

Nature of Philosophy Lecture Notes

The term philosophy originates from the Greek words, *philo* and *sophia*, which translate to love and wisdom, respectively. Thus, the literal meaning of philosophy is the love of wisdom. However, this does not capture the true meaning of philosophy. Philosophy is not merely an appreciation of wisdom, that is, a static activity. Rather, it is an academic subject concerned with the active pursuit of wisdom.

What is wisdom then? Wisdom has both a theoretical and practical aspect. Wisdom is the grasp of supremely important truths and the reorientation of one's life in response to the grasp of those truths. In other words, a wise individual is someone who knows the truth of matters of supreme importance and allows the truth impact their life and practice.

Philosophy as a subject will not supply you with the truth of these matters, but rather, supply you with the most well-developed perspectives available. For instance, the question of whether humans have free will has been a long-standing debate that has no clear answer, though there are well-developed arguments for both sides.

The answers philosophers supply to such questions as whether humans have free will or whether God exists, provide us with a comprehensive vision of existence or a world view. This is exactly what wisdom supplies us with.

Knowledge is not directly correlated with wisdom. An individual can possess knowledge, but may not be wise if that knowledge does not affect their world view.

What is evidence and when it is adequate? When we are undertaking ordinary investigation in everyday life, we presuppose evidence. However, we often don't examine this assumption. One of things philosophers do is examine and better understand concepts like evidence.

Philosophers are interested in asking general abstract questions about general abstract concepts, such as "what is knowledge?" or "what is justice?" These concepts act as "glue" that hold together our world view.

Philosophy tends to overlap with many other subjects. For example, philosophy of biology is a subfield of philosophy that is focused on abstract conceptual questions concerning the kinds of things investigated by biologists.

Sellars' definition of philosophy is "how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of that term."

There are three main areas of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Metaphysics focuses on what there is in the most general sense. Questions of metaphysics may be "is there such a person as God?" or "do we have free will?" Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and its central question is "how do we know?" Questions of this field may be "when is a belief reasonable or justified?" or "when does someone actually understand something?" Ethics investigates questions concerning value or conduct, such as "what's right or wrong?"

Philosophy is centered around questions of these three fields, namely "what is there?", "how do we know?", and "what should we do?"