

**Philosophy  
Higher level  
Paper 3**

Wednesday 8 November 2017 (morning)

1 hour 15 minutes

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**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].

Philosophy critically examines anything and everything, including itself and its methods. It typically deals with questions not obviously addressed by other areas of enquiry, or those that remain after their activity seems complete. Paraphrasing A C Grayling: Philosophy, as the critical examination of beliefs, “pokes its nose in”, finding problems where it may not always be welcome. For de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, philosophy goes “straight to the essentials” and “right to the heart of truth.” Whilst this is the nature of philosophy, it is also its value, for, according to Socrates, the unexamined life is not worth living. Such critical examination helps to mitigate the risk of being deceived by untenable beliefs and spurious claims, uncritical acceptance of which claims can result in dire consequences.

As to how “we” do philosophy: In *A Philosophy of Boredom*, Svendsen reminds us to be wary of what Nietzsche referred to as the “hereditary fault all of philosophers” – a lack of the historical sense, facilitating an unwarranted assumption that existence in our own particular *milieu* gives privileged access to truth. With this in mind, we seek to identify and address philosophical problems whilst remaining aware of past and current responses, as well as alert to and explicating flaws in extant arguments, their assertions and assumptions. We aim also to be aware of the findings of other pertinent disciplines and their bearing upon those of contemporary philosophical concerns, drawing upon them to help address both perennial matters and those peculiar to the present and so to our possible futures. In so doing, we try to frame our arguments rationally and cogently, such that they can be claimed to be “true” – all of which concepts are common to philosophy.

Philosophy involves the analysis of arguments and concepts, examining the validity and soundness of the arguments, and revealing the connections and distinctions between the concepts.

This all seems a little dispassionate – a rarefied and refined pursuit to be indulged away from the hurly-burly of daily life, like butterfly collecting. But what does every philosopher dream of delivering? A knock-down argument! Philosophy is full of belligerent language. Using the power of reason and the weight of evidence, a philosopher exposes unsupported assertions, prejudice, rhetoric, rash generalizations and wishful thinking, crushes the opposition with brilliant counter-examples, and ultimately triumphs with the truth. A successful philosophical argument forces someone to a belief, whether she wants to believe it or not.

Of course, I’m not talking about a shouting match. A philosophical argument uses only the finest ingredients: Well-judged premises, and assumptions containing only the choicest facts, locally sourced rather than flown in from another planet, all kneaded with the yeast of reason.

People die from faulty reasoning as easily as from faulty wiring. In safeguarding the good name of reason, philosophers offer a valuable service to our fallible minds. They clear the cognitive undergrowth, clogged by vague concepts, dodgy premises, logical fallacies, invalid arguments. They mentor the inner philosopher we each have within us. They remind us that a wise man proportions his beliefs to the evidence. This matters when peddlars of false medicines, cultish religions or faulty intelligence sincerely spin their tales. Perhaps most importantly, mindful of our humanity, our common frailty, the best philosophers do philosophy with kindness as well as clarity.

Philosophy is the universe, or at least the general survey of it. It's the ocean in which physics, chemistry, psychology and all of the other disciplines float, the soil from which they grow. All of the sciences are built on it. Philosophy won't directly provide the equation for the velocity of a projectile, but it yielded the mathematics on which the equation is based. Not the vaccines, but the scientific method with which they were created – including Occam's razor, so that the theories wouldn't be too difficult to work with. But philosophy is not done yet, for once science gives us something, whether a new medicine or a new bomb, we're then forced to decide if we should use it or not.

Thinking is the most obvious way of doing philosophy, but we can't overlook the actual doing of philosophy: As Marx said, in probably his least controversial statement, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point however, is to change it."

Realization, then actualization. I see a girl. She's pretty (Bam!! Aesthetics). So pretty, that I wonder if she's even real (Wham!! Metaphysics). Her boyfriend is standing next to her. I ponder killing him (Pow!! Ethics). But, come to think of it, I'm not quite sure that they're dating (Bam Wham Pow!! Epistemology). I conclude that since she's attractive, and might be free, I should at least try to ask her out (Other Sound Effect!! Logic). Yet, all of this wonderful looking, questioning, scheming, thinking, and concluding is absolutely useless unless I actually walk over to her and start a conversation – or use the situation as an example of how we do philosophy.

Basically, philosophy is the general study of the intangible foundations of the universe, and we do it by studying this infrastructure and putting our conclusions into practice. In other words, by existing.

[Source: *Philosophy Now*, Issue 79 © Colin Brookes, Jon Wainwright and Matthew Hewes]

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