

## Aug 28 Lesson Plan, PHI315

Today our topic is the following: what is philosophy? This class is “Philosophy and Science Fiction” and I have mentioned that I intend to present a kind of interpretative methodology wherein you use science fiction as a sounding board, in a sense, and then you use philosophy to presumably somehow extract insight from that. This is in general the content of this week—the methodology I am developing.

However, we must first discuss what philosophy is, and the way in which it will be used in this class. Wednesday we will discuss why scifi is a perfect medium, and on Friday we will run them together, but today, we focus on philosophy. You signed up for this class, and so you saw the title. Let me now ask, what do you think philosophy is?

Let us look at the word etymologically—perhaps there will be clues offered in the name. Philo comes from Greek *philia*, or love for or toward something. Sophy comes from Greek *sophia*, or wisdom. So, the transliterated, philosophy means love of wisdom.

However, that sort of interpretation is cliché, empty, and frankly overused. It does not tell you anything about what philosophy actually is, and so on. Consider this—love of wisdom—does that mean that one actually attains the wisdom in question? I am not sure. When you love another person, you sometimes delude yourself into thinking that you ‘have’ them as it were. Marriage is like this. But we know divorce exists, and that nothing in this life has any true permanence. So, even if you love wisdom, that means nothing, because to love is not to have. I prefer to think of philosophy as an activity where one actually attains wisdom, instead of merely loving it from a distance. It is no longer passive limerence at a distance, but an active seizing of wisdom into one’s own hands.

So, then, wisdom. What does that mean? What is this so called wisdom? I think of wisdom as being a kind of practical knowing but one that only comes about through a particular activity. We will first discuss wisdom as a knowing, and then the activity by means of which it is derived.

What is wisdom as a kind of practical knowing? The Greeks had a name for it, *phronesis*, that referred to the kind of wisdom one has that pertains to judging well. Situations are complex, and being able to make good judgments is crucial, since good judgments make for good outcomes. This approaches what I mean fairly well, but not quite.

I do not think of practical knowing as being in isolation from the theoretical. By theoretical knowing I refer to knowing how the world is in all terms. A kind of knowing about the way in which things are at the very broad level. Knowing how computers work is theoretical, but it is requisite for any kind of judgment involving their operation. Same with psychology, for knowing what people have going on internally is paramount to making good judgments about how to interact with people, for example. So, I think the distinction between theoretical and practical knowing is a kind of loose, and it is not clear to me how one can be without the other.

There are some people who are highly theoretical. They know many things from a theoretical perspective, but they are incapable of making good judgments and living practically. This is as close as I can get to understanding what pure theoretical knowledge is, but I am incapable of inhabiting such a mindset. I think it is fair to say that practical knowing always requires some theoretical underpinning and theoretical knowing is always in the service of practical knowing.

So, then, what do I mean when I say that the wisdom I think philosophy aims to attain is a kind of practical knowing? I mean that it is the kind of wisdom that allows us to live in such a way that can be said good. In other words, the wisdom I mean is the wisdom for living a good life in the full sense of the term. It is the requisite knowledge and judging ability for living a good life.

What then is the good life? The good life is a life that, as you lay dying on your death bed, or perhaps in that last moment of awareness if your death is spontaneous, you can be happy and proud of. In other words, a good life is a life that, should you have to leave behind, is one you can say was good. It seems circular, the definition I have presented. But, it is not.

Words fail where intuitive knowing succeeds. Gaus, the scientist, once said: "I get it, but now I have to get it". The idea is that we know very well what it means when we say that a good life is a life that upon death is so considered. We then try to define that further by using words, but definitions in language are attempts to articulate what is in and of itself inarticulable and exists at the non linguistic physicochemical level, probably even deeper than that. When we say that something is a snapper or a tuna, we make a call based on a particular recognition mechanism. When we then try to give a definition of what a snapper or a tuna is, we try to articulate in words that call, that judgement we made. But nobody actually compares a picture they see in their eyes with some linguistic definition dictionary in the mind. No, we make a call. Then, when asked to explain after the fact, we give this story as to why we said what we said, and how red snapper is a such and such thing.

So, to clarify, I will not give a full definition of what it means, not because I do not know the definition, but because it is non linguistic. I can point to it, but that is about it. So, here is a pointer—a good life is when you die and you can freely say that. I think it has to do with not having regrets, that is as close as I can get to defining it. But it is a life that one is proud of, content with, and generally happy about as one lies dying.

A warlord, a pirate, and a farmer can all live good lives, and it has nothing to do with this popular notion of ethics as doing the right thing or acting in a moral way. A good life is a life that one is content with as one dies.

So, to recap, our definition so far: philosophy refers to a kind of attaining of wisdom, where wisdom is a kind of knowing requisite for living a good life, where good life is a life one is content with as one dies. We have now to define what this activity is by means of which we attain the knowing.

If the goal is knowing, then it may seem that the requisite activity. This is what most philosophers will tell you. Philosophy is thought about thought, or something approximate. I do not think about this definition, because then you

are playing their games.

For me, activity involved in attaining the wisdom of the good life is double. One, is living life. It is being immersed in life, which includes engaging with culture that is one approximate to. This necessitates being open to the world around you, to truly losing oneself in the world, being completely and entirely submersed. It is contrary to thinking. When you are thinking, you are not in the world, you are abstracted away from it.

The point of aesthetic experience is to lose yourself in it. When you go look at art at museum, do you think about it as you look at it? If you do, then you are not actually enjoying the art. Enjoying the art takes immersion, fully losing yourself in the painting before you, or fully feeling the song. Notice that human beings are primarily sight based, but paintings rarely make us cry. Songs, on the other hand, make us emotional often. This is so because it is far easier to forget to think when one's internal voice is drowned out by the sound of music.

So, one aspect of this activity by means of which we attain wisdom is fully and completely losing oneself in the activities of life, including culture and cultural products, with a certain openness. Another aspect is reflecting after the fact. Thinking of course is a part of this, but at the same time, the kind of thinking that it is matters. Thinking about thinking is thinking about something empty. Thinking is an activity that needs a substance, or content on which it is done. So, the second aspect of the activity is reflecting—I prefer this word to thinking—critically about the lived experience you had while fully immersed.

I should say more about this second aspect. When we reflect critically, I do not mean we completely tear down the lived experience in question. Rather, the critical part is tracing all logical possibilities, asking what the experience meant, remaining vigilant against various distorting biases we might have or defense mechanisms. Critical here refers to thorough and non ideological. The focus is on meaning. Why reflect? Because the truly immersed lived experience puts you in touch with the Real, whatever it is. But, to attain insight, to bring it to the forefront of the mind, it has to be conceptualized and processed. So, through reflection we do this.

As you get better at reflecting, as you read the reflections of others and the insight they share, you attain such knowing for yourself. But most importantly, you begin to blur the boundaries between the living and the reflecting. When you immerse yourself in experiences once more, the you who is immersed now is primed for deeper experience, and eventually you begin to grasp insights in the experience itself.

I will share an experience. I often frequent EDM events around town. I could care less about the music, about who is playing. I am there because it is a kind of experience that allows for the erasure of the neurotic philosophical mindset that thinks about thinking. Fishing is the same for me as well. In these moments, I sometimes have sudden and forceful insight. It is as if an idea forces itself into my mind, and I will suddenly realize something.

So, the activity has two aspects. The first part is living life immersed, engaging in life and culture without thinking. The second part is reflecting critically on these experiences and trying to probe it for meaning. We can now put together

philosophy.

Philosophy is the activity of fully immersing oneself in life, reflecting critically on the experience attained in immersing oneself in life, with the purpose of attaining the requisite knowing for living a good life, understood as being the kind of life one can so call at the moment of death.

In relation to science fiction, I have said philosophy is going to be the means by which we extract insight. Science fiction will therefore be the cultural substance, the medium as it were, that we will immerse ourselves into and then reflect upon in class during discussion. We will also read reflections of others prior, so that we can maximize the amount of insight we attain from the medium that we consume.

When you see on the schedule the lecture sessions, during those I will be sharing my own and the reflections of others, as well as familiarizing you with what I want you to think about after you watch the movies, if that makes sense. I expect these to float in your mind, while you watch the movies (do not think about philosophy when you watch, just focus on the aesthetic experience) and then, in reflecting, apply the stuff I told you about to the thoughts you are having. More on this Wednesday.