

If you think that philosophy is “all Greek to you,” well, you’re absolutely right! (I’d rather give you my puns in person, but this will have to do). Philosophy was “invented” by the Greeks. It was Pythagoras who in 570 BC coined the term philosophy. It comes from 2 words, Philos, meaning the love of and Sophia, meaning wisdom. So the word literally means, “lover of wisdom.” Now, what does philosophy have to do with loving wisdom? Wisdom, for the ancient Greeks was a big term. To be wise, meant that you were a virtuous person, virtue meant to strive for excellence. So, wisdom meant being the best that you could be. Wisdom also meant that you work on “knowing yourself.” Self knowledge was a huge aspect of wisdom for the Greeks. If you truly knew yourself, you were wise.

The Greeks were all about thinking and questioning. You know from your history classes that the Greeks ruled the world at one time. They excelled in thought, drama, literature, architecture, sports, and on and on. Alexander the Great ruled the world, and three all time great thinkers were Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Socrates, we’ll talk about him at length very shortly, was called the “wisest man in Athens” by the Oracle of Delphi. He was called the wisest, because he “knew that he did not know.” He recognized his strengths as well as his limitations. He taught his students on the streets of Athens by asking them question after question. It is called the Socratic Method of teaching. He believed that the teacher did not impart knowledge to the student, but rather, the teacher helped to “bring out of the student” what the student already knew. An interesting view on teaching, isn’t it?

Aristotle had a rather neat definition of Philosophy. He said: “Philosophy arises from the human ability to reflect upon experience, to wonder and be curious about what happens to us and to others.” We are rational beings, what separates us from the other animals is our ability to reason and think. Though, at times, one wonders if human beings are really thinking? That’s one of my caustic side comments. We wonder! I believe that the older we become we lose more and more of a sense of wonder. Watch a small child and watch his/her wonder at the simplest things. Hold up a shiny object in front of a young child, watch the reaction. It’s wonderful!

When was the last time you wondered? When was the last time you said that, “This is wonderful, meaning full of wonder? When was the last time you looked at a tree, held a blade of grass in your hand, and marveled at the

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complexity of these “simple objects? We reflect upon our experiences. All of us have had many experiences that make us who we are. If some of these experiences would not have happened, would we be the same person? That’s something to ponder!

We reflect upon what we said, what we did, how we acted, how we treated someone, etc. If you were trying to solve a problem, you would study possible solutions. Then, you would choose a course of action, and see if the problem got solved. If the problem was still there, you would reflect upon what action you took and then choose another course of action.

Experiences and wonder and reflection about ourselves and others is what philosophy really is. It’s those timeless questions about life which I mentioned above.

Philosophy is also a broader umbrella under which a few other disciplines fall. One is **Metaphysics**, another Greek word, meaning other than physical, beyond the physical. Metaphysics, which we will study, is concerned with the question of **reality**. What is real? How do we define something that is real? Usually reality consists in something tangible. We can see it, touch it, smell it, taste it, and hear it. Right? Well, are things also real which we cannot qualify or quantify with our senses? Some have said that we all make our own reality! Do we? Interesting question! What is real for me may not necessarily be real for you. Get it?

When I lived in Santa Fe, the favorite “catch phrase” was , “we create our own reality”. Do we? If you walk outside and you say, “It’s hot out here”, is it really hot? To you it may be, but to someone else, it may not be. See? Your reality of the air temperature hitting your skin is being hot. Someone else’s reality of the air temperature hitting their skin may be very different.

For those of us in this area of the country, 94 degrees may be “hot.” But, for someone in Phoenix, Arizona; 95 degrees may feel like spring, when the temperature hits 120 in August.

If I look outside on a late summer day and say, “Wow, there’s 6 inches of snow on the ground, and if I really believed there was six inches of snow on the ground; would you be able to tell me that I was wrong? Not really! You

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might disagree with me, but you really could not tell me that I was wrong, because it is my reality, not yours.

Speaking of reality, I have never watched any of the “reality” TV shows. Why? For me, lights, cameras, sound-stages and scripts are not reality- they are illusion. Besides, I’m involved in my own reality show and have been for 60+ years in every second of every day.

Metaphysics also has to do with the idea of perception. Some philosophers we will talk about believed that everything is simply perception. We are a bundle of perceptions constantly bumping into other bundles of perceptions. Hot, cold, good, bad, right, wrong, pain, joy, etc, it’s all our perception, sort of the thing I talked about above regarding the air hitting your skin. If you wake up late one morning, go rushing around, walk out to your car and find a flat tire, get caught in traffic and then show up late for school or work; you may say that you are having a “bad day.” But, it is your perception of the events that have taken place which makes your bad day, isn’t it? Someone else may have similar experiences that morning, but for them, they are still alive and it is a “good day.” See?

Do we ever share the same reality? Do you have the same reality at this very moment as someone in Rome? Do you even have the same reality as your neighbor next door, or the same reality as the person in the very next room? I dare say, no. We would have to be automated robots, programmed with the very same thoughts, desires, emotions, observations and experiences to say that we share the same reality.

Think about this aspect. When we are angry or upset we may say something like, “You/They made me angry when.... But, can anyone make us anything? It is absolutely impossible for anyone to make us angry, jealous, upset, etc. We make ourselves that way by our reaction to and perceptions of the events and circumstances that we have experienced. So, when you are feeling a certain emotion, ask yourself what happened to precipitate these feelings in you? Often, when we are upset, angry or disappointed, it is due to something not going the way we expected it to go, or a person not responding to us in a way that we expected. Think about it!

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Another area under the Philosophy umbrella is **epistemology**. Epistemology is concerned with the question of knowledge. What is knowledge? From where do we obtain knowledge? What is knowledge and what is merely opinion? What is knowledge and what is truth? What is truth compared to error? Two philosophical camps which we will discuss down the road, are the Rationalists and the Empiricists. Rational philosophers believed that knowledge came from our ability to think and to reason. They believed that all knowledge came from our thought processes. Empirical philosophers believed that we have knowledge about things we experience and things we sense. Our knowledge comes through the senses: we see, smell, touch, hear and taste things. After we can sense something we then have knowledge of it. We'll discuss this question at length. It should be interesting.

Another area of philosophy is called **axiology**. Axiology is concerned with the study of values, the distinctions between values and facts. Axiology is comprised of 2 areas, **aesthetics** and **ethics**. Aesthetics is concerned with what is pretty, pleasing to the senses, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" type of attitude. I may see a painting that I believe is aesthetically pleasing. You may see a painting that is aesthetically awful. It's a matter of taste. Is our taste objective or subjective? If I say that, vanilla ice cream is better than strawberry, am I stating a fact or merely my personal value of liking vanilla better? Surely, I am stating my opinion, personal preference.

Ethics is of course concerned with what is right/wrong/good/bad? Is ethics objective or subjective? From where do we receive our ethical viewpoints? Do we all behave ethically the same in every situation? Are ethics relative?

Are ethics ever absolute? Can I definitively state that if something is right for me, it should be right for you? Or, can you state that if you believe something is wrong, that it should be wrong for me?

A lot of people today believe that the ethics that they hold should be the ethics for all. Whether it's gay marriage, abortion, individual rights, the economy, the environment, etc.; some folks feel that their opinion is the only opinion. The, I'm right and you're wrong philosophy. Actually our ethical stances are oftentimes personal opinions and feelings for which we have very little rational thought processes operating. We will talk later, about a philosopher, David Hume, who believed that ethics are based on sentiment.

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Our ethics are simply how we feel regarding a particular issue, and we have no better basis for our ethical stance than the next person. Interesting questions? We'll also discuss this area a lot more, when we specifically deal with ethical theories.

The philosophical essays that are contained in the book are interesting. How should you read these essays? I want you to read these essays with a critical eye. Do you agree with what the author has written? Do you agree with his/her philosophy? How can you adapt the philosophy to your everyday life? As I said above, I'll be lecturing on the philosopher's lives and philosophy. You read the essays and I'll pose discussion questions based on your reading and my lectures. That's the course we'll take.

We've only just begun!