

## **UCU 103: CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING LECTURE 1 NOTES**

### **1. Definition and meaning of Philosophy**

#### *Etymological definition*

Philosophy is derived from the Greek term *Philosophia* which literally translates to the ‘Love of Wisdom.’ Etymologically, the term is derived from 2 Greek words: *Philo* and *Sophia*. Literally, Philo refers to Love and Sophia refers to wisdom. Thus, Philosophy is the love of wisdom. This implies that philosophy is a thoughtful and creative response to the exigencies of life

#### *Popular/Common conception of Philosophy*

The term philosophy has been used to mean a wide range of phenomena. For instance, the popular/common understanding of philosophy is that it is used to denote an attitude towards actions, activities. It can also be used to mean a people’s unique way of looking at the world (a people’s world view). This would refer to their fundamental beliefs and convictions. Philosophy can also be used to refer to a general outlook of what constitutes ideal society e.g. national philosophies such as Nyayoism, Ujamaa, e.t.c

Thus all people and cultures can claim to have a philosophy to the extent that they have some ideas about; physical objects/world; man; meaning of life and death; good and bad; right/wrong; beauty and ugly etc. These idea or views may be a result of deliberate thinking or may be largely a result of convention

#### *Technical sense of philosophy*

Philosophy is defined as the rational inquiry into reality. This means that it is the systematic study of the world and our place in it and it entails a critical examination of reality characterized by rational inquiry that aims at the Truth for the sake of attaining wisdom.

### **2. Branches of Philosophy**

Philosophy has four broad branches which include: Logic, Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Axiology.

## *Axiology*

Axiology refers to the philosophical study of values. The study of values is divided into Ethics and Aesthetics.

Ethics is the study of moral values. This study consists in the systematic study of human conduct. It is also referred to as moral philosophy. Ethics studies how people ought to act, and the nature of good and evil acts. The term ‘ethics’ is derived from the Greek term ‘*ethos*’ meaning ‘custom’ or ‘habit.’ Questions asked in ethics are such as, “How should people act,” “What constitutes a right or wrong action,” and many others.

Aesthetics, on the other hand, is the study of beauty. It is concerned with the nature and appreciation of art, beauty, and good taste. The word Aesthetics is derived from the Greek term ‘*aisthetikos*’ meaning ‘of sense perception.’

## *Epistemology*

The term Epistemology is derived from the ancient Greek word *Episteme* which literally means Knowledge. Epistemology therefore refers to the study of knowledge. It seeks to establish the process of attaining knowledge, the nature of knowledge, and assesses the validity of this knowledge. It asks questions such as, “How do we know,” “How can we justify our knowledge claims,” “what are the sources of our knowledge” e.t.c.

## *Metaphysics*

It is the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of existence. The term metaphysics is derived from 2 Greek words: *meta* and *physica*. *Meta* directly translates to ‘beyond’ while *physica* translates to ‘physical’. Literally metaphysics studies reality beyond the physical world. Metaphysics, therefore, studies the essence of things (that which makes things to be what they are). It deals with abstract reality and concepts that cannot be apprehended through the senses.

## *Logic*

Logic is the study of the methods and principles used to distinguish between good and bad/bogus reasoning. It investigates and classifies the structure of statements and arguments and

determines if they constitute right reasoning or not. Logic aims at securing the clarity and organization of our thought process so that our arguments have a consistency and accuracy. Questions asked in logic include: what is correct reasoning, what distinguishes a good argument from a bad one? Etc.

### **3. Characteristics of Philosophy**

Philosophy transcends common sense view of world. It is characterized by the following;

Philosophy is CRITICAL

- Accepts only what is well grounded
- Bases convictions, beliefs, and actions on well-reasoned grounds
- Frees us from slogans, hypocrisy

Philosophy is INQUIRING

- Open minded view of worlds
- 360% perceptibility of issues, not straitjacket

Philosophy is QUESTIONING

- Not yes men/women
- Questions – popular views, values, norms, traditions etc

Philosophy is REFLECTIVE

- Scrutinizes common sense view to discover the underlying basis and validity

Philosophy is RATIONAL

- Relies on power of reason to see the how we can stretch human reason to answer fundamental questions

### **4. Methods of Philosophy**

Philosophy is an adventure, which demands hard work and intellectual rigor. Like an adventure there is no where exactly you will end up, but if you persist, you will gain some valuable insights, and hopefully an altered perspective on your world- **Paul Voice, University of South Africa, Pretoria.**

Note that in lecture one, we observed that deliberative reasoning is fundamental to philosophy and its principles. If you can remember this, here are some of the techniques which are employed in such an activity.

### **ANALYSIS**

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) defined “analysis” as the classification of a word or entity by genre and differentia, that is, analysis is the classification of a word or entity by placing it in a large class called the genre and then differentiating it from other members of that class. A very good example of this form of analysis is found in the Dictionaries. You should look up in the Dictionaries and see how they define concepts.

However, analysis does not only consist in this kind of classification only. Analysis is also the listing of the most important characteristics of the thing to be analyzed, that is, outlining what constitutes the essence of a thing. Both forms of analysis are common and extremely useful.

### **For Example: Analysis of Concepts**

A good example of philosophical clarification is by the English philosopher William James (1842-1910) who, on returning from a walk one summer while on a camping holiday in New England, found other campers engrossed in a heated debate regarding a man, a squirrel and a tree (James, 1967:366-368)

On one side of the trunk of the tree clung a squirrel. But since the man was on the opposite side, he was unable to see it. The other men argued him to have a glimpse of it, so he walked round, but the squirrel also moved. But they argued him on. But every time the man moved the squirrel also moved in such a way that although the man circled the tree severally, he was unable to see the elusive animal.

he ensuring argument cemented on the following: The man went round the tree, and the squirrel was on the tree, but did the man go around the squirrel?

James was invited to arbitrate. He pointed out that the answer to the question depended on precisely what was meant by asserting that the man went round the squirrel, or more precisely, by what was meant by going round in this context. If going round meant that the man passed successively through positions first facing the front of the squirrel, then one side of it, then its back, then the other side of it, and then its front again, clearly the man did not go round the squirrel, since he never occupied these positions relative to it. However, if going round the squirrel meant that the man passed successively from positions first south of the animal, then west, north, east then south again, then clearly, he did go round the squirrel since the squirrel was on the tree and the man successively passed through each of these positions relative to the squirrel.

Thus, James clarified the concept by distinguishing between two senses of going round with which he resolved the dispute, since it transpires that neither of the apparently opposing

factions in the debate were disagreeing with what the other meant by the term going round, that in fact was no genuine disagreement between them.

## **SYNTHESIS**

Just as important as analysis is synthesis. Synthesis is to relate the thing to be known to something already familiar. Essentially, it is the attempt to reveal the thing to be known as part of some larger whole, e.g. an established philosophical rule, policy or standard. For example, the student of Socrates, Theaetetus, thought that it is possible to clarify “knowledge” by analyzing it into its instances, like geometry, the art of the cobbler and carpenter. This was “analysis.”

Contra wise, consider Socrates thought on the definition of knowledge. The father of philosophy argued that knowledge cannot be defined by analyzing it into parts, because no part is identical to the whole. Thus he stated, “Knowledge” is not equivalent to geometry or the art of the cobbler and carpenter although these are fundamental instances in knowledge. For him, knowledge is all these and more. Thus more phenomena like knowledge cannot be defined by analysis. In common experience “blue” is such a phenomenon or word. To clarify ‘blue’, other than pointing to some blue object, you shall either have to say that blue is the color produced by light of wavelength .000047 cm, or you shall probably have to say that blue is the color of the sky on a cloudless day or refer to some other known feature.

## **DIALECTIC**

This is the method originally associated with Socrates (467-399 B.C.). But it was later adopted and developed by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). For Socrates, dialectic method consists in clarifying phenomena or the words and terms that reflect them through discussion of their central concepts. In this dialectics, he acted out as a “mid-wife” of ideas. He does not seek to impose his views in the process but through question and answer method, he seeks to evoke independent positions of his students and followers on selected issues. That method was so effective that it has become one of the classic techniques of education.

Hegel, a German philosopher considered dialectic as a method through which ideas develop. When beginning with an idea (“thesis”) its opposite (“antithesis”) develops until a middle ground (“Synthesis”) is reached. This becomes a fresh thesis.

## **EXAMPLE**

### **Socratic Dialectic from Theaetetus**

*Theaetetus* is a book written by Plato pitting the middle aged Socrates in a discussion over the nature of knowledge against other characters mainly the young Theaetetus and the elderly Theodorus. Socrates questions the young man, Theaetetus, whom as Theodorus explains, has shown great aptitude for learning. Moreover he exhibits humility. He like Socrates himself is quite aware of his ignorance. Here is an excerpt from that book. In this part of the dialogue. Theaetetus gives examples of knowledge rather than its definitions; and this is rejected as insufficient. Socrates suggests that knowledge cannot be defined by analysis

**Socrates:** And by wisdom the wise are wise

**Theaetetus:** Yes.

**Socrates:** And is that different in any way from knowledge?

**Theaetetus:** What?

**Socrates:** Wisdom; are not men wise in that which they know?

**Theaetetus:** Certainly they are.

**Socrates:** Then wisdom and knowledge are the same?

**heuetetus:** Yes

**Socrates:** Herein lays the difficulty which I can never solve to my satisfaction-What is knowledge? Can we answer the question? What say you? Which of us will speak first? Whoever misses shall sit down, as at the game of ball, and shall be donkey, as the boys say; he who lasts out his competitors in the game without missing, shall be our king, and shall have the right of putting to us any questions which he pleases... Why is there no reply? I hope, Theodorus, that I am not betrayed into rudeness by my love of conversations? I only want to make us talk and be friendly and sociable.

**theodorus:** The reverse of rudeness, Socrates: but I would rather that you would ask one of the young fellows; for the truth is that I am unused to your game of question and answer, and I am too old to learn; the young will be more suitable, and they will improve more than I shall, for youth is always able to improve. And so having made a beginning with Theaetetus, I would advise you to go with him and not let off.

**Socrates:** Do you hear, Theaetetus, what Theodorus says/ the philosopher, whom you would like to disobey, and whose word ought to be a command to a young man, bids me interrogate you. Take courage, then and nobly say what you think that knowledge is.

Theaetetus: Well, Socrates, I will answer as you and he bid me; and if I make a mistake, you will doubtlessly correct me.

**Socrates:** We will, if we can.

**heuetetus:** Then I think that the sciences which I learn from Theodorus-Geometry and those which you mentioned- are knowledge; and I would include the art of the cobbler and other craftsmen; these each, and all of them, are knowledge.

### **Why this Initial Definition Given by Theaetetus is Insufficient**

**Socrates:** Too much, Theaetetus, too much; the nobility and liberality of your nature make you give many and diverse things, when I am asking for one simply thing

**Theaetetus:** What do you mean Socrates?

**Socrates:** Perhaps nothing. I will endeavor, however, to explain what I believe to be my meaning: When you speak of cobbling, you mean the art or science of making shoes?

**theaetetus:** I do.

**Socrates:** In both cases you define the subject matter of each of the two arts?

**Theaetetus:** True.

**Socrates:** But that, Theaetetus, was not the point of my question: We wanted to know not the subjects, nor yet the number of the arts or sciences, for we were not going to count them, but we wanted to know the nature of knowledge in the abstract. Am I not right?

**Theaetetus:** Perfectly right.

Socrates hope in utilizing this method was that in weeding out incorrect understandings, he and his conversational partner would be moving toward clearer pictures of the true answer.

Because Socrates believed that the truth about the ultimate issues in life lay deeply hidden within us, this process of unpacking the truth within was like that of a mid-wife helping a mother in labor bring forth her child.

### **5. Relevance of Philosophy**

1. General Problem Solving- it enhances one's problem solving abilities. It helps one analyze concepts, definitions, arguments, and problems. It helps them to organize ideas and recognize the best possible solution to a problem from an array of possibilities.
2. Communication skills- it contributes to the development of expressive and communicative powers. It provides some of the basic tools of self-expression - for instance, skills in presenting ideas through well-constructed, systematic arguments - that other fields either do not use, or use less extensively. It helps one to express what is distinctive of one's view; enhances one's ability to explain difficult material; and helps one to eliminate ambiguities and vagueness from one's writing and speech.
3. *Persuasive Powers.* Philosophy provides training in the construction of clear formulations, good arguments, and apt examples. It helps one develop the ability to be convincing. One learns to build and defend one's own views, to appreciate competing positions, and to indicate forcefully why one considers one's own views preferable to alternatives. These capacities can be developed not only through reading and writing in philosophy, but also through the philosophical dialogue, in and outside the classroom, that is so much a part of a thoroughgoing philosophical education.
4. *Writing Skills.* Philosophy teaches interpretive writing through its examination of challenging texts, comparative writing through emphasis on fairness to alternative positions, argumentative writing through developing students' ability to establish their own views, and descriptive writing through detailed portrayal of concrete examples: the anchors to which generalizations must be tied. Structure and technique, then, are emphasized in philosophical writing. Originality is also encouraged, and students are generally urged to use their imagination and develop their own ideas
5. Liberates individuals from narrow- mindedness to open- mindedness  
Opens up one's scope of perception, it enlarges our scope of awareness.
6. Develops in individuals logical, coherent, systematic, consistent, clear thinking

Such thinking enhance our rational capacity – which enhances decision making, problem solving.

7. Philosophy helps to come to terms with meaning and significance of human life in its existential conditions. How we experience the world as individuals but also as collectivities, for example by grounding our values on rational grounds, foundation or basis; sharpening our moral sensibilities.
8. Philosophy helps to provide answers and explanations to some of the most complex, troubling questions of human existence e.g. death, destiny of man etc.