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**PHILOSOPHY  
HIGHER LEVEL  
PAPER 3**

Wednesday 2 November 2011 (morning)

1 hour 30 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.

*In your response you are expected to:*

- *develop a philosophical response in an organized way*
- *use clear, precise and appropriate language*
- *identify what doing philosophy means in the text*
- *take an independent position about the nature of philosophical activity in relation to the ideas developed in the text*
- *draw upon, and show a holistic appreciation of, the skills, material and ideas developed throughout the course.*

### **Unseen text – exploring philosophical activity**

*Read the text below then write a response to it (of approximately 800 words). Your response is worth [30 marks]. In your response include:*

- *a concise description of philosophical activity as presented in the text*
- *an exploration of the pertinent issues regarding philosophical activity raised in the text, relating this to your experience of doing philosophy throughout the whole course*
- *appropriate references to the text that illustrate your understanding of philosophical activity*
- *your personal evaluation of the issues regarding philosophical activity raised in the text.*

Philosophy consists of our views – our beliefs and attitudes about ourselves and the world. Doing philosophy, therefore, is first of all the activity of stating, as clearly and as convincingly as possible, what we believe and what we believe in about ourselves and the world in which we live. This does not mean, however, that announcing one’s allegiance to some grand-sounding ideas, or, perhaps, some grand-sounding words, is all that there is to doing philosophy. Philosophy is the development of these ideas, the attempt to see their connections with other people’s views – including the classic statements of the great philosophers of the past. It is the effort to appreciate the differences between one’s own views and others’ views, to be able to argue with someone who disagrees and resolve the difficulties that they may throw in your path. Philosophy is the attempt to coordinate a number of different ideas into a single viewpoint, and holding out for what you believe against those who want to refute you. Indeed, a belief that can’t be tied in with a great many other beliefs and that can’t withstand criticism might not be worth believing at all.

To defend your ideas is quite different from insisting, no matter how self-righteously, on the mere sound of a word or a series of statements. To say that you believe in “freedom”, for instance, may make you feel proud and righteous, but this has nothing to do with doing philosophy, or, for that matter, with freedom, unless you are willing to spell out exactly what it is you stand for, what it is that you believe, and why it is that this “freedom”, as you call it, is so desirable. Similarly, many people use such words as “truth”, “reality”, “morality”, “love”, and even “God” as important words, words that make us feel good just because we pronounce them. But to express the beliefs these words represent is to do something more than merely say the words; it is also to say what they mean, and what is in the world (or out of it) to which we are referring by these words.

Therefore, philosophy is, first of all, critical reflection. It is stepping back, listening to yourself and other people (including the great philosophers of history), and trying to understand and evaluate what it is that you hear, and what it is that you understand, what it is you believe. To formulate your own philosophy is to say what it is that you believe as clearly and as thoroughly as possible. After reflection, articulation – spelling out our ideas in words and sentences – is another primary process of doing philosophy. Writing down your ideas is an excellent way to articulate them, but an even better way is to discuss these ideas with others. Indeed, discussion not only forces you to be clear and concrete in your articulation of your views; it also allows you to engage in yet another essential feature of doing philosophy: arguing for your views. Articulating your opinions still leaves open the question of whether they are worth accepting, whether they are well thought out and can stand up to criticism from someone who disagrees with you. Arguments serve the purpose of testing our views; they are to philosophy what practice is to sports – ways of seeing just how well you are prepared, how skilled you are, and, in philosophy, how coherent and convincing your views really are.

Articulating and arguing your views has another familiar benefit: stating and defending a view is a way of making it very much your own. Once you have adopted a viewpoint, which very likely was defended at some time by a philosopher, it becomes very much your own as well. Indeed, doing philosophy almost always includes appealing to other philosophers in support of your own views, borrowing their arguments and examples as well as citing them when they have striking observations to offer. It is by doing philosophy, articulating and arguing your views, instead of just reading about other people’s philosophical viewpoints, that you make your own views genuinely personal, by working with them and committing yourself to them. That is how the philosophies of the past become important to us, and how our own initially unexamined ideas become something more significant. Philosophy, through reflection and by means of articulation and argument, allows us to analyse and critically examine our ideas, and to synthesize our vision of ourselves and the world into a unified, defensible and philosophically justified vision. Such a synthesis is the ultimate aim of philosophical reflection.

Finally, the quality of doing philosophy depends also upon the ingenuity with which ideas are presented, the thoroughness with which they are worked out, the care with which one idea is tied to another, the vividness with which the entire perspective is presented to the audience. It is arguing with a distinctively philosophical style. Therefore, doing philosophy is essentially making a case and it should be done persuasively. Occasionally it is working out common views in ways that are not at all common. Your philosophy, too, is nothing less than the whole of what you believe, articulated and argued as convincingly and as elegantly as you can.

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