

# Reading and Analysing Philosophy

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## Answers to questions:

### 1.

A1. Sartre means the qualities that define things as the entities we take them for. For example, a pair of scissors is understood to be, and has meaningful sense to us, through the use to which we put them for cutting other things in a controlled way with a specific action. That use defines what scissors are: the *essence* of being a pair of scissors. Without that essence there simply are no scissors, as scissors. Sartre is arguing that we have no such 'defining' essence and that our existence as beings is prior to the meaning we give to ourselves (or what others and society impose on us). How far is it true, do you think, that there really is no human nature in this sense?

A2. From the passage we can see that Sartre concludes that there is (at least) one entity that has the property of existence before essential definition. The argument implies and assumes that (a) there has to be such a being; (b) if God existed God would fulfil that role. The full text of the essay covers these assumptions earlier on.

### 2.

A1. Hume's general point is that, as things stand, it appears there is no evidence that can be offered against a strong position about the entity called the self that does not support it. All evidence appears to point to the existence of the self. Sensations appear to strengthen the evidence, and arguments that are not direct appeals to sensation are not as good since their basis is less accessible and immediate.

A2. One way would be to say that in outline something like Descartes' argument 'I think therefore I am', the *cogito*, is being appealed to here. If there is no self there can be no bedrock for knowledge, because everything can then be thrown into potential doubt once we include

immediate sensation and thinking upon which other judgments are built. The assumption is that with no entity called the self underpinning them, there is no basis for assuming that any knowledge can be derived from experience or sensation.

### 3.

- A1. You will probably have discovered that 'volitional action' can have a wide range of meanings, and different authors have included different sorts of willed acts within the definition. However, in this context the author means controlled, free, willed acts. What other meanings could there be and how would this affect your understanding of the passage?
- A3. The passage suggests that human actions are to be morally assessed on the basis of an evaluation of volitional acts through the concept of *kamma*, but that these acts themselves are judged to be good, bad, neutral or mixed. How is *this* judgment made if not through assessment of human action? Is this a fair criticism? Defend your answer.

### 4.

- A2. If the argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* were wholly negative we would have to conclude that he undermines the basis by which he makes his claims. However, he also constructs a different role for philosophy, and it is in this light that the passage should perhaps be judged; he suggests that philosophy should be seen as 'edifying', providing new ways of thinking about the world and ourselves without making any claims for these ideas as foundations for knowledge.

### 5.

- A1. The two concepts are *intentionality* and *causality*. These are rich and complex concepts with their own philosophical history and baggage. What is the implication for intention and causality in the case of photography from this account?
- A3. One possible consequence, which Friday does pursue, is to argue that digital images produced by digital cameras are *not* photographs. This is because the causal pathway for production of the image in a digital camera is radically different from a traditional film camera; it therefore involves greater image manipulation and intentional image production. Is this a good argument? Justify your answer.

## 6.

A1. The passage is about how three things might connect up: the meaning of words (specifically 'pain'); the public world of observable behaviour; and the private mental states of someone (in pain). There are different interpretations possible, but here Wittgenstein points out that, because we do not have access to what anyone else has as a raw experience of pain, and yet, at the same time, the word 'pain' functions perfectly well for us all, it is not the pain *sensation* that the word is referring to. We are left with our shared observable pain behaviour (saying 'ouch!' for example), while the 'internal' private sensation is no longer referenced; it ends up with no role in the way the word 'pain' *actually works*. Although we think the word 'pain' connects the private sensation to the external world, it does not. The word 'pain' refers only to the public behaviour.