

**Philosophy
Higher level
Paper 3**

Thursday 17 November 2016 (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].

Nowadays we tend to think of philosophy as an academic discipline that you study. But that is not always how it has been, according to the French philosopher and historian of ancient philosophy Pierre Hadot (Hadot 1995). Thus, in ancient philosophy it was perfectly possible to be a philosopher without having written anything, for what mattered was not the discourse of philosophy in itself (being knowledgeable about philosophical theories), but living philosophy. Living philosophy, Hadot tells us, was a spiritual exercise. Spiritual because it was more than a merely moral or intellectual exercise, but consisted of a total transformation of one's existence. Hadot divides these spiritual exercises into four distinctive disciplines:

1. Learning to live
2. Learning to dialogue
3. Learning to die
4. Learning to read

1. Learning to live

If the aim of philosophy is to teach one how to live one's life better, what is it that prevents us from doing so? The answer for ancient philosophy is the passions. It is because we cannot control our passions that we end up being miserable and unhappy. The art of living well, therefore, is measured by the ability to control one's passions and this is what philosophy can teach you. One of the schools of philosophy, the Stoics, argued that there were two origins for human unhappiness: We seek satisfaction in possessions that we cannot have or can lose, and we try to avoid misfortunes that are inevitable. Philosophy teaches us that the only matter that truly lies in our power are moral goods. The rest we should accept with indifference. The intellectual exercises of philosophy, reading and writing, listening and talking to others, were never simply for the sake of gaining more knowledge, but applying this knowledge to how one lives one's own life.

2. Learning to dialogue

Intellectual and spiritual activity is never a solitary affair. This is why the ancient philosophical schools were always communal in form. I learn to think for myself by thinking with others. It is not so much what is said that is important but that one speaks, because it is only through interacting with others that I can gain any self-knowledge. As Hadot writes: "The intimate connection between dialogue with others and dialogue with oneself is profoundly significant. Only he who is capable of a genuine encounter with the other is capable of an authentic encounter with himself, and the converse is equally true" (Hadot 1995). Such a relation of authentic speech with others is always more important than writing and appearing to be knowledgeable. Again the aim of philosophy is self-transformation and not knowledge, if knowledge means here theory or discourse.

3. Learning to die

Learning to die is not a morbid obsession with death. Quite the opposite, it is to learn not to fear death. For what is the most important aspect of human life is that it transcends death. Socrates, the most important philosopher for both the Stoics and the Epicureans, was willing to die for his beliefs, because he realized that the most important thing about him was not his body, but his ideas, and these would live on despite him. Far more important than one's individual life is truth itself. To learn to die, therefore is not to be obsessed about death in a morbid way, but to aim for a higher existence. To think of one's death in one's life is to realize what is and is not important. It is the very possibility of an authentic life.

4. Learning to read

- 40 To read, to gain knowledge, is not an end in itself but for the sake of self-formation, to understand oneself. The aim of all spiritual exercises is therefore the same: Return to the true self so as to liberate yourself from the passions that control you from the outside. Even the written masterpieces of philosophy that we still read today are not important in themselves. One reads and writes philosophy not so that one could be clever about it, but that the practice of reading
- 45 and writing itself is directed towards self-mastery and control. Thus what is important first of all is teaching (learning how to dialogue), and writing only has a function within this practice. Writing was never for the sake of philosophical discourse itself, but the practice of self-mastery and freedom.

[Source: adapted from <http://drwilliamlarge.wordpress.com>, accessed 17 March 2015]
