

---

# A-LEVEL PHILOSOPHY

7172/2 Paper 2 The metaphysics of God and the metaphysics of mind  
Report on the Examination

---

7172/2  
June 2023

---

Version: 1.0

---

---

Further copies of this Report are available from [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2023 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.  
AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

## Introduction

What follows is a question-by-question commentary on some of the trends in performance of students on component 7172/2: Metaphysics of God and Metaphysics of Mind. In the course of this commentary, reference is made to student responses, the question paper, the assessment objectives, the Specification and associated readings, and the Mark Scheme. In producing this report, the observations of the lead examiner have been supplemented by the evidence provided by senior examiners and their team members. The reference year for the purposes of awarding is 2019, the inaugural year for this reformed specification, but the qualitative point of comparison will be Summer 2022, the first full series since the end of the pandemic. All statistical data should be treated as provisional, but it will not change significantly given the weight of quantitative data already collected.

## Summary Findings

On the basis of the data collected at the time of writing this report, the (mean) average continues to hover at 50%, and is currently marginally up on 2022. The qualitative judgements of examiners would support this statistical indication, which is best accounted for by an improvement at the higher and middle range of performance.

On the basis of the mean average, students performed better this year on the Metaphysics of God than on the Metaphysics of Mind on all question types; last year, students performed better on the Metaphysics of Mind on all but one question type (the essay). There is evidence of higher performance on the essay questions this year: more students accessed the top band of marks (21-25) on both themes compared with 2019 and 2022. More and more students are engaging AO2 earlier and more consistently in their essays, whereby the strengths and weakness of positions are identified, with supporting reasons given on an ongoing basis. Some students continue to use Mark Scheme language designed to help examiners identify evaluation (the 'weight' given to arguments, how 'crucial' certain arguments are, and how 'robustly' they are arguing), but with little or no evidence that this is what the students are actually doing. But on the whole we find that students are professing in the key skills necessary to answer these essay questions: taking and sustaining a position in relation to the specific question; stating arguments clearly, correctly and in detail; presenting counter argument(s), and where possible responses to those counters; producing brief, evaluative, integrated summary judgements throughout the essay, and an overall summary judgement in the conclusion.

One general observation made by examiners this year, echoing 2022, centred on a perceived decline in the quality of handwriting. There are always illegible scripts escalated to senior examiners, but this has been more pronounced in the last two years. This was most apparent in the essays, and it impacted students at all levels. Students can only be credited for material that examiners can read, and it remains a concern that some students are not fulfilling their potential because of the clarity of their written communication.

## Assessment Objectives:

**AO1:** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the core concepts and methods of philosophy, including through the use of philosophical analysis.

**AO2:** Analyse and evaluate philosophical argument to form reasoned judgements.

## Section A: Metaphysics of God

### 01: What does Swinburne mean by 'temporal order/regularity' in his design argument? [3 marks]

This question assessed students' ability to recall and explain a specific concept developed by Swinburne in his design argument (testing AO1 only). Student did very well, with over 65% of them earning at least 2 marks.

Over 37% of students were awarded maximum marks for connecting 'temporal order' with 'regularities of succession' or the 'laws of nature', which 'regulate events and behaviours in time / the universe'. Some students explained the concept by way of a comparison with 'spatial order'. Swinburne himself does just that in the relevant article in the Specification, and so long as students clearly understood the difference, that approach was perfectly acceptable. Some students connected 'temporal order' with 'personal explanation' (human or divine), and noted that this functioned as part of 'Swinburne's a posteriori, inductive teleological argument for the existence of God'. These additions were not necessary for the full 3 marks, but they are clearly relevant and correct.

Where students lost a mark, it tended to be because there was some lack of clarity in the distinction with spatial order, and/or there was some conflation with fine tuning arguments (the latter are of course related but different design arguments). Sometimes Swinburne's argument was presented (implicitly or explicitly) as deductive.

Where students were only able to score 1 mark, this it was usually because they just managed to associate 'temporal order' with the 'order of the universe' and/or with 'personal agency', but this was not connected to the other substantive features of Swinburne's design argument.

Where students attempted but failed to score any marks (over 14%) it was typically because they were only able to offer generic remarks about design arguments, and were unable to pick out anything distinctive in Swinburne's version. There were often straightforward confusions with spatial order, sometimes complete with Paley's watch analogy.

### 02: Outline Norman Malcolm's ontological argument. [5 marks]

This question assessed students' ability to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding (AO1) of one of the ontological arguments on the Specification. Although there have been many questions on ontological arguments in previous series, this is the first one on Malcolm's specifically. In terms of the mean average (just under half marks) it was the most challenging 5-mark question on the exam. And students found it harder to score marks on this question than the corresponding one last year (on Hume's design argument). More students did not attempt this question - or otherwise failed to score marks - than on any other 5-mark question on the paper (over 15%). Having said that, over 50% student got at least 3 marks. More students were awarded 4 marks for this question than any of the other 5-mark items, but fewer converted this to maximum marks.

Almost one third of students were able to recall and lay out an argument with some of the more complex and distinctive aspects of Malcolm's version (eg its 'modal' nature, understanding 'necessary existence as a predicate/perfection', the 'conceptual coherence of God') but omitted the major premise from which God's perfections (including necessity) were derived: there was no fundamental conception of God as the bedrock on which to develop the relevant steps in reasoning. Those students who did access 5 marks were able to deduce God's relevant perfections from Malcolm's conception of God as an 'infinite' or 'unlimited' being, or they could

simply take over Anselm's conception (Malcolm's initial starting point in the relevant article on the Specification, where he reinterprets the argument(s) in the Proslogion): 'a being greater than which nothing can be conceived'. Some students knew the text well and gave the background for Malcolm's intervention to defend the ontological arguments from modern objections (especially Kant's).

Lower down the performance scale (3 marks), but still showing commendable knowledge and understanding, students captured the substantive content of the argument: showing how, for Malcolm, God's existence is either possible (and necessary) or impossible, and because God's existence is indeed possible, God's existence is therefore necessary.

Those accessing 1 or 2 marks showed some generic knowledge about ontological arguments with a more or less reasonable attempt to connect this to the specifics of Malcolm's version (eg 'God's necessity'). Because of the importance of 'necessary existence' in Malcolm's argument, there were a number of conflation with cosmological arguments from contingency within these response at the lower end of the performance scale.

**03: Explain how Ayer's verification principle challenges the status of religious language. [5 marks]**

This item required students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding (AO1) of Ayer's famous verification principle and its implications for the status of religious language. On every measure the students answered this exceptionally well: not only did they do better on this question than the corresponding item on the paper last year (on Russell and the 'fallacy of composition' response to cosmological arguments), they did better on this than on any 5-mark question in the last two assessment series.

Over 23% of students scored maximum marks. They typically did so by explaining Ayer's principle as part of a general (cognitive) approach to meaning, whereby language is only meaningful if statements are analytically true or empirically verifiable. Some students included 'mathematics' within the analytic (which was true to Ayer's intentions in *Language, Truth and Logic*), although some seemed to be separating this out as a different category. Given the controversial classification of mathematics (acknowledged by Ayer himself) students were not penalised for this so long as their account of the verification principle did the same work as Ayer's at the level of testing for meaningful discourse, and in so far as it was correctly applied to religious language specifically. So, because religious statements such as 'God loves humankind' are neither true by definition (or via mathematical demonstration), nor can they be proven by sense experience, then they are not meaningful claims. Some of the best students developed their explanation in terms of the problematic 'metaphysical character of religious language' and/or the 'failure of ontological arguments' to establish existential facts, which prevents them from qualifying as 'truth apt'. Some explained how the verification principle impacts religious language when stated in its weak form, in its strong form, or both. It wasn't necessary to go into this level of detail, however, and most did not. Students falling short of full marks may have presented the verification principle as if it was developed only for the purposes of discrediting religious language, but otherwise gave a precise outline; or, conversely, the general logic of the argument was well understood but the application to religious language specifically was not as precise and full.

Students on 3 marks captured the substantive content of the challenge posed by Ayer: the verification principle, with its twofold test (analytical and empirical), rendered religious language meaningless. But there may have been imprecisions and/or a lack of development on one or both aspects of the principle. At different levels of performance there were occasional slips into the language of 'falsification'. Sometimes this was a passing reference which only marginally detracted from the answer.

Lower down the performance scale (2 marks) students were able to outline the principle but nothing more; or they were able to note that religious language was ‘meaningless’ on Ayer’s account but the logic of the explanation wasn’t clear. Sometimes ‘verification’ and ‘falsification’ were used interchangeably, and in some cases the arguments were blurred with those of Flew. Occasionally students answered the question with reference to ‘moral language’ rather than religious.

Responses at the bottom (1 mark) typically contained fragments of relevant material: references to concepts such as ‘analytic’, ‘tautology’, and ‘meaning/meaningless’, in relation to ‘religious language’, but nothing more.

**04:** Outline what it means to say that God is supremely good (omnibenevolent) **and** explain how the Euthyphro dilemma challenges this attribute. **[12 marks]**

This question required a more expansive demonstration of philosophical knowledge, understanding and analysis (AO1), whereby students were required to outline ‘what it means to say that God is supremely good (omnibenevolent)’, and then explain how an ancient ‘dilemma’ – originally created by Plato in a polytheistic context where the concern was with the relationship between piety and the gods – has been utilised as a critique of omnibenevolence (or supreme goodness) attributed to the God of classical theism.

On average students found it easier to score marks on this question than on the corresponding question in 2022, when the focus was on religious language. This year students averaged over half marks with the majority of students awarded at least 7. Where students did not succeed as well as last year was at the very highest end, with fewer students accessing the top band (10-12).

There are two main reasons why students fell short of the top band (although over 12% did achieve this): (1) many students had very little to say at all on the first part of the question, on God’s supreme goodness; and more significantly, (2) students could not sustain focus on the problem that the Euthyphro dilemma poses for God’s omnibenevolence, as opposed to God’s omnipotence. The latter did get some credit, because it is relevant to the Euthyphro dilemma as it is often presented. But only those students who were made to show how both horns of the dilemma pose a problem for God’s supreme goodness accessed the top band. These high performing students addressed the first part of the question in various ways: understanding God’s goodness in ‘personal and moral’ terms, and in terms of ‘what God is or is not able to do as a morally perfect being’; in terms drawn from sacred scripture (mainly the Bible); and in metaphysical terms. These were all acceptable approaches. Some were very sophisticated and drew on Augustinian, Neo-Platonic and Thomistic ideas about goodness. But they were rare. The Euthyphro dilemma was often framed in the form of a question, whereby neither of the candidate answers seem satisfactory from a theistic perspective. Although very few students unpacked the nature of a ‘dilemma’ in general.

The majority of students were able to access the 7-9 band on the strength of a brief but correct account of God’s omnibenevolence (‘all-loving’), and a clear and detailed treatment of one horn of the dilemma: almost invariably the horn which seems to render morality an arbitrary matter (sometimes explicit reference was made to ‘divine command ethics’ as an approach to morality which implies precisely this). This was often vividly illustrated with references to seemingly immoral acts God might command (‘killing babies’ proved popular), if morality is utterly dependent on God’s will and humankind must simply accept this, or with examples of acts that God has in fact commanded in sacred scriptures (eg sending the ‘great flood’ in the Book of Genesis). But these same students were often unable to show why the other horn of the dilemma indicates to some

that there must be a moral standard which is independent from (and higher than) God, thereby driving a metaphysical or moral wedge between God and the essence of moral goodness and/or the truth maker of moral claims.

Students in the 4-6 band sometimes offered brief but accurate comments on the nature of God's supreme goodness. They often framed the dilemma in terms of whether God creates morality or subscribes to it, which was a reasonable approach, but this may have been followed by treating just one horn of the dilemma and omitting the other altogether when it came to discussing its implications.

Students in the 1-3 band offered brief remarks on God's goodness, sometimes within the context of a longer list of God's attributes. Others only managed to repeat the key terms in the question when it came to outlining what it means to call God 'supremely good (omnibenevolent)', while showing some fragmentary knowledge of the Euthyphro dilemma. At this lower end of performance there were, perhaps not surprisingly, some confusions with the problem of evil.

**Question 05: Does the cosmological argument prove that God exists? [25 marks]**

The question (testing AO1 and AO2) invited a discussion of a classic family of arguments for the existence of God: the cosmological argument. The mean average was lower than last year, due in large part to an increase in the number of marks at the very lower end: even the weakest students last year tended to know something about the problem of evil (in general or in one of its major forms), and to be able to make a judgement about it. This year, students at the lower end found it harder to show as much relevant knowledge and understanding. Almost 3% of students failed to answer the question at all, or were unable to produce scoring responses. Further up the performance scale, the picture was very different.

A higher proportion of students than ever got into the top two bands (16-20 and 21-25): over a quarter of students scored at least 16 marks. Those students tended to discuss at least three cosmological arguments, sometimes six: the Kalām (sometimes with good knowledge of Al-Ghazali's original version and/or Craig's modern development of it; the first three of Aquinas's Five Ways; Descartes's causal argument (an extension of the Trademark argument), and Leibniz's argument from the principle sufficient reason. This breadth of material was not necessary, however, and some students got lost in the range of arguments, when a more focussed approach would have served them better.

There were examples of students accessing the top band with an examination of just two versions of the argument, but they did so in detail with a sustained and integrated series of arguments, counter argument, and responses. Most students argued that the cosmological argument did not prove the existence of God, but there were good examples of students arguing in their favour, too. All of the higher scoring versions were able to make reasoned judgements about stronger and weaker versions of the arguments. Students often identified Aquinas's Third Way and Leibniz's argument from the principle of sufficient reason as the strongest, because (it was suggested) they avoided some of the issues with arguments focussing specifically on causation, temporal infinities, and because 'necessity is a divine attribute' and can be connected with 'eternity' and therefore the God of classical theism, in a way that the causal arguments cannot. There was some excellent discussion of possible v actual infinities (abstract and mathematical infinities, physical infinities, divine infinities) and the significance of those for cosmological arguments. Likewise, with the difference between metaphysical necessity and logical necessity (with reference to Hume, Russell, and their critics). Students operating at this higher level of the assessment scale were sometimes able to distinguish between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' versions of cosmological arguments, and use them in a creative way to evaluate their relative merits. In particular, this served students well in

their consideration of the merits of Aquinas's arguments. In terms of counter arguments, some of the best essays utilised Mackie very effectively in relation to Aquinas's rejection of the possibility of an infinite regress.

Students in the top two bands were more likely to draw on the distinction between 'deductive and inductive' versions of the arguments, and use this in a consistent and systematic way in their analysis, rather than just mention the logical forms of these arguments in passing. Some argued that if we take 'prove' to refer to the certainty achieved with sound deductive arguments, then cosmological arguments all fail. But if we take them as inductive, some are 'strong and the existence of God (or at least a first cause) is more likely than not'.

The band that students accessed most frequently was the 11-15 band. At this (and indeed higher) levels, students often began by distinguishing between arguments from causation and arguments from contingency. The 'inductive' or 'deductive' forms of arguments were often raised, but this was rarely a consistent consideration in the analysis. Where a distinction between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' versions was attempted this was rarely well explained, and not consistently utilised in evaluation (see below). Like higher scoring responses, these essays tended to have a clear position, indicated at the outset along with their intended discriminations between the strengths of the various arguments identified for discussion.

Where these responses fell short of the higher marks was that arguments were not always presented on their strongest terms, especially but not only the Kalām, which despite its simplicity was subject to a very wide range of presentations. Some students presented Al-Ghazali as a proto-deist, or someone with no interest in or arguments for 'the divine nature of the first cause'. And the counter arguments by students in this range were not always as well integrated with the arguments supposedly under consideration: eg Aquinas's Second Way would be presented as a vertical demonstration (ie an argument for a 'first/primary sustaining efficient cause'), but the criticisms would presuppose a horizontal (temporal) argument focussed on the 'beginning of the universe'. Or the 'fallacy of composition' would be used as a response to Descartes's Trademark argument or Aquinas's First Way in a manner that seemed forced and failed to respond directly to the features of the arguments just outlined. Nevertheless, there was sometimes very impressive detail in knowledge and understanding in this range of marks on the assessment scale: for example, Aquinas's argument from motion/change would be explained using relevant (technical) philosophical language, with 'potentiality and actuality' correctly defined and appropriately illustrated.

Hume was used at all levels of performance as a major critic of cosmological argument, and sometimes these arguments were very well executed indeed: eg the problem of 'arguing from a single case', and the 'conceivability (and therefore possibility) of something coming into being without a cause'. More students seem aware of Anscombe's notable response to Hume on the conceivability of events/beginnings in the absence of causes, although they rarely explained her arguments in any detail. Evidence from the 'behaviour of particles' in the quantum world was often used effectively here in relation to (seemingly) uncaused events/beginnings. The complexities of interpreting this data about subatomic particles were rarely acknowledged or questioned. Sometimes students wrote at length about the problem of induction, with reference to Hume and his general sceptical arguments concerning the 'metaphysical' as opposed to 'psychological' status of causation. Often the latter was offered up as the deathblow for all cosmological arguments. This worked best when students focussed on deductive and casual version of the cosmological argument, where the introduction of reasonable doubt into a premise can be fatal. This was less effective where students insisted on presenting all the arguments as 'inductive' and Hume's sceptical position on causation was treated as if it were just a well-established principle in philosophy that can reasonably be used to refute any argument with causal assumptions (rather



like 'Hume's folk', which also featured frequently as a test of the premises and conclusions of arguments). Russell's 'fallacy of composition' criticism was often used very effectively as a critique of arguments from contingency, sometimes supplemented by his counter proposal that the universe could just be 'a brute fact'.

Lower down the assessment scale (6-10) there were more profound confusions of the different arguments. Some students produced outlines of cosmological arguments which seemed to combine elements of at least three different versions: Aquinas's arguments would be an obvious case in point, but they were by no means the only ones. Arguments ostensibly from contingency, by Leibniz and others, would often morph into temporal arguments for the necessity of a 'beginning' (and therefore a first cause) 'of the universe'. In short, answers in this band tended to present arguments in weak / inaccurate forms. In terms of salience of subject matter, while questioning the nature of a 'first cause' is clearly relevant to a discussion of any theistic proof (cosmological arguments included), extended treatments of the 'problem of evil' did little to show that students were able to engage with the question, especially when this surfaced before the prospects of any 'first cause' argument had been thoroughly examined. Moreover, if students do want to focus on the nature/attributes of God when examining these arguments, they should be sure to unpack the term 'God' as they understand it for the purposes of the essay, rather than presuppose its meaning.

At the bottom of the performance scale, some students were able to offer general definitions of the cosmological argument, sometimes outlining one specific example, but not within the context of complete essays with any credit worthy evaluation. Sometimes an essay was structurally complete, with a position taken, but the content would be so limited in scope and accuracy, it could not advance beyond the 1-5 band. There were sometimes confusions with the design argument, and occasionally the ontological argument.

At various levels on performance, certainly up to the top of the 11-15 band (probably higher) students would sometimes try to show an element of balance or open mindedness in their conclusion by leaving the door open to other theistic proofs in light of the failure of cosmological arguments (teleological and ontological arguments both featured in this content). Some of these alternatives were stated to be 'better' or 'more promising'. It is fine to acknowledge these alternatives, but students should be careful which ones they chose, as it makes little sense to indicate support for arguments which they already seem to have closed down. For example, if 'necessary beings are impossible', and 'matters of fact cannot be demonstrated a priori', what hope for ontological arguments? And if 'the existence of evil proves that the cause of the universe cannot be God', what hope for design arguments? It is better to be definitive on the specific argument under discussion than open up alternatives which may be inconsistent with the prior discussion. Once again, clearly defining what is meant by 'God' may help those students who might (quite reasonably) want greater flexibility and nuance in the positions they take up in these essays.

## **Section B: Metaphysics of Mind**

### **06: What are phenomenal properties? [3 marks]**

This question (testing AO1 only) required students to explain an important concept in the philosophy of mind. On average students found it harder to score marks on this question than the corresponding question on the paper last year (on 'philosophical zombies'), but over 56% scored at least 2 marks.

Students who got to 3 marks (almost 30%) could do so in a number of ways. Perhaps the most common was to define ‘phenomenal properties’ in terms of ‘qualia’ (which was the topic in 2019): eg ‘The intrinsic, non-intentional and non-representational properties of conscious mental states’. Students were not penalised for redundancy if they associated this position with forms of dualism, or noted that the definition is contested with some physicalists denying their very existence. But it would be mistaken to claim that phenomenal properties are exclusive to dualism or denied by all physicalists.

Responses awarded 2 marks often defined phenomenal properties as the ‘what it is like’ of mental states, but lacked the precision and explanatory fullness of those awarded full marks. Sometimes there was blurring and confusion with ‘intentional states’. It was open to students to say that even intentional states have phenomenal properties, but where there was clear conflation of the concepts, students did not reach full marks.

Responses awarded 1 mark identified fragments of (potentially) correct accounts of phenomenal properties: usually centring on ‘subjective’ or ‘individual experiences’. There was often some confusion between ‘phenomenal properties as properties of the mind / mental states’ (which is of course essential to the concept), and phenomenal properties as ‘properties of the objects that minds perceive’. In this context, there were sometimes redundant and confused attempts to link phenomenal properties to the ‘primary and secondary quality’ distinction.

Just under 20% of students failed to score any marks for this question, and more than twice as many did not even attempt this question compared with Question 01. Attempted but non-scoring answers often wrote exclusively about ‘properties of objects’. Some response approached ‘phenomenal’ in terms of the mind being in some sense ‘exceptional’, but they were not able to generate anything of philosophical relevance.

**07: Explain how substance dualism and property dualism differ. [5 marks]**

This question (testing AO1) required students to give an account of the differences between the two major forms of dualism. On average students found it easier to score marks on this question than on the corresponding question on the exam last year (on the ‘inverted qualia’ objection to functionalism), and over 62% accessed at least 3 marks.

Students were able to access 3 marks with correct definitions of both positions, which left the differences implicit. Those students who advanced beyond that level were more precise and developed in their focus on the differences. For example, the ontological differences, and the potential (or lack thereof) for the independent existence of a unified conscious mind/self (possible for substance dualists, not for property dualists). Some connected each position to famous arguments in their favour: eg the ‘indivisibility argument’ (substance dualism), and the ‘philosophical zombie argument’ (property dualism). This wasn’t necessary, but it was relevant and filled out the answer with appropriate knowledge content. Where students might have been penalised for redundancy is on those rare occasions when they would start evaluating those arguments, and the essential point of the question was lost.

Students seemed less secure on property dualism, which is one of the reasons fewer students scored full marks than we might have hoped (nearly 11%). The best responses would not only note a distinction between ‘mental and physical properties’ within ‘a physical substance’, but they were clear that those properties were ‘nonphysical and did not (logically/necessarily) supervene on the physical’. It was fine for students to take epiphenomenalist dualism as an example, and develop a difference in terms of causal interaction: ‘two-way interaction between the mental and physical for

substance dualism'; one-way interaction between the physical and the mental for property dualism'. But property dualism does not presuppose epiphenomenalism, whereas some students presented this as essential to the position.

At the lower end of the assessment scale students performed relatively well: in the sense that more students attempted and were able to access at least some marks than on any other 5-mark question on the paper (over 96%). This was typically due to having a vague grasp of one of the two positions (usually 1 mark for something on substance dualism). Sometimes a couple of credit worthy points were made, usually one on substance dualism, and there was an imprecise/incomplete attempt to sketch a definition of property dualism (2 marks).

**08: Explain the issue that 'Super-Spartans' pose for 'hard' behaviourism. [5 marks]**

This question (testing AO1) required students to explain a problem facing 'hard behaviourism', and the issue posed by 'Super-Spartans'. This item provides an interesting point of comparison with the corresponding question on the 2022 exam, which concerned the problem posed to behaviourism by the 'asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of other people's mental states'. Students did considerably better this year, with over 70% of responses awarded at least 3 marks, which made this the second highest scoring 5-mark question this year.

Those students awarded maximum marks understood hard behaviourism, sometimes defined precisely along the lines of the Specification: 'Hard behaviourism is the view that all propositions about mental states can be reduced to propositions that exclusively use the language of physics to talk about bodily states/movements'. They explained what a 'Super-Spartan' is, often framing it explicitly as a thought experiment devised by Putnam to challenge the reductionist project of behaviourism. Some students stuck with 'Super-Spartans', and that was fine to access full marks (almost 17% did). Others developed the argument in terms of 'Super-Super-Spartans'. What was important was to show how this conceivable (and therefore metaphysically possible) scenario - whereby a race of creatures 'experience pain but show no behavioural evidence of this qualia' - counts against the claim that 'propositions about mental states cannot be reduced without loss of meaning to propositions about behaviour' (and ultimately the language of physics). Where students lost out on marks (scoring 4), it tended to be because their responses lacked precise and consistent focus on the linguistic dimension of the issues involved.

Those students who accessed 3 marks had at least a basic understanding of hard behaviourism, but it tended to be generic. Sometimes there was blurring with soft behaviourism and 'behavioural dispositions'. These students knew what a 'Super-Spartan' was, but they framed the critical issues in terms of the irreducibility of mental states to behaviours, omitting the linguistic dimension to a greater or lesser extent.

Students accessing 1 or 2 marks would usually do so on the basis of more or less effective definitions of hard behaviourism and/or Super Spartans, but the logic of the issue posed for the former by the latter was just not clear. The language of 'multiple realisability' was sometimes applied to the issues at this lower end of the assessment scale, but it was not clear how exactly students were using the term in this context.

**09: Explain the 'problem of other minds' facing dualism and the response that the existence of other minds is the best hypothesis. [12 marks]**

This question constituted a more wide-ranging test of AO1, requiring students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and analysis with respect to a classic problem faced by dualism (that of 'other minds') and the response that 'the existence of other minds is the best hypothesis'. On

average students found it marginally harder to score marks on this question compared with last year's Question 09 (on the 'knowledge/Mary' argument for property dualism and the 'acquittance knowledge' response). And like last year, the main challenge for students was with the second part of the question.

Almost 59% of students scored at least 6 marks. They were able to score well on the first part of the question by showing knowledge and understanding of dualism (usually substance dualism), and how the question of the existence of other minds actually arises from this 'non-physical' conception of mind which prioritises the 'first person perspective'. The best went further in stating exactly why it was a problem: eg the threat of solipsism and why that is unattractive; explanatory deficiencies; counter intuitive implications etc.

When it came to the second part of the question, the response students gave was often straightforwardly confused with Mill's argument from analogy, where the starting point is the first person certainty of the existence of at least one mind (our own). Students who did this well could still access the 7-9 band if they had a clear and correct account of the problem of other minds. Moreover, where students built this analogy into a more wide-ranging case for why the existence of other minds as indeed 'the best hypothesis', they could still access the full range of marks. But in order to do so, it was essential that they also showed knowledge and understanding of the most relevant argument for the existence of other minds for this specific question: 'the third person argument' whereby mind functions as a theoretical (hypothesised) entity, which 'explains a range of empirical (behavioural) phenomena' better than its competitors. And almost 13% of students were able to do this. The most relevant philosophical language was utilised by these students, too: this argument was said to be 'abductive' or inductive', concerned with the relative strength and probability of an explanation not its certainty.

Students who only accessed the 4-6 band sometimes only scored marks on the first part of the question. Some students framed the response in terms of what is more psychologically congenial to believe, rather than what is more evidentially compelling. The importance of 'Ockham's razor' was appealed to at all levels of response, usually adding little or nothing to the answer: the 'simplicity' of the 'best hypothesis' response was frequently asserted, but there were few successful attempts to show where the simplicity lay. This tendency was most apparent in the lower bands. Some students at this level also blurred the problem of the existence of other minds (or our knowledge of their existence) with issues which arise around the 'variation of mental states' between subjects (eg qualia) and 'multiple realisability'.

At the lower end of performance, 1-3 band, students were often able to make a few points on dualism, and refer to some relevant concepts concerning the problem (eg 'introspection') but they were very limited in detail, and produced little or nothing that was credit worthy on the response beyond repeating the phrasing in the question itself.

#### **10: Does mind-brain type identity theory give the right account of mental states? [25 marks]**

This question (engaging AO1 and AO2) tested students' ability to assess the merits of one of the physicalist positions on the specification: mind-brain type identity theory (MBTIT). Compared with questions on eliminative materialism (2019 and 2022), students performed better at every level. Students were better able to answer the specific question this year rather than discuss and juxtapose a range of theories of mind (although see below). They generally showed a good grasp of MBTIT as 'a physicalist theory of mind', which is 'ontologically (not analytically) reductive'. Few students reflected on the type dimension of the theory, unless they had cause to contrast this with token versions of identity theory. There were relatively few references to Smart and his seminal

arguments, with limited evidence of students' familiarity with the relevant text from the Specification. It was the theory, in general terms, that was front and centre in the discussions rather than the arguments of specific proponents, but the knowledge and understanding was largely sound and reliable.

Over 23% of students accessed the 16-20 band or higher: a record for Metaphysics of Mind. And more responses were awarded a mark in the top band (21-25) than the corresponding question in 2022 (over 7%). These high-scoring responses were sometimes produced by those who knew something about Smart's own arguments and the rationale for his resistance 'nomological danglers', clearing the ground for his 'physicalist arguments' driven by a commitment to 'Ockham's razor' and 'ontological reduction'. The strength of MBTIT was tested against a range of criticism. Some of those came from arguments from a dualist stance which can be utilised against any form of physicalism (eg arguments from 'indivisibility', 'conceivability', the 'zombie argument', the 'knowledge/Mary argument'). Others were specifically targeted at MBTIT, such as arguments centring on the 'multiple realisability' of mental states, with reference to variations with a species and between species. There were different versions of the 'location problem', with the best drawing on Leibniz's principle of the 'indiscernibility of identicals', and focussing on the logical disconnect between 'the location of brain states in physical space' (an empirically demonstratable fact) and any similar attempt to 'map thoughts in spatial terms (eg the distance between a belief and a sensation)'. In so far as mental states lack the properties of spatial location, they cannot be identifiable with brain states. Responses to the location problem challenged the 'question begging' nature of this argument, insisting that in so far as brain states are shown, empirically, to be identical to mental states, then this should disabuse us of our philosophical prejudices and 'common-sense intuitions'. The 'zombie' and 'knowledge/Mary' arguments were often rigorously evaluated, and many students thought that mind brain type identity theory could respond effectively to them. The best consistently integrated these anti-physicalist arguments with the specific physicalist theory under consideration: keeping MBTIT in focus throughout.

For most students, including at the top end of the assessment scale, 'multiple realisability' seemed to be the fatal argument for mind brain type identity theory, despite more or less successful responses. Some turned to ('more successful') token versions of identity theory to address these issues. The latter were often supported by arguments in favour of identity theories in so far as they are 'supported by neuroscience', and are consistent with so much that we now know about the mind/brain relation: including evidence from head injuries, strokes, mood altering drugs, mental illnesses and their treatment. The challenge of 'accounting for intentionality and qualia' also featured as decisive considerations for some in these high scoring answers, but less frequently so. Sometimes what separated answers in the 21-25 band from those in 16-20 was: (1) the aforementioned ability to maintain focus on MBTIT when critiquing physicalism; and (2) being able to defend their position on MBTIT against objections at every point in the argument. For example, where 'multiple realisability' was decisive, it was acknowledged that the identity theorist can qualify their position and acknowledge 'species specific types of brain state which are identical with types of mental state'. The student would then show why this reply is not satisfactory.

Although more students were able to produce scoring answers this year than last, the number of low scoring answers was still high. Over 6% of students failed to score, typically because they offered no answer at all. Those students who were unable to get beyond the bottom scoring band (1-5) simply summarised (with limited accuracy) all the other theories on the specification, expressing an opinion in favour of one. Others were mostly incoherent discussions of case studies of people who have suffered brain injuries or experienced other neural changes, which could of course be relevant, but no clear philosophical points / arguments were drawn out from them. There were also some confusions with eliminative materialism, whereby MBTIT was presented as 'rejecting the existence of mental states in favour of brain states'. Further up the assessment scale,

---

answers in the 6-10 band were more likely to effectively juxtapose MBTIT with forms of dualism, with credit worthy evaluation from those students critiquing the physicalist dimension, and responding to those criticisms. Others would hone straight in on the problem of multiple realisability (the ‘sentience of the octopus’ as a species certainly made an impression on students), but the nature of and rationale for MBTIT as a position in the philosophy of mind wasn’t especially clear.

The most frequently accessed band this year was the 11-15 range. Here students tended to discuss a range of relevant arguments, often in detail. One quite common strategy would be to defend the physicalist dimension of MBTIT while rejecting its distinctive features. That worked for students up to a point. There were impressive discussions of the relative strength of MBTIT over dualist positions, for example: Ockham’s razor was used effectively in this instance; and issues around mental-physical interaction, arising from substance dualism, were said to be overcome. But with some of these responses, the focus became so skewed towards whether or not – for example - there were ‘satisfactory physicalist responses to the knowledge/Mary argument’ that the strengths and weaknesses of the specific theory named in the question got lost. These students were also less likely to consider possible replies to objections raised against the distinctive claims of MBTIT, so it was hard to say their arguments / conclusions were ‘robustly defended’. But there were definite improvements this year in two key areas: (1) the quality of relevant knowledge and understanding; and (2) the ability to make reasoned judgements when assigning weight to particular arguments. This helps to explain why the average score improved and a higher proportion of students were pulled into the 11-15 band and beyond.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.