

# Markscheme

November 2025

Philosophy

Higher level and standard level

Paper 1

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## How to use the Diploma Programme Philosophy markscheme

The assessment markbands constitute the formal tool for marking examination scripts, and in these assessment markbands examiners can see the skills being assessed in the examinations. The markschemes are designed to assist examiners in possible routes taken by students in terms of the content of their answers when demonstrating their skills of doing philosophy through their responses. The points listed are not compulsory points, and not necessarily the best possible points. They are a framework to help examiners contextualize the requirements of the question, and to facilitate the application of marks according to the assessment markbands listed on page 6 for the core theme and page 9 for the optional themes.

It is important that examiners understand that the main idea of the course is to promote *doing* philosophy, and this involves activity and engagement throughout a two-year programme, as opposed to emphasizing the chance to display knowledge in a terminal set of examination papers. Even in the examinations, responses should not be assessed on how much students *know* as much as how they are able to use their knowledge in support of an argument, using the skills referred to in the various assessment markbands published in the subject guide, reflecting an engagement with philosophical activity throughout the course. As a tool intended to help examiners in assessing responses, the following points should be kept in mind when using a markscheme:

- The Diploma Programme Philosophy course is designed to encourage the skills of *doing* philosophy in the students. These skills can be accessed through reading the assessment markbands in the subject guide
- The markscheme does not intend to outline a model/correct answer
- The markscheme has an introductory paragraph which contextualizes the emphasis of the question being asked
- The bullet points below the paragraph are suggested possible points of development that should *not* be considered a prescriptive list but rather an indicative list where they might appear in the answer
- If there are names of philosophers and references to their work incorporated into the markscheme, this should help to give context for the examiners and does *not* reflect a requirement that such philosophers and references should appear in an answer: They are possible lines of development.
- Students can legitimately select from a wide range of ideas, arguments and concepts in service of the question they are answering, and it is possible that students will use material effectively that is *not* mentioned in the markscheme
- Examiners should be aware of the command terms for Philosophy as published in the Philosophy subject guide when assessing responses
- In Paper 1, examiners must be aware that a variety of types of answers and approaches, as well as a freedom to choose a variety of themes, is expected. Thus, examiners should not penalize different styles of answers or different selections of content when students develop their response to the questions. The markscheme should not imply that a uniform response is expected
- In markschemes for the core theme questions in Paper 1 (section A) the bullet points suggest possible routes of response to the stimulus, but it is critical for examiners to understand that the selection of the philosophical issue raised by the stimulus is *entirely at the choice of the student* so it is possible for material to gain credit from the examiner even if none of the material features in the markscheme.

### Note to examiners

Students at both Higher Level and Standard Level answer **one** question on the core theme (Section A). Students at Higher Level answer **two** questions on the optional themes (Section B), each based on a different optional theme.

Students at Standard Level answer **one** question on the optional themes (Section B).

**Paper 1 section A core theme markbands**

This task presents students with an unseen stimulus in the form of either a short text extract or an image. Students are required to explore a philosophical issue related to what it is to be human, the focus of the core theme, that arises from this stimulus. Within their critical exploration of their chosen issue, students are required to make explicit reference both to the stimulus and to their wider knowledge from their study of the core theme.

Marks	Level descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A philosophical issue raised by the stimulus is implied but not explicitly identified. There is minimal explanation of how this issue relates to the stimulus. Few, if any, references to the stimulus are made in the response.</li> <li>• The response demonstrates little relevant knowledge of the core theme. Philosophical vocabulary is not used or is consistently used inappropriately. Points made are poorly organized and frequently unclear.</li> <li>• The response is mostly descriptive and any analysis present is superficial or incoherent. Examples are included but are irrelevant and ineffective. There is little or no discussion of different points of view. Where a conclusion is included, this is very superficial or is not consistent with the rest of the response.</li> </ul>
6–10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A philosophical issue raised by the stimulus is identified but is imprecisely or vaguely stated. There is some limited explanation of how this issue relates to the stimulus. Occasional references to the stimulus are made in the response.</li> <li>• The response demonstrates basic knowledge of the core theme, but this knowledge lacks accuracy and/or relevance. Philosophical vocabulary is used, but often inappropriately. There is some attempt to organize the points made, but it is often unclear what the response is trying to convey.</li> <li>• The response contains limited analysis and overall is more descriptive than analytical. Examples are included but are ineffective. There is awareness but limited discussion of different points of view. A simplistic conclusion is included.</li> </ul>
11–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A philosophical issue raised by the stimulus is explicitly identified. There is a basic explanation of how this issue relates to the stimulus. Specific references to the stimulus are made during the response, although these are sometimes ineffective or unclear.</li> <li>• The response contains some relevant knowledge of the core theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used, sometimes appropriately. There is an attempt to organize the points made, although there is some repetition and a lack of clarity in places.</li> <li>• The response contains analysis, although this analysis lacks development. Relevant examples are used to support the discussion. There is some discussion of different points of view. A conclusion is included.</li> </ul>
16–20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A philosophical issue raised by the stimulus is explicitly identified. There is good explanation of how this issue relates to the stimulus. Specific references to the stimulus are made regularly throughout the response.</li> <li>• The response contains relevant and accurate knowledge of the core theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used, mostly appropriately. Points are generally clear and organized, and the response can be easily followed.</li> <li>• The response contains critical analysis, although this analysis may lack development. Relevant examples are used to support the discussion. There is discussion of different points of view. The response argues to a conclusion that is consistent with the arguments presented.</li> </ul>
21–25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A philosophical issue raised by the stimulus is clearly and explicitly identified. There is a well-developed explanation of how this issue relates to the stimulus. Clear, effective and specific references to the stimulus are made regularly throughout the response.</li> <li>• The response contains relevant, accurate and detailed knowledge of the core theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used accurately and precisely throughout. The points made are clear, coherent and effectively organized.</li> <li>• The response contains well-developed critical analysis. Relevant examples are used effectively to support the discussion. There is critical discussion of different points of view. The response argues to a reasoned and clearly stated conclusion that is consistent with the arguments presented.</li> </ul>

## Section A

Core theme: Being human

1. Stimulus from *Performing Deception*.

**With explicit reference to the stimulus and your own knowledge, explore a philosophical issue related to the question of what it is to be human.**

**[25]**

The following paragraphs provide only a framework to help examiners in their assessment of responses to this question. Examiners should be responsive to a variety of philosophical perspectives and approaches. Examiners should be aware that students might respond to this passage in a variety of ways including ones not mentioned in the summary below.

This text shares the philosophical reflections of someone performing for others. The author tries to picture himself from the outside, as his audience would, and finds this to be illusive. The text is reminiscent of many famous philosophical arguments, thought experiments and questions about self-reflection, which may be invoked directly by students wishing to explore the themes of consciousness and identity. The text also explores the video-like nature of conscious experience in a way that questions the reliability of memories. Students may wish to use this to explore objectivity and subjectivity as they pertain to the core theme. A wide range of questions can be explored, and examiners should be open to other approaches besides those mentioned here, provided that the topic falls within the core theme and that the student makes a strong connection to the material.

Students might explore:

- consciousness, self-consciousness, and the difference between the two
- objectivity and subjectivity
- the relationship between mind and body
- alienation and the feeling of being “other” than oneself
- the role of memory in identity, and the (un)reliability of memory
- the question of whether the self is unified or fragmented
- Hume’s bundle theory
- the Buddhist argument that the self is an illusion
- Butler’s performative theories of identity
- Dennet’s argument that self-consciousness is an illusion
- theories of identity construction (i.e. Ásta in *Categories we Live By*)
- the possibility of self-deception
- Descartes’s *cogito-ergo-sum*, Avicenna’s floating man, or other similar arguments.

## 2. Image

**With explicit reference to the stimulus and your own knowledge, explore a philosophical issue related to the question of what it is to be human.**

**[25]**

The following paragraphs provide only a framework to help examiners in their assessment of responses to this question. Examiners should be responsive to a variety of philosophical perspectives and approaches. Examiners should be aware that students might respond to this passage in a variety of ways including ones not mentioned in the summary below.

The image shows a barcode printed on the hand of a baby, which raises many questions about being a human. The presence of a barcode on a human hand seems unnatural and provocative, and students may interpret it as an attempt to control or diminish individuality and personhood. In this light, the image connects to the theme of freedom. On the other hand, students may have a more benign interpretation of the image, viewing the barcode as a unique ID which signifies one's identity. A student may also wish to ignore the barcode and focus instead on the connection between the parent and the child. This makes available a host of questions relating to the themes of self and other and human nature. The theme of consciousness is a little out of reach from this image but may be explored via the distinction between mind and body, if a student can make this connection explicitly and convincingly. Diverse interpretations of the material should be expected and rewarded, provided that the response is in line with the Core theme guidelines.

Students might explore:

- the relationship of children to their parents
- intersubjectivity and our relationship with others
- human nature, love and dependence
- to what extent we are “stamped” by our DNA (nature vs nurture)
- whether human identity is fluid or fixed
- whether human characteristics and qualia can be reduced to quantities
- capitalism or consumerism as forces which shape human beings in today’s world
- whether infants are persons
- ageing and the development of identity
- the implications of tattoos and body modification on personal identity
- determinism and fate.

**Paper 1 section B optional themes markbands**

This task requires students to write a thematic essay on the optional theme they have studied (SL) or two optional themes they have studied (HL). Students are presented with a choice of two questions per theme, with each question relating to one of the points of “required content” specified for that theme. Students are required to undertake a critical and explicitly philosophical discussion of the question posed, selecting and using specific examples drawn from their study of the optional theme to support their points.

Mark	Level descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is minimal focus on the question. Points made are poorly organized and frequently unclear.</li> <li>• The response demonstrates little relevant knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is not used or is consistently used inappropriately.</li> <li>• The response is mostly descriptive and any analysis present is superficial or incoherent. Examples drawn from the study of the optional theme are included but are irrelevant and ineffective. There is little or no discussion of different points of view. Where a conclusion is included, this is very superficial or is not consistent with the rest of the response.</li> </ul>
6–10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is some focus on the question, although the specific demands of the question may only be partially addressed. There is some attempt to organize the points made, but it is often unclear what the response is trying to convey.</li> <li>• The response demonstrates basic knowledge of the optional theme, but this knowledge lacks accuracy and/or relevance. Philosophical vocabulary is used, but often inappropriately.</li> <li>• The response contains limited analysis and overall is more descriptive than analytical. Examples drawn from the study of the optional theme are included but are frequently ineffective. There is awareness but limited discussion of different points of view. A simplistic conclusion is included.</li> </ul>
11–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The response is focused on the question. There is an attempt to organize the points made, although there is some repetition and lack of clarity in places.</li> <li>• The response contains some relevant knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used, sometimes appropriately.</li> <li>• The response contains analysis, although this analysis lacks development. Relevant examples drawn from the study of the optional theme are included. There is some discussion of different points of view. A conclusion is included.</li> </ul>
16–20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The response is focused on the question, showing engagement with the specific demands of the question. Points are generally clear and organized, and the response can be easily followed.</li> <li>• The response contains relevant and accurate knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used, mostly appropriately.</li> <li>• The response contains critical analysis, although this analysis may lack development. Relevant examples drawn from the study of the optional theme are used to support the discussion. There is discussion of different points of view. The response argues to a conclusion that is consistent with the arguments presented.</li> </ul>
21–25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a sustained focus on the question, showing clear engagement with the specific demands of the question. The points made are clear, coherent and effectively organized.</li> <li>• The response contains relevant, accurate and detailed knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used accurately and precisely throughout.</li> <li>• The response contains well-developed critical analysis. Relevant examples drawn from the study of the optional theme are used effectively to support the discussion. There is critical discussion of different points of view. The response argues to a reasoned and clearly stated conclusion that is consistent with the arguments presented.</li> </ul>

## Section B

### Optional theme 1: Aesthetics

**3. Evaluate the claim that one should approach works of art impartially. [25]**

This question invites an evaluation of whether a person can interact with a work of art impartially, that is with disinterest or without a predisposed perspective or judgement. The claim is largely about the idea of a universally accepted way of interpreting forms of art. The interpretation or judgement according to the claim should not be based on personal likes or dislikes but more so on the formal structure of the art form. The quality of the art is a result of disinterested satisfaction which rests on our appreciation of the harmony it creates. In effect, the art form has created pleasure. There are two ways to investigate this claim, one from the perspective of the creator and the other from that of the audience. The claim seems not to entertain the idea that the creator might have intended to stir a given response from the audience—viewer, reader, listener—and this response might be emotional (like or dislike). However, the creator might deliberately wish to stir the audience into action. A completely objective creator would be impossible, as the creative act is either a result of conscious or unconscious intention. Equally, the creative act-art form seems not to be able to be separated from its context-environment of creation, the creator and their product being a result of their own current and past experiences. The alternative way of investigating the claim is from the audience’s perspective. The audience cannot be neutral in terms of its encounter, nor can they be time consistent. The interpretation of the art form might well be influenced by the current and past experiences of the audience. Ideas of what good art is might change with time and cultural perspective. There is also the issue of whether there are agreed standards for artistic structure. Works of art can break accepted paradigms, and then the application of current standards might not be applicable. There might not to be one universal theory of art.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Can an emotional response be removed and objectivity achieved?
- whether knowing the circumstances of the creator effects the audience’s response
- whether humans have a consistent response to art forms
- the degree to which one culture can appreciate the art of another culture
- Kant’s stance on the way art should be judged relating to “transcendental deduction”—the interaction between intellectual understanding and imagination
- Kant’s view on the role of taste
- Plato’s position that all art is an imitation of reality and therefore lacking in value
- the relationship of partiality and judgement
- Can people be educated in a way so as to appreciate art, e.g. Hume?
- should different levels of art be treated differently, e.g. folk and high art, or Mill’s distinctions between high and low pleasure
- whether universal criteria for the structure of art can exist
- the effect of commercial market forces on forms of art
- the effect of socio-political factors influencing both creator and audience
- Is creativity and its appreciation inherently emotional?
- Can artistic activity be reduced to a mechanical process?
- If there is no emotional input and response, is it art?

**4. Evaluate the claim that art is a representation of reality.**

**[25]**

This question seeks an evaluation as to whether the purpose of art is to represent reality. Can art have other purposes? There are many routes to follow here in that students might wish to evaluate whether art can authentically represent reality. Of course, the issue of those realities and what is a reality would arise. Representational art is often valued because of accuracy of observation and technique in terms of visual art. It is also valued because of the ability to crystallize feelings and emotions in words in literary forms or convey a sense of time and space in musical forms. In addition, approaches might move towards trying to reveal hidden or unconscious aspects particularly in painting and poetry, and this might raise the question as to whether art is representing a hidden aspect of reality, when it is able to portray an emotional state. Conversely, art can move into conceptual and symbolic areas which might not be seen as reality. Therefore, it would seem appropriate to consider what humans understand as reality and whether artists can capture a deeper sense of reality. To challenge the claim being made, a discussion of formalist theories of art and expressionism might be presented. Support could come from both literary and visual forms, and in doing so, the medium of paint can be contrasted with the use of words, and tones and rhythms. There might be mention of the audience as the receiver of the work of art and the role that imagination might play in creating a purpose of the work of art. Another challenge towards representative forms of art is that art might have little to do with reality but needs to have a clear purpose or function on societal behaviour.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- the differences between representation, imitation and copying
- the role of convention and resemblance in art
- Plato’s view of art as imitation
- technical production or reproduction, e.g. Benjamin
- Aristotle’s views on structure and formal theories
- art and emotion
- Can art convey hidden “truths”?
- societal limits on what art can represent
- cultural relativism and function in art; cultural industry and critical theory, e.g. the Frankfurt School
- the degree to which different forms of art can represent different aspects of the human condition
- Can art impact humanity?
- symbolism and reality
- the role of technique in art forms; the degree to which the message might compete with the technique
- the idea that the message or content might work in tandem with the form to achieve a strong result; this could be collaborative rather than competitive
- Variations of personal reality; whose reality is represented?

## Optional theme 2: Epistemology

### 5. Evaluate the claim that truth is relative to the individual.

[25]

This question asks students to evaluate the view that truth is relative to the individual. It is also about who controls knowledge and truth and how truth is disseminated. If the truth of a belief is determined by an individual, then there are as many truths as there are people. Furthermore, making epistemic judgements becomes difficult. For example, falsehoods and lies cease to exist outside of each individual's belief system. Another possible consideration is that given the rapid expansion of information in the world, there is so much information that ordinary people cannot even hope to acquire or understand all of it. There are also many competing beliefs, and little guidance about which beliefs are true. One response is that the truth is up to the individual to decide. The counterargument to this is that there is an objective truth. Students might discuss who should decide what is and is not true. Experts or specialists might be qualified to do this. For example, many of us do not know how our mobile phones work, but as a society we are able to have mobile phones because of the expertise of others. Someone who is ill must trust the expertise and testimony of their doctor. This situation comes with some dangers as it places power in the hands of experts. On the other hand, the belief that we can make our own truth leads to conspiracy theories or the belief in "fake news". This raises questions about education too, for example, Aristotle thinks that the aim of education is to ensure that people know how to judge the claims of experts. If knowledge is objective, then there are methods and standards for establishing the truth of claims; if not, then there are none.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- technology and the availability of knowledge, e.g. over the internet
- conspiracy theories, fake news and other sources of misinformation
- relativism and objectivism about truth; theories about the nature of truth and knowledge such as the correspondence theory of truth
- technocratic governments which rely on expertise
- populism which rejects the focus on experts and appeals to what people want to hear
- ideas about how knowledge is formed, e.g. philosophy of science; the social basis of knowledge claims
- education and knowledge; knowledge and power, e.g. Freire
- Plato's Republic as a state run by experts, and the philosopher king as wielding power based on knowledge
- the difference between knowledge and belief
- how far individuals should research and establish information themselves, and how far they are justified in trusting others
- whether the analysis of knowledge as justified, true belief allows us to decide what is true for ourselves
- how to evaluate who or what is a source of truth
- societal progress and truth; advances in technology which rely on specialist knowledge, e.g. mobile phone technology, or solar power
- The relationship between power and truth. If truth is determined by the individual, then do powerful individuals control truth?
- critiques of specialization, e.g. Ortega y Gasset, Gehlen
- the role of institutions in belief formation and shaping beliefs.

**6. Evaluate the claim that false beliefs cannot be justified.****[25]**

Traditional epistemology holds that knowledge is defined in terms of justified, true belief. This question asks students to evaluate the importance of truth and justification when it comes to knowledge. The question could be explored by considering different conceptions of truth and justification, such as the correspondence theory of truth or the coherence theory of truth. According to the correspondence theory, a false belief is one which does not correspond to reality. It is possible that some of the beliefs we hold as justified do not correspond to reality and so technically are not knowledge. This view might be taken by extreme skeptics who have doubts about whether our beliefs represent the real world. Coherence theorists infer the truth of beliefs using their coherence with other beliefs, in so called “self-supporting webs”. This coherence is how beliefs are justified, so technically it is possible to have a justified false belief if the entire web is false. One criticism of coherence theories of truth is that the entire web might be false; in which case although it appears that we have knowledge, if knowledge is justified, true belief, then we do not because all of the beliefs are false. Pragmatism is an example of an epistemological stance which downplays the emphasis of truth when it comes to defining knowledge and emphasizes justification. A pragmatist might argue that justified beliefs always constitute knowledge. Pragmatists such as William James hold that the best we can do is ascribe knowledge status to beliefs which work well. A poorly functioning belief is false, and a well-functioning belief constitutes knowledge. Students might also explore human fallibility, realism and anti-realism and whether objective knowledge is possible.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Gettier’s cases which ask whether true, unjustified beliefs constitute knowledge
- Whether there is a threshold for knowledge, i.e. can a belief which has some truth, but also some falsehood be knowledge?
- theories of justification e.g. foundationalism and reliabilism
- whether justified beliefs can ever be false
- whether a justified, false belief would count as knowledge
- Plato’s concept of truth, including his discussion of justified, true belief
- theories about truth, e.g. correspondence theory
- skepticism and whether we can ever have entirely true beliefs
- pragmatism, which holds that the truth of a belief does not determine whether it is knowledge, rather the usefulness of that belief, i.e. how well it serves its believer determines whether it counts as knowledge e.g. Peirce, James, Rorty
- coherence theories of truth
- arguments about realism and anti-realism
- questions about whether objective knowledge is possible.
- If knowledge is subjective then whether the truth of beliefs matters or is determinable
- reference to Plato and the divided line
- other classical approaches to knowledge, e.g. Descartes
- discussions about religious beliefs, their truth status and whether they qualify as knowledge
- a discussion about conspiracy theories and whether they are examples of justified, false belief systems.

### Optional theme 3: Ethics

#### 7. Evaluate the claim that the rightness of moral action is grounded in seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. [25]

The aim of this question is to invite students to evaluate the extent to which the rightness of moral action can be grounded in pleasure. The question is situated in the first topic for study of the program which focuses on normative ethics, exploring moral theories and how we make ethical decisions. It also opens possible reflections on moral principles themselves, and debates such as whether moral principles are universal or relative. The issues under scrutiny might be firstly directly associated with hedonism and teleological theories, for example, rule utilitarianism and act utilitarianism. A classical utilitarian view would hold that pleasure is the only thing that contributes to a subject's happiness and that pain is the only thing that detracts from a subject's well-being. The aggregate utility that would be produced by an act is the sum of all the utility it would produce minus the sum of all the disutility that it would produce, where utility is a measure of whatever it is that enhances a subject's happiness, and disutility is a measure of whatever it is that diminishes a subject's happiness. Further, by contraposition, other views of what the morally right action is and other ethical theories, e.g. virtue-based or deontological theories, might also be discussed.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- pleasure as the only intrinsically good thing
- whether “right” means “best”
- the variety of views of what constitutes pleasure and pain; some sustain that almost all hedonists agree that pleasures and pains are essentially mental states
- Bentham and the Hedonic calculus
- If any two people shared identical mental states, would they experience the same amount and kind of pleasure and pain?
- an argument against hedonism: pleasures cannot be what makes life fulfilling, since a life of pleasure-seeking is fit only for animals
- further criticisms: hedonism also fails to acknowledge the intrinsic value of other things, such as autonomy, virtue, and knowledge
- Mill's qualitative account of pleasure: “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied”
- the idea of a morally right action itself
- views on what constitutes a morally right action
- the extent to which in order for an action to be morally right it should have positive consequences for most people
- Are there other various aspects which have to be taken into account when considering a morally right action, e.g. whether it harms another person, whether it makes one a better person for performing it, whether it conforms to God's will?
- the extent to which the statement of pleasure as the only intrinsically good thing is practically the same as traditional ethical egoism
- views on morality, e.g. Mill, Singer (vague)
- Indian schools of materialism (Carvaka) and counterarguments from the Sankhya and other schools
- counterarguments, e.g. Kantian ethics or virtue ethics approaches.

**8. Evaluate the claim that moral judgements are only justified if they can become a universal law.**

**[25]**

The topic for study focuses on meta-ethics, on the origins and nature of moral values and foundations for moral judgement. It also explores debates surrounding ethical language, including the significance of calling something right or wrong. The aim of this question is for students to engage with this central meta-ethical issue regarding universalizability as the key element of the justification for moral judgements. They are mainly challenged by the idea that an action is morally obligatory only if it can become a universal law. One formulation of the principle of universalizability states that, for something to be morally right in a certain circumstance, it must be morally right for anyone to do the same in relevantly similar circumstances. Based on this principle, one might see the idea that there is something self-contradictory in demanding one rule for others and another for oneself. What applies to one should apply to all. Rationality as the ground of justification requires consistency. One way of presenting a formulation of the categorical imperative states that a maxim (a description of someone's action and the purpose for which it is done) is morally right if one wills at the same time that it becomes a universal law. Acknowledging that the question might be discussed in relation to Kantian ethics, responses are not necessarily obliged to refer explicitly to the Kantian formulation of the Categorical Imperative or other forms of universalization exploring the variety of possible ethical approaches.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Kant's categorical imperative: that we should only act on a maxim which we think should become a universal law
- if everyone was making false promises to escape hard situations, no one would believe the promises of anyone else; so, I am unable to will that my maxim of making a false promise to escape a hard situation becomes a universal law
- the extent to which consistency is a necessary condition for moral justification; consistent immoral rules seem possible too
- How can universalizability be a necessary requirement for moral justification given the diversity of human beings, goals and actions?
- the difference between causal explanations and moral justifications
- ethical principles try to give sense to human conduct; human conduct is not always rational, so rationality and universalizability are at most aspects to be considered
- the contrast between rational theories about ethics and other approaches e.g. Kittay's ethics of care
- the role of practical wisdom in the justification of moral judgements; practical wisdom is not like scientific knowledge, which is of universal principles, it must also recognize particulars, since it is concerned with actions, and actions are concerned with particulars
- ethical naturalism: moral judgement is a natural activity among human beings; ethical actions are justified when they serve as an effective means of perpetuating our genetic lines
- the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
- possible counterarguments: relativism and utilitarianism.

#### Optional theme 4: Philosophy of religion

**9. Evaluate the claim that different religions are all human responses to the same divine reality.**

**[25]**

This claim stems from John Hick’s views about religious pluralism. He viewed different religions as different responses to the same divine reality. A common analogy for religious pluralism is different paths all leading to the same place. This is reflected in some religions such as the Bahai’ faith which embraces Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism as all following the same God. On the other hand, many religious views are exclusivist, holding that only their faith reflects the divine. Many Christians hold that it is only through recognizing Christ as the son of God that believers can reach heaven. Islam recognizes Christian and Jewish prophets, but holds that Muhammed was the final prophet, and only his message is ultimately correct. Students might mention debates about exclusivism, such as Plantinga’s discussion about whether exclusivists are right to think that they have better epistemic access to the truth than people of other religions. Students might ask whether different religions can agree with one another or see truth in each other’s claims. In response to the teleological argument, Hume asks why evidence of design in the world suggests a Christian deity and not several deities all working together. Students might mention religious language and discuss whether different accounts of the divine are just a matter of language use. They might explore the idea that different religions might be taken to refer to different gods, and whether these gods might in fact be the same god(s). They might refer to the similarities between the Jewish, Muslim and Christian deities which all hold that god is a single entity. Alternatively, students might mention pantheism, the idea that god(s) are present in everything, and that thinking in terms of different gods and different religions is beside the point.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Hick’s arguments for pluralism
- arguments for the existence of god(s) and whether these point to a particular religion being closer to the truth than others e.g. Hume’s point that the teleological argument does not necessarily imply a single Christian God
- different gods of different religions, and whether plurality about religious belief is possible
- religious language and whether different religions are all different ways of trying to express
- the idea that god(s) are beyond human understanding and that different religions all hold some of the truth
- exclusivism in different religions e.g. in Christianity and Islam
- ecumenism and debates within religions about which denomination or sect is closer to the truth
- debates about the epistemology of religious beliefs e.g. Plantinga.

**10. Evaluate the view that the existence of evil and suffering proves too great a challenge for people to believe in an all-loving God/god. [25]**

This question invites an exploration of the “problem of evil and suffering”. The problem of evil was addressed by the philosopher, Epicurus. Epicurus challenges God/god to use omnipotence to stop evil, if God/god is all-loving, and asks why there is evil if God/god is omnipotent and all-loving. Epicurus’s challenge was echoed by Mackie and his “inconsistent triad”. Mackie sets out the existence of evil alongside God/god’s all-loving and omnipotent nature and claims all three cannot co-exist consistently. Defences of God/god in the face of suffering and evil range from jettisoning traditional attributes of God/god (as in process theology) or often use human freedom as a way to explain suffering, but as a part of an overall plan that will vindicate God/god’s all-loving nature. Such defences of God/god in the face of evil are “theodicies”, and the significant early ones are those of Irenaeus and Augustine. Irenaeus sees the experience of evil as a way to contribute to the development and maturing of the free human soul, where Augustine sees the existence of evil as the responsibility of humans in their exercising of free will. These both form what is termed a “free will defence” of the loving nature of God/god, and this defence has seen modern examples from Plantinga and Swinburne. Students might explore where there is a denial that evil properly exists, which can be seen in Augustine, where evil can be described as “the absence of good” thus absolving God/god of any responsibility for creating a world with evil in it.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Epicurus and Mackie’s “inconsistent triad”
- Augustine’s evil as the absence of good and the role of human free will
- Irenaeus’s “soul-making” theodicy
- Swinburne and natural evil
- Plantinga’s challenge that the existence of evil is not a logical contradiction with the existence of an all-loving God/god
- Hick’s theodicy restating the soul-making view and the importance of humans having real freedom to commit evil acts
- the moral sensitivity of those who argue for the theoretical position on freewill and suffering to people who actually experience such suffering acutely
- process theology and Whitehead and Hartshorne’s argument that the problem of evil is aggravated by flawed accounts of omnipotence
- arguments that humans are responsible for suffering and God is justified in allowing it to remain may not convince some critics because of the sheer scale of suffering permitted
- the evidential problem of evil highlights the view that God’s nature is inconsistent.

## Optional theme 5: Philosophy of science

### 11. Evaluate the claim that scientific methods are a problem-solving process. [25]

The question asks for an evaluation of the scientific method as a problem-solving process. Located in the first topic of the program, nature and methodologies of science, it enables an exploration of some of the aspects that constitute or are related to it, e.g. the nature of theories and hypotheses, explanation, construction of theories and justification, and inductive and deductive reasoning. In turn, the idea of problem-solving processes can be related to, for example, the invention of computers which brought forward a new dimension for the study of the mind. The study of cognition called for an integrated approach of theoretical as well as empirical disciplines, notably philosophy, psychology, neurosciences and computer science. In artificial intelligence research, new logics emerged and proliferated having also an impact on mainstream philosophy of science. Biology also offers an alternative approach to scientific method. Biological evolution has endowed not only human beings, but virtually all organisms, with a natural logic through which they manage to survive. Thus, scientific methodology as a projection of natural logic is not an arbitrary creation, but a response to certain basic facts and features of the world, and a response which is essential for life.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- central aspects of scientific method pointed out traditionally: induction, based on observations; experimental and measurement-based testing of deductions drawn from the hypotheses; and refinement (or elimination) of the hypotheses based on the experimental findings
- the development of machine learning, the creation of computational models of human intelligence put forward proposals such as the GPS (General Problem Solver), a program aiming at the mimicking of human problem solving
- Popper's claim that induction is a myth and computer programs began to be able to carry out induction successfully in some cases
- approaches to the scientific method: the methodology of scientific research programs and methodological anarchism e.g. Feyerabend
- Is there a single method for all the sciences, and if so, what is it?
- Is the scientific method fixed, or does it change over time?
- the extent to which criticism of classical conceptions of scientific method could be extended to the idea of scientific method as problem solving, e.g. Kuhn
- the various structures of problem solving and scientific methods: in Western traditions it tends to be linear while in Arabic traditions it is more web-like
- How much should we expect the theory of the scientific method to help with the progress of science?

**12. Evaluate the claim that consciousness cannot be explained by science.****[25]**

The question invites an evaluation of the scope and limits of the possible explanations given by cognitive science. Scientific thought has made significant advances in understanding many previous enigmas, such as what living organisms are composed of, how their characteristics are transmitted from one generation to the next, and what matter is made of. Looking at the history of science, the list of mystery-shattering breakthroughs is long. Science progresses in knowing our world. Yet, to many, consciousness remains as an untouched mystery. Can the so-called cognitive sciences understand consciousness? While the cognitive sciences have embraced this question, many believe we are far from a solution to the problem of consciousness. This begs the more general question regarding the state of the cognitive sciences. Are they doing as well as many might think? After all, consciousness is not just an important feature of our minds; it is the feature without which nothing matters.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- What can the sciences of the mind tell us about ourselves? Scope and limits of scientific explanations of the mind
- the explanatory gap between brain and consciousness e.g. Levine
- over the past fifty years cognitive sciences have painted a new picture of us, based on principles of information processing
- many of the questions which cognitive sciences investigate are not new; however, its approach is new: cognitive science uses abstract (logical/mathematical) concepts drawn from AI and control theory, alias cybernetics
- some researchers believe consciousness is part of physical reality, but we lack the ability to understand how
- in the cognitive sciences there is no agreed upon definition of consciousness
- although the field of consciousness research is full of question marks, neuroscience has made progress on understanding the brain
- the fact, however, that neuroscience has not solved the mystery of consciousness has led philosophers to develop alternative perspectives on mind and consciousness
- philosophical approaches to consciousness: from Socrates to Descartes
- philosophy, science, and the Mind–Body Problem
- information processing, e.g. the brain as a computer (brain imaging); Turing’s Test, Searle’s Chinese room
- Godel’s incompleteness theorem and undecidable questions that might relate to consciousness and self-awareness (Hofstadter); consciousness, self-awareness and self-regulating systems of computers
- functional neuroanatomy and biochemistry; experience, qualia and the hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers)
- approaches to understanding the mind: Idealism, physicalism, behaviourism, functionalism; externalism and consciousness
- A conscious universe? Western subjectivism and eastern formlessness.

### Optional theme 6: Political philosophy

#### 13. Evaluate the claim that only the state can legitimately use force.

[25]

The claim stems from Weber's work *Politics as a Vocation* (1919) and invites an exploration of the concept of state and the many possible related issues of legitimacy, obedience, disobedience, coercion, violence, power, liberty. As a development of the central ideas of the contractarian theories, which focus on the convenience of a social agreement (social contract), Weber's view is grounded in the crucial element of legitimacy. Students might consider whether legitimacy comes from mere social agreement or from elsewhere, e.g. authoritarianism or charisma. According to Weber, leadership can rise from charisma, tradition or legal authority. Students might discuss whether legal authority still preserves individual liberties and the possibility of civil disobedience, e.g. the *Tao* where governing should involve a light touch. They might consider whether violence is the only means to protest and disobey, e.g. anarchism, terrorism. References to Hobbes or Mill might be illustrated by students where Hobbes provides a justification for the use of physical force by the government, whereas Mill limits this to limiting harm in society. Responses might also focus on the concept of liberty itself and distinguish between negative and positive liberty, e.g. Montesquieu, Hobbes, Rousseau, Constant, Berlin, Bobbio. Students might mention the role and the extent of legitimate coercion within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic measures, including lockdown and curfew. The concept of power is another possible path: students might consider the possible definitions of power as domination or as an influence: in the first case, A dominates B, whereas in the second case A dominates B by making B believe that what A asks is in the interest of B. Responses might consider views on coercion and conformity ("tyranny of majority"), e.g. de Tocqueville, Mill, Ortega y Gasset, or the Critical Theory, e.g. the Frankfurt School.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- definitions and role of state, e.g. Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, Weber
- the state as the result of a social agreement (contractarianism), e.g. Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant
- possible views on the city/state in ancient times, e.g. Plato, Augustine,
- the concept of legitimacy
- the different kinds of authority and leadership, e.g. charisma, tradition, authoritarianism
- legitimacy and coercion; violence; obedience/disobedience, e.g. the *Tao*, Kant, Dewey, Weber, anarchism, terrorism
- the role of individual liberties, e.g. Locke, Mill
- negative versus positive liberty, e.g. Montesquieu, Hobbes, Rousseau, Constant, Berlin, Bobbio
- possible definitions of power, e.g. as domination or influence
- coercion and conformity, e.g. the "tyranny of majority"
- social control and Critical Theory, e.g. the Frankfurt School
- legitimate coercion as during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and curfews.

**14. Evaluate how society and free speech affect issues such as gender politics. [25]**

The question is central to issues such as gender politics. For example, Campus's book *Women Political Leaders and the Media* (2013) claims that media coverage and free speech reinforce gender stereotyping in relation to women who are leaders. The idea that media coverage reinforces stereotyping is grounded in the view that there is a contrast between general qualities attributed to different groups of people. This affects members of different social groups such as women, minority ethnic groups, or religious groups. Students might consider the idea of stereotypes, and whether they are always negative. They may discuss stereotypes, such as the idea that all leaders are men. Responses might consider possible definitions of the concept of power. Students might consider the idea that people are defined by their society, e.g. de Beauvoir's view on the woman as a cultural product of a man-centred world. Students might discuss the role of media in general and how they contribute to shape opinions and beliefs: this might be related to the spread of mass communication and how it affected politics and political debate. References to conformity and homologation, as in the "tyranny of the majority", might be taken into account, e.g. de Tocqueville, Mill, Ortega y Gasset. Students might also consider the role of media in fostering and delivering stereotypes, as in Critical Theory and the concept of "cultural industry", e.g. the Frankfurt School. Reference to the spectacularizing of politics might drive students to Debord's view or, in general, to the consideration of the consequences of the fact that politics has moved from a discussion on programs and parties to a discussion on politicians: students might evaluate whether media stereotyping has increased the distance between social groups. Another possible path might be to consider equality and rights.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- the issues of gender politics; recent media coverage of male and female leaders
- institutionalism and discrimination e.g. racism, ageism, homophobia, antisemitism
- different social groups and power
- whether stereotypes are always negative
- biological, social, economic, cultural differences between different social groups, e.g. de Beauvoir's analysis of woman
- the role of media in shaping opinions and beliefs
- media and conformity, e.g. the "tyranny of majority"
- media and the "cultural industry", e.g. Critical Theory, the Frankfurt School
- spectacularizing of society and politics, e.g. Debord
- personalization of politics
- Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach and the issues of equality and rights.

## Optional theme 7: Social philosophy

### 15. Evaluate the claim that people do not marry just to have a family and children. [25]

The assertion that individuals do not enter marriage primarily for the purpose of having a family and children provokes a profound examination of human agency and societal structures. Marriage, as a longstanding social institution, has conventionally been associated with family formation. However, beneath this conventional wisdom lies a more intricate interplay of individual intentions, unintended consequences, and the influence of institutions. To evaluate this claim, students could explore the multifaceted motivations behind marriage, acknowledging the complex interplay between personal desires, cultural norms, and the reproductive instincts that underlie human behaviour. Moreover, students could consider the dynamic relationship between individual agency and the enduring influence of societal institutions, which often transcend the explicit intentions of those who participate in them. This inquiry delves into the philosophical depths of human choice, societal norms, and the enduring role of marriage in shaping our lives.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- the historical evolution of marriage as an institution and how its primary purposes have changed over time
- Confucius and the importance of filial piety in maintaining harmonious familial relationships as a foundation for social harmony.
- the cultural variations in the motivations behind marriage and how different societies perceive the role of marriage in family formation
- individual intentions behind marriage, considering factors such as love, companionship, emotional connection, and personal fulfilment
- how economic factors, including property ownership and inheritance, have influenced marriage throughout history and in contemporary society
- the legal frameworks surrounding marriage and how they impact individuals' decisions to marry or not
- the connection between reproductive rights and marriage, considering how societal norms may have evolved to separate the two
- traditional gender roles and their impact on marital decisions and family formation
- de Beauvoir's criticism of the traditional gender norms and the ways in which they shape familial relationships.
- the societal pressures and expectations related to marriage and whether they align with the claim in question
- the influence of religion on the motivations for marriage and family, especially in societies where religion plays a significant role
- the ethical dimensions of marrying for reasons other than reproduction, including personal autonomy and happiness
- explore philosophical theories on marriage, such as contractual views (e.g. Locke) versus more communitarian perspectives (e.g. Hegel), and how these relate to the claim
- how societal norms and expectations shape the reasons people marry and whether these norms align with the claim
- alternative family structures and how they challenge the conventional link between marriage and family formation
- how factors like race, class, and sexual orientation intersect with the motivations behind marriage and family formation.

**16. Evaluate the effectiveness of tolerance as a principle in achieving equal citizenship for minority groups.**

**[25]**

The examination of the effectiveness of tolerance as a principle in achieving equal citizenship for minority groups presents a profound inquiry within the realm of social philosophy. In recent years, this topic has gained significant attention, driven by evolving perspectives on diversity, inclusivity, and human rights, and a deepening comprehension of the socio-cultural dynamics that shape these discussions. Throughout history, the notion of tolerance has played a central role in shaping interactions between dominant and minority groups. However, the assessment of its effectiveness reveals complex dimensions. Tolerance, while lauded as a cornerstone of civil society, can sometimes fall short in securing equal citizenship for minority communities. It's crucial to scrutinize how tolerance, when misapplied, can perpetuate inequalities and maintain the status quo of power imbalances. For instance, superficial tolerance that merely tolerates the presence of minority groups without addressing systemic discrimination may not lead to genuine equal citizenship. To evaluate the effectiveness of tolerance, one must consider its historical context, acknowledging instances where it has been invoked to maintain oppressive structures. Moreover, an exploration of ethical frameworks and the role of legislation in translating tolerance into concrete equal rights and opportunities is essential. Philosophical analysis can illuminate the complexities of balancing tolerance with the imperative of achieving full and equal citizenship for minority communities. It prompts reflection on the limitations of tolerance and calls for the development of comprehensive strategies that ensure minority groups are not just tolerated but genuinely embraced as equal citizens in diverse societies.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- the historical context of tolerance and its evolution as a principle in the quest for equal citizenship for minority groups
  - philosophical foundations of tolerance (e.g. John Locke)
  - the concept of tolerance as a social contract and its implications for minority rights (e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract)
  - the effectiveness of tolerance in promoting multiculturalism and social cohesion in diverse societies (e.g. Will Kymlicka)
  - the distinction between passive tolerance (mere acceptance) and active tolerance (promotion of diversity and inclusion) as it relates to equal citizenship
  - how tolerance intersects with the principle of freedom of expression (e.g. John Stuart Mill's arguments on liberty)
  - the potential shortcomings of tolerance when it comes to addressing systemic discrimination and power imbalances
  - the ethical dimensions of tolerance, particularly its relationship with justice and fairness (e.g. John Rawls)
  - the concept of “intolerant tolerance” and its paradoxical nature (Karl Popper)
  - tension between tolerance and cultural relativism
  - the idea of “recognition” as an alternative or complement to tolerance in achieving equal citizenship for minority communities
  - potential consequences of tolerance fatigue or backlash in societies experiencing rapid cultural and demographic changes
  - the relationship between tolerance and social justice
  - the impact of globalization on the concept of tolerance and its implications for equal citizenship in a globalized world
  - ethical dilemmas surrounding tolerance in situations of conflicting values and beliefs within multicultural societies
  - the concept of “deep diversity” and its challenges to traditional notions of tolerance (Charles Taylor).
-