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Philosophy
Higher level
Paper 3

Thursday 13 May 2021 (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].

Answering the question, ‘What is philosophy?’, is by no means straightforward. Indeed, it is arguably a philosophical task in itself. Part of the difficulty relates to the fact that philosophy has changed its meaning over the years. The first philosophers were the ancient Greeks [...] ‘philosophy’ [...] means ‘love of wisdom’. So construed, the philosopher in the ancient world was
5 someone who was concerned with a range of questions, not all of them of a kind that we would these days think of as philosophical. [...]

Even so, that does not mean that there are no distinctively philosophical problems and questions, and here there is a clear continuity from the inquiries undertaken by the ancient Greek philosophers and those undertaken by philosophers working today. Indeed, many
10 of the core problems of philosophy [...] have been with us since the ancients, such as the epistemological problem of radical scepticism and the metaphysical problem of free will. What is it about these problems that make them distinctively philosophical?

One way of thinking about this question [of what is philosophy] is to regard the intellectual development made since the invention of philosophy over 2000 years ago as a gradual carving-
15 up of philosophical and non-philosophical questions. The lover of wisdom is interested in learning everything he or she can about our world and our place within it. In the absence of specialised branches of learning, the ancient Greek philosophers thus posed philosophical questions alongside other kinds of questions, ones that we would today classify as falling under the remit of, say, chemistry or psychology. But once those specialised branches develop, then
20 the questions that belong to these branches become detached from the rest. The philosophical problems are thus the ones that cannot be [handed over to] one of the other specialised branches of learning.

Although there is some truth in this way of thinking about philosophical problems, it is not the full story. For while it is quite right that philosophical problems do not neatly fall within the
25 ambit of any other specialised field of study, to classify philosophical problems purely in terms of this negative criterion fails to capture the positive characteristics shared by such problems. [...] philosophical problems display a distinctive kind of generality that you don’t find in other subject areas. For example, whereas modern cognitive science might ask questions about the nature of human cognition – such as concerning how it works, or how it might be improved – it takes
30 a philosopher (of mind) to wonder how human cognition is possible at all. For instance, how did we come to have self-consciousness, and what is the nature of this self-consciousness? These are philosophical questions.

This point about the generality of philosophical problems is sometimes expressed by saying that philosophy is the ‘queen of the sciences’, in that it interrogates the underpinning
35 intellectual framework which is taken for granted in specific subject areas. That is why philosophical problems are distinct from the kinds of problems that arise within particular fields, and it is also why philosophical problems have a special kind of generality. While there is something right about this way of thinking about philosophy, it is important not to construe this point as saying that philosophical inquiry should be completely divorced from other kinds of
40 inquiry, much less should we conclude that while other subject areas can learn from philosophy, philosophy has nothing to learn from them.

45 A moment ago I compared the kinds of questions asked by cognitive scientists with the more general questions posed by philosophers of mind. Nonetheless, philosophers of mind should be very interested – and in practice *are* very interested – in the latest findings in cognitive science. Indeed, when properly done, philosophy of mind can interact very closely with cognitive science. And this point is not confined to philosophy of mind, much less is it confined to philosophy’s relationship to the sciences. All areas of philosophy can both learn from, and contribute to, other subject areas, and often these intellectual bonds will not just be with the sciences, but with non-scientific subjects too, such as history or literary theory.

50 The best way of getting to grips with philosophy is, however, to simply dive in and engage with a philosophical debate.

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