



L-Università  
ta' Malta

MATSEC  
Examinations Board



## Examiners' Report

### AM Philosophy

Special September Session 2020

## Examiners' Report (2020): AM Philosophy

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## A. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The total number of candidates who registered to sit for AM Philosophy was **105**, which is **21** candidates more than in 2019.

Table 1 shows the distribution of grades for the Special September 2020 session of the examination

| GRADE                    | A   | B    | C    | D    | E   | F    | Abs  | TOTAL |
|--------------------------|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|------|-------|
| <b>No. of Candidates</b> | 4   | 11   | 23   | 15   | 6   | 13   | 33   | 105   |
| <b>% OF TOTAL</b>        | 3.8 | 10.5 | 21.9 | 14.3 | 5.7 | 12.4 | 31.4 | 100.0 |

*Table 1: Distribution of grades for AM Philosophy, Special September Session 2020*

## B. GENERAL REMARKS

The majority of candidates showed a good grasp of the different topics. The majority of essays were well structured and clear. However, at times, some essays lacked the use of proper philosophical language and a proper engagement with philosophical ideas. At an Advanced Level, philosophy candidates are expected to be able to construct a sound argument backed by theories they learnt.

## C. COMMENTS ON PAPER I AND PAPER II

### Paper I

#### Section A: Logic and Reasoning

##### *Question 1*

In this question, the majority of candidates fared well. However, some of these candidates did show an inadequate knowledge of fallacies.

##### *Question 2*

A majority of candidates chose this question. One issue encountered was in a) where candidates were not very familiar with the difference between inductive and deductive arguments. Another issue was in b) about the translation into words. Some candidates did not form a grammatically correct sentence-structure when translating the symbols. The final issue was in c) where some candidates either did not know how to interpret counter-interpretations when working implications or else did not provide an appropriate reason for their answer.

##### *Question 3*

A majority of candidates chose this question and fared well. A considerable number of these candidates did not do c) correctly, as they either wrote the rest of the implication without stating whether it was valid or admissible, or else wrote only that it is valid or admissible without continuing the implication.

##### *Question 4*

The majority of candidates that chose this question fared well. Only a few of these candidates did not provide a proper explanation of a) or b).

## Section B: Ethics and Society

### Question 5

The majority of the candidates fared well in this question. Although some did not provide the adequate detail expected, many managed to provide the main points showing a sound knowledge of the topic in question. In some cases, Protagoras was only mentioned in passing and, in turn, the essay revolved almost entirely around Socrates. In other cases, important notions like the Socratic Method were mentioned but not fully explained while other notions, such as Moral Optimism, were completely omitted.

### Question 6

The candidates that answered this question did not fare too well. The majority of candidates failed to mention important terms, elaborate and explain key definitions.

### Question 7

The majority of candidates fared well in this question. The majority of candidates tackled all the points expected and in a good level of detail.

### Question 8

The majority of candidates that answered this question wrote an opinion-based essay rather than a philosophical one. In many cases, there was no reference to the different types of euthanasia and what active or a passive euthanasia are.

## Paper II

### Section A: Key Questions in European Thought

#### Question 1

The compulsory question was about an excerpt from John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Candidates had to answer questions on Locke's epistemology, his ideas on sensation and reflection, simple and complex ideas, and the differences between Locke's empiricism and Descartes' rationalism. For the most part, candidates correctly identified Locke's epistemology as being empiricist, and identified the phrase in the text that explained the notion of *tabula rasa*.

The majority of candidates correctly contrasted Locke's ideas on the mind as devoid of innate ideas at birth with Descartes' views on innate ideas. They also compared the implications of a rationalist epistemology (emphasis on the mind/reason as the source of knowledge) with empiricism (experience/senses as the source of ideas).

Various candidates lost marks due to insufficient explanations of the notions of sensation and reflection in Locke, failing to explain that reflection entails the operation of the mind to perceive its own operations and ideas. With regard to Locke's distinction between simple and complex ideas, candidates were expected to indicate how simple ideas are obtained through the senses and reflection, while complex ideas were the product of repetitions, comparisons and unifications of the mind that resulted in abstract and complex ideas. High scores in this section depended on candidates providing correct definitions of the notions at play, as well as correctly explaining the necessary distinctions in order to highlight a good grasp of the ideas being discussed.

## Section B: Key Questions in European Thought

### Question 2

Few candidates answered this question on Aristotle's metaphysics. Candidates were asked to explain Aristotle's concepts of being, becoming, potentiality and actuality. A good answer to this essay question required candidates to explain and discuss Aristotle's views on being and his account of change, referring throughout to the notions and philosophical ideas proposed by Aristotle.

### Question 3

This question was answered by a significant percentage of candidates. The question pertained to the Stoics' views on nature, virtue and evil. With regard to the Stoic views on nature, candidates were expected to refer to Stoic doctrines of pantheism, pneuma and logos. With regard to virtue, candidates were expected to explain the Stoic view of differentiating between things that are in one's control as opposed to things that are not, leading to a discussion of Stoic apatheia and indifference, as well as the Stoic idea of an ethical life as lived in accordance with nature. With regard to Stoic ideas on evil, candidates were expected to refer to Stoic views on moral evil. Candidates who obtained more marks in this question elaborated further on the Stoics' discussion of freedom and determinism, illustrating their discussion with references to Stoic philosophers (ex: Zeno, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus).

### Question 4

This question concerned Rousseau's phrase, 'man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains', in relation to his account of human nature and society. A good and detailed account of Rousseau's discussion of human nature (and its sentiments), innocence and his portrayal of the state of nature were expected. Moreover, candidates who obtained better marks in this question delved in more depth on Rousseau's political philosophy and his account of the nature of social inequality with reference to the rise of social institutions. Furthermore, good references to Rousseau's texts, his notions of *homme sauvage*/ primordial man, and to his views on the general will and the social contract were signs of better responses to this question.

### Question 5

This question asked about Albert Camus' views on the absurd hero as he described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Some context to this book was expected, indicating the questions that Camus sought to engage with in this text. Moreover, candidates were expected to describe Camus' views on the human condition and the human desire for meaning in a meaningless universe. Camus' discussion of rationalism and suicide in relation to the absurd were also expected. Finally, the candidates were expected to illustrate their essay with references to Camus' images, characters and narrative. Candidates who simply described, in general terms, the story of Sisyphus, focusing just on his punishment of pushing the boulder, without situating this story in the context of the philosophy of Camus, did not obtain a good mark.

*Question 6*

This question, was not among the more popular questions, concerned the topic of speech act theory. The question asked for a discussion of two speech act theorists, which could have included JL Austin, John Searle or HP Grice. Candidates were expected to consider the distinction between constatives and performatives, as proposed by Austin, as well as his discussion of a speech act in terms of its parts (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary). With regard to Searle, candidates could have referred to his distinction between constitutive and normative rules, and his discussion of what constitutes a speech act. In relation to Grice, candidates could have focused on his explanation of the cooperative principle, and his discussion of maxims and implicatures. Correct use of examples of speech acts was expected. Some candidates who answered this question struggled to explain clearly the distinctions proposed by speech act theorists.

**D. CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Generally, the examiners noted that candidates need to back their claims by making a clear reference to philosophers' ideas so as not to end up writing a generic essay based on opinion. Candidates are expected to write an essay that clearly engages with philosophical views by showing more familiarity with the proper terminology. The examiners also point out that candidates need to make sure they read and follow the instructions carefully to avoid partial and irrelevant answers. Examiners strongly advice candidates not to rely too much on memorization as at times it leads them to go out of point and not answer the question in appropriately.

Chairperson

Examination Panel 2020