

Markscheme

May 2026

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 4 for the core theme and page 7 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	- 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. - 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. - 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.
6–10	- 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. - 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. - 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.
11–15	- 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. - 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. - 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.
16–20	- 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. - 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. - 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.
21–25	- 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. - 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. - 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.

Section A

Core theme: Being human

1. Text

On the most general level, one can say that for the Yup'ik people of the turn of the century, society was viewed as primary. The life of the individual only acquired meaning in a complex web of relationships between humans and animals, both the living and the dead. Moreover, while a distinction existed between human and non-human persons, the latter were considered of equal worth. The Yup'ik people considered animals to have originally been capable of transformation into creatures like humans.

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 stimulus consists of a description of how the Yup'ik people of Western Alaska thought about personhood in the late 1800s. It was written as part of a biography of two missionaries from Moravia.

The stimulus may prompt discussions of issues related to personhood, cultural identity and the self and other. In particular, students may discuss what qualifies something as a person. The idea that non-human animals have the same status as humans may strike students as at odds with thinkers such as Aristotle, who ascribed personhood to those who are rational. A second theme that may strike students is the relationship between the individual and society. Rather than thinking about personhood as individual, and people as independent beings, Yup'ik people thought of themselves as part of a social network. Students might discuss the extent that culture and society influence identity. This may raise issues about the idea of the self and the other. Students may draw links to existentialist thought such as De Beauvoir and Sartre's views about the other. They might consider thinkers such as Taylor who highlights the importance of society and identity.

The stimulus may also prompt discussions of the nature of personhood and its relationship with morality. If animals qualify as persons, then are they also morally culpable? This might be linked to discussions of Kantian ethics, or preference utilitarianism e.g. Singer. Students might consider personal identity in relation to life and death. For example, Locke's view that identity consists of continuous memories would imply that for those who think memories end at death, personhood also ends then. On the other hand, eschatological beliefs can extend personhood into an afterlife.

Students might explore:

- The idea of transformation and whether an animal transformed could be transformed into a man
- Whether identity is individual, or shaped by broader society
- Life, death and personal identity, e.g. Christian views on the afterlife
- The implications of viewing animals and persons, including whether they should be afforded equal moral standing e.g. Singer
- Taylor's view that modern Western society is narcissistic, and the importance of broader society when seeking authenticity
- Rationality and personhood, e.g. Aristotle
- The self and the other, e.g. De Beauvoir, Sartre
- Buddhism and the idea of no self or *annatta* as a point of contrast
- The source of the excerpt: European missionaries are the subject, and the Yup'ik are the other
- Individualistic accounts of personhood e.g. Locke, Hume, Descartes, Plato
- The responsibilities of individuals to the environment
- Reflections on different philosophical traditions and the influence of Western thought on dominant ways of thinking about personhood.

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 stimulus consists of an image of a head, with two people boxing in it.

The stimulus may prompt discussions of issues related to the concepts of identity, the self, consciousness, human nature and freedom. The boxers may remind students of Plato's tripartite account of the soul, with reason, appetite and spirit all in competition. This raises questions about the extent to which we are in control of our own behaviour, and the extent to which our sense of self is genuine or a construction. Students may also discuss the nature of consciousness and its relationship with neuroscience. They might ask whether being able to see into the brain explains anything about our mind. This links to the mind-body distinction and debates about dualism and materialism, e.g. Descartes, Chalmers.

The stimulus may also prompt discussions of human nature. The image might suggest a masculine, aggressive vision of what it is to be a person. Students may challenge this as a stereotype and discuss other views of human nature. They might refer to feminist thought such as Noddings' work on care ethics which emphasises the importance of caring interpersonal relationships in human nature. They might consider Buddhist ideas of self which emphasise abandoning desire and seeking enlightenment. Students may also consider the notion of freedom, and whether we are in control of our own actions, or whether they are determined by our subconscious, e.g. Freud.

Students might explore:

- Plato and the tripartite soul
- Rationality and human nature, e.g. Aristotle
- Consciousness and neuroscience, e.g. Churchland
- The extent to which neuroscience can tell us anything about the human experience
- The mind-body distinction, e.g. Cartesian dualism
- Materialism e.g. Chalmers
- The view of human nature reflected in the image and alternative views, e.g. Noddings' feminism, Buddhist views
- The problem of other minds: how can we tell someone else is conscious
- Qualia and experiences, e.g. Jackson
- Freedom and determinism, e.g. are our actions determined by our subconscious

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	- There is minimal focus on the question. Points made are poorly organized and frequently unclear. - The response demonstrates little relevant knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is not used or is consistently used inappropriately. - 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.
6–10	- 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. - The response demonstrates basic knowledge of the optional theme, but this knowledge lacks accuracy and/or relevance. Philosophical vocabulary is used, but often inappropriately. - 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.
11–15	- 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. - The response contains some relevant knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used, sometimes appropriately. - 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.
16–20	- 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. - The response contains relevant and accurate knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used, mostly appropriately. - 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.
21–25	- 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. - The response contains relevant, accurate and detailed knowledge of the optional theme. Philosophical vocabulary is used accurately and precisely throughout. - 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.

Section B

Optional theme 1: Aesthetics

3. Evaluate the claim that “each mind perceives a different beauty”. [25]

This question invites to consider whether the experience of beauty is subjective or objective. If objective, beauty is a universal quality, and students might examine Plato's Form Theory. If subjective, beauty is only an experience in the eye of the beholder – in the mind of an individual -, then students might address issues of interpretation and judgment. If art is seen solely as a personal experience, then beauty remains an individual taste. Issues that might influence one's perception could be discussed. Students might also consider whether judgements are societal and perhaps change over time; or whether there are some fixed parameters that define beauty, and the individual must discover them. Different theories of aesthetic judgment might be discussed ranging from imitation – good art is an accurate representation of the world – through to formalism – that might support the idea of the universality of beauty, that overrides cultural or historical contexts.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Plato's views that beauty is an instinctive characteristic raises his contradictory view that either that beauty has precise qualities or indefinable qualities
- Kant's views on the nature of taste generating delight as well as being universal valid
- The links between imagination and aesthetic understanding and appreciation
- Emotive language associated with beauty, leading to ideas that art needs to trigger emotions – Collingwood and Richards
- Contradictory aesthetic judgements
- The degree to which cultural background might influence aesthetic judgment
- Freud's ideas that individual perceptions are related to suppressing and hiding unconscious desires
- The Marxist idea that when art is a fundamental reflection of human nature, its experience might be common to all
- Beauty is universalised because it becomes systemised – hijacked by conventions- Marcuse
- Existentialist views about individual judgments; reference might be made to Fallico and Nietzsche

4. Evaluate the claim that art is a way to go beyond human limits.

[25]

This question seeks an investigation into the effect of art on the individual and society, suggesting that art might open new insights into both the human condition and human capabilities. These capabilities might be both actual (physical) or mental - reference might be made to sublimeness that the artist can create. It might be suggested that art gives possibilities for humans to see more of themselves and the world – essentially opening up new realities. Students might refer to the sublimeness that the artist can create. Forms of art might also have a cathartic effect and extend appreciation of self. Contrasts might be made between the social impact of art and the effect of art on its creator. Essentially art can extend the limits of the creator as well as the audience. If art is seen as having a function to generate change in society, then good art would be seen as that which does extend the limits of humans. The use of art revealed through satire and social comment creates a subtle social commentary. Therefore, art could be seen as a challenge to social and political controls and hence generate censorship and overall government interference- this might affect the impact on humans.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Art as a means of displaying emotion – Collingwood and Croce
- Art as therapy
- Art exposing new values- Murdoch
- Does art have a transcendental quality?
- Art as a form of language that can convey new meanings
- Whether art just mirrors the world – imitation – and whether this is positive or negative
- Art raising awareness and revealing new realities
- The interplay of intention and interpretation
- Kant's disinterestedness
- Freud's theories about the repression of desires
- Art as a vehicle to pleasure in all its different forms
- Issue of subjectivity in aesthetic judgment
- The control of art because of the fear of its impact on society, e.g. the reaction of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to various forms of art.

Optional theme 2: Epistemology

5. Evaluate the claim that “knowledge does not rest on truth alone, but upon error also”. [25]

This statement by Jung offers the chance for answers to explore various approaches to epistemological questions that revolve around doubt and the possibility of error. Plato offered a definition of knowledge as ‘justified true belief’. Gettier problem’s examples raise the possibility of error while believing something to be true. In the Socratic dialogues, Socrates points out error to help advance a point he is developing with his interlocutor. Scepticism played a key role in the development of Descartes’s quest for certain knowledge, Descartes emphasised the need to apply doubt in confirming what knowledge he could take as ‘certain’. Hume distinguished between ‘relations of ideas’ and ‘matters of fact’, with the latter exclusively referring to knowledge of the world outside the mind and being subjected to the limitations of induction. In the 20th century, Popper introduced criteria based on the ability to falsify propositions to gaining knowledge. In this, Popper drew out a means of distinguishing between science and non-science. Recent contributions by Kuhn and Feyerabend could also be discussed in the way knowledge is accepted or confirmed.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Socratic doubt: “True wisdom comes to each of us when we realise how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.”
- Knowledge as ‘justified true belief’; Gettier problem examples
- Testing error in Descartes
- ‘Clear and distinct ideas’
- Hume’s fork
- Possibility of error with induction; e.g. Hume, Russell
- Bacon’s use of testing hypotheses to find possible error as a guarantee of knowledge
- Verification principle; e.g. Ayer, logical positivism, Vienna Circle – and how the verification principle fails its own test
- Popper and falsification
- The difference between science and non-science
- Modern theories on the progress of knowledge; e.g. Kuhn, Feyerabend
- Foundationalism in the search for knowledge
- Coherentism in the search for knowledge

6. Evaluate the claim that “knowledge is of no value unless it is put into practice”. [25]

Chekhov’s claim asserts that knowledge is not best when retained inside a person’s mind, but only comes into meaning and value when applied to the real world. This assumes an epistemic distance between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’ with a meaningful difference between the mind of the ‘knower’ and the world outside the mind. Kant’s work challenged this separation with his so-called Copernican revolution of the synthetic a priori in minds knowing the world. The quote also offers a chance to explore the emphasis on meaning through action from phenomenological and existentialist approaches to knowledge. For the phenomenologist, experience confers meaning and knowledge. For the existentialist, the most important knowledge is self-knowledge, acquired through action and self-discovery. Through these means, knowledge supports authentic decision making. Answers may explore how knowledge is gained and where the role of pragmatism or practical experience fits into that acquisition. Justifying knowledge through inductive or deductive reasoning might be explored. Answers might also explore the sub-conscious or intuition in knowledge claims.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- “Knowing what” (e.g. Bhartrhari) versus “knowing that” and “knowing how”
- Theories of knowledge justification
- Induction and deduction
- Theories of truth: coherence, correspondence and pragmatism, e.g. James, Dewey
- Sources of knowledge: e.g. perception, reason, testimony
- Epistemic distance; examples include knowledge of God
- Kant’s synthetic a priori – the Copernican revolution in how we know the world and how we know things in the world
- Phenomenological approaches to knowledge – the emphasis on lived experience
- Existential approaches to knowledge – eschewing the analytical method of science
- Self-knowledge, including through learning from mistakes
- Intuition and instinctual knowledge

Optional theme 3: Ethics

7. Evaluate the claim that “ethics are more important than laws”.

[25]

This question offers the opportunity to explore the relationship between ethics and law, where they intersect and where they part. There might be cases where it could be judged ethical to break a law (e.g. apartheid South Africa or in civil protest) and there might be laws which espouse an ethical ideal (like the sanctity of life or the sovereignty of the individual over personal property). But the quote sets ethics against law in a hierarchy of importance and answers will explore how that might – or might not – be justified. Ethics sets directions for deciding action from an ideal base, applying overriding principles to particular circumstances. Ethics articulate the principles and often law is housed to uphold those principles. However, law also has a social function which might not be considered ethical, but rather an enforcement of a social contract aimed at civil stability. The framing of law might be explored, in that in democracies this is done by a government voted in by a majority. However, a law might be housed which groups within the society vehemently oppose, like the abortion laws in different nations. Similarly, different groups might disagree on the ethical implications of different behaviours (like eating meat) and in those cases, arguments arise using both factual information and normative perspectives. Answers might pursue the difference between doing the “right thing” and doing the “best thing”, while exploring the different normative ethical theories and their possible relationship with the law. Answers might explore Natural Law approaches to ethics in the Aristotle and Aquinas tradition.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- The definition of ethics and the definition of the law
- Possible intersections between the law and ethics (with examples)
- Possible points of separation between the law and ethics (with examples)
- Ethics as applying ideal principles to particular situations
- Do ethics apply if you are stranded on an uninhabited island?
- The difficulty of agreeing ethical principles vs the housing of universally applicable law
- How law is housed; see the tyranny of the majority (Mill) and the general will (Rousseau)
- The social contract as a basis for law
- The role of the state in asserting values
- Different normative ethical theories and their relationship with law: e.g. utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics
- Subjectivity and ethics vs objectivity and the law
- Natural law; Aristotle, Aquinas
- Do ethical principles exist? Are they universal or relative to a particular situation or culture?
- *Dharma* and duty

8. Evaluate the claim that “one should die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly”.

[25]

Nietzsche coined the question title’s phrase in ‘The Twilight of the Idols’ emphasising his view about authentic personal choice. Nietzsche saw morality as a project to ‘improve’ humankind exercised by some persons over others, the typical ‘improver’ being the priest. Morality in these hands becomes a tool for suppression of the individual and this quote exhorts an individualistic attitude to the meaning and value of life. Camus wrote: “There is only one really serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Deciding whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question in philosophy. All other questions follow from that.” In offering freedom to assert one’s own meaning and value, existentialism offers apparent support for the title statement. Individualistic ethical approaches emerged following Nietzsche and find support from evolutionary biology and socio-economics, where the motivation for action stems ultimately from self-interest. Dawkins’s Selfish Gene offered an ultimately survivalist explanation to the question of human behaviour, which might militate against the sentiment of the title statement. Special duties to others might be considered when looking at an individualistic approach to ethics. Modern legal liberation of assisted dying and euthanasia might be used as a practical, contemporary example.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Nietzsche’s account of morality and criticism of his possible genetic fallacy
- Individualistic approaches; e.g. Nietzsche, existentialism, Darwin, Dawkins
- Theories of value and meaning in life
- Camus’ views on suicide
- Morality as the interest of others over self-interest; duty to self, duty to others
- Examples of the moral consideration of others in utilitarianism, deontology and virtue theory
- Kant’s analysis of suicide
- Special duties
- Biomedical ethical situations involving consideration of assisted dying
- Are moral values anything more than individual or group preferences?
- Authenticity in morality
- Morality as non-cognitive and an expression of human emotion and preference

Optional theme 4: Philosophy of religion

9. Evaluate the claim that philosophy cannot answer the question of whether God exists. [25]

The claim provokes an essential inquiry into the limits of philosophical reasoning and the nature of religious belief. Traditionally, philosophy has grappled with the existence of God through various arguments—ontological, cosmological, and teleological—yet none have yielded definitive conclusions. This raises questions about whether philosophical inquiry, grounded in reason and logic, is equipped to address metaphysical questions that may require faith or revelation. To evaluate this statement, we can explore the tension between rational inquiry and faith, as well as the role of epistemology in shaping our understanding of religious truths. Additionally, this claim challenges us to consider the boundaries of human knowledge and whether certain existential questions lie beyond the scope of philosophy. This inquiry invites a deeper reflection on the intersection between faith, reason, and the limits of philosophical discourse in grappling with the divine.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- The ontological argument for the existence of God (e.g., Descartes, Anselm) and whether it demonstrates the existence of God as a necessary truth independent of empirical evidence.
- Kant’s critique of the ontological argument, which questions whether existence can be a predicate, and if philosophy can establish the existence of God through reason alone.
- Aquinas’s argumentation for the existence of God based on empirical observations of motion, causality, and contingency, and whether these arguments prove the existence of God or merely suggest a first cause.
- David Hume’s critique of natural theology, which challenges the ability of reason to infer the existence of a divine being from the observable world, particularly in relation to causality and design.
- The role of faith in Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy, and whether philosophical reasoning is relevant in the decision to believe in God, or if faith transcends rational discourse.
- Pascal’s Wager, which suggests that philosophy may not provide definitive proof of God’s existence, but that practical considerations of belief offer an alternative approach to religious faith.
- Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics, especially his declaration of the “death of God”, and how it reflects scepticism about philosophy’s capacity to engage meaningfully with divine existence in modernity.
- Plantinga’s argument for properly basic beliefs, and whether belief in God can be considered foundational and rational without the need for philosophical proof.
- Logical positivism’s verification principle, which argues that statements about God are meaningless if they cannot be empirically verified, and whether this limits philosophy’s engagement with theological questions.
- Swinburne’s argument from temporal order, which asserts that the regularity of natural laws is best explained by the existence of a divine being.
- Plantinga’s modal ontological argument, and whether the possibility of the necessary existence of God can be established through modal logic.
- The problem of evil (e.g. Leibniz, Dostoevsky, etc.), and whether the existence of suffering is an obstacle that philosophy can resolve in relation to the existence of a benevolent God.
- The epistemological problem of divine hiddenness, which considers whether the lack of direct evidence for the existence of God undermines philosophical attempts to prove or disprove God.
- Sartre’s existential atheism, which asserts that God does not exist and that humans must create their own meaning, posing the question of whether philosophy must adopt an atheistic stance.
- Thomas Nagel’s critique of reductionism, particularly whether a purely scientific worldview can account for consciousness and intentionality, potentially leaving room for philosophical arguments for the existence of God.
- Postmodern critiques of metaphysics (e.g. Derrida or Foucault), which question whether philosophy can engage with absolute truths, including the existence of God.

10. Evaluate the claim that even when humans turn away from religion, they remain subject to it.

[25]

The statement invites a critical exploration of the enduring influence of religious thought and structures on human life, even in secular contexts. Religion, as a deeply embedded aspect of culture and morality, shapes social norms, ethical frameworks, and personal identities. To evaluate this claim, we can examine how historical religious values persist within modern, ostensibly secular institutions, influencing laws, ethical systems, and worldviews. Philosophers such as Nietzsche and Marx suggest that religious ideologies leave a residual imprint on human consciousness and societal structures long after formal religious adherence declines. Furthermore, this statement challenges us to consider whether secular ideologies, such as nationalism or political ideologies, function as replacements for religious belief systems, retaining similar structures of authority and moral guidance. This inquiry delves into the subtle and pervasive ways that religion continues to shape human experience, even in the absence of explicit religious practice or belief.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Nietzsche’s concept of the “death of God”.
- Nietzsche’s discussions about whether secular modernity truly escapes the influence of religious thought, or if religion continues to shape underlying values and ethics.
- Marx’s view of religion as the “opium of the people”, and whether, even after rejecting religious belief, individuals and societies remain subject to structures of power and ideology inherited from religious systems.
- Freud’s theory of religion as an expression of unconscious psychological needs, questioning whether the rejection of religion eliminates its psychological influence on behaviour and culture.
- The etymology of “religion,” deriving from the Latin *religare* (to bind), implies that humans may remain “bound” to religious structures and ideas through inherited moral codes, rituals, and cultural narratives, even when they consciously reject faith (Wittgenstein’s language games).
- Capitalist structures and modern work ethics are still shaped by religious ideas, even in secular societies (e.g. Weber).
- Durkheim’s view of religion as a source of social cohesion, and whether secular ideologies, such as nationalism or civic religion, replace traditional religion while maintaining similar social functions.
- The persistence of religious language and symbolism in secular contexts, exploring how religious metaphors and narratives continue to shape cultural identity and political discourse.
- The role of religious morality in shaping contemporary ethics, even in societies that claim to be secular or post-religious, and whether these ethical systems can be disentangled from their religious origins.
- Kant’s moral philosophy, particularly the categorical imperative, and whether modern secular ethics are still dependent on principles rooted in religious thought, such as the idea of universal moral law.
- Whether political systems and legal frameworks in secular societies are influenced by religious concepts of sovereignty and authority.
- Existentialist critiques of religious morality (e.g. Sartre)
- The influence of Judeo-Christian values on human rights discourse.
- Postmodern critiques of grand narratives, such as those by Foucault and Derrida, and whether secular ideologies function as replacements for religious meta-narratives that still exert control over thought and behaviour.
- Charles Taylor’s notion of “secular age”, exploring whether secular societies have fully escaped religious influence, or if they remain shaped by religious histories, even in the absence of belief.
- The persistence of ritual and sacredness in secular contexts, asking whether human beings have an inherent need for the sacred, which finds expression in non-religious ideologies, such as environmentalism or patriotism.
- The ethical implications of rejecting religious authority, asking whether secular moral systems are truly independent of religious traditions, or whether they replicate the same structures of moral obligation and guilt.

Optional theme 5: Philosophy of science

11. Evaluate the claim that “brains are not magical; they are causal machines”. [25]

The question aligns with the topic “Science and the self”, for example, the issue “Neuroscience and the brain”. The claim that “brains are not magical; they are causal machines” is one made by Patricia Churchland. She uses it to make claims about what neuroscience tells us about morality, freewill and other questions about how we view individuals and society. Students may explore physicalism and materialism about the mind, contrasting it with Cartesian dualism. They might discuss whether the mind or soul can be reduced to physical processes. This might be linked to causal determinism and freewill such as Dennett’s conclusion that although our actions are causally determined, we are still free to act as we wish. Students might consider the massive modularity thesis as posited by Fodor in relation to the sort of causal machine a brain might be. The idea of artificial intelligence could be explored to explore the idea of the causal machine as there appear to be significant differences between machine intelligence and human cognition.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Qualia, experiences and physicalism, e.g. Jackson
- The concept of the soul, e.g. in Christianity, or the denial of soul in Buddhism
- Cartesian dualism and the idea that the mind is substantially different from the body
- Causal determinism and free will, e.g. Dennett,
- The idea that the brain is magical, or that there is something mystical about human existence i.e. the sanctity of life
- The limits of science, e.g. McGinn and the explanatory gap
- The inability of neuroscience to explain or characterise qualia, e.g. Nagel’s *What is it like to be a bat?*
- The massive modularity thesis put forward by Fodor which thinks that each brain function can be captured by an independent mind module
- Churchland’s eliminative materialism and its implications for key philosophical questions about freewill, morality and consciousness
- Intentionality, and the complexity of moving from perception to intention, e.g. Searle
- What artificial intelligence can tell us about the brain as a machine, e.g. Turing.

12. Evaluate the claim that “every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination”. [25]

The claim comes from John Dewey. For Dewey and other pragmatists, inquiry is a social endeavour that is continuous with other aspects of human life. In *the Fixation of Belief* Peirce claimed that over enough time by enough people, scientific inquiry will converge on the truth. Students might discuss the underdetermination of theories by evidence. This means that for every set of observations, numerous scientific theories provide equally valid explanations. This opens up a role for human imagination- a set of observations need to be explained, and it is the human imagination that does this work. Peirce calls this role for the imagination abductive logic. Chomsky makes a similar point when it considers the possibility of a science forming capacity. Students might talk about Kuhn’s understanding of scientific process in terms of paradigm shifts, and point to the role of the imagination in breaking free from a paradigm and suggesting a new one.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Inductive, deductive and abductive logic
- The social basis of science, e.g. funding and social trends
- Longino and social interactions as the basis of science, i.e. her account of a feminist scientific method
- Kuhn, paradigm shifts, and the necessity of imagination to propose a paradigmatically new theory
- The underdetermination of scientific theories by evidence, e.g. Duhem, Quine
- Dewey’s views on science as a social endeavour
- Peirce and the nature of inquiry and truth
- The potential of a decolonised vision of science to provide a greater number of imaginative explanations
- Examples of leaps of imagination in science, e.g. the move from Ptolemaic to Copernican astronomy, or from Newtonian to Einstein’s theories in physics
- The role of creativity in coming up with hypotheses, e.g. Popper, Hempel
- Accounts of the imagination, e.g. Aristotle, Kant, Sartre.

Optional theme 6: Political philosophy

13. Evaluate the claim that “as government expands, liberty contracts”.

[25]

This assertion suggests an inherent tension between government authority and personal autonomy, a theme central to the works of thinkers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. To evaluate this claim, we can consider the historical context of government expansion, particularly during times of crisis, such as war or economic turmoil, where increased state control often leads to restrictions on civil liberties. Philosophical inquiries into the balance between security and freedom reveal the complexities of governance, where the need for order and safety can overshadow individual rights. Moreover, this statement raises questions about the nature of liberty itself: is it a negative freedom (freedom from interference) or positive freedom (freedom to act and achieve)? The interplay between government intervention and personal liberty is crucial in contemporary debates regarding surveillance, regulation, and social welfare. Ultimately, this inquiry delves into the philosophical depths of authority, autonomy, and the enduring quest for a just society.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- The historical context of government expansion, particularly during crises such as wars or economic downturns, and whether these conditions inherently threaten individual liberties.
- Locke’s theory of natural rights, questioning how the expansion of government authority aligns or conflicts with the protection of individual liberties as articulated in his social contract.
- The concept of positive versus negative liberty (e.g. Isaiah Berlin), exploring whether government expansion can enhance freedom by providing essential services, or if it primarily constrains individual autonomy.
- The implications of security versus liberty, particularly in the context of national security measures that may infringe on civil rights in the name of public safety.
- The role of constitutional safeguards in maintaining individual liberties amid government expansion, and whether such protections are sufficient to counterbalance state power.
- Machiavelli’s perspective on power and authority, examining whether expanding government power can be justified if it leads to a stable and secure state.
- The impact of technological surveillance on personal freedoms.
- How Hobbes justified absolute authority for the sake of peace and security, and its implications for the relationship between state power and liberty.
- How active resistance to government authority can be seen as a defence of personal liberty (e.g. Gandhi).
- The relationship between democratic governance and individual freedom, questioning whether an expansion of democratic institutions leads to greater liberty or potential authoritarianism.
- Foucault’s concept of biopower, examining how the expansion of government authority over life and population can lead to both control and liberation, complicating the relationship between state power and personal freedom.
- The implications of economic regulation on personal liberty.
- The philosophical foundations of civil rights movements, questioning how historical struggles for liberty reflect or contradict the idea that government expansion inherently limits freedom.
- The role of public discourse in shaping governmental authority, investigating how citizen engagement and dialogue can serve as a counterbalance to potential overreach.
- The paradox of tolerance, exploring whether a tolerant society can tolerate intolerant ideologies without jeopardizing the freedoms of others.

14. Evaluate the claim that “an imbalance between rich and poor is the oldest and most fatal illness of all societies”.

[25]

The statement prompts a critical examination of social justice and political philosophy. Economic inequality has been a persistent issue throughout human history, often leading to social unrest, instability, and conflict. To evaluate this claim, we can consider the philosophical implications of wealth distribution and the ethical responsibilities of both individuals and governments in addressing inequality. Thinkers like John Rawls advocate for principles of justice that seek to mitigate such disparities, emphasizing that a fair society should protect the least advantaged. Moreover, this inquiry raises questions about the relationship between power and wealth, examining how concentrated resources can lead to the erosion of democratic values and the marginalization of voices. The effects of systemic inequality on social cohesion and individual agency further highlight the need for philosophical discourse around economic structures. Ultimately, this statement invites us to explore the moral foundations of our economic systems and the profound impact of wealth distribution on the fabric of society.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- The historical roots of economic inequality, examining how the imbalance between rich and poor has manifested across different civilizations and the implications for social cohesion.
- The philosophical underpinnings of social justice, questioning what constitutes a fair distribution of resources and the moral responsibilities of wealthier individuals in addressing inequality.
- Marxist critiques of capitalism, particularly how economic systems inherently create class divisions that perpetuate wealth disparities, leading to social unrest.
- John Rawls’s theory of justice as fairness, analysing whether his principles could effectively address the economic imbalance and promote a more equitable society.
- The impact of globalization on wealth distribution, exploring whether global trade and economic policies exacerbate inequality or provide opportunities for the poor.
- The ethical implications of wealth accumulation, questioning whether excessive wealth in the hands of a few leads to moral decay and societal harm.
- The role of government intervention in economic disparity, discussing whether policies like progressive taxation and social welfare programs are effective means of addressing inequality.
- The relationship between education and economic opportunity, considering how access to quality education can mitigate the imbalance between rich and poor.
- Feminist perspectives on economic inequality, examining how gender intersects with class and how women are disproportionately affected by poverty and wealth disparity.
- The implications of technological advancement on labour and wealth distribution, questioning whether automation and AI will widen the economic gap or create new opportunities.
- Philosophical discussions on the value of work, considering how differing views on labour affect the understanding of economic disparity and individual worth.
- The role of philanthropy in addressing inequality, questioning whether charitable giving is a sufficient response to systemic issues of poverty and wealth concentration.
- The historical context of revolutions and social movements, analysing whether economic disparities have been catalysts for significant societal change throughout history.
- The implications of economic inequality on political power, exploring how wealth concentration influences democratic processes and the representation of marginalized groups.
- The relationship between environmental justice and economic inequality, examining how wealth disparities affect environmental policies and the impact on marginalized communities.
- Hayek’s claim that the idea of social justice is meaningless, analysing whether social justice is compatible with economic growth.

Optional theme 7: Social philosophy

15. Evaluate the view that the way a society is organized may lead to social inequality. [25]

The view that the way a society is organized may lead to social inequality is central to debates about the practical implications of social philosophy. Some ways of organizing societies rely on private property, market competition, and the pursuit of profit, which some argue leads to disparities in wealth, power, and opportunity. Critics like Karl Marx have long contended that a certain way of social organization inherently produces inequality by concentrating wealth in the hands of a few, while others like Adam Smith and Friedrich Hayek argue that that particular social organization incentivizes innovation and social mobility. Philosophers such as John Rawls and Amartya Sen offer nuanced positions, suggesting that while certain social organizations can create inequality, it can also be regulated or modified to address these disparities. This claim invites reflection on whether inequality is an inescapable feature of social systems or a consequence of particular forms of social organization and inadequate regulatory frameworks.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- How Marx argues that class structure leads to inherent inequalities by concentrating wealth and power among capitalists (bourgeoisie) while exploiting the labour of the working class (proletariat).
- Thomas Piketty's research into capitalist economies, and how the rate of return on capital often exceeds the rate of economic growth, leading to increasing wealth inequality over time.
- Adam Smith's defence of capitalism, and the highlight of the "invisible hand" of the market, suggesting that individual self-interest in a competitive economy promotes overall societal well-being and can reduce poverty, not necessarily create inequality.
- How Rawls argues that inequalities in wealth are only justifiable if they benefit the least advantaged, implying that unregulated social organizations may require intervention to align with principles of justice.
- Robert Nozick's defence of inequality as a natural outcome of capitalism, arguing that as long as wealth is acquired through just means, unequal outcomes are morally acceptable.
- Meritocracy claims that reward talent and effort, but critics argue that structural inequalities such as access to education and opportunities mean that not everyone competes on an equal footing.
- Joseph Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction" that argues that capitalism fosters innovation, but this process also leads to job loss and economic instability, often exacerbating social inequality.
- How the existence of welfare states show that it is possible to mitigate social inequality through progressive taxation and social safety nets, raising the question of whether capitalism itself or the absence of regulation causes inequality.
- Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman's stance, that advocates for minimal government intervention, suggesting that free markets efficiently allocate resources. However, critics argue that deregulation tends to exacerbate income inequality by benefiting the wealthy.
- Kimberlé Crenshaw and Nancy Fraser's perspective that certain social organizations' effects on inequality are compounded by race, gender, and other social categories, making it difficult for marginalized groups to escape systemic economic disadvantages.
- How Jean Baudrillard critiques consumer culture, where social status is determined by material wealth, reinforcing class divisions and creating social inequality through commodification of identity.
- John Dewey's stance that unchecked social organization can undermine democratic values, as extreme wealth inequality leads to political power imbalances, where the wealthy have disproportionate influence over government policies.
- Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory suggests that global capitalism perpetuates inequality between wealthy core nations and poorer peripheral nations, with the latter being systematically disadvantaged in the global economic hierarchy.

16. Evaluate the claim that power dynamics shape social norms and values.

[25]

The claim that power dynamics shape social norms and values reflects a key concern in social philosophy. Social norms—informal rules that govern behavior—and values—shared beliefs about what is good or bad—are often seen as reflective of deeper power structures within society. Philosophers such as Michel Foucault argue that power is omnipresent in shaping discourse and knowledge, including what becomes accepted as normal or valuable. Karl Marx suggests that dominant economic classes impose their values on society, reinforcing their own power and control. On the other hand, theorists like Jürgen Habermas explore how power interlinks with democratic deliberation and the open exchange of ideas. Understanding the relationship between power and social norms requires examining how various forms of power, whether economic, political, or cultural, influence what is accepted as proper behavior and belief, often at the expense of marginalized groups. This claim invites questions about the legitimacy of these norms and the possibility of reshaping them through resistance or reform.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Michel Foucault reasoning that power is diffused throughout society and operates through discourse, shaping what is considered true, normal, or acceptable behaviour, with norms reflecting the interests of those in power.
- Karl Marx claims that the ruling class imposes its values and ideology on society, reinforcing its dominance by making these values appear universal and natural, thus shaping social norms to maintain class structures.
- Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony describes how the ruling class exerts control not only through force but by shaping societal values and norms in such a way that the dominant worldview becomes internalized and accepted by all social classes.
- How Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir argue that gender norms, such as masculinity and femininity, are shaped by patriarchal power structures, reinforcing the subordination of women and marginalized gender identities.
- Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality shows how overlapping systems of power related to race, gender, and class shape social norms and values, often marginalizing individuals who fall outside dominant identity categories.
- Pierre Bourdieu's stance that those with more cultural capital (knowledge, education, social status) influence and maintain social norms in a way that reinforces their own power and social position.
- Howard Becker's labelling theory that suggests that what is considered deviant behaviour is determined by those in power, who impose social norms that serve their interests, often marginalizing those who do not conform.
- J.L. Austin approach that emphasize how language itself is a tool of power that constructs and reinforces social norms, with performative speech acts shaping societal expectations and behaviours.
- How Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue that mass media, controlled by powerful elites, disseminates and reinforces social values and norms that serve capitalist interests, influencing public perception and behaviour.
- Jürgen Habermas suggestion that power circulates in the public sphere through open, rational discourse, where social norms and values are shaped not by domination but by democratic deliberation and consensus
- Émile Durkheim's stance that religion plays a key role in shaping moral norms and values in society, often reflecting the interests of dominant social groups and reinforcing existing power structures.
- How Frantz Fanon and Edward Said argue that colonial powers imposed their norms and values on colonized peoples, shaping their identities and societal structures in ways that perpetuated colonial domination and cultural erasure.
- Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze perspective that power is not only repressive but also productive, and that individuals and groups can resist dominant norms and values, potentially reshaping them through acts of defiance and counter-discourse.

- Arjun Appadurai's work on globalization that highlights how power dynamics at a global level influence the spread and adoption of social norms and values, often leading to tensions between local and global power structures.
 - The contemporary debate about cancelling culture and how it has added a new element to power dynamics within societies. Especially through the lens of intersectionality theorists, e.g. Crenshaw.
-