

Answering Philosophy Gobbets

Harry Alanen

harry.alanen@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

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A gobbet is a quote or extract of text which you need to comment on. Commenting on a gobbet is not the same as writing a short essay. It is a short analysis, testing your ability to say something *philosophically interesting or relevant* regarding the given text. A good structure for a gobbet answer is to begin by explaining the (i) context of the text, (ii) what its philosophical content is, and then to (iii) assess the passage.

(i) Begin by explaining what the immediate context of the passage is: is it part of some larger argument (if so, what)? Don't summarize large portions of the book. Exercise judgement. Your answer should *focus on the passage in question*.

(ii) Summarize and explain *the philosophical point* being made in the gobbet. What contribution does the gobbet make in its philosophical context? For example, does it introduce some distinction that will be important later on (if so, what is being distinguished from what? Why does this matter)? Or does the passage contain an argument? If so, set out the steps the argument. Does the passage contain any technical or ambiguous terms (or sentence structure)? If technical, explain their use: if ambiguous, spell out the different ways of understanding the passage or word.

(iii) In assessing the passage try and find one or two interesting philosophical issues that arise from the gobbet, one's that you can discuss briefly. If the passage contains an argument or presents some contentious claim or assumption, you can *criticise* it (but you can also consider what the author might say in their defence). If the gobbet *introduces* a concept or argument which is important for the wider context, explain what its significance is.

Some added points:

Do not omit what may seem like obvious points. You are being examined on your knowledge and abilities. Do not assume that something is so obvious it does not warrant mentioning. If an argument occurs as part of, say, the cave analogy in the *Republic* then say this. Also pay attention to who is speaking, and are they expressing e.g. their own opinion or are they arguing in an opponent's voice? Are any technical terms being used (such as 'Form', or '*eudaimonia*'), if so, give a brief definition or account of what the term means or how it is used. Also do not simply focus on a small section of the passage. While you need not comment on everything in the passage, do not act as if a part of the gobbet simply isn't there. Again, exercise your judgement. Your primary focus in philosophy gobbets should be on argumentative and philosophical content.

You are typically asked to answer three gobbets (from a selection of six), in addition to three essay questions. Being able to write good gobbet answers thus requires familiarity with the

In compiling these notes I've drawn on advice shared by Ursula Coope, the PPE Handbook, and the "Faculty of Classics: Guidance on Commentaries and Gobbets".

primary text (the ability to quickly recognize where the passage is from, what its argumentative context is, what contribution it makes to the argument), and the ability to quickly recognize something *philosophically interesting* or problematic *with the passage given*, and the ability to express yourself clearly and concisely.