



**PHILOSOPHY  
HIGHER LEVEL  
PAPER 3**

Friday 19 November 2010 (morning)

1 hour 30 minutes

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**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the text and write a response.

*In your response you are expected to:*

- *develop a philosophical response in an organized way*
- *use clear, precise and appropriate language*
- *identify what doing philosophy means in the text*
- *take an independent position about the nature of philosophical activity in relation to the ideas developed in the text*
- *draw upon, and show a holistic appreciation of, the skills, material and ideas developed throughout the course.*

### **Unseen text – exploring philosophical activity**

*Read the text below then write a response to it (of approximately 800 words). Your response is worth [30 marks]. In your response include:*

- *a concise description of philosophical activity as presented in the text*
- *an exploration of the pertinent issues regarding philosophical activity raised in the text, relating this to your experience of doing philosophy throughout the whole course*
- *appropriate references to the text that illustrate your understanding of philosophical activity*
- *your personal evaluation of the issues regarding philosophical activity raised in the text.*

“Philosophy” is one word but we must distinguish between two primary meanings. We must distinguish between philosophy as a possession (or something *you have*) and philosophy as an activity (or something *you do*). In the first sense “philosophy” refers to the substance of people’s beliefs, attitudes and concepts.

“Substance” means elementary or basic. It refers to the elements out of which something is constructed and without which it cannot be maintained. Just as a house or car has elements, people’s beliefs, attitudes and concepts have elements. So when we say that “philosophy” means the substance of people’s beliefs, we mean elementary beliefs or basic attitudes out of which other beliefs and attitudes are formed and through which they are maintained.

Consider, for example, the issue of free will. Some people believe that we are always free in our decisions and actions; whatever you decide and do is up to you. Others believe that human behaviour is unfree; nothing you decide or do is up to you. Still others claim that some of what we do is free, some is unfree. Ideally, philosophically, these beliefs about freedom have a basis in other beliefs: they rest on more elementary attitudes about the nature and purpose of decision and the character of natural laws. Even if your elementary beliefs about decisions and the laws of nature are vague and not fully complete, that is no reason to limit their emergence or to refuse to acknowledge their potential existence and need for development. This raises issues about what it means to do philosophy.

You are introduced to philosophy as a possession when you are introduced to elementary beliefs of philosophers ... You are introduced to philosophy as an activity when you are trained to do philosophy. However, it is difficult to distinguish between being introduced to philosophy as something possessed and as something done, for, in truth, there is no sharp line between possessing and doing philosophy. A careful reading of a philosopher plunges you into doing philosophy: it plunges you into thinking for yourself about the issues the philosopher discusses.

So what, then, does it mean to *do philosophy*? Philosophical activity often focuses on the meaning of elementary beliefs, their rational basis and coherence, and their connections with other beliefs

or convictions; it involves assessing, creating, designing and refining the substance of one's beliefs. Being trained to do philosophy is:

“... learning how to ask and re-ask questions until meaningful answers begin to appear. It is learning how to relate materials. It is learning how to reject fallacious claims – to reject them no matter how prestigious the authority who holds them or how deeply one would personally like to believe them.”\*

“Pretend what we may,” wrote William James, “the whole person within us is at work when we do philosophy.”

Every person has *some* elementary beliefs or convictions even if the scope of most people's convictions is limited to issues of daily bread. Most of us have beliefs about the life we desire and the values to which we aspire, but our deliberations about these matters usually fall short of *doing* philosophy. When you do philosophy you try to render (“make”) those beliefs and values systematic and informed, to discover alternatives that might be overlooked and to investigate what rational support might exist for them.

Your cultural inheritance may give you many of your elementary beliefs, but it does not give you a clear articulation of the meaning of these beliefs or their rational basis. For that, you need to do philosophy.

It is unwise to hold unexamined, inexplicit elementary beliefs; it is imprudent not to give the substance of your beliefs some careful thought and perhaps even to replace or revise your beliefs, if their credentials seem weak. If your basic commitments, unknown to you, are incoherent or riddled with inconsistencies, there is a good chance your life will be messy and haphazard. This is because you will live according to those commitments. To mix metaphors, “a healthy garden of beliefs requires well-nourished roots”. You may live more satisfyingly – healthily, as it were – if you make explicit and examine your elementary beliefs and convictions at some time in your life.

We can express this idea another way. Life is full of conflicts. Some conflicts get in our way and cause confusion. The most troublesome are internal conflicts – conflicts within yourself. For example, is death something I can survive or does it extinguish me? You are pulled in two directions. Part of you says that death extinguishes; part of you hopes to survive.

Philosophy can render personal conflict less intense and dramatic. It does encourage greater coherence and consistency in belief and conviction.

[N. Scott Arnold, Theodore M. Benditt and George Graham (eds) *Philosophy Then and Now*, 1998, Wiley-Blackwell. Used with permission.]

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\* Quote taken from James L Christian, *Philosophy: An Introduction to the Art of Wondering* (1994)