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Philosophy
Higher level
Paper 3

Monday 16 May 2022 (morning)

1 hour 15 minutes

Instructions to candidates

- Do not turn over 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].

5 The type of critical conceptual enquiry with which we are familiar in traditional philosophy is not confined to “academic” philosophy. It can be directed to “existential” questions – questions concerned with life in its personal dimension. Here philosophy requires some of the qualities and experiences which enable a novelist or poet to have something to say, and its work can contribute to our understanding of just those matters on which they speak.

10 Philosophical reflection can bring one new insight in connection with certain questions about life and this may overlap with what one learns from works in literature. However, there is still a difference between what one learns from philosophy and literature, that is from meeting them in the course of one’s engagements, so that they challenge one’s very being. What makes a difference to one’s thinking may often fail to make an impact on one’s mode of being.

15 In reading philosophy and literature, one is removed from what challenges one’s being directly. Despite this, however, it is still possible for philosophy to clear up certain confusions and misconceptions and so leave one freer to face certain things in life differently. A student doing philosophy told me that the thought that selfishness is inescapable in one’s actions had troubled her personally and held her back from taking an active interest in other people’s needs. She apparently found relief and release in coming to see the mistaken belief in her thinking. Certainly, philosophy can make a person receptive to ideas they have rejected and these ideas may in time come to change their life. But when they do, they do so by changing the character of their engagements.

20 Perhaps more importantly, however, one needs to make a distinction between what one may gain from the pursuit of particular philosophical questions and what one gains from the pursuit of truth in philosophy. Although, this can only be pursued through the discussion of particular philosophical questions. As far as any particular philosophical question goes, what one gains from its pursuit is by and large confined to one’s understanding – except in so far as coming to a new understanding involves the giving up of cherished positions. But the transformation that comes from a serious dedication to philosophy, given the character of its questions, may amount to a spiritual reorientation – as Socrates tells us it did for him. Such transformation is more than a change in the philosopher’s understanding, confined to his thinking; it is a change in *him*, in his mode of existence and, therefore in his very being.

30 We must remember, however, that such dedication to the pursuit of philosophy is itself a form of engagement. I mean an engagement of the person as a whole, not merely of his intellect. To put it differently, an engagement with life as opposed to with objects of thought. One can compare it with dedicating one’s life to the service of others. In this sense philosophy is, if you wish, a form of marriage, and so it should not be surprising if it changes the life and perspective of the person who takes it seriously, including his perspective on his own personal problems. And this, indeed, would constitute a change in these problems themselves and thus a change in the person who takes philosophy seriously.

References:

Dilman, I., 1992. Can Philosophy Speak about Life? In: A. P. Griffiths, ed. 1993. *The Impulse to Philosophise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.121–123. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear. Source adapted.