54 READING PRACTICE

You are going to read an article about philosophy. For questions **31 - 36**, choose the answer **(A, B, C, or D)** which you think fits best according to the text.

31) How does the writer feel when he is asked about his job?

A annoyed that people do not understand what he says
B frustrated that people define themselves by their work
C apprehensive about the reaction his response will cause
D anxious to explain that he is no cleverer than anyone else

32) In the second paragraph, what does the writer say about human beings?

A We all enjoy challenging the established cultural norms.
B We are all capable of a certain degree of contemplation.
C We are wary of those who stand in judgement of others.
D We have lost the ability to learn from teachings of the past.

33) According to the third paragraph, an examined life is one in which a person

A understands the practical application of their studies.
B appreciates knowledge for its own sake.
C considers their priorities.
D lives apart from others.

34) The second reason the writer gives for the misconception about philosophers is that

A few people ever find out about philosophical studies.
B philosophers now work exclusively in universities.
C philosophy has become less popular as a course of study.
D the subjects which philosophers choose to focus on are obscure.

35) What does the writer say about the term 'ethicist' in the sixth paragraph?

A He uses it to show he represents a new branch of philosophy.
B The way in which it is used by philosophers has changed.
C It makes clear his connection with the justice system.
D It is too narrow to describe the work he does.

36) The writer uses the example of downloading films to show

A the type of conversation that he thinks people should be having about philosophy.
B how applied ethics can lead to considerations of more universal issues.
C that the study of philosophy should play a greater role in modern life.
D how people are able to ignore their own ethical failings.

Mica Education

PHILOSOPHY NEEDS TO ENGAGE MORE WITH THE WORLD

Philosopher Adrian Small considers the role of philosophers in modem life

'What do you do for a living?' It's classic small talk - we define ourselves by our jobs. And it's a question usually answered in a few words. However, when you're a philosopher, as I am, it's slightly harder to deal with. For one thing, describing yourself as a philosopher sounds rather pretentious. Saying you study or teach the subject is fine, but to say you are a philosopher is, in the eyes of many, to claim access to some mystical truth or enlightenment above one's fellows. This is clearly nonsense; philosophers are no different from - indeed are part of - the masses, but the persistence of the notion makes me hesitate.

So why does this stereotype of a philosopher pervade? One reason is that philosophers have established themselves as people who judge the activities of others and celebrate intellectual life. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 - 322 BC) argued that a life lived in contemplation, i.e. a philosophical life, was the most virtuous of all. Few modern philosophers would agree, but there's still a cultural aura around philosophy that associates it, rightly, with the life of the mind. Another Greek philosopher, Socrates, remarked that "the unexamined life is not worth living', meaning that a life that simply accepted prevailing cultural norms would be deeply unsatisfying. It's partly mankind's innate ability to reflect upon the world that allows us control over our lives, and therefore the ability to make our own decisions.

But the examined life doesn't require the wide reading of the philosophical classics, nor a life dedicated to intellectual reflection. It simply means looking more closely at the everyday experiences that define our lives to ensure they deserve their central role. It doesn't need to be the life of the sage, removed from society in order to evaluate it impartially. In fact, in order for the examined life to serve in guiding the experience of individuals, it's actually a deeply practical enterprise, and one in which knowledge should be shared, as it's an essential element of the good life.

This brings me to a second reason for the misconception about philosophers: in becoming a profession, academic philosophy has grown increasingly removed from lived experiences, especially those of people without formal training in the discipline. This isn't entirely the fault of philosophers: university funding, performance evaluations and esteem are tied to increasingly expensive and inaccessible academic journals. As a result, philosophers have little opportunity to explain their ideas to anyone other than the minute group of experts who populate their particular field of study. For the lay observer, the discipline can often seem far removed from reality.

If the bulk of philosophers once challenged this view of themselves as being remote, many have since ceased. Although the university system initiated the environment of privileged isolation, academics haven't shied away from supporting it. As thinking in some areas has grown increasingly concerned with very specific, technical debates, the process of interpreting them for philosophers working outside the specific subfield can be laborious enough, but trying to do so for the untrained mind becomes almost impossible. Philosophy, in some circles, has withdrawn from society altogether. This trend must be reversed.

I sometimes describe myself as an 'ethicist', because most of my work is in ethics, the field of philosophy concerned with evaluating human activity. More recently, though, I've begun to feel that title insufficient to capture my area of inquiry, because ethics is commonly asserted as being connected to formal codes, values and laws. This represents quite a new and largely unconsidered development in philosophical thinking: the field of ethics has colloquially come to refer to applied ethics - a subfield that explores the justice of particular social practices. The task of the ethicist, in modern thinking, is to determine whether or not a certain activity is 'ethical' or acceptable.

These are important questions, and ones I engage in regularly. However, there's more to philosophy than this. A typical discussion might, for example, begin by exploring whether illegally downloading films is unethical (it is) before moving to an exploration of how we think about responsibility, our attitudes towards art, and the influence of market consumerism. In this way, philosophy can help people look a little more closely at the practices and behaviours that define their lives. Sometimes this might reveal something we already know; at other times we might discover that our beliefs are hard to justify. Either way, merely by examining these ideas, we'll be doing something for the benefit of everyone.