thing to happen regarding the assessment for this module was the difficulty that many students had in getting the essay completed on time. I appreciate that in some cases there were very good individual reasons for this, and as far as I am aware all those to whom this applied got extensions. Nonetheless I've never known anywhere near such a large proportion of students on a module to fail to hand in work on time. In several cases where there was no reason that would justify an extension I had to deduct marks for lateness, which seems a shame and which I really hate having to do.

Now to the exam. Overall I was pleased with the standard of exam answers. I'll make some general comments then I'll go through the exam question by question. You all answered the right number of questions and in most cases wrote roughly the same amount for each question, which is normally the best way to maximise marks. There was one particular stand-out exam script showing evidence of reading well beyond the reading list and with excellent clarity, precision and understanding of the issues, though there were some other very good scripts as well. More disappointing was that I saw a few exam answers that really just regurgitated the lecture handout, point-by-point, even using the same examples. At this level this is really very poor. There were also one or two that, although they avoided directly regurgitating the lecture handouts, still showed far too little evidence of reading, sticking very much to the issues in the form in which they had been discussed in the lectures and tutorials without adding any further detail derived from reading.

Section A

1. What is the difference between dualism and materialism? Which type of theory offers the best prospects for a satisfactory account of the mind-body relation?

Not many of you answered this so I don't have anything specific to say about it. It was a rather broad question, allowing a number of potential topics to be discussed.

2. Why should anyone think that rational thought consists in the manipulation of symbols?

One or two quite pleasing descriptions of the Language of Thought hypothesis, though not always related as explicitly to machine functionalism/Turing machines as they might have been. No one went into real depth over the arguments for LOT based on systematicity, productivity etc., though there were some good brief discussions of this. If you wanted to discuss objections to LOT some obvious issues to discuss would have been the Chinese Room, or eliminativist/connectionist objections to regarding psychology in terms of symbol manipulation, or (slightly less obviously) Dennett's (or even Davidson's) view that even if propositional attitudes actually happen to involve LOT they don't have to. Some of these were discussed. There was scope with this question to get really technical about LOT and give an outstandingly sharp and detailed answer, but no one did so.

3. What is folk psychology? Is it a scientific theory and, if so, how plausible is it that it is a true theory?

One or two rather unoriginal responses to this one, some sticking too close to the lecture handout, but some slightly better ones too. Not many of you directly tackled the question of why folk psychology should be regarded as science at all, though one person made quite a good job of this.

4. Describe Donald Davidson's anomalous monism. Can anomalous monism be defended in the face of criticisms regarding mental causation?

A lot of you answered this one. It was probably the most difficult question in section A (though (2) also had scope for dealing with very difficult material). There were some very good answers (including one outstanding one discussing a broad literature beyond the reading list), and I was pleased to see how many of you seemed to have grasped Davidson's position reasonably well. What I found very surprising, though, was how few of you said much about Kim's well-known objection to Davidson based on issues concerning mental causation (to the effect that anomalous monism would make mental properties epiphenomenal). Since this featured significantly in both the lecture and the readings I was puzzled by how few of you discussed it (in previous incarnations of this module when I've set similar questions most students have discussed Kim in detail). I didn't exactly mark down for not discussing Kim – my only strict criterion was that you answer the question – but there was scope for one or two of you to have gained higher marks if you had done so.

Section B

5. What is the relation between knowledge of the physical world and knowledge of conscious mental states? What might the answer to this question tell us about the metaphysics of conscious mental states?

This is pretty much an invitation to say whatever you want to say about Jackson's Knowledge Argument (though you could also have discussed Nagel's bat argument, Levine's explanatory gap etc.), so I was very surprised that not a single person answered it. This was even more surprising given that several people did discuss the Knowledge Argument when answering other questions, particularly question 6.

6. Do qualia really exist?

When I set this question, given what we'd discussed in lecture 9 (which was entitled 'Do Qualia Really Exist?') I assumed that anyone who answered it would focus on Dennett's eliminativist arguments in 'Quining Qualia' and elsewhere. I was therefore very surprised to see that several people concentrated on Jackson's Knowledge Argument. This was rather bizarre given that: (i) question 5 was the obvious question under which to discuss the Knowledge Argument, and (ii) the Knowledge Argument doesn't concern whether qualia exist (unless of course by 'qualia' one means 'epiphenomenal qualia', but no one made it clear that they were taking 'qualia' this way). Some of you discussed both the Knowledge Argument and Dennett, mostly failing to notice that while the Knowledge Argument is an argument for epiphenomenal, non-physical qualia Dennett's argument is directed against a notion of 'qualia' that can be shared by materialists as well as dualists. Some of the discussions of Dennett weren't bad, though often based too much on the lecture – I saw disappointingly little discussion of points that Dennett makes in his article other than those that I'd mentioned myself in the lecture. One person simply regurgitated the main points from that lecture in a somewhat garbled form without adequately explaining the point of any of the various demonstrations of illusions etc., showing no evidence of any reading whatsoever, and got a very low mark as a result.

7. What is the relation between the phenomenal character of a conscious experience and its representational content?

Some reasonably good and in some cases extremely good answers to this one. I was pleased to see how many of you had a good grasp of what was going on overall, in some cases also showing some good reading.

8. *Describe Fodor's Modularity Hypothesis. In what respects does he suggest that perception is like a reflex? What sorts of perceptual phenomena would be explained by the modularity hypothesis?*

No one answered this, which was probably sensible given that we covered it in the last lecture when there was no time for a tutorial afterwards. I didn't think there would be many takers but I put it in the exam just in case anyone was particularly keen on the topic.

PY4638 Philosophy of Religion

Answer any TWO questions. Avoid overlap between your answers.

1. EITHER

a. *'There is quite a chance that, if there is a God, he will make something of the finitude and complexity of a universe. It is very unlikely that a universe would exist uncaused, but rather more likely that God would exist uncaused. Hence the argument from the existence of the universe to the existence of God is a good c-inductive argument.'* (Richard Swinburne)
Explain and discuss.

OR

b. *Does God provide the best explanation of the existence of the physical universe?*

2. EITHER

a. *Is it plausible to regard the fact that our universe is life-permitting as a brute fact?*

OR

b. *Which of the following offers the better explanation of the fact that our universe is life-permitting: the multi-verse hypothesis or the God hypothesis?*

Some students answering 2(b) did not devote enough time to the COMPARISON between the TWO hypotheses – instead writing an essay discussing only one hypothesis.

3. *What does Alston claim in his defence of Christian mystical practice? Does that defence succeed?*

4. *Does the fact of religious diversity prove that all religions are false?*

5. *Is there a sound form of the ontological argument for the existence of God?*

6. EITHER

a. *Why does Adams claim that morality requires transcendent values? Is he correct?*

OR

b. *Is belief in God necessary for morality?*

OR

c. *Can religious belief ever be a justified doxastic venture?*

7. *How does van Inwagen respond to the atheist argument from evil? Is his response plausible?*

Students answering 7 often did not spend enough time on the second question. Too much time was spent explaining van Inwagen's view, and not enough time on evaluating it. Some students also did not explain the difference between a theodicy and a defence, and how this related to van Inwagen's response.

8. *Can philosophy prove or disprove the existence of God? (Discuss with reference to one or more of the arguments discussed in the course.)*

Question 8 was mostly answered very badly. Most students wrote on the argument from evil, with little reference to anything studied in the course.

Overall, the exam performance was good. Apart from the specific issues mentioned above, some of the main reasons students did not score more highly were the following:

1. Too much time spent on exposition, and not enough on critical evaluation. Many answers were very well-structured and accurate summaries of the material organised around the question. This is very good. However, at this level, you will not get above 16 unless you develop some original ideas or arguments of your own.
2. Some answers stayed too close to the lectures and/or main set readings, and did not show evidence of any wider reading or investigation.
3. Failure to address the question. Some students wrote what looked like pre-prepared essays on a given topic, rather than selecting material that was relevant to the particular question that was asked. This was most common if the question focused attention on a particular quotation, argument, or thinker.
4. Failure to clearly explain key points and arguments. Some answers were quite brief, with explanations of the main points not sufficiently detailed to assure the marker that the student understood what was going on.
5. Inadequate acquaintance with the material studied in the course. Students who scored below 13 on particular questions typically wrote general answers based on background knowledge, rather than engaging with the material covered in this course.