

Philosophy
Higher level
Paper 3

Tuesday 17 May 2016 (morning)

1 hour 15 minutes

Instructions to candidates

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the text and write a response.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[25 marks]**.

Unseen text – exploring philosophical activity

Compare and contrast the view(s) of philosophical activity presented in the text below, with your own experience and understanding of what is involved in doing philosophy [25 marks].

It is difficult to give an account of the defining features of philosophy. The reason for the difficulty in answering the question of what philosophy is paradoxically provides an answer of sorts. An essential part of philosophy is the extent to which it reassesses its own nature. Philosophy tends to ask extremely broad and fundamental questions, and it raises problems which are not normally considered problems at all in most other areas of human inquiry. A feature which helps us to understand the nature of philosophy [...] is its freedom of thought; in philosophy no question is, on the face of it, unaskable.

It is sometimes said that the subject matter of philosophy is far removed from anything that could have practical importance in life. Even if this were true it would not follow that philosophy is not worth bothering with, for it might be intrinsically interesting. In any case, philosophy does examine ideas in ethics and politics that have immediate practical consequences. Moreover, one of the reasons why philosophy is important is that more than any other subject it freely examines presuppositions and assumptions that people have that might otherwise go unquestioned; and many of these very basic beliefs, which people take for granted, lead to, and underpin, other beliefs which have immediate practical consequences in that they determine what people believe and how they act. Whenever and wherever we live we absorb a worldview which can be so familiar that it can, through going unnoticed, go unexamined. So long as people are not dogmatically locked into, or wedded to, a fixed system of ideas and beliefs there will always be philosophy. Philosophy is not a luxury, indeed it becomes a necessity just as soon as people are able and willing to think freely about their beliefs. The terrible consequences that have followed from dogmatically held beliefs throughout human history bear sufficient testimony to the need to philosophize. Anyone who open-mindedly and critically examines, rather than simply accepts, fundamental ideas, has started doing philosophy. Philosophy cuts very deeply into our beliefs concerning the world and our place in it.

It is characteristic of philosophy that it goes back to where most other subjects begin and then probes still further back in its inquiries. Philosophy discusses enduring problems arising from life and thought. It is one of the attractions of philosophy that it connects thinkers of otherwise different historical ages and finds in them the same fundamental problems.

Reference to the historical and intellectual context in which a philosophical position arose may help us to understand what is meant by that position. However, it is important not to confuse the truth of philosophical positions and the soundness of the arguments presented for them with either their causal, psychological, historical origin or the extent of the causal, psychological, historical influence. Philosophy involves expounding existing ideas, creating new imaginative ideas and critically assessing the soundness of arguments put forward in support of views claimed to be true. Neither the causal origin of a claim or argument, nor its causal influence on human affairs, has any relevance in assessing the truth of a claim or the soundness of the argument presented for it. One can of course trace origins and influences as well, but that is not the same as, and not a substitute for, assessing the validity of arguments and the truth of beliefs. A given philosophy could have an interesting origin or be very influential, but may be bad philosophy for all that.

40 Those who are interested and willing to follow the path of philosophical inquiry are embarked on perhaps the greatest adventure of ideas of all. Philosophy is an important part of what Bertrand Russell called “all the noonday brightness of human genius”, destined though it may be to ultimate annihilation; it is by such activity that for the time being human beings can dignify themselves in the face of a universe that may seem at best indifferent to human concerns.

[Source: PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS : AN INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN PHILOSOPHY by Shand, John]
