

EXAMINERS' REPORT

AM PHILOSOPHY

FIRST SESSION 2018



L-Università
ta' Malta

**MATSEC
Examinations Board**

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Part 1: Statistical Information

Table 1 shows the distribution of the candidates' grades for the May 2018 Advanced Level Philosophy Examination.

Table1:

GRADE	A	B	C	D	E	F	ABS	TOTAL
NUMBER	4	14	19	24	11	16	10	98
% OF TOTAL	4.1	14.3	19.4	24.5	11.2	16.3	10.2	100

Part 2: Comments on the candidate's performance

Paper 1

Section A: Logic and Reasoning (Questions 1, 2, 3, 4)

The majority of candidates fared well in this section. However, it was noted that in some cases, some questions were not attempted, resulting in a substantial loss of marks. The following is a list of the most common mistakes:

Q1: The majority of candidates showed a poor level of knowledge when it came to answer the virtual bi-location and virtual bi-temporation question, in turn giving a vague answer. With regards to the fallacy question, the majority correctly identified it as being an irrelevant conclusion. However, when it came to writing down the structure, many candidates gave an incorrect answer, opting to give a personal opinion about the fallacy, rather than writing down the actual structure.

Q2: Most candidates identified the adjunct and the conditions of when it is false. Some students failed to show what symmetry is and therefore could not work question (b). Others could not identify what being mutually distributive and associative meant. This resulted in incorrect truth tables, in some cases even leaving them out without an attempt. A minority of candidates showed a good grasp of the concepts mentioned and achieved very good marks for this question.

Q3: The majority of candidates showed that they knew the difference between an implication and an equivalence. However, not all responses provided the conditions under which these are valid or invalid. The majority of candidates answered correctly the partial replacement rule and therefore could answer (b). However, some candidates showed a lack of understanding of terms when it came to answering question (c), responding only with a "yes" or a "no".

Q4: Some candidates mixed up the deductive with the inductive argument, while others ignored the valid and sound part and gave examples of deductive arguments that were unsound. Some responses showed a poor level of knowledge when it came to translate questions (b) and (c).

Section B: Ethics and Society (Compulsory Question No. 5)

In question 5 candidates were asked to give a philosophical account on whether they agree, or disagree, with the statement provided by making reference to the theory of privacy and personal information in Cyberspace. It was noted that a substantial amount of candidates provided answers from their own experiences and gave out their personal opinions rather than offer a philosophical reflection on the subject with reference to the theories on privacy and personal information.

Section B: Ethics and Society (Questions 6, 7 and 8)

Questions 6 (Optional)

Many candidates who chose this essay did not do too well. Many failed to adequately show a thorough understanding of both sides of the question, the majority putting too much weight on either Socrates or the Sophists, at time omitting one side completely from their answer.

Question 7 (Optional)

The candidates who chose this essay got the best marks out of the three options. The majority were very concise, well-prepared and showed comprehensive philosophical reasoning.

Question 8 (Optional)

The majority of candidates who chose this essay achieved very good results. However, some candidates were too caught up in a political or religious discussion, emphasising too much on their personal opinions, rather than offering a philosophical discussion.

Paper 2

Section A: Key Questions in European Thought (Compulsory Question)

The compulsory question was about an excerpt from Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. Students had to answer questions on Rousseau's ideas on man in the state of nature, the general will, and how his idea of the social contract compares with those by Hobbes or Locke. Several students did not fare well in this section, primarily because they gave an incomplete answer or repeated the same ideas in the different questions. Not many students highlighted the centrality of the idea of social inequality in Rousseau's social philosophy. A finer understanding of Rousseau's notion of the general will required elucidation of how, according to him, the general will was based on the common good rather than individual interests, and that its aim was to preserve true freedom. The majority of candidates successfully compared Rousseau's ideas on the social contract with Hobbes' conception of the state of nature as marked by a war of all against all.

Section B: Key Questions in European Thought

Question 2

Few candidates chose to answer this question on Aristotle's metaphysics. Those who did gave a good account of Aristotle's concept of being and becoming, and potentiality and actuality, as demanded by the question. They also explained Aristotle's theory of change in terms of the four causes.

Question 3

This question, on the notion of speech acts in the philosophy of J. L. Austin and John Searle, was quite popular among candidates. Most students who answered this question defined speech acts in terms of its three parts (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary) and gave examples of each part. Some candidates distinguished between constative and performative statements to highlight the difference between the two. Candidates who fared better in this question proceeded to give a brief account of Searle's elaboration of Austin's notion of speech acts, as was demanded by the question.

Question 4

This question was not particularly popular among candidates and in most did not fare well. This question, which concerned the importance of language and dialogue for the functioning of democracy, was essentially about the role of dialogue and communication in a democratic society. Therefore, the key philosopher with whom the students were being asked to engage with was Habermas, particularly his distinction between communicative and strategic action, and his notion of the ideal speech situation. Many candidates who answered this question gave a generic answer without rooting it in philosophical ideas and theories. In any philosophical essay, it is expected and taken as obvious that students must engage with at least the work of one philosopher to justify their claims.

Question 5

This question on rationalism and empiricism was the most popular among candidates. Those who answered this question mainly discussed the work of rationalist Descartes and empiricists Locke and/or Hume. Most students discussed the main tenets of rationalism as a philosophical view that holds that knowledge is acquired primarily through reason, and empiricism as the view that holds that knowledge is acquired primarily through the senses. Most students discussed Descartes' method of doubt and his notion of the cogito, as well as Locke's notion of *tabula rasa*, and Hume's critique of causation.

Question 6

This question asked about Albert Camus' views on the meaning of human existence in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Despite this question asking about a text, some candidates who answered this question gave a general (and not very refined) account of some of Camus' ideas, such as absurdity, suicide, and meaning. Others focused a bit too much on the 'narrative' aspect of Sisyphus' story, failing to link the story to Camus' philosophical ideas. The candidates who fared better in this question elaborated upon Camus' idea that human existence is a conflict between the desire for a meaningful ordered world and the absurdity of life, and that Camus' point is to not avoid, but embrace, this facet of human existence.

General Remarks

Overall, the quality of the essays was satisfactory. It must be emphasised, however, that candidates need to structure their essays better and not merely present a chunk of text. Essays must give a clear and accurate account of philosophers' ideas and, importantly, candidates must explain and define the technical philosophical notions used. At an Advanced Level, Philosophy students should be able to show a good grasp of theories learned throughout their studies whilst addressing the question being asked in relation to those theories, to avoid going out of point and/ or not providing a philosophical essay.

Chairperson
Examiners' Panel 2018