



What is Philosophy

What is your philosophy?

Life is not what
it seems...it is
much more
beautiful



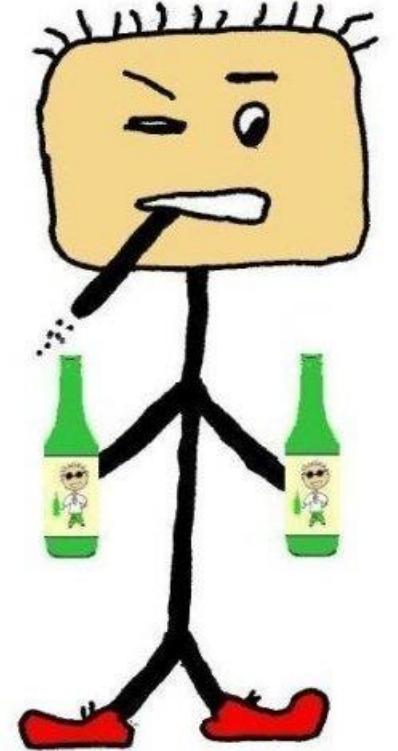
Life is too
much fun not
to make more
mistakes



Life is too
short to
travel second
class



If we concentrated
on what matters
most, there would
be a shortage of
beer



Personal Philosophy

- The Oxford English Dictionary gives two meanings/definitions of philosophy. In this context, the word philosophy is used in a broad sense to mean one's general outlook on life.
- **A personal philosophy**
 - influences everything we do
 - shapes how we see the world
 - gives us a framework to live our lives

Key determinants of a personal philosophy

Upbringing, environment, experience, education, values, beliefs

What is Philosophy as a Discipline?

“The enemy of cosy complacency of thought” Simon Blackburn

Oxford Primary definition “Philosophy is the use of reason and argument in seeking truth and knowledge of reality, especially of the causes and nature of things”

It is high level thinking to establish what is true or real, given the limits of human thought and senses .

As a discipline, it constantly questions assumptions

- A quest for wisdom and knowledge
- A process of analysis and critical reflection
- A way of thinking about certain sorts of questions. Most distinctive feature is its use of logical argument.

Why study Philosophy?

“ Philosophy removes us from our narrow everyday concerns and takes us to a realm of generality which can put our lives into a new perspective” Bertrand Russell

- to help us think clearly about our prejudices and clarify our beliefs
- for the sake of asking questions
- to break free from our self imposed restraints
- to enlarge our concept of what is possible, expand horizons, use imagination

Professor Marianne Talbot, Oxford University

- Studying Philosophy develops an independence of mind
- It is about critical thinking, looking at things from different angles/ perspectives, analysing and unpicking statements
- Philosophy thrives on debate and asking questions
More questions lead to more knowledge. Don't expect answers
- When we adopt a philosophical approach to the big questions, our thinking becomes more disciplined and logical

Advice/Guidance for Group members

- Philosophy entails a particular state of mind, different from our usual ways of thinking
- Need to challenge assumptions and prejudices, letting go of personal beliefs and opinions
- Its about adopting and exploring a whole range of perspectives when considering an issue (not just from individual experience but from other perspectives societal, global etc. No anecdotes)
- Philosophical enquiry is a desire to understand something, rather than just know it
- Its about the journey as well as the destination
- Give ourselves mental space to explore unfamiliar ideas (before, after and during classes)

Early Greek Philosophers 600BC

Intellectual Revolution takes place.

Rational thinking was first recorded in 600 BC. Natural Philosophers(Thales from Miletus and others) began to question why there were floods, famine, drought ...

Not satisfied with current explanations and explored natural causes to explain them

Up until then, the response from people was one of acceptance and powerlessness.

Supernatural explanations(mythological/religious) were given to explain natural occurrences e.g Gods were angry

Socrates further developed this way of thinking, using his reasoning skills to construct a rational argument. This distinguishes Philosophy from superstition.

Making a Philosophical/Logical Argument

- **An inductive argument** involves a generalisation based on a certain number of observations.
- Provides us with fairly reliable predictions about our environment.

- **A deductive argument** begins with a particular premise/claim
- It moves logically to a conclusion which follows on from the premise. The claim is backed up by supporting reasons
- If the premise is true and the argument has a valid form, the conclusion automatically follows
- It is important to seriously consider counter arguments to strengthen, challenge undermine the premise.
- There are true premises and false premises...

1) All men are mortal (premise)

Socrates is a man

Socrates is mortal (conclusion) True premise and logical argument

Branches of Philosophy

- **Epistemology**

- What can we know and how can we know it ?
- What counts as real knowledge ?
- How does genuine knowledge differ from belief ?

- **Greatest divide in Philosophy:**

Rationalism (truth can be arrived at through abstract reasoning/idealist view) **versus**
Empiricism (all information comes from senses, materialist view)

Plato versus Aristotle

- **Metaphysics**

- Is the world an illusion? Is there a deeper reality out there that we can't understand?

Ethics/Moral Philosophy

Concerned with concepts: justice, virtue, happiness

- What makes an action right or wrong?
- How should we live ?
- How should we treat other people?
- Is morality simply a matter of prejudice or can we give good reasons for our moral beliefs ?

Three types of Moral Theories which provide a philosophical framework for understanding moral issues: Duty based, Consequentialist, Virtue based

Political Philosophy

- How we should live together in society? Embraced by Ethics
- A primary concern is with the balance of power between autonomy and authority, between individual and State.
- How much freedom should the individual have and how much power should the state have ?
- Who has the power? What is the nature of power?
- What is the distribution of resources in society ? Is it fair? What is a fair society?
- What values, principles should underpin how a society is governed?

Other subject areas of Philosophy

- History, Religion, Education, Law, Language, Science, Feminism...
- Philosophy groups usually combine a study of the ideas and writings of previous Philosophers from the Early Greeks onwards with current topics, themes in a debate/discussion format.
- Parallels are drawn with events/developments of modern times
- European Philosophy is based on Ancient Greeks and the completely new way of thinking that evolved here.

Socrates

- Three people set philosophy's agenda for subsequent 2,500 years, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle
- Socrates wrote nothing down but his student Plato did. The Dialogues featuring Socrates in the lead role, articulating sound logical arguments.
- He challenged those in power, criticising all forms of injustice and corruption.
- Questions open up discussions and debates. Answers, personal opinions can close subjects down (Democracies/Autocracies)
- State brought charges against him for being a threat to the stability of the State and a corrupting influence on the minds of young people.
- Executed in presence of Plato 399BC

Socrates 400 BC

“Wonder is the feeling of the philosopher and philosophy begins in wonder” Plato

- “One question is more powerful than a thousand answers”
- “The unexamined life is not worth living “
- “Beware the barrenness of a busy life”
- “One thing I know and that is that I know nothing “
- “Most subversive people are those who ask questions “

What does Political Theory/Philosophy mean ?

How should we live together in society ?

Two types of thinking in Political Theory

- 1) Descriptive Thinking. Presents a picture of how people in a society actually are. It mirrors the world. It inspired Machiavelli's radical new approach to politics. "Let's look at how things are and not how we would like them to be") Hobbes
- 2) Normative Thinking
- How people in society ought to live together, what is right and just
- These theories aim to change it e.g. Plato, Aristotle (elitist) Hobbes (absolutist) Rousseau (democratic) Karl Marx, John Rawls
- Putting ideas into action. These philosophers had a huge influence on culture, ideologies

Political Theory involves both types of thinking. Need to describe the world to which your theory applies.

Overview of Women throughout History

- For over 3000 years, women have lived in a patriarchal world dominated by men
- For most of this time, there were no protests made about the subjugation of women
- Women had no independence from men and were seen as men's property
- **18th century Age of Enlightenment in Europe alone**, a few lone voices begin to emerge in protest at the situation
- Women joined the revolutionary movement for natural rights, demanded to be recognised as citizens of equal status to men and be shown equal respect.
- They didn't achieve their aims but seeds had been planted

Feminist Philosophy, a power perspective

- A study of the political world in which women and their current and historical concerns are represented and addressed.
- A study of the nature of power. Who has power in society and who has control?
“Gender divides society along with race and class”
- Explores ways to develop new ideals and practices
- The focus is on ways of improving women’s lives, by reorganising political institutions and practices

Feminist Political Philosophy

All feminists support the following beliefs:

- 1) Gender is entrenched in society
- 2) Patriarchy is global, inequality is institutionalised
- 3) Gender creates a hierarchy with men at the top and women at the bottom (Patriarchy)
- 4) We have a society that advantages men and disadvantages women.
This power imbalance is maintained by social norms.

Development of Movement

- **First wave of Feminist Activism 1840s-1920s**
Objective- to improve life for women educationally, politically and economically
Some success, women were given the vote in the Western world
- **Second wave 1960s Women's Liberation Movement**
- In the U.S. the movement allied itself to the Civil Rights movement.
- Exposed the entrenched sexist attitudes in society.
- Biological sex is fixed but gender is a social construction
- **Where are we now ? How fragile is the position of women in the world today?**