

Module : Humanities and Social Sciences

Level : 1st year

Teacher: Dr. Nassima Amirouche

Lecture 8: Philosophy

Objectives:

- Define what is Philosophy: both in its etymological and real definition.
- Differentiate the different branches of Philosophy.
- Understand what is Critical Thinking and its importance.

1. Etymology

- Pythagoras is the first one who coined Φιλοσοφο (philosopho)
- Philosophy came from the Greek word, philosophia, which is a compound of two root words, philo and sophia: “Φιλοσοφία”

ο Φίλος (philos)

Φιλεω (philein) – Which means “TO LOVE”

ο Σοφία

(Sophia) – Which means “Wisdom”

- Literally, philosophy is then the “LOVE OF WISDOM.”

2. Definition

Traditionally philosophy is defined as love of wisdom because it came from two Greek words philo (love) and Sophia (wisdom).

- Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom through individual or group concepts or ideologies. Simply put, it is the quest for knowledge.
- “Philosophy is the science by which the natural light of reason studies the first causes or highest principles of all things – is, in other words, the science of things in their first causes, in so far as these belong to the natural order.” – Jacques Maritain

3. Origin of Philosophy

Greece is the birthplace of philosophy in the West. To be more precise it is the ancient Greek city of Miletus in the Western coast of what is now Turkey that gave birth to philosophy. It is in this city that the first philosopher in the West, Thales, lived. Thales is the Father of Philosophy in the Western civilization. He lived between 624 and 546 BCE

4. Scope of Philosophy

First in terms of scope philosophy involves the widest generalizations. Philosophers concern themselves with big issues pertaining to the truth, , the good, the just, the beautiful, and the existence of

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practically all things. While scientists concern themselves with scientific knowledge, historians with knowledge of the past, economists with knowledge of supply and demand, philosophers concern themselves with the nature of knowledge as such (which embraces all types of knowledge previously mentioned and more).

Second philosophy is all about fundamentals. A fundamental is the root cause that explains almost everything in a given context. To understand this imagine that knowledge is like a building with levels. Now the higher level depends on the lower levels. If somehow the lower level crumbles then all the higher levels that rest upon it will collapse. A fundamental is like the lower floor that supports everything above it. That kind of support is exactly what philosophy provides.

Philosophy for the three different primary civilizations

- **Greeks** – Where am I? (Cosmo-centric)

E.g. Pre-Socratics (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, etc.)

Socrates, Plato, Aristotle (Father of Science)

- From where does everything come?
- From what is everything created? (Primary substance)

- **India** – Who am I? (Egocentric)

E.g. Hinduism, Buddha

- What am I composed of?
- Was I created? If I am a creation, who is the creator?
- What is life?

- **China**- What am I? – (Anthropocentric)

E.g. Lao Tzu (Daoism), Confucius, Mao

- What is the nature of the world we live in?
- What is the nature of man?
- What should we strive for?
- How can we live in harmony with each other?

- **Jews** – Why am I here? (A question that is more religious than philosophical, because it deals with destiny or fate [teleology] rather than Reason.)

5. Branches of Philosophy

1. Metaphysics – the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being, knowing, identity, time, and space.

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2. Epistemology – The study of the nature of knowledge.

3. Ethics – The study of values and of human action.

Compare with: Morality – The study of set codes and systems of conduct. (A sub-field of ethics)

4. Aesthetics – The study of the nature of art.

5. Logic – The study of science and art of correct inferential reasoning.

“It is very certain that, when it is not in our power to determine what is true, we ought to act according to what is most probable.” – René Descartes

6. Philosophy of Man/Rational Psychology – The study of the nature mankind, and the good which he should strive for.

“Man is a political/social animal” – Aristotle

7. Cosmology – the study of the nature of the universe or the cosmos

6. Philosophical Tools and Processes

Philosophy as a science is also a systematized body of knowledge but unlike other sciences which employs observation and experimentation to prove their theories, philosophy uses reason to arrive at a certain knowledge or truth. The tools that they frequently utilized are the following:

1. **Philosophical Questions.** Philosophy was born because of ignorance. If one is ignorant, he asks questions and if he keeps on questioning the more knowledge he acquires. Once a person stops questioning, he ceases to become a philosopher.

Socrates went further not just asking questions for himself but poses questions to people which is the beginning of series of questions and responses from participants. His method is called dialectics.

2. **Logical Reasoning.** In philosophy reasoning is the process of thinking about something in a logical way in order to form a conclusion or judgement. It has been the method institutionalized by the Greek philosophers specially Aristotle.

Why Study Philosophy?

Philosophy provides us with valuable skills. It produces better critical thinkers, more creative thinkers, and better communicators. Philosophy exposes us to different ways of thinking about even very familiar concepts, in part by carefully engaging the history of thought. Anyone curious about the fundamental questions that have occupied the greatest minds needs to study philosophy.

By improving critical thinking, and grappling with foundational questions in ethics, science, religion, politics, and logic, philosophy also produces more responsible thinkers, enabling us to better understand pressing social issues.

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Communications Skills

Philosophy also contributes uniquely 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.

Persuasive Powers

Philosophy provides training in the construction of clear formulations, good arguments, and apt examples. It thereby 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.

Writing Skills

Writing is taught intensively in many philosophy courses, and many regularly assigned philosophical texts are unexcelled as literary essays. 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.

Understanding Other Disciplines

Philosophy is indispensable for this. Many important questions about a discipline, such as the nature of its concepts and its relation to other disciplines, do not belong to that discipline, are not usually pursued in it, and are philosophical in nature. Philosophy is, moreover, essential in assessing the various standards of evidence used by other disciplines. Since all fields of knowledge employ reasoning and must set standards of evidence, logic and epistemology have a general bearing on all these fields.

Development of Sound Methods of Research and Analysis

Still another value of philosophy in education is its contribution to one's capacity to frame hypotheses, do research, and put problems into manageable form. Philosophical thinking strongly emphasizes clear formulation of ideas and problems, selection of relevant data, and objective methods for assessing ideas and proposals. It also emphasizes development of a sense of the new directions suggested by the hypotheses and questions one encounters in doing research.