

What is Philosophy?

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Our mission for this week is to try and understand a little bit about what philosophy, as a subject, actually is. What makes it different from other subjects? What are its distinctive aims and methods? We'll think about two claims that are often made about philosophy: that it deals with questions that are, in some sense, *fundamental*; and that it deals with questions that are of some special *importance*. We'll also look at how philosophy is actually practiced by exploring some of the criteria philosophers bring to bear when assessing the success of philosophical arguments. Finally, we'll finish by briefly thinking about how two very influential philosophers - David Hume (1711-1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) - attempted to answer the question of how we can know whether, in any given case, there really is a right way of looking at things.

* Please feel free to leave me comments :-)

This is my first wave review. I plan on adding to it over the next week.

Here are my notes & comments from the videos:

Video #1

I believe Philosophy basically does what science and religion cannot and will not do, and that is ask questions challenging the validity of the past, present, and perhaps even the future. I say this because most science operates on concrete evidence and most religion operates on faith; philosophy is a discipline of its own as it operates outside the boundaries of science, and goes beyond having mere faith. Philosophy can really be described as the study of knowledge, reality, and existence as it relates to man's journey through space and time; it is not limited to only known information, and certainly does not lean on faith.

Video #2

Philosophy does ask questions. It asks questions that many take for granted; always step back and reflect. I believe Philosophy's core ideology is questioning; questioning everything just like a child.

Video #3

Philosophy is something you do based upon academic argument. I like the "argument" approach. Anyone can debate, but it takes a special person to form premises, ask questions, analyze, assess, and to provide sound conclusions based upon the argument itself; the validity of the argument is what matters most.

On the topic of free will, I don't think this is as difficult as some like to make it. I believe "free will" is the ability to create your own options, not just have the access to choose from available options that someone else has created for you. For example, stopping at a red light isn't free will because

someone has created a system of control for you to follow, and thus provided you with the options (yes, you could run a red light, but nonetheless you still didn't actually create the original options). On the other hand, let's say you live on a private farm that you own. You have the ability to do whatever you want with the farm. You could buy cattle, chickens, seed trees, or even plant a garden (along with many other things). You choose to lay down irrigation, plant corn, and fence in the garden. Now that is an exercise in free will.

If you're born into a city-state (which most of us are) free will is somewhat an illusion, in that you just can't do whatever you want. However, there are still plenty of elements in life where you can exercise free will. For example, you can choose higher education or not. You can choose where you live (for the most part). You can choose your friends. You can basically become anything and nothing you want. Yes, you still have to pay taxes. Yes, there are lots of rules. But nonetheless, there are plenty of ways to exercise free will.

In the end, free will is about creating options for yourself, assessing which of those options are best for you, and then acting upon or utilizing those options. If you cannot add options you want, it is not free will.

Video #4

Philosophy is the right way of thinking about things.

Perhaps we could amend this by saying the "best" way (as in best practices). My reasoning is "the right way" seems slightly one dimensional (as in right way versus wrong way)...whereas "the best way" lets people know there are many ways of thinking, with many possible outcomes; but, if you want to reach the "best" outcome, using a philosophical approach could possibly help you achieve that.

Having a skeptical attitude towards philosophy is acceptable - Hume

I would venture out to say that there isn't a perfect "right" way (perhaps just a better way)...and definitely not one way of thinking that could be used for all arguments, in all situations. As the scenario changes, so must your thinking. Of course, purely in an academic setting, you could form a structured way of thinking (and have great results). The problem with doing that, is that in reality, in the real world, it may come off as too logical and insensitive (Who are we? Vulcans?). Learning the artform of philosophical debate is great...learning how to integrate it into your life and benefit those around you, now that's a challenge. I've always looked at philosophy as a personal journey...to help me to better understand the world around me. For example, science tries to steer clear of the existence of god, and religion professes that there is a god. But, what I want to know is, what if there isn't a god, and what would that mean? What if there is a god, and what does that mean to me? Why are we here? Are we suppose to do something? All questions I ask, seeking answers in the most non-religious way. So, what is the right way of thinking? The right way of thinking is whatever benefits your life and the people around you most; whatever leads you down the path towards enlightenment.