

## ***Gobbets for Philosophy Special Subjects***

The gobbet question is designed to test a different skill from the essay questions – it is designed to test your ability to extract the relevant philosophical content from a short stretch of text. The basic format of a gobbet should be: (i) context, (ii) content, (iii) assessment.

*(i) Context.* You need to identify the argumentative context of the passage. For example, 'This passage occurs in Socrates' response to Thrasymachus' claim that the ruler properly so-called is expert in promoting his own advantage; in reply Socrates urges that all expertise aims to promote the advantage of that on which the expertise is exercised, hence the expert ruler must aim to promote, not his own advantage, but that of the subject.'

*(ii) Content.* You need to say what the specific contribution of the passage is to that argumentative context. Is it a sub-argument (in which case the steps of the argument should be set out)? Or does it introduce a distinction (in which case you should clearly state what is being distinguished from what)? Or does it introduce some key concept (in which case, you should elucidate the concept, and explain its importance for the argument)? If there are differing interpretations of the passage, you should canvas them all – don't just state your preferred one.

*(iii) Assessment.* Once you have elucidated what the content of the passage is, you need to assess that content. If the passage contains an argument, then you should say whether the argument is a good one, and identify its flaw if it is fallacious or unsound. If the passage introduces some key distinction or concept, you should say why the distinction or concept is important for the surrounding argument. If the significance of the passage goes beyond the immediate argumentative context (e.g. in introducing a concept which is important for a wider range of contexts) that wider significance should be indicated. Wider significance may be internal to the work as a whole, or may extend beyond it, for instance by relating to some theme central to the thought of the author (such as Plato's Theory of Forms or Aristotle's Categories) or to some important topic in modern philosophy.

Your primary focus in philosophy gobbets should be on argumentative and conceptual content. Details of sentence construction, vocabulary etc should be discussed only in so far as they affect that content. The same goes for the identification of persons etc named in the passage; note that where the passage is taken from a Platonic dialogue it will usually be relevant to identify the speaker(s).

It is vitally important to observe the time constraints imposed by the number of passages to be translated and commented on. Brevity, relevance and lucidity are crucial. It is especially important not to be carried away in expounding the wider significance of the passage (see above); a gobbet should not expand into an essay on the Theory of Forms, or the problem of universals, or whatever.