NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Part III History and Philosophy of Science

SENIOR EXAMINER'S REPORT 2011-12

The Part III course was taken by 9 students, of whom 4 achieved First Class (mark 70 and above), 2 achieved a high II.i (67-69) and 3 achieved a II.i (mark 60-66).

Prizes (Non-University)

The *Lipton Prize* was awarded to Tillmann Taape for best overall performance in the course.

External examiner

Dr Serafina Cuomo (Dept of History, Classics and Archaeology, Birkbeck College, London), the External Examiner, saw a total of 16 pieces of work (including 3 dissertations) out of 45 (36%). Dr Cuomo saw: the best and worst essays, borderline marks, those essays or dissertations for which there was a wide variation between the examiners' marks and those for which the internal examiners failed to reach an agreement. The Examiners wish to thank Dr Cuomo for her careful reading of the work and her constructive contributions to the discussion.

Recommendations

1. Guidelines on Examinations

   At the Examiners' Meeting held in April 2012, the Examiners approved a document, entitled "Guidelines on Examinations", which the Secretary of the Degree Committee had prepared, based on extensive revision of the previous guidelines. The document covers a wide range of issues connected to examining; whilst primarily designed for use by examiners, the Guidelines will be available on the Departmental website for consultation by a wider audience, including supervisors and students. The Guidelines were approved by the HPS Degree Committee at its meeting on 14 May 2012.

2. Overlap of Topics in Essays and Dissertation

   The Guidelines concerning overlap were discussed at the 2nd Part III Examiners' Meeting in April and the policy was re-affirmed: students are advised that it is permissible to build on work done in an essay in preparing the dissertation, as long as the original piece is appropriately referenced. It was noted that in the case under discussion, while the topics in question may have appeared similar, care had been taken to establish that the work was in fact quite different. It was also noted that the Department knowingly has two guidelines that are in tension with each other: firstly, that students are encouraged to choose topics which demonstrate wide spread across a range of topics and secondly, that students are informed that building a dissertation on the preliminary work completed in an essay is perfectly acceptable and often wise.

3. Feedback to Students

   In response to a case in which extensively critical examiners' reports had been transmitted to a candidate, it was reiterated, at the Examiners' Meeting in April, that Examiner's Reports are drafted principally for the Examiners' Meeting and the addressee of each report is the Chair of the Examiners' Meeting. The reports are only secondarily for the eyes of the candidates. It was agreed that, since the non-confidential parts of the Examiners' Reports are the principal

feedback students receive on their progress, the comments therein should convey an accurate and balanced sense of the quality of the work. It was agreed that the Part III Manager is able to assist with this by editing the versions of reports that are transmitted to students; via the individual feedback meetings, the Part III Manager is able to interpret the content of individual examiner's reports for the students.

Professor John Forrester

Part III HPS Senior Examiner, 2011-12

3 October 2012