

Eton College King's Scholarship Examination 2016

GENERAL II

(One and a half hours)

You must answer both questions.

Each of the two questions is worth the same number of marks.

*You need not answer the questions in the order set,
but you must start each one on a separate piece of paper.*

Remember to write your candidate number on every sheet of answer paper used.

Spend about 45 minutes on each question.

Do not turn over until told to do so.

GENERAL II

Question 1 : *START A NEW SHEET OF PAPER NOW*

Study the following extract carefully.

LIFE

One Summer more than ten years ago, when I taught at Princeton, a large spider appeared in the urinal of the men's room in 1879 Hall, a building that houses the Philosophy Department. When the urinal wasn't in use, he would perch on the metal drain at its base, and when it was, he would try to scramble out of the way, sometimes managing to climb an inch or two up the porcelain wall at a point that wasn't too wet. But sometimes he was caught, tumbled and drenched by the flushing torrent. He didn't seem to like it, and always got out of the way if he could. But it was a floor-length urinal with a sunken base and a smooth overhanging lip: he was below floor level and couldn't get out.

Somehow he survived, presumably feeding on tiny insects attracted to the site, and was still there when the fall term began. The urinal must have been used more than a hundred times a day, and always it was the same desperate scramble to get out of the way. His life seemed miserable and exhausting.

Gradually our encounters began to oppress me. Of course it might be his natural habitat, but because he was trapped by the smooth porcelain overhang, there was no way for him to get out even if he wanted to, and no way to tell whether he wanted to. None of the other regulars did anything to alter the situation, but as the months wore on and fall turned to winter I arrived with much uncertainty and hesitation at the decision to liberate him. I reflected that if he didn't like it on the outside, or didn't find enough to eat, he could easily go back. So one day toward the end of the term I took a paper towel from the wall dispenser and extended it to him. His legs grasped the end of the towel and I lifted him out and deposited him on the tile floor.

He just sat there, not moving a muscle. I nudged him slightly with the towel, but nothing happened. I pushed him an inch or two along the tiles, right next to the urinal, but he still didn't respond. He seemed to be paralyzed. I felt uneasy but thought that if he didn't want to stay on the tiles when he came to, a few steps would put him back. Meanwhile he was close to the wall and not in danger of being trodden on. I left, but when I came back two hours later he hadn't moved. The next day I found him in the same place, his legs shrivelled in that way characteristic of dead spiders. His corpse stayed there for a week, until they finally swept the floor.

(Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford: OUP, 1986, pp. 208-209)

GENERAL II

[Question 1 continued]

Now answer the following questions:

- (a) The author of this passage is a well-known philosopher. Philosophy is concerned with asking profound questions about existence such as: ‘What is real?’, or ‘How can we know anything at all?’.

Write down one profound question that might occur to a philosopher reading this passage, and explain why you chose this question.

[5]

- (b) Why might it be argued that we can never be sure about what is in another’s best interest? You may refer to the passage if you wish.

[10]

- (c) Nagel goes on to suggest that our individual lives have very little significance in the grand scheme of things. He points out that this appreciation of our own insignificance is in apparent conflict with our sense that our lives *are* worthwhile and have positive meaning. Suggest some possible responses to this apparent conflict.

[10]

[Total Marks for Question 1 : 25]

GENERAL II

Question 2 : *START A NEW SHEET OF PAPER NOW*

Write a response of no more than 700 words, in whatever style seems appropriate, to ONE of the following.

EITHER

What, if anything, is wrong with swearing?

OR

‘Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.’ Discuss.

OR

Vanity

[25]

[Total Marks for Question 2 : 25]

[End of Paper]