

Knowledge and Reality Exam Feedback

The following was compiled by the two markers (Paul Broadbent and Naomi Thompson) and myself, Nikk Effingham, as moderator and module convenor.

Notable Issues With All Questions

Handwriting: At least 8 scripts were noted as being incredibly difficult to read. 1 script was illegible (thereby receiving a mark of zero, and a note was passed to the exam's officer concerning this). Instructions were passed by me to the PGAs to the effect that no great effort should be to decipher handwriting. Students are responsible for ensuring that their scripts can be read.

Answering with material not asked: Particularly in the metaphysics section, where there was no question this year on the topic of 'Time', students nevertheless wrote about Taylor and analogies between time and space (often for the question on paradoxes, but sometimes for the question on material constitution). In the vast majority of these cases, the student received a mark of 0. It would be inappropriate for students to revise just one answer and turn up to the exam, provide that answer with no regard to what questions were asked, and expect to get credit. Hence, a 0 is justified. In a smaller minority of cases some attempt was made to link the Taylor stuff up to arguments for the impossibility of motion. Whilst these received credit, as there is very little to link up, they received low marks. I hypothesise that this failure to even understand what the topic was a result of the laughably low attendance at lectures and seminars.

Ignoring the demand to stick to one line of argument: Throughout this module, for reasons explained in the 4th and 5th lecture of semester one, we tend to ask you for breadth not depth. Lots of students, when asked to evaluate one line of argument or one response, would evaluate many. This was both pointless, in that it didn't answer the question and so the extraneous material was ignored, and counterproductive, as obviously students who cannot read a question and follow its instructions are to be graded poorly with regards to those students who can read a question and follow its instructions.

Question One: How many boxes should you open if you played the box game described in Newcomb's paradox?

Quite a few students failed to get even the basics down:, and some didn't even manage to explain the box setup itself (common mistakes included thinking that it was random whether or not there would be money in box B). Many answers failed to explain the justification for one, or both, of the two responses given in the lecture. Barely anyone tried to go beyond the basic material in the lecture, and so there were many 2:2s. . A fair number of students talked about the prisoner's dilemma in their answers, which was largely irrelevant to the question.

Question Two: Evaluate a solution to the Problem of Other Minds.

Most students who attempted this question received marks at a 2.1 or 2.2 level. There was a tendency to talk about more than one position in a way that was superfluous given the question (for instance, where we would want students to use other positions effectively to criticise the one they had chosen to evaluate, this did not happen). Many of those who mentioned behaviourism also mentioned Wittgenstein's private language argument, which was generally well understood.

There was also a concern that there was little 'evaluation' but a lot of 'explanation'. These things are not the same.

Question Three: Evaluate a response to scepticism*

Very few students attempted this question, but those who did generally did very well. There were (fortunately, as it is mainly irrelevant) few links to HPA material. Almost all students who attempted the question relayed only the material from lecture notes.

Question Four: Given that you are currently sitting on a chair, are you also sitting on a distinct object that exactly occupies the same place?

A fair number of students attempted this, though there was some confusion about what the numerically distinct object occupying the same place as the chair might be (more than one, for example, thought it might be themselves, and some believed that they were chairs in any case(?)). The marks for this question ranged from fails to high firsts.

Answers were often quite poorly structured (people seemed to love explaining every position, and evaluating none of them. Pretty foolish), but many students correctly identified the different positions in the debate and responded to them. Most had a couple of paragraphs talking about nihilism, which should have been ruled out given that the question stipulated that there was (at least) a chair (again: one must read the question!).

Question Five: Describe and evaluate one argument for the impossibility of motion.

Most that attempted this managed to get the basic paradox down. Very, very few got any further than that. There was a tendency to interpret the question as being about time (specifically the Taylor paper about the analogies between time and space). Nobody who answered the question with reference to Taylor did so very effectively (to do so would have been very impressive) and most were completely off the mark.

Two or three students answered the question with reference to Zeno's paradoxes, and did reasonably well.

Question Six: Can you know what it is like to be a dolphin? What does that answer indicate about property dualism?

There was a broad range of marks awarded for this question. The argument involved (from not knowing what it is like to be a dolphin to property dualism) is fairly complicated, and so many students made errors in recounting it. Few attempted to respond to the Nagelian argument, though many talked about physicalism and what a physicalist might say about the dolphin case. There was a common error where students thought that property dualists were best able to explain how we *can* know what it is like to be a dolphin, and that this provided support for property dualism over physicalism. They seemed to assume that the task at hand was to explain which theory best enabled us to know what it was like to be a dolphin, and that property dualists were in the lead.

Whilst few students wrote exclusively about substance dualism, a fairly large proportion spent time discussing substance dualism as well as property dualism, both failing to relate it to the question and ignoring multiple statements given in lectures that substance dualism was not to be covered in the examination, and was largely irrelevant except for background setting.

* Because of an error in my notes, the actual exam question may vary slightly from that given here.