

Transcript: Philosophy VIDEO 1.1 – Welcome to “Asking Questions

Welcome to Asking Questions. Or Q, for short. It's also known as Q Pillar, because it's a GE module. General Education. And the GE program consists of so-called pillars—five in all. So this is Q Pillar. Eh, what's in a name?

But maybe this name's worth a moment's thought, here at the start. The pillar metaphor is obvious. Pillars hold up the roof. The roof of your education. They support knowledge. They touch the foundations while reaching to the sky. Fair enough.

But do questions function like pillars? Is that a metaphor that makes sense? In a sense, yes: we say things like

'Scientific inquiry is based on the scientific method, which is based on rigorous questioning'.

Inquiry just means question, so it's almost a tautology. Science based on questions.

All the same, it seems like questioning, as an activity, is more about knocking down than building up. Questions don't hold up the roof. Do they? Answers do. Q maybe looks more like a wrecking ball than a pillar.

That's OK. That's just a way of saying that GE isn't only about holding up the roof. It's about holding up the roof, and knocking down the roof. And putting up a new roof. On a regular basis.

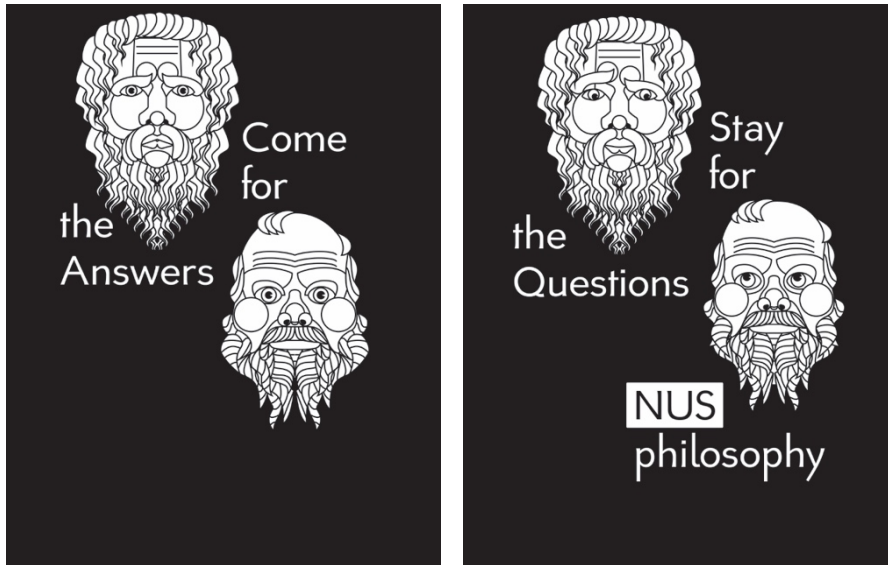
I mention it because that's what I'm going to be talking about in the following videos.

Speaking of which: I'm Associate Professor John Holbo. I'm a Professor of Philosophy. It's my job to tell you about questions in philosophy and to give you a kind of philosophy of questions—which should continue to be relevant to our module material even after I pass the baton to the lecturer for the next segment: physics.

I know what you're thinking. So NUS picked you to be the Philosopher King of Questions, Holbo? You're the power behind the Q Pillar.

Nah, they picked me because I'm the guy who knows how to use Adobe Illustrator, so I design the t-shirts. Here, let me show you a sample of my work. I designed it for the Philosophy Department.

Philosophy – Come For The Answers, Stay For The Questions!



Get it! Philosophers. Always confused.

But who are these two guys? That one at least has a definite answer. They're Plato and Socrates. Ancient Greek philosophers. I'll totally talk about them later. For now I'm just saying that obviously someone saw people around campus wearing my t-shirts. So they said: bring me the head of the one who designed this wise shirt. He or she shall teach Q! So I got the job.

No, I'm pretty sure that's not what happened. But, while I've got the shirt here, I've got a question.

Come For The Answers, Stay For The Questions!

Does that make any sense at all? I mean, yeah, it's a bit of a joke. But jokes are funny because they are true. So where's the truth?

Suppose I build a calculator app that, instead of giving one consistent, correct answer when you add different numbers, always gives different, hence mostly incorrect answers. You'd be annoyed at this useless app, wouldn't you. If you paid money, you'd want your money back.

Suppose I defended my feeble programming efforts like so: it's not a bug, it's a feature! A philosophical calculator that gives you different answers each time really makes you think about math!

Come for the math answers, stay for the math questions?

Weak, right?

Then again, Come For The Answers, Stay For The Questions seems like it could be an OK motto not just for the Philosophy Department but for NUS. For any University. I mean sure: I obviously have a vested interest in t-shirt sales so I would say that, wouldn't I? But seriously. The university is in the inquiry business. The question business.

In case you missed it, I'm circling back to my initial point about how it's kind of funny to talk about Q Pillar—about questions holding up the roof. On the one hand, that seems right. On the other hand, no. Answers hold up the roof. Questions knock down the roof.

In what sense can you build, constructively, on a foundation of demolition techniques? I'll just add that this is totally what was so annoying about Socrates, way back in ancient Greece, 2500 years ago. Always with the questions, that guy. Where does that leave you? Sitting in the rubble of your former beliefs is where. So where to go from here?

And that's enough philosophy for this first video.

Now, some basic module mechanics. Everything I am about to say is just what you are going to get by reading the syllabus on the module IVLE page. So if you prefer to get it that way you can now press stop with a clean conscience. Move straight on to the next video.

Still here? On we go.

In this module are going to be watching videos featuring professors who are, respectively, and in the following order: a philosopher—that's me; a physicist, an economist, a computer scientist, a designer and an engineer.

The lectures for this module exist in the form of recorded videos, like this one, available on demand. I'm sure you know how videos work. Let me stipulate some vocabulary about how we're slicing it up. The module has six **segments**. These correspond to the major disciplinary divides just mentioned.

The module is 12 weeks so can think of each segment as two weeks long.

We have bi-weekly tutorials, starting in week 3, and each one of those corresponds to one segment. But starting in week 3 only gives us five tutorials for our six segments. Here's a solid math truth: 5 does not equal 6. Solution. The design tutorials are going to be completely online. So during the final tutorial period you will kind of be doing two tutorials, one just online—about design—one in the classroom, about engineering.

Moving right along: how you watch on-demand videos is largely up to you, as well it should be. That's what 'on-demand' means. So the two-week thing is a bit artificial, lecture-delivery-wise. Each **segment** is divided into two **parts**. Think of those as like week-dividers. We would just call each part a lecture, but in fact they are divided up into lots of shorter videos. All the videos for a given part kind of add to a lecture, but we'll probably do better just calling them videos. However, professors are creatures of habits so I hereby predict that someone says 'lecture' at some point, meaning 'video' or 'segment'. No big deal. You'll figure it out.

Confused? Just think of it like this: 12 weeks. 6 segments. 2 weeks per segment. One tutorial per segment. Every segment is a different discipline. Every segment divided into two weekly parts but really into short videos. In olden days, weeks were all-important because all classes had to meet. Now class time is an illusion, because we have videos you can watch any time. But you still have to go to tutorial in the real world, so time half an illusion.

You'll get the hang of it.

So let's get started. In the next video: dinosaurs! (OK, one dinosaur.)