

PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

Answers and Frequently Made Mistakes

Midterm – October 2022

General remarks:

- This exam was, it turned out, difficult. This means that the average grade for this exam was relatively low. I see a few reasons for this. First of all, I was absent due to COVID at the start of the course and you had to make do with video-lectures, which is always sub-optimal. Perhaps due to this, there was also /some confusion about the formulation of question 1 although, interestingly, grades for this question were not lower than for the others. For all these reasons, and with an eye on the curve, grades have been corrected by +0,7 point. This means the final grade for the test was the weighted average of the partial grades for questions 1 (30%), 2 (30%) and 3 (40%), plus 0,7.
- The point distributions mentioned below are indications: grading is not an exact-mathematical exercise
- General indication of partial grades: what can I improve? (NB: this applies especially to the longer question 3)
 - *Insufficient (< 5,5)*
 - Either crucial/essential elements are missing from this answer, or the quality of writing is substandard to a degree that essential information is not understandable enough. Find the solution in studying more and in more detail for the exam, and/or seeking help with writing
 - *Sufficient (5,5 < 7)*
 - Usually these answers contain the minimal/essential information, but either not very well/clearly written or not very thoroughly explained. Two possible solutions: do you write neatly and clearly? Is your story logically constructed, do you use paragraphs, are your sentences clear and error-free? If so: are you going too quickly? Do you perhaps *mention* the right things but forget to explain in depth what they mean?
 - *Good (7 < 8,5)*
 - All minimal/essential information is explained clearly. Here you can look for improvement either in further depth (can I be more detailed or more complete in my answers?) or in independence: have I primarily reproduced the material neatly as it was handed to me, or can I show that I have an independent and critical grasp of the material? Is the order of the information determined by the order in the lectures or do I reconstruct the information independently?
 - *Excellent (8,5 < 10)*
 - These answers contain more than the minimal, display an independent grasp of the material, and are well written. Differences (say, between 9 and 9,5) will be in details, but not in your approach. You don't have to change anything structurally: keep up the good work!

1. In the Protagoras, Socrates argues that virtue cannot be taught. Explain why this standpoint is in line with Socrates' views on the role of knowledge in upbringing/education (*paideia*).

Point distribution: This question was interpreted in different ways. For this reason, it is not possible to give a single strict answer-model. Points have been awarded for different kinds of explanation depending on the strategy of the answer. They have therefore partly been awarded based on the criteria below, but also partly for the general quality of explanation.

The thought behind this question was to compare Socrates' claim in the *Protagoras* that virtue cannot be taught, on the one hand, with what Socrates says about knowledge and education in the texts on the line and the cave from the *Politeia*. Some of you did this. Others discussed only the *Protagoras*. Others wondered whether the question should have been on Plato rather than Socrates. I understand this thought insofar as the slides on *paideia* were on Plato, but everything discussed in this context (and the relevant texts you read) was based on Socratic dialogues and what Socrates says in them. In that sense, the distinction between Plato and Socrates was not relevant for his question.

Having said that, points were awarded for the following elements:

- It was possible but not necessary to explain Socrates' claim that was given in the question (that virtue cannot be taught) with reference to Socrates' arguments in the *Protagoras*. There, he gives two:
 - o Virtue ('being good') knows no specialists (unlike painting or playing the flute)
 - o Often those who are good cannot transfer this
- A good answer to his question requires at least an explanation of these three elements: (1) virtue or the good; (2) knowledge; (3) upbringing/education. A good answer will at least have to explain why being good is no technique; why knowledge is no possession and why education is not the transfer of knowledge.
 - o Virtue/the good
 - Through his questioning Socrates continually emphasizes the difference between good things or opinions of the good or definitions of the good on the one hand, and the good 'itself' on the other
 - The good itself is an intrinsic norm (it is not good *for* something else)
 - o Knowledge (of the good)/wisdom
 - The good transcends the visible; insight into the good can only be intellectual
 - The good also transcends intellectual or scientific formulae or definitions
 - Because the good cannot coincide with given opinions or definitions, knowledge of the good is no possession; the good is object not of a having but of a striving
 - o Upbringing/education
 - If true knowledge is not possessed, then education cannot be transfer of knowledge, and upbringing no accumulation of knowledge
 - Instead education is described as "turning around" or learning to "direct" of the soul
 - This turning around consists of turning away from appearance, thus introduces insight into the difference between appearance and truth (between opinion and knowledge, between good things and the good itself)
 - This is not a progressive but rather a regressive movement to the extent that through Socrates' questioning former certainties are unmasked as mere

unfounded opinions (Socrates is wise because he knows only that he does not know)

- Conclusion:
 - o Because education is a turning around of the soul in which one learns the difference between opinions about the good and the good itself, and because knowledge of the good itself can only be a striving, education cannot be the transfer of knowledge. This is in line with Socrates' claim that virtue cannot be taught: there is no transferable method or technique for becoming good or wise.

Points of attention/frequently made mistakes:

- Often, ambiguous expressions were used but not explained. For example: "knowledge of the good" (what this is, is precisely the question); "attaining the good" (what does attaining mean in this context?).
- "According to Plato we cannot know the good". We saw this a lot but without further clarification it cannot be true. Plato was not a sceptic. It *can* be correct, but needs qualification: "According to Plato, we cannot know the good *in the way that* trees or mathematical insights are known" is an example of a correct answer.
- Many interpreted the claim that virtue cannot be taught as: you can only become virtuous on your own. This is not in line with the text: in the cave we see a painful process that requires force and that people cannot want or be able to attain by themselves, and in the dialogues Socrates is always the instigator: true wisdom is attained dialectically, i.e. through the critical testing of opinions. This is Socrates' role as the one who irritates and paralyzes.
- Some interpreted virtue not being taught as: no one can learn to be good, either in the sense of everyone already being good, or in the sense that one's goodness depends on innate qualities one may or may not have. Unless heavily qualified through Plato's theory of knowledge as remembrance, this is untrue. Even though Socrates' interlocutors are not taught virtue by him, they nevertheless go through a development towards wisdom.
- Socrates' argument in *Protagoras* that everyone may speak in politics was often misconstrued. For example as: in politics it does not matter who advises because everyone is endowed with reason (this definitely does matter). Or as: one does not require education to speak to matters of virtue (same problem). Or: if virtue cannot be taught one cannot distinguish between better or worse in matters of politics (yes one can).

2. According to Hobbes, civilization reorganizes already existing forces. Explain what this means and why Rousseau disagrees.

Distribution of points: This question was more straightforward and therefore has a more unambiguous answer-model and points distribution. Roughly: 4 possible points for the explanation of Hobbes, 4 possible points for the explanation of Rousseau; 2 possible points for general quality of the answer (clarity, language, structure, etc.).

Hobbes:

- "Already existing" refers to the "state of nature": an imagined state of humanity without civilization or society
- What does this state look like?
 - o Human beings have relatively equal capacities
 - o Human beings have relatively equal needs:
 - "Competition for gain"

- “Diffidence for safety”
 - “Glory for reputation”
- Because of this relative equality the state of nature is a “war of all against all”
- How does civilization reorganize these already existing forces?
 - Competition is still present in economics and politics, the state still guarantees security, the arts satisfy the desire for reputation; i.e. civilization does not essentially alter the needs of human beings
- What is the nature of this reorganization?
 - Civilization is the way human beings survive in nature
 - Civilization is a self-fulfilling dynamic: it creates time for development that is absent in the state of nature, creating conditions for further civilization

Rousseau:

- Rousseau disagrees with the claim that civilization merely reorganizes already existing forces because civilization creates a qualitatively new state of humanity
 - In Rousseau’s state of nature
 - Humans are free and independent
 - Humans satisfy natural needs / necessities behoeften / noodzaak
 - There is healthy self-love (*amour de soi*)
 - Civilization transforms this condition:
 - A life of freedom becomes a life of advantages, a life of independence becomes one of mutual dependence/extortion
 - Satisfaction of natural needs becomes satisfaction of unnatural desires
 - Healthy self-love becomes unhealthy competitive egoism (*amour propre*)

Points of attention/frequently made mistakes:

- With this question people arrived at the correct conclusion fairly easily but the quality of explanation varied considerably. For example: many cited Hobbes’ “war of all against all” but neglected to state why that war exists, hindering the answer to the question. Moreover, this obscured the status of the state of nature (as thought experiment rather than empirical condition)
- Some remarked about the reorganization of society that the war is kept in check by a sovereign ruler, but neglected to show how for example competition is retained in e.g. the economy.
- Many wrote that man is good in the state of nature according to Rousseau, or that Rousseau has a different conception of human nature or the state of nature than Hobbes, which is true, but does not suffice to explain why Rousseau disagrees with civilization as reorganization
- Some wrote that there is no scarcity in the state of nature according to Rousseau but not according to Hobbes, but failed to explain why (i.e. the increase of artificial desires)

3. The third proposition of Kant’s *Idea of a universal history on a cosmopolitical plan* states the following:

It is the will of Nature (a) that Man should owe to himself alone everything which transcends the mere mechanic constitution of his animal existence (b), and that he should

be susceptible of no other happiness or perfection than what he has created for himself, instinct apart, through his own reason (c)." (p. 2)

To which Kant adds, a bit further down:

[Nature's] purpose with Man was not that he might live in pleasure, but that [...] he might make himself worthy of living in pleasure (d). (p. 3)

Write an essay in which you explain what these quotes mean. Make sure that you pay special attention to explaining the underlined elements labeled a, b, c and d.

Distribution of points: roughly: 2 possible points for the explanation of each of the elements (a) through (d), and another 2 possible points for general quality of the answer (clarity, language, structure, etc.).

The four elements:

- a) The "will of nature"
 - Most of you correctly identified the purposiveness or teleology of nature. But the level of explanation varied:
 - Kant's natural purpose does not deny the unpredictability of human free actions but asks whether precisely through that randomness a pattern emerges on a larger scale (Kant is no determinist)
 - The natural purpose is a metaphor: Kant does not believe nature literally has a "will"; he is explicating what regularity can be found in the development of humanity
 - I saw a lot of caricatures on this point: that Kant would claim that "everything is pre-determined" or that Kant believed "everything will be alright in the end"
 - The goal of nature is a "regulative idea", not an object of knowledge but belief in it is rational. The idea is regulative in the sense that belief in the idea may expedite its arrival
 - The goal consists in the progressive development of human capacities, c.q. the progressive development of freedom
- b) "his animal existence" (also "instinct" from the next quote)
 - Many correctly identified human "inclinations", but explanations varied: these are the involuntary inclinations of human beings as natural creatures that are determined by causal natural laws
- c) "what he has created for himself, instinct apart, through his own reason"
 - Kant contrasts reason to the inclinations that humans share with other animals: reason is the capacity for freedom as autonomy (the capacity for self-legislation; not having to coincide with one's inclinations or contingently given self). Insofar as man transcends the capacities of the other animals with this kind of freedom, it is what constitutes "human dignity"
- d) "make himself worthy of living in pleasure"
 - This was clearly the hardest part. Some connected this worthiness to the aforementioned human "dignity" and depending on the explanation points were awarded for this.
 - A complete answer would address the apparent tension in the two quotes between happiness and pleasure: the first quote seems to say that a type of happiness is the

natural goal of human existence, whereas the second quote says that pleasure is not humanity's natural goal at all.

- The highest good of human beings qua natural beings is happiness as pleasure, in the sense of the satisfaction of inclinations. The highest good for human beings qua moral or free beings is being good (for Kant: acting in accordance with the moral law). According to Kant, no one will ever be able to prove that doing good is rewarded with happiness as pleasure. Human beings can at best "make themselves worthy" of pleasure by acting morally. There is no guarantee that this results in pleasure but it is rational to believe so.

Points of attention/frequently made mistakes:

- There were big differences in the quality of writing: some gave an unordered list of the 4 points. The best answers integrated the elements into a coherent and unified text.
- Many referred to Kant's conception of the *ungesellige Geselligkeit* or unsocial sociability in their answer, especially to argue that human beings are therefore unsocial and thus not happy in the sense of pleasure (or they would cite the quote that nature ordains "discord"). Depending on the explanation points were awarded for this.
- Often terms were used (or repeated from the text or the question) without sufficient explanation, like connecting "worthy" to human "dignity" without explaining what they mean; repeating that human beings make themselves worthy of pleasure without explanation; repeating that nature "wills" without qualifying that will, etc.
- Some explained human's transcendence above "animal existence" in terms of typically human achievements like clothing or security (or the related idea that "animal existence" would refer to the state of nature). This is not necessarily wrong but makes it harder to clarify the rest of the quote.
- It is not correct that Kant's unsocial sociability means that ultimately all conflicts "will have been worth it"; Kant does not normatively subordinate history to the natural purpose, nor is he a naïve optimist (in fact, he is quite pessimistic, both about the possibility of true enlightenment as well as because the natural purpose requires a contradictory political solution to which there does not seem to correspond a state of political stability)
- That pleasure is not humanity's highest goal does not mean man is condemned to be unhappy, which was sometimes suggested.
- Some interpreted the final quote as saying that pleasure is not given, and therefore must be earned by human beings through their own efforts. This misses the point, namely that pleasure as the satisfaction of inclinations is not the natural purpose of human beings at all.
- A surprising number of you boldly stated that the natural goal is pleasure, which directly contradicts the quote. Sometimes happiness was stated as the natural goal, but this would require qualification: because what distinguishes happiness from pleasure?
- A number of you took the opportunity to voice critique, especially of Kant's notion of a natural purpose. In principle, being critical is obviously a good thing, but in this particular case the criticisms were almost always detrimental to the quality of the answer. This was because the criticisms were either vague (a suggestively ironic undertone) or superficial (criticisms came at the cost of a good explanation of Kant). At this point I saw a lot of caricatures: that Kant would claim that "everything is pre-determined" or that Kant believed "everything will be alright in the end". Remember that good criticism is really only efficacious when there is first a good comprehension of what is criticized. Otherwise, it simply misses the mark.