BANQUE DE SUJETS

ANGLAIS / PHILOSOPHIE

SECTION EUROPÉENNE

SESSION 2019

MARLY - SARTROUVILLE

Sujet n° 1

Notions : Truth - Knowledge

Question : Why is truth so important?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

To the extent that we learn in greater detail how we are limited, and what the limits of our limitation are, we come thereby to delineate our own boundaries and thus to discern our own shape. We learn what we can and cannot do, and the sorts of effort we must make in order to accomplish what is actually possible for us. We learn our powers and our
5   vulnerabilities. (…). It defines for us the specific sort of being that we are. Thus, our recognition and understanding of our own identity arises out of, and depends integrally on, our appreciation of a reality that is definitively independent of ourselves. In other words, it arises out of and depends on our recognition that there are facts and truths over which we cannot hope to exercise direct or immediate control. If there were no such facts or truths, if
10   the world invariably and unresistingly became whatever we might like or wish it to be, we would be unable to distinguish ourselves from what is other than ourselves and we would have no sense of what in particular we ourselves are. It is only through our recognition of a world of stubbornly[1] independent reality, fact, and truth that we come both to recognize ourselves as beings distinct from others and to articulate the specific nature of our own
15   identities. How, then, can we fail to take the importance of factuality and of reality seriously? How can we fail to care about truth? We cannot.

H.G. Frankfurt, *On Truth* (1986).

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[1] Stubbornly = obstinately

Sujet n° 2

Notions : Truth - Knowledge

Question : Do we always prefer reality to fiction?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank[1], with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you
5   plug into this machine for life, preprogramming your life's experiences? If you are worried about missing out on desirable experiences, we can suppose that business enterprises have researched thoroughly the lives of many others. You can pick and choose from their large library or smorgasbord[2] of such experiences, selecting your life's experiences for, say, the next two years. After two years have passed, you will have ten minutes or ten
10 hours out of the tank[1], to select the experiences of your next two years. Of course, while in the tank[1] you won't know that you're there; you'll think it's all actually happening. Others can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so there's no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in.) Would you plug in? What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the
15 inside? (…)
Plugging into an experience machine limits us to a man-made reality, to a world no deeper or more important than that which people can construct. There is no actual contact with any deeper reality, though the experience of it can be simulated (…). We learn that something matters to us in addition to experience by imagining an experience machine
20 and then realizing that we would not use it (…). Perhaps what we desire is to live (an active verb) ourselves, in contact with reality. And this, machines cannot do for us.

R. Nozick
Anarchy, State, and Utopia (1974).

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[1] Tank : *réservoir*
[2] Smorgasboard = a large choice of

Sujet n° 3

Notions : Truth - Knowledge

Question : Can one access reality through senses?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

Only sensations and memories are truly data for our knowledge of the external world. We must exclude from our list of data not only the things that we consciously infer, but all that is obtained by inference, such as the imagined hardness of an object seen but not touched. (…) It is only for knowledge of things outside our own minds that it is necessary to regard only sensations as data.

B. Russell
Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits (1948)

In my view, signs do not intrinsically correspond to objects, independently of how those signs are employed and by whom. But a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects within the conceptual scheme of those users. 'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. Since the objects and the signs are alike internal to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what.

H. Putnam
Reason, Truth and History (1981)

Sujet n° 4

Notions : Truth - Knowledge

Question : Does knowledge consist in knowing the truth?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

It is clear that knowledge is a sub-class of true beliefs: every case of knowledge is a case of true belief, but not vice versa. It is very easy to give examples of true beliefs that are not knowledge. There is the man who looks at a clock which is not going, though he thinks it is, and who happens to look at it at the moment when it is right; this man acquires a true
5   belief as to the time of day, but cannot be said to have knowledge. There is the man who believes, truly, that the last name of the Prime Minister in 1906 began with a B, but who believes this because he thinks that Balfour was Prime Minister then, whereas in fact it was Campbell-Bannerman. There is the lucky optimist who, having bought a ticket for a lottery, has an unshakeable conviction that he will win, and, being lucky, does win. Such
10   instances can be multiplied indefinitely, and show that you cannot claim to have known merely because you turned out to be right.

B. Russell
Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits (1948)

Sujet n° 5

Notions : Truth - Knowledge

Question : Is truth still possible if the world is only what we can say about it?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

When a statement is true, there is, of course, a state of affairs which makes it true and which is *toto mundo*[1] distinct from the true statement about it: but equally of course, we can only describe that state of affairs in words (…). I can only describe the situation in which it is true to say that I am feeling sick by saying that it is one in which I am feeling
5   sick (or experiencing sensations of nausea): yet between stating, however, truly that I am feeling sick and feeling sick there is a great gulf fixed. (…). It takes two to make a truth.

J.L. Austin
Truth (Online Conference of the Aristotelian Society,
University of Warwick, 2013).

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[1] *Toto mundo* (latin): completely

"What objects does the world consist of?" is a question that it only makes sense to ask within a theory or description. Many philosophers, though not all, hold that there is more than one 'true' theory or description of the world. 'Truth', in my view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability – some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each
5   other and with our experiences as (…) represented in our belief system – and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent 'states of affairs'. There is no God's Eye point of view that we can know or usefully imagine; there are only the various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve[1].

H. Putnam
Reason, Truth and History (1981)

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[1] To subserve: to help to promote.

Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n° 6

Notions : Truth - Knowledge

Question : Should we doubt the existence of the exterior world ?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

In one sense it must be admitted that we can never prove the existence of things other than ourselves and our experiences. No logical absurdity results from the hypothesis that the world consists of myself and my thoughts and feelings and sensations, and that everything else is mere fancy. In dreams a very complicated world may seem to be
5   present, and yet on waking we find it was a delusion; that is to say, we find that the sense-data in the dream do not appear to have corresponded with such physical objects as we should naturally infer from our sense-data (...). There is no logical impossibility in the supposition that the whole of life is a dream, in which we ourselves create all the objects that come before us. But although this is not logically impossible, there is no reason
10   whatever to suppose that it is true; and it is, in fact, a less simple hypothesis, viewed as a means of accounting for the facts of our own life, than the common-sense hypothesis that there really are objects independent of us, whose action on us causes our sensations.

B. Russell
The Problems of Philosophy (1912)

Sujet n° 7

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : What are the foundations for the rules of justice?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

While I dispute the pretensions of any theory which sets up an imaginary standard of justice not grounded on utility, I account the justice which is grounded on utility to be the chief part, and incomparably the most sacred and binding[1] part, of all morality. Justice is a name for certain classes of moral rules, which concern the essentials of human well-being
5   more nearly, and are therefore of more absolute obligation, than any other rules for the guidance of life; and the notion which we have found to be the essence of the idea of justice (…) implies and testifies to this more binding[1] obligation.
The moral rules which forbid mankind to hurt one another (…) are more vital to human well-being than any maxims, however important, which only point out the best mode of
10   managing some department of human affairs. They have also the peculiarity, that they are the main element in determining the whole of the social feelings of mankind. It is their observance which alone preserves peace among human beings: if obedience to them were not the rule, and disobedience the exception, everyone would see in every one else a probable enemy, against whom he must be perpetually guarding himself.

J. S. Mill
Utilitarianism (1861)

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[1] Binding : *contraignant*

Sujet n° 8

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : Is it legitimate to sacrifice the freedom of a minority for the well being of a majority?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override[1]. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many.
5   Therefore in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests. The only thing that permits us to acquiesce in an erroneous theory is the lack of a better one; analogously, an injustice is tolerable only when it is necessary to avoid an even greater injustice. Being first virtues of human activities, truth and justice are
10 uncompromising.

J. Rawls
A Theory of Justice (1971)

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[1] To override = to be more important than.

Sujet n° 9

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : What kind of agreement is society based on?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

In justice as fairness the original position of equality corresponds to the state of nature in the traditional theory of the social contract. This original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain
5   conception of justice. Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities [1] . The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of
10   ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances.

J. Rawls
A Theory of Justice (1971)

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[1] Propensities = tendencies

Sujet n° 10

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : Why should we punish?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

But all punishment in itself is evil. Upon the principle of utility, if it ought to be admitted, it ought only to be admitted in as far as it promises to exclude some greater evil.

J. Bentham
Principles of morals and legislation (1780)

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The distinction between the loss of consideration which a person may rightly incur[1] by defect of prudence or of personal dignity, and the reprobation which is due to him for an offence against the rights of others, is not a merely nominal distinction. It makes a vast difference both in our feelings and in our conduct towards him whether he displeases us in things in which we think we have a right to control him, or in things in which we know that we have not. If he displeases us, we may express our distaste, and we may stand aloof[2] from a person as well as from a thing that displeases us; but we shall not therefore feel called on to make his life uncomfortable. We shall reflect that he already bears, or will bear, the whole penalty of his error; if he spoils his life by mismanagement, we shall not, for that reason, desire to spoil it still further. (…). He may be to us an object of pity, perhaps of dislike, but not of anger or resentment; we shall not treat him like an enemy of society: the worst we shall think ourselves justified in doing is leaving him to himself, if we do not interfere benevolently by showing interest or concern for him.
It is far otherwise if he has infringed the rules necessary for the protection of his fellow-creatures, individually or collectively. The evil consequences of his acts do not then fall on himself, but on others; and society, as the protector of all its members, must retaliate, must inflict pain on him for the express purpose of punishment, and must take care that it be sufficiently severe.

J. S. Mill
On Liberty (1859)

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[1] To incur = to experience
[2] Aloof = distant

Sujet n° 11

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : Are some pleasures better than others?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

The game of push-pin[1] is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry.

J. Bentham
The Rationale of Reward (1830)

Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance[2]; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them (…) are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise. Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying.

J. S. Mill
Utilitarianism (1861)

There are different sorts of agreeable feelings themselves incomparable, as well as the quantitative dimensions of pleasure, intensity and duration. How are we to balance these when they conflict? Are we to choose a brief but intense pleasant experience of one kind of feeling over a less intense but longer pleasant experience of another? Aristotle says that the good man if necessary lays down his life for[3] his friends, since he prefers a short period of intense pleasure to a long one of mild enjoyment, a twelvemonth of noble life to many years of humdrum[4] existence. But how does he decide this? (…) The person himself must make this decision, taking into account the full range of his inclinations and desires, present and future.

J. Rawls
A Theory of Justice (1971)

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[1] Push-pin: a game for children
[2] Want of sustenance = lack of nourishment
[3] Lay down = sacrifice
[4] Humdrum = boring

BACCALAURÉATS GÉNÉRAL ET TECHNOLOGIQUE

SESSION 2019

ÉPREUVE SPÉCIFIQUE MENTION « SECTION EUROPÉENNE OU DE LANGUE ORIENTALE »

Académies de Paris – Créteil – Versailles

Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n° 12

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : What does it mean to be part of a society ?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

Coming to an agreement behind the veil of ignorance ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances. Since all [members] are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favor his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain (…). The original position is, one might say, the appropriate initial status quo, and thus the fundamental agreements reached in it are fair.

J. Rawls
A Theory of Justice (1971)

To ask whether a particular society is a community is not simply to ask whether a large number of its members happen to have among their various desires the desire to associate with others or to promote communitarian aims – although this may be one feature of a community – but whether the society is itself a society of a certain kind, ordered in a certain way, such that community describes its basic structure and not merely the dispositions of persons within the structure. For a society to be a community in this strong sense, community must be constitutive of the shared self-understandings of the participants and embodied in their institutional arrangements.

M. J. Sandel
Liberalism and the Limits of Justice (1982)

Sujet n° 13

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : Is consensus about justice necessary to live together?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

We have all too many disparate and rival moral concepts (…) of justice, and the moral resources of the culture allow us no way of settling the issue between them rationally. Moral philosophy, as it is dominantly understood, reflects the debates and disagreements of the culture so faithfully that its controversies turn out to be unsettlable in just the way
5   that the political and moral debates themselves are. It follows that our society cannot hope to achieve moral consensus. (…) Marx was in the right when he argued against the English trade unionists of the 1860s that appeals to justice were pointless, since there are rival conceptions of justice formed by and informing the life of rival groups. Marx was of course mistaken in supposing that such disagreements over justice are merely secondary
10 phenomena, that they merely reflect the interests of rival economic classes. Conceptions of justice and allegiance to such conceptions are partly constitutive of the lives of social groups (…). Nonetheless Marx was fundamentally right in seeing conflict and not consensus at the heart of modern social structure. It is not just that we live too much by a variety and multiplicity of fragmented concepts; it is that these are used to express rival
15 and incompatible social ideals and policies and to furnish us with a pluralist political rhetoric whose function is to conceal[1] the depth of our conflicts.

A. MacIntyre
After Virtue (1981)

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[1] Conceal = hide

Sujet n° 14

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : Liberalism versus communitarianism: a false debate?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

Liberalism, it is commonly said, is founded on the idea of a pre-social self, a solitary and sometimes heroic individual confronting society, who is fully formed before the confrontation begins. Communitarian critics then argue (…) that there really cannot be individuals of this sort. The critics (…) believe in a radically socialized self that can never
5   "confront" society because it is, from the beginning, entangled in society, itself the embodiment of social values. The disagreement seems sharp enough, but in fact, in practice, it is not sharp at all (…). Nor does liberal or communitarian theory require views of this sort. Contemporary liberals are not committed to a pre-social self, but only to a self capable of reflecting critically on the values that have governed its socialization; and
10 communitarian critics, who are doing exactly that, can hardly go on to claim that socialization is everything. The philosophical and psychological issues here go very deep, but so far as politics is concerned, there is little to be won on this battlefield.

M. Walzer
The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism
In *Political Theory*, Vol. 18 (1990)

Sujet n° 15

Notions : Justice - Society

Question : Can we refute scepticism?

Use the text(s) and your knowledge in philosophy to answer the question above in a personal and organized way.

The sceptic about knowledge argues that we know very little or nothing of what we think we know, or at any rate that this position is no less reasonable than the belief in knowledge. The history of philosophy exhibits a number of different attempts to refute the sceptic: to prove him wrong or show that in arguing against knowledge he presupposes
5 there is some and so refutes himself. Others attempt to show that accepting scepticism is unreasonable, since it is more likely that the sceptic's extreme conclusion is false than that all of his premisses[1] are true (…). Even when these counter-arguments satisfy their inventors, they fail to satisfy others, as is shown by the persistent attempts against scepticism. The continuing felt need to refute scepticism, and the difficulty in doing so,
10 attests to the power of the sceptic's position, the depth of his worries.

R. Nozick.
Philosophical Explanations (1981)

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[1] Premiss: starting point in a reasoning.