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**Philosophy
Higher level
Paper 3**

Monday 8 November 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].

What is philosophy?

Professional philosophers find it difficult to define philosophy. The meaning of “philosophy” is “the love of wisdom”, which covers just about everything; philosophy encompasses the study of science, and art, and language – for most subjects there will be a “philosophy of” that subject.

5 In philosophy, we learn to identify, and think carefully about, our most basic ideas and theories – those that support all the questing for knowledge we do in other subject areas. We look behind our everyday concerns to examine the systems and structures which support our thinking and to test their soundness.

10 Because of this distinctive approach it is often easier to capture the nature of philosophy by providing examples of “doing philosophy” rather than defining its field of study. This helps us to appreciate how philosophy has a distinctive contribution to make to our knowledge and understanding of the world.

15 In studying philosophy, we learn to take a step back from our everyday thinking, and to explore the deeper, bigger questions which underpin our thought. We learn to identify hidden connections and flawed reasoning, and we seek to develop our thinking and theories so that they are less prone to such errors, gaps and inconsistencies. This is a vital contribution to human knowledge.

20 Studying philosophy sharpens your analytical abilities, enabling you to identify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in any position. It also hones your ability to construct and articulate cogent arguments of your own. It prompts you to work across disciplinary boundaries, and to think flexibly and creatively about problems which do not present immediate solutions. Because philosophy is an activity as much as a body of knowledge, it also develops your ability to think and work independently.

25 Different schools of philosophy have argued for systems which colour every aspect of human life in highly contrasted ways. You will view the universe and the place of humanity within it differently if you are an atheist rather than a theist; if you believe that all our knowledge is derived from experience rather than from a combination of experience and reason; or if you believe that our will is completely determined by causal laws rather than capable of its own free action. Even if you suspend judgement on such issues your study of them will leave you enriched with an understanding of the complexity of the physical and human sciences which students of other disciplines may lack.

30 Knowing about the great philosophical thinkers of the past and their theories is naturally a crucial element and as in any discipline, it is important to develop a thorough understanding of key topics. However, philosophy is much more than the history of ideas. How you analyse the theories discussed, and how you structure your own arguments in response. [...] you are learning to do philosophy, not just learning about it, and you can best do this by actually venturing your own arguments [...] you need to develop your ideas not in a vacuum, but informed by the philosophical theories of others – you should try to philosophize, not just to learn about philosophers. This is the key distinguishing feature of doing philosophy – success consists not just in absorbing knowledge, but in developing and demonstrating your own critical understanding of, and interaction with, the issues in question.

The stress is on philosophy as an activity and a process rather than just on the product. You learn the philosophical virtues of unearthing and examining hidden assumptions; of detecting conceptual confusions and clarifying them; of revealing and resolving contradictions; and so on.

- 45 Often there are no perfect solutions to philosophical problems. Some answers may be better argued for, or better equip us to deal with other issues, but none hold a permanent, fixed, uncontested place in the thinking of all philosophers. So we need to understand that philosophy has the potential to change the way we think about ourselves, the world and everything in it. This involves challenging ideas and theories to see how they work, or might even be developed.
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References:

Clare Saunders, David Mossley, George MacDonald Ross and Danielle Lamb, 01 Nov 2012, *Doing Philosophy: A Practical Guide for Students*, Continuum, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Source adapted.

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