

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

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 the transformation a new mother undergoes during pregnancy and motherhood.

The stimulus may prompt discussions of issues related to identity, particularly identity over time and through change. They might focus on the radical physical changes a new mother undergoes, and whether identity remains stable over that time. Thought experiments such as the ship of Theseus could be used to frame such a discussion. Responses to the challenge of identity over time might be discussed such as Locke's view that identity can persist through memory. They might consider the metaphysics of identity e.g. Olson, or in contrast accounts that deny identity such as the Buddhist denial of the soul.

The stimulus may also prompt discussions of the relationship between body and mind, where motherhood is a physical process which appears to affect mind. They might discuss Cartesian dualism and contrast it with physicalism or materialism. Students might reflect on human nature, and whether it is fixed and innate, or changes over the course of a person's life. They may turn to discussions about gender and sex, considering differences between those who bear children and those who do not e.g. De Beauvoir.

Students might explore:

- Persistence over time and identity e.g. the ship of Theseus
- Psychological accounts of the persistence of identity e.g. Locke, Hume
- Personhood, and where it begins and ends
- Substance dualism where the immaterial soul allows identity to persist over physical changes e.g. Descartes, Swinburne
- Physicalism and materialism, e.g. Dennett
- Buddhism and the denial of self that persists over time
- The relationship between identity, mind and neuroscience, and questions about what neuroscience or other biological facts can tell us about what it is to be a person
- Human nature, and whether it changes over time
- Gender, sex and identity e.g. De Beauvoir, or alternatively, Butler
- The self and other e.g. Sartre, De Beauvoir, Heidegger, Freud
- The relationship between society, social expectations, and personal experience.

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 man who has lots of other people on the end of strings. He appears to be controlling them.

The most straightforward theme indicated by the image is that of freedom and determinism. The people on strings may feel that they are acting freely, but they are being controlled by someone else. Students may discuss determinism; the idea that our actions are caused by factors outside of our control. This could be compared to compatibilism e.g. Locke's thought experiment where despite being locked in a room, a person is acting freely because they did not want to or attempt to leave. Here the idea is that even if our actions are outside of our control, we are still acting freely. Students may discuss social determinism where actions are largely determined by society and upbringing e.g. Marx. They may discuss psychological determinism where actions are determined by our psychology and subconscious e.g. Freud. They might mention issues arising from determinism when it comes to moral agency e.g. Van Inwagen.

The stimulus may also prompt discussions of the relationship between individuals and society, or individuals and culture. They might discuss the relationship between the self and others, noting that the individuals in the image are connected to one another. They might discuss the notion of deity, where the figure holding the strings could be seen as divine. Students might also discuss notions of personhood, such as whether we only appear to be sentient individuals e.g. Block's 'blockhead' thought experiment. This links with behaviourism and discussions about intelligence, artificial intelligence and whether behaviour is enough to indicate personhood e.g. Turing, Searle.

Students might explore:

- Existential freedom, e.g. Sartre, Camus, De Beauvoir
- Determinism e.g. Spinoza
- Compatibilism and as solution to argument for freedom and determinism e.g. Mill, Strawson
- Predestination e.g. in Calvinism
- Social determinism e.g. Durkheim
- The influence of culture on the individual e.g. Herodotus' statement that "culture is king"
- Whether personhood requires individual identity and agency e.g. Block
- The relationship between freedom and moral culpability
- Behaviourism and intelligence or personhood e.g. Turing
- Positive and negative freedom e.g. Berlin
- Nature versus nurture and the extent to which we can influence our own identity.

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 freedom is essential for great art to be created. [25]

This question invites an evaluation of whether freedom is an essential component for great art to be created. References and examples might be drawn from literary, visual and expressive forms of art to show whether freedom is an essential component of great art. Aspects of freedom could involve the realms of freedom such as mental, physical and institution factors that might be required for great art. Exploration might include the qualities that might be seen to make art great. Factors other than freedom that might establish greatness could also be seen as a challenge to the claim, these being ideas of uniqueness, form, style, originality, purpose, fashion/taste and the impact on and the reflection of the human condition. Counter positions might be developed; these could include the ideas that great art might be developed as a reaction to lack of freedom such as in totalitarian states, and examples might be drawn from artistic movements during the Nazi and/or Soviet periods. Also, are definitions of great art reflective of an audience, with the idea of greatness changes through time and with fashion? Arguments might refer to both the subjective nature of artistic judgment and relative notions of freedom.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Mental freedom and types of art that might be reflective of neurodiversity
- Physical freedom in relationship to space, materials, and opportunity
- Institutional freedom with reference to political and social influences on the production and the sharing of art
- Other factors that relate to aesthetic judgments such as taste, e.g. the ideas of Kant, *telos*- the purpose of the creative form- Aristotle's perspectives,
- Social pressures, drivers and influences with reference to the Frankfurt school on the creative process, particularly the impact of technology
- Market forces that might both restrict freedom of action and influence definitions of greatness
- The influence of Dewey moving artistic activity from process to experience and whether art itself can create freedom
- Great art as a reaction to a lack of freedom
- The history of art and the influence of e.g. technological advances, trends, politics and social changes.

4. To what extent should the interpretation of works of art include the understanding of their creators?

[25]

This question invites an evaluation of the degree to which art works can only be understood in the context of understanding the artist. Students might argue that the greater influences are cultural or social rather than the deliberate action of the artist. Students might consider whether non-intentional creations are to be judged by the same criteria. They might also consider if artists and their creations ever be divorced from the cultural and social mores that they operate within. Similarly, issues arise as to whether the artist should be judged because of their creation, or the creation judged because of the artist. The impact of structuralism and post structuralism might be raised and the relevance or irrelevance of the creator in the judgmental process. Contrasts might be made with functionalism which might imply that a full understanding of the artwork can only be achieved with an understanding of the maker of the work. Issues of intentionality might arise, e.g. John Lennon seeking an understanding of his poetry/songs by reading the Manchester The Guardian's critique. The authoritative stance of the artist as the author and definer of their own work. The role of the audience in controlling the meaning in art.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Whether intentionality is the only criterion to be used in aesthetic judgement
- Whether the critic can ignore the artist's intention
- The Romantic view of the artist: that they alone assign meaning
- Whether anonymity restricts the interpretation of the artwork
- The role of the critic; can they ignore an artist's intention?
- The interaction between the public and the artist; factors of taste, fashion and preference
- Whether aesthetic judgement can be universalized and be divorced from the creator
- The degree to which the work of art and the artist can be separated from their social context
- Can works of art be accidental- non-intentional? Issues of unconscious drivers might be raised. Mention might be made to Freud and the display of the unconscious through art
- Hegel's view that the work art is a demonstration of the spirit of the artist.

Optional theme 2: Epistemology

5. Evaluate the claim that “the true sign of intelligence is imagination rather than knowledge”.

[25]

Based on the possible value of knowledge as a sign of intelligence, the question provides an opportunity to evaluate the role of imagination in knowledge. The concept of intelligence opens various connections to central aspects of knowledge, from traditional views of mind and intellect to currently dominant cognitive approaches and the massive implications of the development of artificial intelligence. The answers could take into account some of these aspects and the many discussions that are involved. For example, students might consider Gardner’s idea of multiple intelligences, or critiques of intelligence that link it to Eurocentric standards of rationality. Imagination is present in a wide variety of human activities. Having been explored from a wide range of philosophical perspectives, it could be explored through examples of the development of science, philosophy and the arts. Some answers may also explore the idea that knowledge involves imagination and that the development of imagination can also lead to knowledge.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- The multiplicity of the semantic network opened up by the notion of intelligence e.g. processing information, understanding, planning, problem-solving
- Intelligence as a human faculty and as the order that constitutes the architecture of the cosmos
- The theory of multiple intelligences (H. Gardner)
- Imagination as a cognitive faculty: its functions and relations to other faculties, e.g. belief and desire
- The Chinese Room argument
- All men by nature desire to know (Aristotle)
- Degrees or ways of knowing following Aristotle: sensation, memory, experience, practical knowledge, science, wisdom
- Classical Chinese epistemologies in which knowledge is based on a holistic understanding of the world and structured as an interactive relationship between humans and nature
- Classical theories of knowledge in the Western philosophical tradition: Plato, Descartes, Kant
- The various roles of the imagination in the development of science, including the construction of hypothesis and the design of procedures
- Hume’s account of imagination as the power to recombine complex ideas
- Are imagined ideas “false”?
- Imagination, fantasy and knowledge through the arts.

6. Evaluate the claim that “the limits of language are the limits of knowledge”. [25]

The question is a modification of Wittgenstein’s famous claim in his *Tractatus*. It invites an analysis of the nature of language and the role it plays in shaping or determining the scope of knowledge. Evaluation of the claim might require a characterization of language and knowledge. Accordingly, answers may address an analysis of the relationship between the two elements. Some answers may assess whether knowledge is only about facts and whether language is the only way to access, describe and explain facts. Some answers may also consider the role of the senses in the process of knowledge and the possibility of verification through experience. Another possible route might focus on the limits of sharing knowledge according to the limits of language. Different languages allow for different understandings and descriptions of the world: how does this affect universal, objective knowledge? Furthermore, if knowledge depends on language, does knowledge also depend on cultural backgrounds, e.g. traditions, habits, beliefs?

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Multiple views on language, knowledge and how they are related
- Language, the perception of the world and the construction of worldviews
- The relationship between language and knowledge: the role of words, concepts, propositions
- Language and the perception of the world and the construction of worldviews
- Classical theories of knowledge in the Western philosophical tradition: Plato, Descartes, Kant
- Knowledge (*zhi*) as essentially and indissolubly linked to human activities and the implementation of social practice (*xing*) in both traditional and modern Chinese epistemology
- Language and the historical development of knowledge
- The role of language in the paradigms and scientific revolutions
- Knowledge is dependent on human possibility to describe facts: is this the only way humans can know? e.g. the role of emotions as described by Damasio, Nussbaum, or Churchland
- Scientific and cultural approaches to knowledge
- How language affects the shaping of culture, and culture affects language
- How cultural diversity affects language and knowledge
- The dependence of knowledge from previously acquired knowledge and beliefs, e.g. theory-ladenness. Are they already in the language?
- The extent to which language impairments might affect knowledge
- Other philosophical views on language and knowledge, e.g. Plato’s analogy of the Divided Line, empiricism, pragmatism, verificationism, social ontology.

Optional theme 3: Ethics

7. Evaluate the claim that ethics is an objective science.

[25]

This question addresses meta-ethical issues and invites students to explore the nature of ethics. Responses might consider the possibilities of ethics as a science or the differences between ethics and science, e.g. Dewey. Students might discuss moral relativism and the views of morals as social convention, e.g. Fletcher, Mackie, Searle. Responses might also evaluate whether it is possible to define universal values, by comparing views on moral objectivism, e.g. Rand, to moral subjectivism, e.g. Sidgwick. Students might explore virtue ethics and the inner value of action, e.g. Aristotle, MacIntyre, or deontological views, e.g. Kant. Students might focus on the relationship between ethics and religion, e.g. Aquinas, Pascal, Kierkegaard and whether ethics requires a theological background to be objective. Students might also mention the issues related to ethical language, e.g. Ayer, Mackie, as possible limits of any objective morals. Responses might consider Nietzsche's view on the genealogy of morals and related Rée's view on the moral sentiments, which links ethics to Darwinism.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

The separation of science and ethics and, generally, between science and philosophy, e.g. Dewey

- The relationship between ethics and other sciences, e.g. psychology, as in Scheler's view
- Views advocating moral relativism, e.g. Fletcher, Mackie
- The social and conventional nature of ethics, e.g. Searle
- Ethics and objectivism, e.g. Rand
- Moral subjectivism, e.g. Sidgwick's intuitionism
- Virtue ethics, e.g. Aristotle, MacIntyre
- Ethics and religion, e.g. Aquinas, Pascal, Kierkegaard
- Issues related to a possible universal ethical language, e.g. Ayer, Mackie
- Nietzsche's genealogical approach to ethics
- Rée's view on moral sentiments as inspired by Darwin's theory.

8. Evaluate the claim that it is impossible to do good business out of bad ethics. [25]

The claim, which stems from a quote by Ezra Pound, invites students to explore the field of business ethics, with reference to its relationship with norms, values, and fair trade. Students might consider the initial philosophical framework in terms of deontological perspective related to means and ends, e.g. Kant, and the concept of human dignity. Responses might explore Smith's view on the division of the labour and its undesirable consequences for the workers: while firms can significantly increase their production, workers end up by being absorbed in meaningless tasks. Responses might also consider Dewey's view on work as art. Students might refer to the ethical views related to business, e.g. Moore, who applied MacIntyre's virtue ethics to business, or the relationship between justice and fairness, e.g. Rawls. Responses might focus on more recent developments of the field that focus on the role of corporations and their agents, e.g. French, Donaldson. They might explore the concept of "corporate moral responsibility" and discuss whether corporations should be considered as moral agents or as moral persons. Responses might consider the "stakeholder theory", which highlights the role of corporate governance as caring for the interests of all stakeholders.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Smith's view on the division of labour
- Locke's view on labour and its relationship with property
- Marx's view on labour and property
- Virtue ethics, e.g. Aristotle, MacIntyre
- Deontological ethics, e.g. Kant, and the concepts of means, ends, and human dignity
- Dewey's distinction between work, labour, education, art
- Moore's view on virtue ethics as applied to business ethics
- Rawls's theory of justice and its relationship with fairness
- Corporate moral responsibility: French's view on the role of moral agents
- Whether corporations can be considered moral persons
- The stakeholder theory, e.g. Freeman
- Corporate social responsibility: ethical marketing, ethical advertising
- Fair trade: initiatives, organizations.

Optional theme 4: Philosophy of religion

9. Evaluate the claim that religious experience tells us about the reality of God. [25]

In the realm of philosophy of religion, the claim that religious experience provides insight into the reality of God is a subject of extensive debate. Proponents argue that personal encounters with the divine—such as mystical visions, answered prayers, or profound feelings of transcendence—offer direct evidence of the existence of God. Thinkers like William James suggest that religious experiences exhibit common features across cultures, indicating a genuine encounter with a higher reality. Additionally, Alvin Plantinga's reformed epistemology maintains that belief in God is grounded in religious experience and can be properly basic. This means it is justified without requiring external evidence. Conversely, critics question the reliability of religious experience as a basis for belief. Psychological and sociocultural explanations propose that such experiences may result from cognitive biases, emotional states, or cultural conditioning rather than authentic interactions with the divine. Sigmund Freud, for example, viewed religious experiences as psychological projections fulfilling subconscious desires, while Richard Dawkins suggests that they are better explained as neurological phenomena. Furthermore, the issue of conflicting religious experiences raises epistemic concerns: if different traditions report contradictory revelations, this weakens their evidential value. Ultimately, whether religious experience confirms the reality of God depends on one's epistemological perspective. If subjective experience is considered a valid source of knowledge, such experiences may justify belief. However, if objective verification is required, the evidential weight of religious experience remains inconclusive, leaving the question open for further philosophical inquiry.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Whether religious experiences provide direct evidence of God or are better explained through psychological or sociological factors.
- The argument that common features in religious experiences across cultures suggest a genuine encounter with the divine, e.g. William James.
- The challenge posed by conflicting religious experiences and their implications for the reliability of religious experience as evidence.
- The concept of properly basic beliefs and whether religious experience justifies belief in God without external evidence, e.g. Alvin Plantinga.
- The role of cognitive biases and emotional states in shaping religious experiences, e.g. Sigmund Freud and Richard Dawkins.
- The distinction between public and private religious experiences and their implications for evidence of God
- The argument that religious experience is a result of social and cultural conditioning rather than divine reality.
- The significance of mystical experiences and their potential to provide insight into a transcendent reality.
- The philosophical implications of religious pluralism and whether different experiences of God point to the same ultimate reality, e.g. John Hick.
- The role of religious experience in faith formation and whether it should be considered a foundation for belief.
- The problem of verifying religious experiences and whether they meet the criteria for reliable knowledge.
- The argument that divine hiddenness raises doubts about the validity of religious experience as evidence, e.g. John Schellenberg.
- The relationship between religious experience and mystical traditions, and whether they offer unique insights into the divine.
- The contrast between empirical verification and personal conviction in assessing religious experience.
- The debate between fideism and evidentialism in determining the significance of religious experience for belief in God.

10. Evaluate the claim that the presence of evil in the world makes it impossible for God to exist.

[25]

In the field of philosophy of religion, the assertion that the presence of evil in the world contradicts the existence of God prompts significant inquiries. Advocates of this position argue that if a deity is all-powerful, all-knowing, and completely benevolent, then the existence of unnecessary suffering and evil should not be acceptable. The deductive approach to the problem of evil argues that the mere existence of evil contradicts the concept of a perfect deity, making divine existence logically incoherent. In contrast, the evidential approach claims that, given the extensive evidence of suffering—ranging from natural calamities to human malice and the pain endured by innocents—makes the existence of God highly improbable. Philosophers like John Stuart Mill argue that the presence of evil challenges the conventional qualities attributed to God. This dilemma is further complicated when considering how various religious traditions interpret the presence of evil. For instance, the Free Will Defence argues that God permits evil as it is essential for granting free will, which can lead to greater benefits. However, critics question whether this rationale is adequate considering the immense scale of suffering. Moreover, contemporary thinkers like William Rowe point out examples of seemingly pointless evils that do not seem to serve any greater purpose. Such discussions necessitate a reassessment of theism, urging believers to confront the complexities associated with evil's existence as they seek to harmonize it with their belief in a benevolent and omnipotent deity. Ultimately, the debate surrounding the problem of evil encourages profound contemplation on the essence of divinity and the human condition.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- The nature of God as all-powerful, all-knowing, and wholly good and how these attributes conflict with the existence of evil.
- The deductive problem of evil, which asserts that any presence of evil contradicts the notion of a perfect deity.
- The probabilistic problem of evil, suggesting that the extent of suffering makes the existence of God less probable, e.g. William Rowe.
- The nature of God as all-powerful, all-knowing, and wholly benevolent, and whether these attributes are incompatible with the existence of evil.
- John Stuart Mill's critique of the traditional attributes of God in light of the presence of evil.
- The Free Will Defence as an explanation for the existence of evil and its potential inadequacy in addressing the severity of suffering.
- The role of free will in allowing for moral evil and whether this justifies the presence of natural evil.
- The relationship between divine hiddenness and the existence of evil as a challenge to belief in God.
- The significance of different religious interpretations of evil, such as in Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.
- The concept of the Greater Good Defence and its argument that evil may lead to greater goods, e.g. Gottfried Leibniz.
- The role of skeptical theism, which contends that human limitations prevent us from fully understanding divine reasons for allowing evil.
- The psychological impact of suffering on faith and belief in God, including the phenomenon of faith crises.
- The role of historical atrocities and systemic injustices as evidence against the existence of a benevolent deity.
- The implications of theodicies that attempt to reconcile the existence of evil with belief in God.
- How philosophical positions such as skeptical theism affect the discourse on evil and the existence of God, e.g. Michael Bergmann.

Optional theme 5: Philosophy of science

11. Evaluate the claim that scientific knowledge has no limits.

[25]

The claim that scientific knowledge has no limits raises significant philosophical questions about the nature, scope, and boundaries of human scientific inquiry. On one side, proponents of scientific realism, such as Karl Popper and Richard Dawkins, argue that science is a progressive and self-correcting endeavour capable of uncovering objective truths about the universe. They claim that through empirical observation, experimentation, and rational deduction, science can potentially understand any aspect of reality. However, critics such as Thomas Kuhn, Immanuel Kant and Paul Feyerabend suggest that scientific knowledge is constrained by human cognition, paradigms, and the limitations of empirical methods. They argue that certain aspects of reality, like metaphysical questions or subjective experiences, might lie beyond the reach of science. Moreover, ethical concerns, political contexts, and technological limitations can restrict what science can investigate. Evaluating this claim requires an exploration of the epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical boundaries of scientific knowledge and its capacity to understand both the material and immaterial world.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Karl Popper's philosophy of science which emphasizes that scientific knowledge is progressive and limitless in its capacity to approach truth, as science builds on falsifiable theories that evolve through critical testing
- The empirical method, as championed by Francis Bacon and David Hume, relies on observation and experience to generate knowledge. This method allows science to explore vast areas of the natural world, from the subatomic to the cosmic level.
- David Hume's problem of induction highlights a potential limit to scientific knowledge: science relies on generalizations from finite observations, which may not guarantee universal truths, leading to uncertainty in some areas of knowledge.
- Thomas Kuhn stance that scientific knowledge is shaped by paradigms, or frameworks of understanding. Shifts between paradigms can limit what can be known within a given period, as certain questions and approaches are only intelligible within a specific paradigm.
- Immanuel Kant position that there are fundamental limits to human knowledge, as our cognition is structured by categories of understanding, which constrain what we can know about the world.
- Chaos theory (Lorenz) and complexity theory (Prigogine) suggest that some systems, particularly in fields like weather forecasting or biological evolution, are so sensitive to initial conditions that their future states may be fundamentally unpredictable, thus posing limits to scientific predictability.
- Philosophers like Hans Jonas and Peter Singer argue that ethical considerations impose limits on scientific research. For example, experimenting on humans or certain animals raises moral questions that can constrain the pursuit of knowledge.
- How Paul Feyerabend critique of the notion of scientific objectivity, arguing that science is not free from cultural, political, and historical influences. These external factors can limit the kinds of knowledge science produces and the questions it pursues.
- How scientific inquiry is often limited by the available technology. While science might aspire to know everything, practical limitations—such as tools for observation, measurement, and experimentation—can restrict the scope of what can be known at any given time.
- Quine and Bas van Fraassen stance that scientific knowledge might be limited by what is observable. Certain phenomena—like consciousness or aspects of quantum mechanics—may be beyond empirical observation, limiting what science can know.
- Philosophers like David Chalmers argue that subjective experiences, or qualia, pose a fundamental challenge to science. The “hard problem” of consciousness may be inherently beyond the reach of objective, scientific methods.
- How Jean-François Lyotard and other postmodernists critique the idea of a “grand narrative” in science, suggesting that science is just one way of knowing among many, and that its claims to universal truth are limited by cultural and historical contexts.
- While Albert Einstein emphasized that “imagination is more important than knowledge,” he also recognized that scientific progress often depends on creative leaps beyond empirical data. However, this reliance on human imagination may introduce subjective limits to what science can claim to know.

12. Evaluate the claim that scientists are responsible for the consequences of the knowledge they produce.

[25]

The claim that scientists are responsible for the consequences of the knowledge they produce raises ethical questions about the role of scientists in society and the extent of their moral accountability. Scientific discoveries and technological innovations have the potential to profoundly shape human life, for better or worse. From advancements in medicine and energy to the development of nuclear weapons and artificial intelligence, the knowledge scientists generate can have far-reaching, sometimes unintended, consequences. Philosophers such as Hans Jonas, who developed the “principle of responsibility,” argue that scientists have a moral duty to consider the potential impacts of their work on future generations. Other thinkers, like Max Weber, emphasize the importance of value-neutrality in science, suggesting that scientists are not morally responsible for how society uses their findings. This debate explores whether the responsibility lies solely with scientists or whether it is shared with governments, corporations, and society at large. Evaluating this claim requires an analysis of the ethical frameworks guiding scientific research, the role of societal oversight, and the balance between knowledge production and its potential harms.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Jonas’s stance that scientists must act with foresight and responsibility for the long-term consequences of their work, particularly in fields like biotechnology or environmental science, where the potential harms could affect future generations.
- Example of AI and its possible consequences.
- Weber suggestion that science should remain value-neutral, meaning scientists are responsible only for producing knowledge, not for how that knowledge is applied by society, governments, or other institutions.
- Einstein’s involvement in the development of nuclear energy, which led to the creation of atomic bombs, illustrates the ethical dilemma of scientific responsibility. Despite his opposition to their use, his work contributed to significant global consequences.
- The precautionary principle, closely associated with Jonas, which argues that when scientific knowledge has the potential for significant harm, scientists have an ethical duty to proceed with caution, considering the risks and potential outcomes.
- Karl Popper’s distinction between the creation of scientific knowledge and its application, suggesting that scientists should focus on expanding knowledge, while society, policymakers, and engineers are responsible for its use and consequences.
- International guidelines like the UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights that stress the ethical responsibility of scientists to consider the potential societal impacts of their research, particularly in fields like genetics and AI.
- IRBs (Institutional Review Boards) which are established to evaluate the ethical implications of scientific research, implying that while scientists have some responsibility, oversight and shared accountability within institutions help mitigate potential harms.
- The dual-use dilemma which refers to scientific research, such as in biotechnology or chemistry, that can be used for both beneficial and harmful purposes. This dilemma raises the question of whether scientists are responsible for both the positive and negative outcomes of their discoveries.
- Jacques Ellul critique of technological determinism, arguing that scientists and engineers have a moral responsibility to foresee how their innovations may shape society. Like Jonas, he emphasizes the unintended consequences of technological advancement.
- Alasdair MacIntyre’s stance that responsibility should be shared between scientists, policymakers, and society. Scientists produce knowledge, but its ethical use depends on broader societal choices and governance.
- How the application of scientific discoveries is often determined by corporations and governments. While scientists create the knowledge, industries and political entities are frequently responsible for how it is used, shifting some responsibility away from scientists.
- The role of whistleblowers scientists like J. Robert Oppenheimer, who expressed regret about his role in the Manhattan Project, show that scientists can take personal responsibility for the consequences of their work by raising ethical concerns and warning against misuse.

- Richard Feynman emphasis on the need for scientists to communicate their work to the public, suggesting that scientists have a responsibility to make the ethical implications of their findings clear and transparent.
- Jonathan Glover addresses for the moral responsibility for unintended consequences, arguing that scientists cannot fully escape blame for harmful outcomes of their work, even if the consequences were not initially foreseeable.

Optional theme 6: Political philosophy

13. Evaluate the view that social-contract theory provides an adequate framework for the relationship between a state and its citizens. [25]

This question invites students to consider how social contract theory attempts to establish a legitimate equilibrium between the interests of the state and its citizens, identifying the rights, responsibilities and obligations of both parties. Students might discuss the social contract as a hypothetical arrangement by means of which autonomous and pre-political individuals enter civil society. Through this contract, either by expressed or tacit agreement, individuals give up certain rights and freedoms enjoyed in the state of nature. Students might discuss how this social contract acts as the origin of the state. It centralizes political authority, establishes political institutions to provide for and protect the rights of individuals and identifies the correlative obligations and responsibilities of individuals to the state. Students might also consider how the state guarantees private property, sees to the protection of personal and social safety and security against internal and external threats, provides for the availability of services and resources, and allows for participation in political activities. In exchange for this, citizens of the state are expected to support the legitimacy of the state, obey common, civil, criminal and constitutional laws, respect the commonly agreed upon code of conduct, and productively contribute to the common good and well-being of society. Responses might explore some of the traditional formulations of social contract theory along with some of the more contemporary, non-Western and global interpretations. Students might also discuss the factual or hypothetical nature of a social contract. Students might draw from theories that point out the lack of historical evidence on the issue.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Traditional formulations of social contract theory, for example, Richard Hooker, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau
- Contemporary interpretations of social contract theory, for example, John Rawls, David Gauthier, Thomas Scanlon, Charles Mills
- The hypothetical versus the factual nature of a social contract; state of nature vs. political society; lack of historical evidence, for example, the views of Alasdair MacIntyre on the social contract as a product of Enlightenment thinking
- Agreement regarding personal, social, moral and political norms governing behaviour: possibility, probability, impossibility, for example, Jean François Lyotard on the impossibility of achieving consensus on approved behaviour in a pluralistic society and Michel Foucault on changing power structures make common behavioural norms difficult to achieve (unclear and too long)
- Responsibilities of a state towards its citizens: examples might include equity of opportunity, protection of freedom, promotion of social order, right to education, employment, health and social welfare, justice for all, protection of private property
- Obligations of the citizen towards the state: examples might include the responsibility to work for and contribute to the state, paying taxes for services rendered, obedience to legitimate laws, participation in civic activities, loyalty to the state, upholding the authority of legitimately constituted civil authority, defending the state from internal and external threat, respect for the rights of other citizens
- Problems for social contract theories in multicultural and multinational contexts; bias, prejudice, exclusion of the interests of marginalised or minority groups, vested interests, for example, the views of Chantal Mouffe, Bhikhu Parekh, Will Kymlicka and Carole Pateman on the shortcomings of social contract theory in contemporary multicultural contexts
- Feminist social contract theories, for example, the work of Susan Moller Okin and Jean Hampton.

14. Evaluate the view that defining universal human rights is becoming increasingly difficult in a world of competing interests, values and cultures.

[25]

Students might go on to point out that this approach to human rights is generally based upon Western philosophical traditions and a Western philosophical anthropology. Hence, traditional notions of human rights might be criticized as a form of Western cultural imperialism. Students might discuss the challenges that emerge from a confrontation between a universalistic understanding of human rights applicable to all people, at all times and in all places and the impact of cultural and moral relativism, multiculturalism and globalization. Political upheavals, the rise of nationalism and populism, an increase in discrimination based on race, gender, and religious persuasion, world poverty and a breakdown in social structures and institutions might also be explored as challenging the idea of the identification, promotion and protection of universal human rights. Furthermore, contemporary challenges from feminist and gender-interest groups, indigenous communities and marginalized minorities pose additional difficulties in formulating a definition of universal human rights. Additional perspectives impacting on the possible definition of universal human rights can be identified and discussed. Students might also consider, the historical and geo-political evolution of an understanding of human rights. The realization that different communities around the world understand personhood, human worth, dignity along with the very idea of human rights in a variety of ways could be discussed. Students might also consider challenges to the formulation and promulgation of documents regarding universal human rights along with issues regarding the implementation and enforcement of those rights.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- The variety of views regarding a definition of rights: human rights, natural rights, citizenship rights, inalienable rights, universal rights, cultural rights, economic rights, for example, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Hannah Arendt, John Locke, John Stuart Mill
- The notions of individual rights possessed by persons, collective rights owned by communities and universal rights possessed by all persons
- Cultural and moral relativism and its impact on approaches to universal human rights, for example, the views of Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, Michael Walzer
- Strong and weak cultural realism and universal human rights, for example, the views of Martha Nussbaum, James Rachels, Joan Ladd
- Multiculturalism and its impact on approaches to universal human rights, for example, the views of Amartya Sen, Charles Taylor, Bhikhu Parekh, Will Kymlicka; multiculturalism as the greatest challenge to universalism in human rights
- The different approaches to human rights in a variety of Western and non-Western philosophical traditions making a universal definition difficult to achieve, for example, deontological views, teleological views, views of virtue ethics, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism
- The challenges of technological developments to an understanding of human rights, for example, issues of privacy, data gathering, surveillance, identity, AI. for example, the views of Luciano Floridi, Shoshana Zuboff, Rosi Braidotti, Noam Chomsky
- Challenges to defining and defending universal human rights considering terrorism, warfare, migration, illegal immigration, for example, the views of Giorgio Agamben
- The universality of human rights does not entail the uniformity of human rights
- Universal human rights and the interference of those in power; political authorities, economic and financial institutions, religious groups, radicalised fringe groups; the power of the majority, for example, Mill's 'tyranny of the majority' and 'despotism of custom'
- Obligations and responsibilities that might follow upon the possession of human rights
- Universal human rights and an acknowledgement of environmental rights, animal rights, for example, the views of Arne Naess and Peter Singer
- International documents supporting a definition of universal human rights despite difficulties: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Optional theme 7: Social philosophy

15. Evaluate the claim that globalization impacts on cultural identity and social cohesion. [25]

The claim that globalization impacts cultural identity and social cohesion addresses the profound ways in which global interconnectedness influences local cultures and the sense of belonging within communities. Globalization, driven by the flow of information, goods, and people across borders, has created opportunities for cultural exchange but also raises concerns about cultural homogenization, loss of local traditions, and fragmentation of social cohesion. Philosophers like Zygmunt Bauman and sociologists like Anthony Giddens have explored how the spread of global capitalism and digital communication reshape identities, making them more fluid and fragmented. Conversely, thinkers such as Amartya Sen emphasize the potential of globalization to enhance multiculturalism and global solidarity. The question also brings to the forefront whether globalization strengthens or weakens social bonds, and how communities respond to the pressures of maintaining cultural identity while integrating into a global society. This inquiry invites reflection on the balance between local cultural preservation and the cosmopolitan ideals promoted by globalization.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Zygmunt Bauman's reasoning that globalization leads to cultural homogenization, where local cultures are absorbed into a dominant global culture, often driven by Western values and consumerism, eroding distinct cultural identities
- Arjun Appadurai's suggestion that globalization does not simply erase cultures but leads to cultural hybridization, where local and global influences merge, creating new cultural forms that reshape identities in complex ways
- Bauman's and Anthony Giddens' perspective that globalization has made identity more fluid and fragmented, as individuals are exposed to diverse cultural influences, leading to a more flexible, yet unstable sense of self
- Frantz Fanon's stance that globalization often perpetuates cultural imperialism, where dominant cultures impose their values and norms on weaker cultures, undermining local identities and traditions
- Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's critique of globalization's role in spreading global capitalism, which fosters consumer culture and commodifies cultural identity, reducing cultural practices to marketable products
- Amartya Sen's emphasis on the potential of globalization to foster multiculturalism and global solidarity, as increased communication and travel allow individuals to engage with and appreciate a variety of cultures.
- How Robert Putnam's argues that globalization can weaken social cohesion within communities, as the rapid pace of change and influx of external influences can fragment shared values and social bonds
- Martha Nussbaum's and Kwame Anthony Appiah's advocate for a cosmopolitan perspective, where globalization encourages individuals to see themselves as part of a global community, fostering a shared global identity that transcends local affiliations
- Frantz Fanon's highlights on how some groups resist globalization to preserve cultural identity, leading to the resurgence of nationalism or fundamentalism as a defence against perceived cultural threats
- How Manuel Castells explores the ways digital communication technologies allow individuals to form global networks, reshaping cultural identity and social cohesion by enabling connections that transcend geographical boundaries
- How Charles Taylor argues that globalization poses a threat to cultural autonomy, as smaller or marginalized cultures struggle to maintain their traditions and identities in the face of dominant global forces
- The way David Harvey critiques of globalization for exacerbating inequalities between global elites and local communities, where the benefits of globalization are unevenly distributed, further destabilizing social cohesion in less affluent regions.

- James Clifford's exploration of the concept of diasporas, where globalization enables the movement of people across borders, leading to the formation of transnational communities that maintain cultural identity while integrating into new societies
- Jürgen Habermas' exploration of how globalization challenges traditional notions of national identity, leading to the fragmentation of national cultures and the rise of more pluralistic and fragmented identities within states
- Alasdair MacIntyre's view on the importance of preserving cultural traditions in the face of globalization, arguing that local practices and values are vital to maintaining social cohesion and a sense of moral community.

16. Evaluate the claim that gender is socially constructed.

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The claim that gender is socially constructed challenges traditional views that regard gender as a natural, biological distinction between men and women. Instead, social constructionists argue that gender is a set of roles, behaviours, and identities shaped by societal norms, expectations, and power dynamics. Thinkers like Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, and Michel Foucault have critically examined how gender is created and maintained through social practices, language, and institutions. Butler argues that gender is performative, meaning it is something we do rather than something we inherently are. De Beauvoir famously stated that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” emphasizing the societal conditioning that shapes gender identity. This claim raises important questions about the nature of identity, the role of power in shaping social roles, and how deeply embedded cultural norms affect our understanding of gender. It also invites reflection on the implications of challenging or reshaping these constructions in the pursuit of equality and justice.

In addressing these philosophical issues students might explore:

- Butler’s claim that gender is not a fixed identity but a performance, constructed through repeated social acts and behaviours. Gender identity is created through the enactment of societal norms, rather than pre-existing biological facts
 - De Beauvoir’s assertion that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” highlighting the social processes through which gender roles are constructed and imposed, particularly on women
 - Michel Foucault’s analysis of power and discourse that shows how societal institutions, such as medicine, law, and education, produce knowledge about gender and shape norms that define what is considered appropriate for men and women
 - Ann Oakley’s view on the role of socialization in constructing gender roles, where children are taught from a young age to conform to gendered expectations, reinforcing societal norms about masculinity and femininity
 - Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality shows how gender is constructed not only through social norms but also through the interplay of race, class, and other identity categories, leading to varied experiences of gender depending on one’s social position
 - Essentialists stance that argues that gender differences are rooted in biology and are fixed, while social constructionists claim that gender is fluid, contingent, and shaped by cultural and historical factors
 - How Joan Scott emphasizes that gender roles have changed over time, illustrating how gender is not a natural fact but a social construct that varies across different historical and cultural contexts
 - The existence of transgender and non-binary identities challenges traditional, binary notions of gender, reinforcing the idea that gender is not inherently tied to one’s biological sex but is a social and personal identity
 - Raewyn Connell’s work on hegemonic masculinity explores how dominant forms of masculinity are constructed to maintain social power and privilege, marginalizing alternative masculinities and reinforcing gender inequality
 - Queer theorists like Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who argue that the rigid binary of male/female is a social construct that can and should be deconstructed, allowing for more fluid and diverse expressions of gender
 - Margaret Mead’s studies of gender in different societies show that what is considered masculine or feminine varies widely across cultures, further supporting the idea that gender is a social, rather than biological, construct
 - Laura Mulvey and John Berger’ approaches of the “male gaze” that illustrates how art and media representations contribute to the social construction of gender, often portraying women in ways that reinforce traditional, objectifying views of femininity.
-