

Philosophy

Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you.



A man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong—acting the part of a good man or of a bad.

And that was the end of our friend, the finest man of all whom we came to know in his generation; the wisest too, and the most righteous — the most generous, the best tempered and the finest man of any that have entered this place.

God orders me to fulfil the philosopher's mission of searching into myself and other men.

Lakehead

University

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy, as a university discipline, will seem both familiar and strange to the new student. Man, from time immemorial, has questioned "what is life?" and "what is right?" and questions of this nature are philosophical.

Anyone can ask questions of this form, and most people do at one time or another. But philosophical questioning is never mere wishing, nor casual curiosity. Philosophy is never easy, nor is it intended to make life easier. It is rather an intense willing to know, which opens new perspectives of knowledge, and establishes new forms of evaluation which threaten and reconstruct our values and forms of understanding. It does not seek mere information. Rather, it is an unrelenting questioning of the familiar so that even this questioning is questioned.

These general questions generate more of the same kind, which have been traditionally grouped into questions about the nature of existence (metaphysics), of knowledge and certainty (epistemology), of valid inference (logic), and of human values (axiology). These basic areas of interest are investigated, according to prescribed and tested methods, to shape the whole response known as philosophy into a science.

Inevitably, the utility of the exercise will be challenged: to what purpose is this restless endeavour directed? At first glance the skills of inquiry and reasoning are obviously applicable to areas beyond philosophy such as science, religion, art, and political action. Thus it is possible to establish essential links between philosophy and

such disciplines as mathematics, languages, history, the natural sciences and the behavioural sciences. But the usefulness of philosophy is primarily evident in the lives of those who engage in this mode of thought. For these persons, the life of contemplation breaks the barriers of a merely impulsive life. With the release from the chains of impulsive and biological needs there follows an enlargement of the self to the extent that our questioning enlarges the understanding, and gives an enriched content to our imagination. There follows a "grasp of infinitude, and appeal beyond boundaries", a "broadening of feeling" which returns as a spiritual gift to temper and intensify the individual's personality and thus mark and guarantee his basic humanity. Thus philosophy as a university discipline may satisfy, in a systematic way, the restless urgency of the human spirit, to question and seek beyond the daily routines, for understanding, meaning, and wisdom in the affairs of man.

Philosophy is the illumination of the old and the new, the rejection of the safe, the end of blindness, and the thrust of wonder, doubt, and speculative criticism; it is the assault of consciousness upon "the boundaries of finitude" which continues to enlarge the meaning of human existence. Philosophy sets itself in the current of human thought and action as mediator, adventurer, guide, and critic of the diverse forms of life. In philosophy, the quickening of man's consciousness lifts and sustains humanity by that *counterpoise* of emotion, understanding, and value which we refer to as civilization.

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Program Selection

Students should plan their programs and courses in the light of a general plan for their university education and projected career. In such a plan, philosophy can be either an area of major emphasis or a helpful adjunct to a major in another discipline. Philosophy is a critical attempt by man to achieve self-understanding. It seeks to understand and relate the various facets of human existence; hence it can help the student to see the relationships among the various subjects in his program. Philosophy also fosters the ability to think clearly and logically, thus providing a basic grounding for many vocational aptitudes and skills. Teachers, writers, historians, social scientists, social workers,

civil servants and lawyers must all think clearly if they are to make the best decisions. Philosophy is also a discipline in its own right with its own professional goals in research, enquiry, teaching and application.

Faculty members in the Department are always glad to talk over with any student the planning of his program and to help him in the selection of appropriate courses and sequences of courses to enable the student to fulfil his goals. Please consult one of the academic staff if you have any questions about philosophy to which you would like an answer.

Acknowledgements:

The Death of Socrates (cover) is by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Wolfe Fund, 1931.

Mankind can hardly be too often reminded that there was once a man named Socrates. J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*.

The factor in human life provocative of a noble discontent is the gradual emergence into prominence of a sense of criticism, founded upon appreciations of beauty, and of intellectual distinction, and of duty.

A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge University Press.

The unexamined life is not worth living. Socrates. Philosophy begins—and ends—in wonder. Plato.

We must do all with a view to living in accordance with the highest principle in us — each man's "Self", since it is supreme and above all others in goodness: it would be absurd then for a man not to choose his own life but that of some other. Aristotle, *Ethics*.

It offers intellectual delights to those who value them, but it does not attempt to flatter human conceit. Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays*, Allen & Unwin.

All men naturally have an impulse to get knowledge. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*.

Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains. A. N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, MacMillan.