

# Introduction to Philosophy

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These notes are taken from The University of Edinburgh's [Introduction to Philosophy](#) course.

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## Additional Resources

- [Philosophy Bites](#)
- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [Selected works of Kant](#)
- [Why do philosophy?](#)
- [The Partially Examined Life](#)
- [Philosophy for Everyone](#)

## Philosophy as a subject

We'll think about two claims that are often made about philosophy: that it deals with questions that are "fundamental" and that it deals with questions that are of some special, greater importance.

Instead, look at philosophy as just trying to understand and reason with answers to these questions. You should try to work your way through the course and consider and engage and understand all the different arguments and problems.

### Philosophy viewed fundamentally

Philosophy as a way of working out the best way to think about things e.g. physics, medicine and is prompted from either the inside or the outside.

- **outside:** medicine calibration using the results of 4 tumors is no good compared to a biological viewpoint
- **inside and outside:** physics analysis of light, thinking of it as both a particle or a wave

Philosophical questions arise in a lot of different places:

- asking why? repeatedly. stepping back further and further

Is philosophy *fundamental* then? As in a surgeon doesn't think about the deeper philosophical musings on life in order to be a great surgeon. Continuously articulating presuppositions too makes philosophy frustrating and seen as futile sometimes.

How do we do it?

To engage with the arguments and topics and problems you find in the course.

### Ex.: cinema and hotdogs

- does the conclusion follow from the premises?
- criticize the premises?

We call an argument **sound** if the argument is valid with true premises.

### Ex.: free will vs determinism

**Premise 1:** The way the world was in the past controls exactly how it is in the present, and how it will be in the future.

**Premise 2:** We're part of the world, just like everything around us.

**Premise 3:** We can't control how things were in the past, or the way the past controls the present and future.

Conclusion: we don't control anything that happens in the world, including all the things that we think, say and do.

Normally, though, it is hard to boil philosophical arguments down to a straight, linear premises sequence. Also, by condensing it down to just premises, philosophy loses out on some fundamental, ineffable aspects and *beauty*.

"...there is something disappointing about a philosophical work that contains arguments, however good, which are not inspired by some genuine vision..." - **Hilary Putnam**

What is the argument illuminating here too?

Hume:

- associating of impressions and ideas and the various propensities that we have to draw conclusions about the world on the basis of those impressions
- never really know whether those habits of association are the right ones, or whether those conclusions that we're drawing are really putting us in touch with the way that the world is.

## Morality: Objective, Emotive, or Relative

We all live with some sense of what is good or bad, some feelings about which ways of conducting ourselves are better or worse. But what is the status of these moral beliefs, senses, or feelings? Should we think of them as reflecting hard, objective facts about our world, of the sort that scientists could uncover and study? Or should we think of moral judgements as mere expressions of personal or cultural preferences?

- moral judgement of a person's actions
- abstract moral judgement with ethical theories

And asking about that status of such judgements.

Are we representing objective facts of matter? Or are we describing our personal or cultural practices? Are we depicting some element of the universe out there? Are we expressing our emotions toward things?

Moral judgements with distinction to empirical judgements:

- giving to charity is morally good
- taking care of your children is morally obligatory
- Cain killing Abel out of jealousy was morally wrong

Questions:

- Are they the story of things that can be true or are just *mere* opinions?
- If they can be true/false, what makes them true/false?
- If they are true, are they *objectively* true?

## Objectivism, Relativism, Emotivism

**Objectivism:** Moral judgements are the sorts of things that can be true or false

**Relativism:** Moral judgements can be true or false, but they're only true or false relative to something that can vary between people

**Emotivism:** Direct expressions to something, neither objective nor relative

So I guess three questions arise in choosing from these three perspectives:

1. Are they the sorts of judgements that can be true or false - or are they mere opinion?
2. If they are true/false, what *makes* them true/false?
3. If they are true, are they *objectively* true?

Theoretical hunch: If morality is distinguished by agent-neutral and overriding, then you could expect a unifying domain of these three parts.

## Epistemology: Theory of knowledge

Topics include:

1. Basic constituents of knowledge

2. Gettier problem
3. Radical skepticism - do we have as much knowledge as we think?

Knowledge requires truth and belief, or true belief. Is this all-encompassing though?

Simply forming the judgement and getting it right in a trial doesn't mean getting it right. It requires thinking things through and using reasoning here, so there is more than true belief. The two intuitions for what is more than true belief is 1. Anti-luck intuition and 2. Ability intuition

**Gettier problem:** The stopped clock example. Forming a belief by looking at the clock and you have a justified true belief. Crux: you can't *know* what the time is, its too lucky and against the anti-luck intuition.

Another gettier problem is sheeps in the field. You create an object that looks like a sheep and hide a sheep behind that object. But does farmer really *know* there is a sheep at that object?

**Radical Skepticism:** Is knowledge impossible? Perhaps, do we actually know next to nothing?

Let's look at some skeptical hypothesis: the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis. Are we possibly just fed fake experiences? It's impossible to know that it's false right.

If that is false, how then can we know that we have two hands? Even though they are far-fetched, the point is that you don't know these statements are for sure false.

## Political philosophy

### Political obligation

Do we have an obligation to obey the law? We attempt to find an explanation for what it means to obey the law and why we have to.

Firstly, there is a difference btw complying and obeying the law. Complying with the law only said we are doing what the law commands, but obeying the law says we are doing what the law commands because the law commands it.

A question is: if there is a stop sign in the middle of the wilderness with no one around you for miles and that is guaranteed, do you still stop?

So, lets look at three arguments:

1. Gratitude: should we be grateful and return services in terms of obeying? what if without consent when someone washes your car without you knowing?
2. Consent theory: do we automatically consent and is a majority consent good enough?
3. Fairness: is it fair when governments provide services and is it fair in our return of obeying?

### Identity Theory

#### Descartes' Substance Dualism Theory of Mind

First, humans mind have something called **conscious awareness**, where we can think of our thoughts and know that we are thinking. Or we can also think about the future and different states and situations as well.

Descartes thought that our body was composed of only two types: a physical one that composes items, skin, etc. and a sentient one that does the thinking.

But is that even possible and how are the two connected? This is the problem of causation brought up by Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia.

**Physicalism: Identity Theory:** This refers to the idea that everything is physical. There is nothing over and above the physical, something at odds with the dualism theory.

- Token identity vs. Type identity:

**Functionalism:**

## Time travel and Philosophy

**Time travel:** distinguishing between two ways in how time can be registered -> external time.

Time travel is just a divergence between personal time and external time. Forward and backward time travel is fundamentally different though in that personal time and external time have different signs in backwards time travel.

Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity(1905): Greater the difference of velocity and the closer that velocity becomes to the speed of light, the more the rate of temporal difference diverges.

**Grandfather Paradoxes:** Objection to backwards time travel logically, not physically or scientifically. It would create contradictions.

**Casual Loops:** chain of events s.t. an event turns out to be one of its own causes. there is debate though between whether they should be seen as *infinite or finite linear chains*.

**Bilocation:** being at two places at one time, is there persistence there? or could it be seen as **branching histories**?

**Closed time-like curves(CTC):** returns to same point in cycle where all velocities are less than the speed of light in quantum gravity.

Free will vs Determinism