PHI 340 Aristotle

Metaphysics Book Theta (Θ, 9)

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Spring Semester 2005-2006

Assessment
Long Essay/Essay plus Exam

For the module web page go to the Departmental website at www.shef.ac.uk/philosophy/ and then follow the links Current students → Information for current students → Level 3 modules → PHI 340
Assessment

Two Alternative Methods of Assessment

Single philosophy students can opt to have at most one of their 3rd year philosophy modules in each semester assessed by long essay (4500-6000 words), rather than by essay plus examination. Dual philosophy students can opt to have at most one of their 3rd year modules throughout the year assessed by long essay, rather than by essay plus examination.

Further detailed information concerning notification of your intention to opt for assessment by a long essay, advisory tutorials, deadlines, penalties and format can be found in the Departmental Booklet Information for 3rd Year Students 2005-2006 (§30).

Assessment By Long Essay

If you are considering assessment by long essay for this module, you should consult with me as early as possible in the semester; and you certainly should discuss your proposed topic with me before starting any serious work on the essay.

You are required to notify the Departmental office by Monday of Week 8 (Monday 27 March) of your intention to submit a Long Essay. You will be asked to provide a title, and an A4 outline signed as having been discussed with and approved by me. No-one will be permitted to opt for assessment by Long Essay after this point.

Assessment By Essay and Exam

Topics: You are provided below with a consolidated list of essay topics and examination questions. You should pick three topics, one to write an essay on and two to prepare as examination questions. Details on submission dates, length etc for essays follow below, and in addition can be found in the Departmental Booklet Information for 3rd Year Students 2005-2006.

Important: you must not write on the same topic twice. When the examination is marked each candidate’s (anonymous) answers will be cross checked with the (anonymous) essays. If any student has repeated a topic they will receive a mark of 0 for the essay.

The intention behind providing a single list of topics from which to choose both your essay and your examination questions is to give you more choice across the topics covered in the course. Your essay is worth 50% of the final module mark, and each examination question 25%. So you should probably pick the topic you find most interesting and about which you have most to say as your essay topic, and then pick two further topics on which you have ideas for your examination questions.
**Essay:** You have to write a single essay, of 2500-4000 words, which is assessed anonymously. The essay counts for 50% of the module mark. You are therefore strongly advised to submit a preliminary draft of the essay to me. This will then be the subject of an advisory tutorial, and may also be returned (if time allows) with written comments. I will publish available tutorial times well before the end of the semester.

**The essay is due in at 4.00 pm on Thursday 4 May 2006** (Thursday of week 10).

Note that the Departmental policy on late submission penalties has changed substantially from that operated in previous years. It is important that you are aware of this.

The policy on late submission penalties now is as follows:

(a) A deduction equivalent to 3 points on the 100-point scale per day is to be made in respect of work submitted up to two days after the due deadline.

(b) A maximum grade of 40 is to be awarded in respect of work submitted between three and five days (ie one week) after the due deadline.

(c) A grade of 1 is to be awarded in respect of work submitted later than one week after the due deadline.

(d) ‘Week’ means ‘working week’, ie Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays. Thus, if the week following a deadline includes a public holiday on the Monday, five working days will be counted from the original deadline, omitting the public holiday. Similarly, ‘day’ means ‘working day’, and excludes weekends and public holidays. Note that for counting purposes ‘a day’ runs from 4.00 pm on the due date to 4.00 pm on each successive day.

For further details of Departmental policy concerning late submission penalties and extensions, see the Information for 3rd Year Students 2005-2006 booklet §29

**Examination:** The examination will be held at a time to be arranged in weeks 13-15 of the semester. Since there is a single list of topics for the essay and the examination it is inevitable that the questions are pre-released. This will enable you to prepare clearer and more well argued answers. See Information for 3rd Year Students 2005-2006 §32 for comment on the extent to which the fact that questions are pre-released is taken into account by exam markers.

Although the questions are pre-released, you will not be allowed to take prepared work into the examination, and you will have to write your answers under exam conditions. This is intended to serve as a safeguard against plagiarism.

The exam will be of **two hours** duration. You will have to answer **two** questions from the list of essay/exam questions provided below. The exam will be marked anonymously. You should not put your name on the paper, but your student registration number.
Essay and Examination Questions

1. “Let us make determinations about potentiality and fulfilment... and first about potentiality most properly so called, though it is not the most useful for what we want now; for potentiality and actuality extend more widely than those cases which are so called only in respect of change” (Metaphysics Θ 1, 1045b34-1046a2)
   Why does Aristotle spend so much of Metaphysics Θ discussing capacities for change?
   How does this discussion contribute towards the broader project of Metaphysics Θ?

2. “It is plain then that there is in a way one capacity of acting and being affected... but in another way they are different” (Metaphysics Θ 1 1046a19-22).
   What is the distinction Aristotle draws in Metaphysics Θ 1 between active and passive capacities?
   On what grounds does he make the two claims in the passage quoted about the relation between active and passive capacities?

3. What are the two distinctions Aristotle draws in Metaphysics Θ 2 first between one way and two way capacities, and second between rational and non-rational capacities?
   Are there good reasons to accept Aristotle’s claims in that chapter that any rational capacity is a two way capacity, and any non-rational capacity is a one-way capacity?

4. “There are some – such as the Megarians – who say that something is only capable when it is acting, and when it is not acting it is not capable” (Metaphysics Θ 3, 1046b29-30).
   Are there any good reasons why the Megarians should have made this claim?
   Does Aristotle provide any effective arguments against their position in Metaphysics Θ 3?

5. Aristotle provides the following test for possibility in Metaphysics Θ 3 (1047a24-26): “And this is what is possible – that for which, if the actuality of which it is said to have the capacity obtains, there will be nothing impossible.”
   What problems, if any, are raised by the application of that test?
   Does the test define a particular type of possibility?
6. “If what has been said is the possible or follows from it, it is evident that it cannot be true to say that this is possible but nevertheless it will not be, the consequence being that in this way what is impossible to be gets away” (Metaphysics Θ 4, 1047b3-6).

What claim is Aristotle putting forward in this passage?

How does he argue for the claim in the first part of Metaphysics Θ 4 (1047b3-14)?

7. Aristotle argues for the following two claims in the second half of Metaphysics Θ 4 (1047b14-30):
   
   [1] if (if A is the case then B is the case) then (if A is possible then B is possible)
   
   [2] if (if A is possible then B is possible) then (if A is the case then B is the case)

Do either of these claims seem defensible to you? Does Aristotle give any good arguments for them?

8. “With [non-rational capacities] it is necessary, whenever agent and patient approach each other so as to be capable, that the one act and the other be affected; but with [rational capacities] this is not necessary” (Metaphysics Θ 5, 1048a5-8).

What does Aristotle mean by these claims? Does he provide any arguments to support them in Metaphysics Θ 5?

9. Imagine a doctor who at the same time both wants to use her medical skill to heal her patient and use her medical skill to poison her patient.

Does what Aristotle says in Metaphysics Θ 5 about the exercise of rational capacities make the example seem problematic? Can Aristotle resolve any problems which the example might raise?

10. Does Aristotle say anything in Metaphysics Θ 6 to clarify the connection between actuality and potentiality on the one hand, and form and matter on the other?

What problems does Aristotle hope to solve by connecting those two pairs of notions? Do the solutions that he hopes for seem promising to you?

11. What is the distinction Aristotle draws in the latter part of Metaphysics Θ 6 (1048b18-35) between an actuality and a change? Is it a distinction which can be clearly drawn?
“One must determine when each thing is potentially and when not; for it is not just at any time” (*Metaphysics* Θ 7, 1048b37-1049a1)

What is the question which Aristotle is concerned with here?
Is his discussion in *Metaphysics* Θ 7 helpful in providing an answer to the question?

What does Aristotle say in *Metaphysics* Θ 8 first about the relation of actuality to potentiality *in account*; and second about the relation of actuality to potentiality *in time*?

What is the connection between his view of the relation between actuality and potentiality *in time* and his claim that “it seems impossible to be a builder if one has not built anything, or a harpist if one has not played the harp” (*Metaphysics* Θ 8, 1049b29-31)?

What does Aristotle mean in *Metaphysics* Θ 8 by *priority in substance*?

How does Aristotle argue at Θ 8, 1050a4-1050b6 that actuality is prior in substance to potentiality in the case of these four instances of the actual-potential schema: mature and immature specimens of a kind, capacity exercise and capacity possession, substance and matter, exercise and capacity?

“But indeed actuality is prior in a more proper way too. For eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things, and nothing eternal is potentially. Here is the reason” (*Metaphysics* Θ 8, 1050b6-8).

How does Aristotle seek to make this claim persuasive?

What consequences does he draw from his argument in the closing part of *Metaphysics* Θ 8?

“...the actuality is also better and more valuable than the good potentiality...”  
(*Metaphysics* Θ 9, 1051a4-5)  
“It is necessary also in the case of bad things for the end and the actuality to be worse than the potentiality” (*Metaphysics* Θ 9, 1051a15-16)

What do these claims mean?

Does Aristotle provide persuasive arguments for them in *Metaphysics* Θ 9?

What point does Aristotle intend to establish through his discussion at *Metaphysics* Θ 9, 1051a21-33 of the two examples he takes from geometry? Do you find any of his claims in this passage plausible?

“Then in connection with the incomposites, what is it to be or not to be and what is truth and falsity?” (*Metaphysics* Θ 10, 1051b17-18).

How does Aristotle answer these questions in *Metaphysics* Θ 10, 1051b17-1052a4?