PHILOSOPHY

Sample written examination

The Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools

2019

Reading Time: 15 minutes
Writing Time: 2 hours

QUESTION AND ANSWER BOOK

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• Students are permitted to bring into the examination room: pens, pencils, highlighters, erasers, sharpeners and rulers.
• Students are NOT permitted to bring into the examination room: blank sheets of paper and/or correction fluid/tape.
• No calculator is allowed in this examination.

Materials supplied
• Questions and answer book of 24 pages, including assessment criteria for Section C on page 24
• Additional space is available at the end of the book if you need extra paper to complete an answer.

Instructions
• Write your student number in the space provided above on this page.
• All written responses must be in English.

Students are NOT permitted to bring mobile phones and/or any other unauthorised electronic devices into the examination room.
SECTION A

Instructions for Section A

Answer all questions in the spaces provided.

**Question 1** (5 marks)

a. Describe the method of knowing (his epistemology) that Descartes uses to achieve his argument for a distinct mind and body.

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2 marks

b. How would Smart evaluate the method identified in part a?

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3 marks
Question 2 (3 marks)
Describe the hard problem of consciousness and how Nagel's example of the bat supports the claim that such a problem exists.

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Question 3 (3 marks)

a. Outline Michaels' Schwanda thought experiment. What is the point of this thought experiment?

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1 mark

b. Compare the case of Schwanda, from part a, with Locke's prince and cobbler example.

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2 marks
**Question 4** (6 marks)
Michaels states "that our bodies are, at the very least, important to who we are" (p. 486).

a. Compare how Locke would respond to this claim?

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b. Compare how Hume would respond to this claim?

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Question 5 (5 marks)

a. According to Callicles all pleasures are good. How does Socrates respond to this claim?

2 marks

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b. Would Nietzsche agree or disagree with either Callicles or Socrates? Explain.

3 marks

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Question 6 (5 marks)

When haters go after your looks and differences, it means they have nowhere left to go. And then you know you’re winning!
I have Asperger’s syndrome and that means I’m sometimes a bit different from the norm. And - given the right circumstances - being different is a superpower.
I’m not public about my diagnosis to "hide" behind it, but because I know many ignorant people still see it as an "illness", or something negative. And believe me, my diagnosis has limited me before. Before I started school striking I had no energy, no friends and I didn’t speak to anyone. I just sat alone at home, with an eating disorder.
All of that is gone now, since I have found a meaning, in a world that sometimes seems meaningless to so many people.

Source: Greta Thunberg, Sept 1, 8:02 AM Facebook

a. Greta Thunberg the 16 yr old Climate Activist said the above. She claims to have ‘found a meaning’. According to Susan Wolf under what circumstances would she support Thunberg’s claim that she lives a meaningful life?

2 marks

b. How plausible is Wolf’s argument?

3 marks
Question 7

a. Why does Aristotle believe that political science is the master of all the sciences?

1 mark

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b. And why, according to Aristotle, is an understanding of political science important to living the good life?

2 marks

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SECTION B

Instructions for Section B

Answer all questions in the spaces provided.

Question 1 (10 marks)

'We've designed machines to act the way we do: They help drive our cars, fly our airplanes, route our packages, approve our loans, screen our messages, recommend our entertainment, suggest potential romantic partners, and enable our doctors to diagnose what ails us. And because they act like us, it would be reasonable to imagine they think like us, too. But the reality is they don't think like us at all; at some deep level, we don't even really understand how they're producing the behaviour we observe. This is the essence of their incomprehensibility. Does it matter? Should we worry that we're building systems whose increasingly accurate decisions are based on incomprehensible foundations?'

Source: Kleinberg, J and S Mullainathan, 'We built them, but we don't understand them', Brockman, J. What to think about Machines that think, Harper Perennial, New York, 2015, pp. 62-64.

Is the incomprehension spoken about in the passage above the same as Nagel's argument about the incomprehension of the subjective character of experience?

Develop a response to this question. In your response, you should also discuss:

• how Descartes might respond to Nagel's argument;
• how Smart might respond to Nagel's argument;
• which view - Nagel's or Smart's or Descartes's - you find more plausible and why.

Justify your response, taking into account the ideas presented in the passage.
Question 2 (10 marks)

Every individual has a unique genetic makeup, their own distinct form of the human genome.... Furthermore, our basic DNA sequences remain unchanged throughout all stages of our growth, development, and degeneration. The individual's DNA sequences are stable despite the replacement of chemical elements. They persist irrespective of damages to DNA due to random accidents. The sequences do not depend on cognitive abilities or consciousness. The Alzheimer's sufferer who has lost most of her memory has the same genetic base as she had as an infant without self-awareness, or as an adult during the peak of a successful career. Our DNA remains the same from the first instant of an individual's existence to his or her last breath.


To what extent should we take the body into consideration when thinking about personal identity?

Develop a response to this question and passage. In your response, you should discuss:

• how this passage challenges Locke's view on personal identity;
• the extent this passage agrees with Michael's views on personal identity;
• which thinker - Locke or Michaels - gives the more plausible theory of personal identity.

Justify your response, taking into account the ideas presented in the passage.
SECTION C

Instructions for Section C

Write an essay on one of the following questions in the space provided. Your response will be assessed according to the assessment criteria set out on page 24.

Question 1 (20 marks)

Extract:

'So if we're going to work more, deeper, and with greater effectiveness thanks to thinking machines, choosing wisely what they'll be "thinking" about is important. Indeed, it would be a shame to develop all this intelligence and then spend it on thinking really hard about things that don't matter. As ever in science, selecting problems worth solving is a harder task than figuring out how to solve them. One area where the convergence of need, urgency, and opportunity is great is in the monitoring and management of our planetary resources. Despite the dramatic increase in cognitive and labor productivity [provided by machines], we haven't fundamentally changed our relationship to Earth.... We have almost 7 billion thinking machines on this planet already, but for the most part they don't seem terribly concerned with how sustainable their life on this planet actually is. Few can see the whole picture in ways that make sense to them, and those who do are often limited in their ability to respond. Adding cognitive capacity to figure out how we fundamentally alter our relationship with the planet is a problem worth thinking about.'


Drawing on how Nietzsche OR Wolf might respond to the ideas in this passage, critically discuss their views regarding technological progress and if this would enable us to live better lives.

You may also draw on other sources if you wish.

OR

Question 2 (20 marks)

Extract:

'Transhumanism is a patchwork of beliefs about how technology will enhance the human condition, maybe radically so. There are Extropians [people who believe in an evolving framework of values and standards for continuously improving the human condition] and brain uploaders, artists keen to paint in virtual worlds, and do-it-yourself biohackers ready to have electronic chips implanted in their bodies. One common thread, though, is the hope for super-longevity. Who wouldn't want to reach 110, if not 500? Unlike mere armchair futurists, the life extensionists are prepared to experiment on themselves, and others, using vitamins and prescription cancer drugs, as well as compounds available only by finagling [obtain through dishonest means] them from chemical suppliers.'


Drawing on the viewpoints and arguments of Plato and Aristotle critically discuss if a technologically enhanced longer life is a good life, and any other issues raised in the passage.

You may also draw on other sources if you wish.
Extra space for responses
Clearly number all responses in this space.
Assessment criteria for Section C
The essay in Section C will be assessed against the following criteria:

- knowledge and understanding of philosophical concepts, viewpoints, arguments and debates relevant to the topic
- critical evaluation of ideas and arguments relevant to the topic
- selection and use of relevant material and appropriate examples to support the response
- development of a coherent and well-reasoned response that addresses the specific demands of the topic
- use of clear and precise language appropriate to philosophy