

Philosophy
Higher level
Paper 3

Wednesday 7 November 2018 (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].

5 The problems of philosophy are deeply interconnected, and there is no natural or obvious starting point from which to begin. Indeed, plausible arguments might be given for starting with almost any of the central problems in the field. You might think that we should surely start with epistemology; until we understand what knowledge is and settle the matter of whether and how we can gain any knowledge at all, how can we possibly determine whether we can have knowledge of God, or our moral duties, or the nature of the mind? Clearly epistemology is the most fundamental philosophical project. Wait—how can we be sure that knowledge is valuable to have? Or that we ought to care about gaining truth and avoiding error? We’d better start with axiology and sort out duty, obligation, and responsibility first. Normativity and ethics must be foundational. Of course, how can we determine what our epistemic responsibilities are if we don’t antecedently know whether we are free to believe one thing rather than another, or if we are truly at liberty to make choices? Let’s begin with the issue of free will and figure that out first. If we’re not free, that torpedoes a lot of other philosophical agendas. Yet if we don’t know what kinds of beings we are, how can we ever determine whether we are free? Maybe personal identity should be the first stop on the road. And so on.

10 [...] Most people have views about ethics and God before ever encountering philosophy, and so starting with topics to which they have already given some thought is a natural way to entice students into a deeper investigation. Appeal to human free choice is a venerable move [...] free will [...] what it is to be a thinking, persisting person at all—personal identity and philosophy of mind [...] reason-giving, and rational belief.

15 [...] The problems of philosophy resemble a Mandelbrot Set (complex numbers, specifically fractals) and the more closely one focuses on the small details, the more complications one finds. [...] You pick up a book on chemistry and you expect diagrams of molecules and talk about “valences,” a book on German and there will be long multi-syllable words [...]. But philosophy? What could that be about?

20 The word “philosophy” comes from two Greek words: “philia,” which was one of the Greek words for love, and “sophia,” which means wisdom. Thus philosophy is the love of wisdom. You may think that is not terribly informative, and it isn’t. However, you have to remember that, back in ancient Greece, to be a scholar at all meant that one was a philosopher. You might have been a stonemason, a fisherman, a soldier, a physician, or a philosopher, a pursuit that would have included mathematics and science. Over the years, as concrete, definite advances have been made in different areas, philosophy has spawned spin-offs, fields that have become their own disciplines with their own specific methodology and subject matter. Mathematics was one of the first fields to splinter off this way, and then in the Renaissance science became separate from philosophy. In the nineteenth century psychology broke away from philosophy and, most recently, cognitive science, which used to be the scientific end of philosophy of mind, has become its own field. In some ways philosophy proper is left with the hardest questions, the ones that we have made the least definitive progress on.

25 That does not mean that philosophers have made no progress in 2500 years. We have. Nevertheless, the philosophical issues to be discussed [...] are tough nuts to crack. Let us hope you do not crack your own coconut in the attempt! In the modern era, philosophy is in the business of giving good reasons for one’s non-empirical beliefs. That is, philosophers try to give arguments for believing claims about the nature of the self, or the existence of God, or moral duty, or the value of knowledge. These are topics that the scientific method of performing laboratory experiments and giving mathematical explanations does poorly in addressing. Philosophers take seriously the findings of experts in other disciplines, but we still have our own puzzles to solve.

Some philosophical topics stir great passions, and people find it threatening to ask questions about those issues. Philosophers are proud that one of the greatest philosophers in ancient times, Socrates, was executed by the state because he refused to stop questioning authority.

- 50 Socrates claimed to know nothing, but he was willing to go down for the pursuit of truth, fearless inquiry, and the life of the mind. If you are to find something of value [...] you too need to be prepared to question your long-standing beliefs, to honestly ask yourself if the things you may have believed your entire life are actually true. All of us believe some things for poor reasons, and to be a philosopher is to try to ferret out those beliefs and either justify them or discard them as unworthy
- 55 of your intellect. It is a difficult and often painful process to become an athlete of the mind, but there is great joy and thrilling discoveries to be had as well.

[Source: adapted from Hales, Steven D. 2013. *This Is Philosophy: An Introduction*, pages xiii–xvi. Copyright © 2013, John Wiley and Sons.]
