

**Philosophy
Higher level
Paper 3**

Thursday 7 May 2015 (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]**.

In your response you are expected to:

- develop a response in an organized way using clear, precise language, which is appropriate to philosophy
- identify pertinent issues regarding the philosophical activity raised 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.

Interviewer (Alan Saunders): What is philosophy? What do philosophers do? These are common questions asked of philosophers, often at parties, or sitting next to someone in an airplane.

5 **Philosopher 1 (Caroline West):** [...] that is actually one of the hardest questions in philosophy, and it's a question that a lot of us who teach philosophy face every year or two, when we have to try and work out what to say to prospective students about what philosophy is [...] and rather than offering a list of necessary and sufficient conditions, I try and do some: I take a problem of philosophy and show how philosophers have analysed the problem and offered different kinds of answers to it.

10 **Philosopher 2 (David Braddon-Mitchell):** [...] I start by giving a lecture which basically covers three or four big questions in philosophy, then give a brief talk on what philosophy is, which is: philosophy builds a bridge between the kind of picture that natural science gives us of the way the world is, and the common-sense picture, and the two seem to be very disconnected. And you try and connect those things and get a big picture of how things are.

15 **Interviewer:** [...] I suggested earlier that “what’s it all about” is the basic philosophical question [...] because it’s a question about the whole of experience, rather than a bit of it. So it’s not like asking “what is physics?”. Do you think I’m correct?

20 **Philosopher 2:** I think you are, but this question, “what’s it all about?”, might be asked for two different reasons. You might ask it because you think that reflecting on what it’s all about will actually help your life, and the life of your community, or you might ask it because you really want to sort out what it could be all about. Now, the answer to the second question, pursued as an activity directed toward the truth, might produce an unpleasant answer: nothing. But if the first activity is what you want, you’d better not produce that unpleasant answer, you’d better do something else. So if philosophy is an activity, it could be an activity with two goals: one could be
25 improvement, or wisdom, the other could be, in some sort of quasi-scientific sense, truth. Those goals aren’t the same goal, so it might be two very different activities, both legitimately called philosophy. I sometimes think that philosophy goes wrong when people confuse these goals.

Interviewer: This brings me to another question: what if the your truth-finding activity results in something unpleasant? For example, Michael Tooley wrote a paper about abortion and infanticide. He argued that as infants do not make plans for the future, then abortion and infanticide are okay. Some very strong and compelling arguments, but very few critics responded to them. Instead they attacked him for being immoral for daring to raise the issue and make the arguments. But are the critics right? Shouldn't I go with my moral intuition?

Philosopher 2: Of course! Just because there is a strong argument for an outcome that you find repulsive doesn't mean you are compelled to do it! It's my experience that few people change their views purely because of rational arguments.

Interviewer: I've met some philosophers who think what they are doing is continuous with science. Do you see philosophy differing from empirical sciences like physics and biology?

Philosopher 1: There is a trivial sense in which it's different in that it doesn't add to the collection of empirical facts, but we should also remember that empirical sciences do more than just this. They think about empirical information, they form theories out of that information, they try to reconcile the information with things they know, and they think reflectively about what counts as good evidence. Now I think that all of those things are philosophical things. So to that extent, philosophy is continuous with science.

Interviewer: This brings us to another question, which is that physicists don't have to read Newton whereas philosophers are still reading the same old stuff: Plato, Confucius, Aristotle, and so on. It looks as if philosophy does not make progress. Are we progressing?

Philosopher 2: I think we have progressed a lot. I think that when people go back to the old texts they're mining them for ideas and so on, to feed into current debates, which are often being conducted in quite different terms in which the debate was situated back then. One danger I think is that when people do read classic texts, they completely misunderstand them because so much philosophy is a reaction to particular intellectual climates and intellectual history. Many people read these texts in the light of their current concerns, not of the original context. This does no good, either to the history of ideas, or to philosophy itself.

Philosopher 1: But to return to the question of progress, I think we have made progress; in ethics for example, we have much clearer ideas of what the problems are [...] that is not to say we all agree about which approach is correct, but we have a better understanding of these approaches.

[Source: *The Philosopher's Zone* (30 December, 2006) Australian Broadcasting Company
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/philosophy-101/3388572>]