M12/3/PHILO/HP3/ENG/TZ0/XX

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PHILOSOPHY
HIGHER LEVEL
PAPER 3

Thursday 3 May 2012 (morning)

1 hour 30 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 *[30 marks]*.

2212-5603

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.*

Our analytical capacities are often highly developed before we have learned a great deal about the world, and around the age of fourteen many people start to think about philosophical problems on their own – about what really exists, whether we can know anything, whether anything is really right or wrong, whether life has any meaning, whether death is the end. These problems have been written about for thousands of years, but the philosophical raw material comes directly from the world and our relation to it, not from writings of the past. That is why they come up again and again, in the heads of people who haven't read about them.

This is a direct introduction to nine philosophical problems, each of which can be understood in itself, without reference to the history of thought. I shall not discuss the great philosophical writings of the past or the cultural background of those writings. The centre of philosophy lies in certain questions which the reflective human mind finds naturally puzzling, and the best way to begin the study of philosophy is to think about them directly. Once you've done that, you are in a better position to appreciate the work of others who have tried to solve the same problems.

Philosophy is different from science and from mathematics. Unlike science it doesn't rely on experiments or observation, but only on thought. And unlike mathematics it has no formal methods of proof. It is done just by asking questions, arguing, trying out ideas and thinking of possible arguments against them, and wondering how our concepts really work.

The main concern of philosophy is to question and understand very common ideas that all of us use every day without thinking about them. A historian may ask what happened at some time in the past, but a philosopher will ask, "What is time?" A mathematician may investigate the relations among numbers, but a philosopher will ask, "What is a number?" A physicist will ask what atoms are made of or what explains gravity, but a philosopher will ask how we can know there is anything outside of our own minds. A psychologist may investigate how children learn a language, but a philosopher will ask, "What makes a word mean anything?" Anyone can ask whether it's wrong to sneak into a movie without paying, but a philosopher will ask, "What makes an action right or wrong?"

We couldn't get along in life without taking the ideas of time, number, knowledge, language, right and wrong for granted most of the time; but in philosophy we investigate those things themselves. The aim is to push our understanding of the world and ourselves a bit deeper. Obviously it isn't easy. The more basic the ideas you are trying to investigate, the fewer tools you have to work with. There isn't much you can assume or take for granted. So philosophy is a somewhat dizzying activity, and few of its results go unchallenged for long.

Since I believe the best way to learn about philosophy is to think about particular questions, I won't try to say more about its general nature. The nine problems we'll consider are these:

- knowledge of the world beyond our minds
- knowledge of minds other than our own
- the relation between mind and brain
- how language is possible
- whether we have free will
- the basis of morality
- what inequalities are unjust
- the nature of death
- the meaning of life.

They are only a selection: there are many, many others.

What I say will reflect my own view of these problems and will not necessarily represent what most philosophers think. There probably isn't anything that most philosophers think about these questions anyway: philosophers disagree, and there are more than two sides to every philosophical question. My personal opinion is that most of these problems have not been solved, and that perhaps some of them never will be. But the object here is not to give answers – not even answers that I myself may think are right – but to introduce you to the problems in a very preliminary way so that you can worry about them yourself. Before learning a lot of philosophical theories it is better to get puzzled about the philosophical questions which those theories try to answer. And the best way to do that is to look at some possible solutions and see what is wrong with them. I'll try to leave the problems open, but even if I say what I think, you have no reason to believe it unless you find it convincing.

[Source: Thomas Nagel (1987) *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3–7]