

Preliminary Examination in Philosophy, Politics and Economics

Trinity Term and Long Vacation 2012

Report of Chair of Examiners

BASIC STATISTICS

248 candidates sat the examination in Trinity Term 2012. One additional candidate re-sat the Economics paper only. Their results were as follows:

Category	Number				Percentage			
	2012	2011	2010	2009	2012	2011	2010	2009
Distinction	61	43	47	63	24.6	18.0	19.2	28.0
Pass	179*	193	183	155	72.2	80.8	75.0	68.9
Fail 1 paper	7	2	12	6	2.8	0.8	4.9	2.7
Fail 2 or 3 papers	1	1	2	1	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.4
Total	248	239	244	225	100	100	100	100

* This figure does not include the candidate re-sitting the Economics paper in June 2012 who achieved a Pass in this paper.

8 candidates failed one or more papers: 2 failed Philosophy, 7 failed Economics, and 1 failed both Philosophy and Economics. The number of failures increased from last year, when 3 candidates failed one or more papers: 3 failed Politics, and 1 failed both Politics and Economics.

Of the 8 failing candidates who retook one or more papers in September, 7 passed the examination and 1 failed. A candidate who withdrew from examinations in Trinity Term 2012 for medical reasons, sat all three papers for the first time in the Long Vacation and passed.

ADMINISTRATION

Wendy Wilkin, the newly appointed PPE administrator, provided very good support throughout the examinations period. However, this year, the PPE office had to process all Prelims marks at the same time as Finals results – in the same week as the PPE Open Day – which put considerable pressure on all staff concerned. The fact that the Chair of Examiners was also and at the same time sole Examiner for Philosophy (as opposed to two Examiners for Economics and three examiners for Politics) did not help matters. Some recording mistakes were made, in Philosophy, at the remarking stage, with the effect that seven students were given the wrong mark via OSS. The Proctors were informed as soon as the mistakes were discovered, and advised the Chair as to the correct procedure. In six of those seven cases, the students had received higher marks than had initially been recorded. In one case, however, a student whom OSS had recorded as having passed the paper had in fact failed it: the Junior Proctor ruled that this student should nevertheless resit the paper in September. Senior Tutors of concerned students each received a letter from the Chair with an explanatory note.

Clearly this was not a satisfactory situation, and we outline some recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the administrative difficulties we encountered this year, and taking into account the fact that there was a considerable imbalance of work between assessors and examiners across the three subjects, we recommend the following:

1. Allowing for two days between the end of Finals' results recording process and the beginning of Prelims' recording process, provided that the Exam Board takes place no later than Friday of 11th week. This would give the PPE Administrator time to deal with any unforeseen difficulty or delay as might arise in Finals.

2. Each of the three Faculty/Departments must nominate at least two Examiners. This would allow for a fairer allocation of work, and ensure in particular that whomever acts as Chair is not solely responsible for the handling of the examination in his/her particular subject.

3. The Philosophy Examiner recommends that each section should have two assessors. Out of the six assessors in total, two should be appointed to serve as Examiners. Having two assessors per section makes all the more sense as, from 2013, students will have to answer questions from all three sections.

4. In addition, in Politics, this year, over 70% of the candidates chose two political theory questions, but there was only one assessor available to mark these scripts, whereas Section B (Institutions) had two assessors. Not only was this an imbalance in effort expended, but it also caused some problems with the shifting of scripts between assessors, thus making the process work less smoothly despite tight deadlines. For next year, the Examiners recommend the following format: sections A and B should each be marked by two assessors. These could be divided into two pairs (theory/comparative, e.g. A/B, A/B) such that each pair works independently. Half of the scripts would be given to each pair, and thereafter scripts would only be moved between two members of the same pair. Such an arrangement would even out the work, and more importantly, generate more efficiency in the somewhat confusing and stressful process of shifting scripts in June. One assessor from each pair should also be appointed to serve as Examiner.

5. With respect to handling the marking material, the Board recommends that the same procedure be adopted for Prelims as is currently in use for Finals. In particular, once the results are processed, each assessor should hand over his/her material to the PPE Administrator and then remove it from his/her computer/disks, etc.

Prof Cecile Fabre (Chair, PPE Prelims Examiners)

PPE Prelims Examination Board Members:

Dr Kate Doornik, Prof Lois McNay, Miss Gillian Peele, Dr Timothy Power, Prof Margaret Stevens

DISTRIBUTION OF MARKS

Distribution of Marks for June 2012 [2011 figures in brackets]			
	Politics	Philosophy	Economics*
Average	61.3 [61.0]	63.2 [61.1]	59.8* [61.8]
Standard Deviation	5.9 [5.7]	9.2 [8.3]	10.7* [8.5]
75+	1% [0%]	10.7% [7.5%]	10.5% [6.3%]
70-74	6.5% [2.1%]	22.2% [7.9%]	16% [10.4%]
60-69	64.3% [67.8%]	40.9% [41.3%]	33.5% [46.3%]
50-59	26.0% [25.5%]	21.0% [37.5%]	25.9% [28.3%]
40-49	2.2% [3.3%]	4.7% [5.8%]	12.6% [8.3%]
37-39	0% [0.4%]	0.5% [0%]	0.5% [0%]
Less than 37	0% [0.8%]	0% [0%]	1% [0.4%]
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Figures do not include candidate re-sitting Economics paper only in June 2012. The Economics figures not including this candidate are: Average – 59.7 and Standard Deviation – 10.8.

The average marks for Politics and Philosophy were higher, and the average mark for Economics was lower than in 2011. Economics had the lowest mean score.

GENDER BREAKDOWN

Category	Female June 2012 [2011 figures in brackets]		Male June 2012 [2011 figures in brackets]	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Distinction	15 [10]	18.5% [13.0%]	46 [33]	27.5% [20.4%]
Pass	63 [67]	77.8% [87.0%]	116 [126]	69.5% [77.8%]
Fail 1 paper	3 [0]	3.7% [0%]	4 [2]	2.4% [1.2%]
Fail 2 or 3 papers	0 [0]	0% [0%]	1 [1]	0.6% [0.6%]
TOTAL	81 [77]	100%	168 [162]	100%

*Figures do not include 2012 candidate re-sitting Economics paper only who gained a Pass.

Gender distribution of Marks June 2012 [2011 figures in brackets]			
Female Average	62.0 [61.0]	63.6 [60.8]	57.6 [59.9]
Male Average	61.1 [61.0]	63.1 [61.4]	60.8 [62.7]
Overall Average	61.4 [61.0]	63.2 [61.1]	59.8 [61.8]
Female Standard Deviation	5.0 [5.3]	8.4 [7.2]	10.9 [7.7]
Male Standard Deviation	6.3 [5.9]	9.6 [8.7]	10.6 [8.8]
% of Female Cohort achieving ≥ 70	6.3% [1.3%]	25.0% [11.7%]	16.3% [9.1%]
% of Male Cohort achieving ≥ 70	6.5% [2.5%]	29.8% [17.3%]	23.8% [20.4%]

PAPER REPORTS

1. Report on INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY (June 2012)

SECTION A: LOGIC

Q. 1. (83 answers – 33.3%)

In part (a), there was a surprisingly widespread misapprehension that an ordered pair is a relation. The quality of answers to part (b) was mixed, with some candidates offering no or inadequate explanations for their answers. Only a few candidates were able to offer a successful general argument in the case of part (c); some simply gave an example of a relation satisfying the properties mentioned in the question.

Q. 2. (100 answers – 40.1%)

Most candidates were able to add quotations marks to attain true sentences in part (a), although this was often not accompanied with sufficient explanation. Part (b) was seldom well done. Many candidates were tripped up by the occurrence of ‘unless’ in the conclusion, incorrectly formalizing it with a single or double arrow to attain an invalid L_1 -argument. Partial truth-tables were seldom correct and often poorly presented. Candidates frequently omitted noting points of interest and difficulty, with only a very few remarking on the ambiguous pronouns in the second sentence or the modal vocabulary in the third.

Q. 3. (66 answers – 26.5%)

Save for near universally correct answers to (b.vi), the incomplete truth-tables in part (b) were of variable quality. Many candidates took ‘obligatory’ to be synonymous with ‘necessary’. Most candidates produced a correct incomplete truth table for ‘because’ in part (c), but many were unable to explain clearly how it could be used to demonstrate the validity of the argument. The best answers demonstrated how the standard truth-table methods for establishing validity could be applied to the case in hand.

Q. 4. (71 answers – 28.5%)

In part (a), almost all candidates offered near perfect proofs for (i) and (ii), and struggled with (iii). Part (b) was usually well done.

Q. 5. (37 answers – 14.8%)

Few candidates were able to give a full and correct definition of an L_2 structure. In part (e), candidates were usually able to determine the truth-values of the sentences in the structure correctly, but not always able to explain their answers clearly. Only a few demonstrated complete mastery of the semantics of quantifiers in L_2 .

Q. 6. (44 answers – 17.6%)

In part (a), almost all candidates appreciated that ‘x’, ‘y’ and ‘z’ cannot occur as bound variables in idiomatic English sentences. Answers to (ii) and (iii), however, often fell very wide of ‘Any one or two things are both parts of something’ and ‘Exactly one thing has everything as a part’ respectively. Part (b) attracted some very poor answers. Some candidates attempting this question were unable to carry out elementary formalizations in predicate logic, failing even to correctly formalize either disambiguation of (i). Few deployed the Russellian analysis in (iv).

Q. 7. (9 answers – 3.6%)

This question was usually answered well by the small minority who attempted it.

SECTION B: GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

8. “There are obviously different levels of ‘justification’. And as long as we use the term to mean ‘justification sufficient for knowledge’, there can be no objection to defining knowledge as justified true belief.” Discuss.

(84 answers) The most popular question, and generally quite well done (with over 70 answers spread between mid-2:2 and low first), apparently because it fitted fairly closely to standard material on the definition of “knowledge” – a strong contrast with last year’s question on the topic which demanded more reflective consideration of that material. One distinctive issue raised here is whether a level of “justification sufficient for knowledge” can be defined without making it impossible for such a “justified” belief to be false (on pain of refutation by Gettier considerations). Several of the best answers found externalism a promising way of dealing with this, since (for example) if P is false, then there cannot be an appropriate causal link between P ’s truth and the belief that P .

9. “If the things I experience behave consistently as though they are real, why should I care whether they really exist or not?”

(22 answers) Most of the answers were rather poor, attempting to force the question into familiar pigeonholes by discussing Descartes, Moore, and Putnam, and rehearsing standard moves in response. The few very good answers were distinctive in focusing on what was asked, namely: is there any sort of normative requirement here, for example an intellectual duty to seek truth, or a moral need to know whether the individuals with whom one is interacting are *really* agents with their own feelings and desires?

10. “When I catch a cricket ball, is the red ball that I see the same object as the hard ball that I feel?”

(10 answers) One of the two least popular questions (along with 11), on a consistently unpopular topic that is being dropped from next year’s syllabus. Most of the answers were mediocre and tended to respond in terms of standard “theories” of perception. One answer interpreted the question as being about primary and secondary qualities, but did a reasonable job of addressing it in those terms.

11. “Should physical properties such as mass and charge (e.g. of a proton or electron) be considered as primary qualities or secondary qualities?”

(9 answers) The least popular question, again on a consistently unpopular topic that is being dropped next year. However this was mostly well done, perhaps because candidates chose the question only if they were prepared to go beyond standard discussions of Locke into the consideration of properties of modern physics that he himself did not (of course) discuss. Mass and charge seem to be *fundamental* qualities that ground physical explanations, but nevertheless *dispositional*, and not plausibly *resemblances* of our ideas of them. Hence Locke’s various criteria for the distinction between primary and secondary qualities are forced apart, requiring critical consideration of the basis and potential value of his distinction.

12. “Is there any good reason to be sceptical about induction?”

(73 answers) A lot of moderately good answers (close to the 2:1/2:2 borderline), but also a fair amount of first class and a long tail – there were far more third class marks on this question than on any other. The poor answers tended largely to ignore the question in favour of trotting out familiar stuff without justifying its relevance: Russell’s chicken, for example (which is surely a joke rather than a weighty point against the reasonableness of induction), and Goodman (who many interpreted wrongly as implying that something’s being “grue” requires a change of colour at time *t*). The best answers – as usual – focused on the question, which gave plenty of opportunity to introduce relatively familiar material, for example by discussing what constitutes a good reason (where Strawson is relevant); what it is to be “sceptical” (an issue addressed by Hume); and what resources might be available to provide a good reason for, or against, such scepticism (including the various attempts to justify induction inductively, pragmatically, or by appeal to probability).

13. “Could a robot be free?”

(46 answers) Generally well done, with a lot of answers in the mid-2:1 to first class range, and few below mid-2:2 (but including a couple of fails). Poor answers tended to assume very crude views of computer software (e.g. as incapable of complex multi-level processing leading to any conclusion not explicitly foreseen in advance by the programmer), or at the other extreme, took for granted that any relevant robot would have to be self-conscious in some rich experiential sense – almost a duplicate human – thus getting into the realms of far-fetched science fiction. The best answers used the question as an opportunity to distinguish between different aspects of *human* thought that are often run together in discussions of free will: on the one hand the complex information processing that computers can plausibly implement, and on the other hand, the phenomenological experiences (including felt desires) that they cannot. Much human thought and action takes place without any obvious conscious activity, so if computers are judged incapable of free action for lack of consciousness, this plausibly has consequences also for human freedom. The good answers to this question left the impression that pondering the potential of (informationally sophisticated but non-self-conscious) robots was a very useful stimulus for thinking about free will beyond the boundaries of the familiar and rather hackneyed debates.

14. “Could my thinking continue in the absence of my brain – for example after I die and my body is cremated?”

(35 answers) A fairly even spread of answers between low 2:2 and low first class. The question avoided any mention of Descartes, so it was disappointing to find such a high proportion of candidates rehearsing standard material about his arguments and the problems of interaction etc. Better answers made a point of justifying the discussion of Cartesian dualism, by first arguing that this would be necessary for my thinking to continue beyond cremation. The best also addressed the question as a scientific issue rather than just philosophical theory: is it really plausible, given what we know from the biological and medical sciences, that thinking can continue independently of the brain? Here our experience of the effects of brain damage is clearly relevant, and also the overwhelming evidence for evolution: how well does the hypothesis of immaterial substance fit with that, and what evolutionary purpose would be served by the complex (and biologically expensive) brain we have, if it is quite unnecessary for our thought?

15. “What, if anything, can science-fiction thought experiments teach us about personal identity?”

(58 answers) The answers to this question had the highest average mark (and lowest standard deviation), with most falling in the mid-2:1 to low first class range. The familiar gamut of brain-switching, teleporting, and fission thought experiments were rehearsed, with the poorer answers simply reporting an opinion on what could be learned from them. The better answers engaged critically with the implied query of whether pondering such science-fiction scenarios can actually teach us *anything* about personal identity in the real world. A number of these, for example, made the point that our criteria of personal identity seem to be *open-textured*, meaning that their application potentially becomes problematic if we reject the real-world assumptions on which they depend. As with question 14, it is dubious to consider this as a purely “armchair” philosophical issue, as though it were completely independent of our scientific knowledge of the world.

SECTION C: MORAL PHILOSOPHY

General remarks

Overall, the quality of the scripts was reasonably high considering that the vast majority of students would have done very little (if at all) philosophy prior to coming to Oxford. I do have a few general comments on writing/essay style. First, a number of candidates wrote overlong introductions, at the expense of sustained argument in the main body of the essay. A few sentences to set the stage should suffice. Second, some candidates made extensive use of rhetorical questions, such as: ‘Is it not the case that Mill, etc.’ Well, no – or not necessarily: rhetoric cannot and should not take the place of sustained argument. Third, far too many candidates expressed their views as feelings (‘I feel that Mill is wrong when he writes that...’) Philosophy involves *thinking*, not *feeling*, and this should be reflected in the way in which students express themselves. Fourth, some candidates wrote in an overly familiar, not particularly academic way – for example, ‘the competent judge is in a pickle’, or ‘this is hard to swallow.’ This is *not* appropriate for an academic essay: students should learn to familiarise themselves with, and properly use, different registers of language.

Before providing comments on each of the questions, two points are worth making. First, it is worth noting that, overall, the most straightforward questions (e.g. on Mill’s conception of happiness) were done competently; questions which did not follow *Utilitarianism* and/or lecture notes closely, and thus required that students think more independently, were done either very well, or very badly. Second, candidates tended to use very well known examples (the case of Haydn and the oyster being the most obvious one – see below) to illustrate their points. I would encourage them to devise their own examples, if only to show that they have properly understood those points and are not just mechanistically repeating what they have read.

1. ‘Mill believes that happiness is a matter of *both* quantity and quality of the pleasures. Therefore, he is not a hedonist.’ Discuss. (Q. 16. 80 answers. 32.1% ¹)

By far the most popular question. A mixed batch of answers, most of which were pretty standard: a vast number discussed Haydn v. the oysters, and/or contrasted the lower pleasure of eating chocolate and having sex with the higher pleasure of reading

¹ Percentage (rounded) of candidates who answered this question.

philosophy. Most of those who attempted the question correctly identified the apparent difficulty, for hedonism, with the distinction between higher and lower pleasures. Not all those who raised the issue of the competent judge were able clearly to show why this is relevant. Quite a few discussed the distinction between the pleasures per se (and the many problems with it) without clearly addressing it in relation to the problem of hedonism. To put the point differently: too many students used the question as a way to discuss Mill's conception of happiness in general terms, without focusing on the terms in which the question was posed.

2. 'Given that Ann will never know that her husband, Bert, is cheating on her with another woman, we cannot say that his unfaithfulness is detrimental to her wellbeing.' Discuss. (Q. 17. 18 answers. 7.2%)

This question invited candidates to reflect on different conceptions of well-being (notably, hedonistic conceptions v. e.g. objective list accounts.) Contrary to what some of the candidates thought, the aim was *not* to discuss whether Bert should confess the truth to his wife, or indeed whether he is acting wrongly, let alone whether he could possibly derive any utility from this state of affairs. Good answers made intelligent use of Nozick's experience machine, and noted that objective list accounts, while making sense of the intuition that Ann's well-being is adversely affected, are themselves beset with problems (disconnect between well-being and the agent's mental states, etc.)

3. Is Mill's proof in ch. 4 of *Utilitarianism* all which the case for Utilitarianism admits of and all that it is possible to require? (q. 18. 28 answers. 11.2%)

A standard question on the proof, which proved relatively popular though most answers were rather mechanical (review each of the steps one after the other.) A few candidates drew on chapters of *Utilitarianism* other than chapter 4, to good effect, to show that there is more to say in defence of utilitarianism than is contained in the latter chapter. The very best answers discussed the concept of a 'proof'.

4. Are the maximisation of happiness and the minimisation of pain sound criteria for the rightness and wrongness of our actions? (19a. 14 answers. 5.6%).

The question had been phrased in such a way as to allow for the deployment of a number of objections against maximisation - such as the epistemic objection (how do we know whether our actions maximise happiness) and, relatedly, the difficulties in articulating non-action-guiding criteria for rightness, or the repugnant conclusion objection, or the distributive objection. Candidates who attempted that question found it quite difficult on the whole. The best answers effectively articulated one or two of the aforementioned objections.

5. Consider the following two cases:

A. Bert kills his wealthy wife Ann, who is suffering from an excruciatingly painful and terminal illness, because (and just because) he wants to inherit her money.

B. Charlie kills his wealthy wife Denise, who is suffering from an excruciatingly

painful and terminal illness, because (and just because) he wants to end her suffering.

Is a consequentialist committed to the view that there is no moral difference between those two acts of killing? If so, would that constitute a reason for rejecting it as a moral theory?

(Q. 19b. 15 answers. 6%)

Very uneven quality of scripts. A number of those who attempted the question spent quite a lot of time discussing whether the husbands derive any utility from the killing, and relatedly whether their wives derive disutility from it. The better scripts immediately focused on the problem of motives, and their relevance for rightness/wrongness, and/or did not immediately turned the question into a discussion of *utilitarianism* (and indeed, the question was about consequentialism in general). Good scripts referred to and made use of Mill's distinction between intentions and motives. Some candidates forced a discussion of the distinction between act- and rule-utilitarianism into the question, without clearly explaining what this might be relevant. Again, candidates should beware of not focusing on the question as it is posed.

6. 'Utilitarianism says that killing one person to save five from a certain death is the right thing to do. It is too permissive a moral theory and ought to be rejected on those grounds.' Discuss. (Q. 20. 39 answers.15.7%)

A relatively popular question, with a wide range of answers both with respect to quality and content. The poorest scripts conflated the question of permissiveness with the question of demandingness. A fair numbers of answers drew a distinction between act-U and rule-U, and claimed that the former permits, while the latter does not, such acts of killing. Disappointingly, very few of those answers examined critically whether rule-U is plausible (if it is not, then it cannot rescue act-U from the permissiveness criticism.) The better scripts decomposed the question into three parts: (a) does U say that killing the one to save five is permissible? (b) Should we reject it if it does? (c) if the answer to b is 'no' might we have other reasons for rejecting it (on grounds *other than* permissiveness, in other words.) A number of candidates interestingly noted that even act-U will sometimes disallow such killing (i.e. if one takes into account the number of years lived by the various parties) or indeed sometimes will permit it and entirely plausibly (e.g. when the 1 culpably threatens the lives of the 5.) The very best scripts engaged in a critical reflection, along Kantian lines, of why it might be wrong to kill the 1.

7. 'According to utilitarians, we ought not to go to the movies or the pub, or treat ourselves to expensive holidays. Instead, we ought to give all our surplus resources to Oxfam. It is too demanding a moral theory and ought to be rejected on those grounds.' Discuss. (Q. 21. 44 answers. 17.7%)

A very popular question. A surprisingly high number of scripts launched into a discussion of Jim and the Indians, as yet another example of the putative demandingness of utilitarianism. This is as good a juncture as any at which to note that discussing an example other than the example at issue in the question is generally *not* a good idea. The weakest of those scripts did not manage to show why Jim's

predicament is similar to that of the agent who is told that he can't go to the movies; the better scripts managed adequate discussions of the problem of negative responsibility. Here too, as in the previous question, the distinction between act-U and rule-U figured rather prominently in a number of answers – same comments as above. Interesting lines of inquiry raised by the best scripts: the distinction between wrongfulness and blameworthiness; the ways in which *satisficing* utilitarianism might remain untouched by the demandingness objection; different kinds of demandingness (practical v. psychological, for example.)

8. 'No one has a moral right to our generosity or beneficence, because we are not morally bound to practice those virtues towards any given individual.' (MILL, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 5) Discuss. (Q. 22. 6 answers. 2.4%)

The least popular by far of all the questions, and the one which received the weakest answers on the whole. Two scripts did a very good job of distinguishing perfect and imperfect obligations as a first cut at the issue, and insightfully applied pressure on Mill's conceptions of charity and justice. Notwithstanding the fact that ch. 5 is the longest of the book, and central to understanding utilitarianism as a theory of the right, it appears that very few of the students who tackled that question had grasped both the distinction between those two values, how they related to the concept of a right, and why Mill's view might appear problematic.

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Peter Millican
James Studd

2. Report on INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS: The Theory and Practice of Democracy (June 2012)

There were a number of impressive scripts which showed an ability to combine comparative analysis with detailed empirical knowledge of particular institutions and political processes. Most candidates were able to display a reasonable knowledge of aspects of the political systems they were studying and to apply some of the insights of comparative politics. There were few really poor performances: no one failed this paper in PPE (although there were a small number of failures in History and Politics). The vast majority of candidates had no difficulty meeting the rubric requirements. In the very small number of cases where there was doubt about whether a candidate had complied with the rubric, the paper was re-read and double marked. This process resulted in just one candidate having a penalty for a rubric non-compliance applied. **(Under the conventions adopted in 2011 and 2012 this penalty was the deduction of 15 points from the averaged mark for the paper as a whole.)** In the case of this one candidate (where the rubric non-compliance was very clear) the penalty had the effect of costing him/her a distinction.

On Section A, as in previous years, the standard of answers for the theory questions was disappointing. Apart from a few notable exceptions, most candidates showed little direct knowledge of the classical texts, stuck to a narrow range of secondary texts and tended to regurgitate formulaic answers.

On Section B, our impression this year was that the answers were more informed by comparative approaches than previously and that candidates utilised their comparative insights even when answering single country questions. By contrast we were less convinced that candidates had any real depth of knowledge of the individual countries — a deficiency which may produce problems for optional papers later in the course. We also found the answers to the specific methodological questions weak.

Section A: Political Theory Questions

1. 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it.' (Marx) Should this be the task of political theory?

(2 takers). Both answers to this question were thoughtful and, perhaps unsurprisingly, showed more imagination than most of the other essays in terms of the texts they chose to draw on to support their respective arguments.

2. How plausible is Rousseau's idea of the general will?

(110 takers). This was by some margin, the most popular question. The best answers showed detailed textual knowledge of the *Social Contract* and whilst pointing out the obvious limitations in Rousseau's idea of the general will, also went on to demonstrate its continued relevance for contemporary democratic theory. Only one or two outstanding answers noted any links between Rousseau's republicanism and ideas of deliberative democracy. Weaker answers (the majority) showed little knowledge of the details of Rousseau's arguments and limited themselves to rejecting the idea of the general will outright.

3. Are elites compatible with democracy?

(29 takers) Better answers showed knowledge of a variety of theories of democracy and also made distinctions between different sorts of elites. Weaker answers attempted to construct an argument around the simplistic distinction between direct and representative democracy. This did not allow them to introduce much theoretical subtlety into their claims.

4. ‘Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions.’ (Democracy in America) What did Tocqueville mean by this?

(6 takers) There were not any notably weak answers here but equally there were not any outstanding ones. Candidates tended to give descriptive answers to this question but did not go on to consider the wider theoretical implications of Tocqueville’s ideas on association, civil society and democratic virtues.

5. Does social conformity undermine democratic citizenship?

(10 takers) Again, there were neither any notably strong or weak answers to this question. Most candidates tended to answer using generalities rather than connecting their argument to specific texts. There was a tendency – much more marked in subsequent questions – to rely on the negative–positive liberty distinction to answer this question. The distinction is not in itself unhelpful as an initial starting point but candidates need to show greater awareness of its limitations and also of other ways of thinking about freedom.

6. Why did Marx predict the collapse of capitalism? Why has that collapse not happened?

(47 takers) Better answers (there were a few outstanding ones) showed detailed knowledge of Marx’s arguments and showed critical sophistication in their assessment of his claim about the collapse of capitalism. Weaker answers relied on secondary interpretations of Marx and limited themselves to a purely descriptive answer. Candidates need to realise that, in most cases, they need to go beyond literal, descriptive answers and show knowledge of relevant critical debates.

7. Do capitalist societies have a dominant ideology?

(9 takers) As is often the case with the less popular questions, the standard of answers was much higher. Candidate showed an impressive knowledge of a range of works on ideology beyond just those of Marx. Their arguments were, on the whole, sophisticated and thoughtful and also marshalled interesting concrete instances to illustrate their points.

8. Is political decision-making the best indicator of who has power in a democracy?

(9 takers). Weaker candidates failed to identify the body of literature that this question alluded to (Dahl’s *Who Governs?* and associated critical responses). As a result some answers were vague and unconvincing lacking a real sense of what the question

required. A couple of candidates treated this question as a straight forwardly institutional one. Whilst institutional material may be relevant and often adds depth and specificity to a theoretical answer, it should not be used to cover up lack of knowledge of the relevant theoretical debate.

9. Given that political behaviour is often deeply irrational, what can rational choice theory tell us about it?

(5 takers) The few answers to this question were of a high standard. They displayed detailed knowledge of rational choice theory and arguments varied from a stout defence of its analytical force to conceding that it is limited in explaining political behaviour other than voting.

10. ‘Freedom is to be found in human community, not in isolation.’ Discuss.

(50 takers) This was the second of four questions (along with qs. 5, 11 and 12) in which Berlin’s positive-negative liberty distinction was uncritically deployed by many candidates to answer the question. Better answers constructed an argument around comparisons of the various classical texts included in the rubric. Most candidates made arguments that were generally in agreement with the question. A few asserted that true freedom was to be found in individual isolation but, given the nature of social being, this made it an unattainable ideal. These were bold although ultimately unconvincing arguments.

11. Would it be correct to characterize John Stuart Mill as a thinker of negative liberty?

(81 takers). One of the most popular questions. Weaker answers showed little knowledge of

On Liberty relying instead on secondary texts and tended to agree, in an unqualified fashion with the question. The majority of the candidates argued that although Mill could be characterised as a negative liberty thinker this was not uncomplicated because of ‘positive’ elements in his thought, notably those associated with his progressive view of human nature. Strong answers showed good knowledge of the text and, on the basis of an argument that it was difficult to characterise Mill as either a negative or positive liberty thinker, went on to question the limitations of the distinction itself and to suggest other ways of thinking about freedom..

12. Are state paternalism and individual freedom always incompatible?

(65 takers) Strong answers differentiated between different forms of paternalism and freedom and backed up their claims with detailed reference to writers such as Dworkin. Weaker answers maintained that paternalism was per se limiting of individual freedom and discussed this through general counterfactual scenarios rather than displaying knowledge of relevant texts and writers.

Section B: Comparative Politics Questions

13. 'If our goal is to gain comparative knowledge about political systems, then single case studies have little value.' Discuss.

(9 takers) This was a straightforward methodological question in which students were asked to evaluate the utility of single case studies. The better answers focused on ways to exploit the inferential value of cases studies, e.g. by examining within-case political change over time or by amassing rich contextual understanding of countries and polities. Weaker answers failed to address the goal specified in the quotation, which was the acquisition of authentically comparative knowledge about political systems.

14. When do the advantages of federalism outweigh its disadvantages?

(36 takers) The majority of answers addressed the goals and functions of federalism with reference to the literature, and many also provided applications to specific federal systems. The best answers had both theoretical and empirical dimensions and offered examples from more than one federal system. Few candidates acknowledged the relative paucity of federal systems in the world, and a handful of responses implied that UK devolution was equivalent to federalism.

15. How can legislatures hold executives accountable for their actions?

(69 takers) Many responses here were developed with application to the UK, with the most frequently mentioned accountability mechanisms being standing committees and PMQs. The more comparative answers often displayed an over-idealized view of the power of U.S. congressional committees, while a few of these also drew on examples from the committee system in the Bundestag. The best answers drew a causal connection between horizontal accountability and the executive format (presidential or parliamentary) while simultaneously recognising that the U.S. Congress is an outlier among legislatures in presidential systems.

16. What factors best explain variations in the numbers of political parties across party systems?

(86 takers) This was a very popular question. The best answers were careful to begin with broad theoretical approaches (e.g. institutionalism versus sociological approaches) and then break these down into their subvariants. The weaker answers displayed the usual confusion between the effective number of parties and the number of effective parties, confusing the mathematical meaning of the former with the Sartorian conception of the latter (which he was careful to label as “relevant” parties). A few candidates took this question as an opportunity to produce paired comparisons of two existing party systems while overlooking the broader theoretical and comparative implications of the question.

17. Do courts make policy?

(44 takers) The best candidates took some time to consider the roles and functions of courts in a democracy before moving on to empirical examples. Also, the strongest essays here were eclectic and diverse in their empirical coverage, with some

addressing both constitutional and subnational courts, and with some containing a few references to supranational courts as well. Some candidates focused instead to focus on specific legal cases and precedents, mostly controversial or well-trodden ones, and tried to draw very sweeping generalizations or inferences from these. Essays of this type got lost in the jurisprudence and did not address the broader theoretical implications of the question.

18. How far can we define the characteristics of successful leadership for comparative purposes?

(12 takers) This question elicited few responses, but those who answered it did so in diverse and sometimes idiosyncratic ways. The stronger responses here gave real attention to “comparative purposes”, although very few candidates seemed to take the definitional goal of the question very seriously. Also, some candidates failed to notice that the question was about “successful” leadership and proceeded to discuss leadership as a generic category.

19. Why do some authoritarian regimes liberalise their political systems?

(1 taker) Candidates steered away from this question in droves.

20. Why do parliamentary democracies last longer than presidential democracies?

(8 takers) The question presented candidates with an empirical fact and asked them to account for it. While candidates were clearly able to rehearse conventional arguments about the differences between presidential and parliamentary systems and the greater tendency of presidential democracies to break down, they had a very hard time providing any insight about how presidential democracy works outside the United States. Unfortunately for them the historical experience of the United States is at odds with the premise of the question.

21. Assess the impact of Germany’s constitutional court on the country’s political life.

(14 takers) The question was designed to probe the impact of the German Constitutional Court on the character of the political system in terms constitutional relationships, individual rights and the wider political culture. The best candidates were able to do this although some just contented themselves with a description of the Court and a few examples of its power.

22. How stable is the German party system?

(6 takers) Most answers described the German party system in outline and noted the appearance of newer parties (the Greens and Die Linke) without trying to explain either why the changes had occurred or whether further instability might occur in future. Only a few candidates tried to analyse the system in terms of ideology, competitiveness or electoral support.

23. The Thatcher and Blair premierships underlined the importance of maintaining a functioning cabinet system.’ Discuss.

(15 takers) This question was designed to get candidates to evaluate the merits and demerits of strong prime ministerial leadership and the extent to which neglecting orthodox cabinet government has consequences for governance (e.g. poll tax, Iraq) and the prime ministers themselves. Too many candidates focussed on the “presidential” styles of Thatcher and Blair without exploring the reasons for that style and its effects on wider political processes.

24. Has the decline of the British Parliament been halted?

(59 takers) This question attracted rather general answers which often read like answers to a different essay question on the constitution. Candidates were quite thus quite effective at identifying why Parliament as an institution might have declined (in terms largely of an erosion of sovereignty rather than influence within the British polity) but less effective at explaining why it might be argued that the decline had been halted. Only a few candidates showed any knowledge of the extent to which Parliament itself had promoted procedural reforms to try to improve its effectiveness and very few explored factors linking the authority of parliament factors such as public trust.

25. ‘An illogical hybrid.’ Assess this comment on the constitution of the Fifth French Republic.

(58 takers) Most candidates were able to demonstrate sound and detailed knowledge of the circumstances of the French Fifth Republic’s constitutional creation and most went on to give their views on its effectiveness. Few linked this analysis to any discussion of the perceived advantages and drawbacks of parliamentary or presidential government for France at this juncture or evaluated the logic of the semi-presidential model of executive power as it operates in France.

26. How far is ideology still at the core of French party divisions?

(19 takers) The question was designed to probe understanding of the evolution of the foundations of party competition in France. Candidates were mostly able to offer a description of the parties and party competition but very few seemed able or willing to link that description to broader changes in the role of ideology, party programmes and electoral alignment.

27. Why do American presidents find it so hard to govern effectively?

(87 takers) This question produced a range of reasonably competent answers which tended to concentrate on the constitutional constraints on a president especially potential conflict with Congress. The best answers brought in other difficulties and constraints including the problems of managing the executive branch, policy challenges and the expectations of the American electorate.

28. What accounts for the power and influence of the American Supreme Court?

(44 takers) The better answers to this question tried to analyse why the Court had remained powerful in the American political system and explored issues of legitimacy and agenda-setting as well as noting the controversy that sometimes surrounded the Court and its decisions. They also gave good illustrations of the breadth of the Court's impact on American society. Weaker answers simply identified the Court's power with the existence of the Constitution and the power of judicial review.

SUMMARY OF POLITICS RESULTS

(data only for the 248 candidates who sat the paper on 20.06.2012)

<i>Question</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>N Responses</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>Popularity</i>
1	goals of political theory	2	54.5	17.7	27
2	Rousseau general will	110	61.7	6.5	1
3	elites & democracy	29	59.5	7.9	14
4	Tocqueville/religion	6	59.8	4.9	24
5	social conformity	10	57.5	9.2	19
6	Marx on capitalism	47	62.1	7.3	10
7	capitalist ideology	9	64.2	6.2	20
8	power in a democracy	9	55.3	11.3	21
9	rational choice theory	5	66.4	2.4	26
10	freedom & community	50	61.3	6.4	9
11	Mill & negative liberty	81	62.5	5.1	4
12	paternalism/freedom	65	60.5	6.8	6
13	case study comparisons	9	66.4	5.8	22
14	federalism	36	66.6	8.1	13
15	executives accountable	69	60.2	7.8	5
16	number of parties	86	59.6	8.3	3
17	courts make policy	44	63.9	6.8	11
18	define leadership	12	57.0	6.6	18
19	dictators liberalize	1	68.0	--	28
20	parl. vs. presidentialism	8	64.8	8.2	23
21	German const. court	14	60.1	10.5	17
22	German party system	6	63.2	8.0	25
23	UK cabinet govt.	15	56.5	6.4	16
24	UK parliament decline	59	62.0	7.2	7
25	French 5th Republic	58	63.6	6.1	8
26	French party ideologies	19	61.4	8.7	15
27	U.S. presidency	87	59.6	6.7	2
28	U.S. Supreme Court	44	60.1	8.6	12
Totals	All essays (4 x 248)	992	61.3	7.3	--

Lois McNay
Gillian Peele
Tim

Power

3. Report on INTRODUCTORY ECONOMICS (June 2012)

The *Introductory Economics* paper was taken by 383 candidates (250 PPE, 94 E&M, 15 H&E, 24 E(M)EM).

There was wide variation in the overall quality of scripts. The best candidates obtained marks over 70 on every question. Weaker candidates struggled with Part A questions but most were nevertheless able to produce a satisfactory essay. In Part A it was typically the parts of questions that required *economic* thinking and explanation that were least well done: almost all candidates were able to carry out standard calculations such as determining an MRS or maximising profit. Less familiar calculations also caused difficulty to weaker candidates.

Almost all candidates could have benefited from better examination technique. Diagrams are often carelessly drawn and not properly labelled. In the sub-parts of Part A questions, answers should be **justified and explained clearly**, rather than simply stated. Candidates with good economic insight sometimes think that an answer is obvious, so lose marks for not providing a fuller explanation. It is often worth adding a comment on a mathematical result, even if the question does not specifically ask for one: candidates can demonstrate the depth of their understanding, and intuition can partially compensate for mistakes or failure to obtain a complete answer.

It is always better to write something rather than nothing. Candidates who are struggling with parts of part A questions can gain some credit for making an attempt, mentioning relevant points, or explaining how they would go about solving a problem even if they can't actually do it. There is no point crossing out an answer to a question or part-question unless you have an alternative to substitute for it, since you cannot then get any marks at all - some candidates did this when the answer was in fact correct.

1. **Production Technologies** 30% of candidates [28,31,27,42]²

This was the least popular Part A question and the least well done. Many candidates did not realise in part (i) that capital and labour were perfectly substitutable in the *Bits* technology. Typically, candidates attempted to determine the cost of producing *Bits* in part (ii) by solving a cost minimisation problem by the Lagrangian method, not realising that they should be looking for a corner solution. This hindered answers to several subsequent parts of the question. When marking the question, the examiners agreed to make an allowance for its difficulty.

2. **Labour supply** 77% of candidates [77,77,73,88]

This was the most popular Part A question; there were a few very good answers, and most candidates were able to make some progress. Part (ii) required clear diagrams and explanations of income and substitution effects: these were of disappointingly low quality. A complete answer of part (ii) also required candidates to use the fact that income effects on the demand for leisure were zero due to quasi-linear preferences. Most candidates were able to carry out the mathematical steps in parts (iii) and (iv). It was relatively straightforward to obtain the critical value of the tax rate t , but very few candidates explained *why* agents would not work when $t > 3/4$, or provided a good diagram of the corner solution at 16 hours of leisure occurring than in this case, so it was not clear that they understood what they done. Where candidates made appropriate extra comments – for example on the form of the labour supply function

² Percentage of [PPE, E&M, H&E, E(M)EM] candidates who answered the question.

in part (iv) – credit was given for these. In part (v) some credit was given to those who attempted a trial-and-error method rather than differentiating total tax revenue; however those who took this approach often did so unsystematically.

3. **Cournot Model** 56% of candidates [54,60,67,58]

In part (i) most candidates understood how price, total quantity, consumer surplus and total surplus would compare with the monopoly outcome. Few could provide a good explanation for the total quantity being higher in Cournot equilibrium. The reaction function was generally derived successfully, as was the equilibrium – although the rationale for the determination of the equilibrium was often unclear. Diagrams were poor: a significant minority of candidates thought that the requirement to indicate the monopoly output meant that the axes should be price and quantity rather than the two quantities. Another common mistake was to label Alpha's reaction function as Beta's and vice versa.

In part (iii) most candidates had reasonably good intuition for the effect of a fall in Alpha's marginal cost, but fewer were able to provide the appropriate diagram showing a parallel outward shift of Alpha's reaction function or a clear explanation for the rise in total output. All that was required in part (iii)c was a recognition that if Beta did not know about the investment it could not be expected to set the new lower equilibrium output level; some candidates argued that Alpha needed to maintain secrecy to prevent copying, despite the explicit instruction to assume that copying could not occur.

4. **Classical Model** 40% of candidates [42,40,47,21]

This question was essentially “bookwork”: an opportunity to explain the classical macroeconomic model as done in the lecture slides and textbook. Some candidates started badly by ignoring the specification of a fixed supply of labour, assuming instead that it was upward-sloping. In part (ii) a fall in taxes increases disposable income and consumption and therefore *decreases* saving: a common mistake was to say that total saving increases when income rises – this is not the case because aggregate income Y is constant. Most candidates did not distinguish between private and public saving, although this would have helped them to understand the relevant effects (private saving rises if $mpc < 1$, but by less than the fall in public saving).

For part (iii), it was necessary to recognise that the fall in K decreases the marginal product of labour and hence the wage, and affects the interest rate through the fall in output and (with marginal propensity to consume less than 1) hence saving. Few candidates understood this. Part (iv) was reasonable well done, although some candidates jumped to the Mundell-Fleming model instead of the open economy extension of the classical model. Similarly in part (v) the quantity theory of money rather than ISLM was the appropriate framework. (This could be presented in an AS-AD diagram if it was made clear that the quantity theory was the foundation for AD.) For part (iv), candidates generally understood that this is a long-run model in the sense that prices are flexible, but tended not to say anything about the model's predictions for the effects of policy. Very few mentioned that stocks of capital and labour are fixed.

5. **ISLM** 38% of candidates [43,29,33,17]

This question was less popular than ISLM questions on previous papers, perhaps because of two differences: an algebraic solution for IS was required in part (i), and part (iii) required a discussion of data. In part (i) some candidates were unable to solve for IS, but had a reasonably intuitive understanding of the effects of the marginal tax rate on the multiplier; others used an appropriate algebraic approach, but made mistakes and did not notice that their answers were counter-intuitive. Few candidates related their answers diagrammatically to the slope and shifts of IS. Some were confused by the specification of the investment function, having made the inappropriate assumption that the constant I_r was positive. Most candidates could do part (ii)a, but very few understood in (ii)b that money demand depends on the *nominal* interest rate, which means that in an ISLM diagram with the real interest rate on the vertical axis the change in price expectations shifts LM upwards. (Some candidates assumed expected deflation would lead to actual deflation and hence a downward shift of LM.)

The data show a steady decrease in unemployment to quite low levels by 1963 and an acceleration of inflation from levels averaging around 2% up to 8.6%. Money growth is accelerating and rapid; interest rates are falling (especially in real terms) and investment rises. It looks as though Italy was experiencing a demand driven boom spurred by expansionary monetary policy. An outward shift of the LM and/or AD curve would be consistent with this development. In 1963-4 the expansionary monetary policy seems to have been reversed, reversing the decline in real interest rates, unemployment, etc. Credit was given for all reasonable observations, and most candidates were able to gain some marks here, even those who had given poor answers to parts (i) and (ii). However some ignored the instruction to use IS-LM and AS-AD models in the answer.

6. **Demand for Money** 58% of candidates [56,61,53,75]

Answers to this question were generally of poor quality. Not all candidates could clearly identify a transactions (medium of exchange) motive and a portfolio (store of value) motive. (The role of money as a unit of account is not a motive for holding it.) Most were aware of the Fisher equation; however in the answers to part (iii) it was evident that very few candidates understood that it is the *nominal* rather than real interest rate that is the opportunity cost of holding (real) money. Another common mistake was to confuse the money-holding decision – holding wealth in the form of money or bonds – with the decision on saving vs consumption.

Part (iii) essentially required an explanation for adopting a demand-for-money function of the form $M/P=L(Y,i)$; some candidates instead stated that demand for money has this form, and *deduced* that it therefore depended on income. In part (iv) candidates were generally able to derive the optimal $C = \sqrt{\frac{2WY}{r}}$, but not to determine the elasticities or the LM-curve; some nevertheless succeeded in answering the last part of the question, on the cost of withdrawals, intuitively rather than algebraically.

7. **Monopoly and Perfect Competition** 22% of candidates [23,15,27,42]

A good answer to this question required candidates to establish clearly the assumptions and predictions of the two models before addressing the specific issue raised in the question; there were some poor answers omitting the details of the models and consisting only of rambling arguments. One effective approach was to present the two models as the extremes of a continuum, with monopolistic competition as an intermediate case; other good answers focused on the contrasting predictions of the two models for efficiency and surplus, and the implications for policy.

8. **Welfare Theorems** 26% of candidates [30,19,13,21]

This was a relatively straightforward and popular question: there were a few very good answers, and a lot of mediocre ones. A full answer required an explanation of *both* theorems; some avoided this and instead wrote almost exclusively about externalities as a counter-example to the statement. It was evident that many candidates do not understand that it is *price-taking* that underlies the result of the first theorem: a very common misconception is that competitive equilibrium must be efficient because if MRSs were not equal agents would trade with each other until they were.

9. **Trade Policy** 16% of candidates [16,21,13,8]

Most candidates understood that protectionist measures increase net exports at any given real exchange rate and real income level, although not all made this explicit. In general candidates had a good grasp of the Mundell-Fleming model and were able to apply it, discussing both floating and fixed exchange rates; however most did not consider what would happen in the long run. Few answers mentioned the possibility of retaliation, or the welfare loss from trade restriction.

10. **Discretionary Fiscal Policy** 35% of candidates [31,45,47,29]

This was the most popular Part B question. Candidates identified a variety of cases in which fiscal policy would be ineffective: partial crowding out of investment in the ISLM model; full crowding out in AS-AD in the long-run; full crowding out of net exports in the Mundell-Fleming model with capital mobility and flexible exchange rates; Ricardian equivalence. Often they failed to clarify the differing assumptions underlying these cases, and the relationships between them. Relatively few candidates were able to identify clearly circumstances under which fiscal policy would be effective. Some contrasted discretionary policy with automatic stabilisation, and/or fiscal with monetary policy. Discussions of debt sustainability were disappointing: the dependence of the evolution of the debt/GDP ratio on the interest rate minus the growth rate (discussed in lectures) was hardly mentioned.

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