

Exercise I: Defining Philosophy

PHIL101: Introduction to Philosophy

Winthrop University

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Introduction: What is Philosophy?

- In the first section of the course, we will begin work on a definition of philosophy. You will make use of this definition throughout the course, modifying or adjusting it as you see fit.
- You will already have attempted one definition of philosophy, on the first day of class. We now begin a process of refining that definition. This process has several steps. See the schedule, below, keeping in mind which section you are in.

Section 001		Section 002	
Mon. 8/20	Weds. 8/22	Tues. 8/21	Thu. 8/23
x	Draft A, written in class	Draft A, written in class	Submit Draft B; discuss in class
Mon. 8/27	Weds. 8/29	Tues. 8/28	Thu. 8/30
Submit Draft B; discuss in class			(Definition C exercise returned)
Mon. 9/3	Weds. 9/5	Tues. 9/4	Thu. 9/6
(Definition C exercise returned)	Submit Draft C	Submit Draft C	

Draft Exercises

- Draft A: conducted on the first day of class
- Draft B:
 - o First, consider what others have said about philosophy.
 - Select two of the philosophers' statements about philosophy from Lesson I.1 (see also, below). Copy each passage onto your paper.
 - Beneath each passage, restate, in your own words, what the passage is saying about philosophy or what it defines philosophy to be. Be thorough in explaining the idea/s contained in the passage.
 - Next, explain why you chose this particular passage. Did the passage "resonate" with you in some way? Did it mean something to you or to your life? What interests you about the passage that you chose, exactly? Be thoughtful, here, explaining fully what you mean.
 - o Then, write a definition of philosophy. This may be the same definition that you used on our first day, or an alteration of it, or a completely different one.
 - You must limit yourself to a single sentence for defining philosophy.
 - You may supplement that definition with further explanation, as needed.
 - o Submit the above to Turnitin.com. See above for the due-dates. You may submit up until midnight, in order to accommodate any changes in light of class discussion.
 - o Bring to class your one-sentence definition of philosophy for discussion.
- Draft C:

- Revise your definition of philosophy as needed. (One sentence, only.)
- Explain key terms in your definition as needed.
- Submit your revised definition to Turnitin.com. See above for due-dates.

What Philosophers Have Said About Philosophy

H. Amiel: “Philosophy means the complete liberty of the mind, and therefore independence of all social, political, or religious prejudice. It is to begin with neither Christian nor pagan, neither monarchical nor democratic, neither socialist nor individualist; it is critical and impartial; it loves one thing only—truth. If it disturbs the ready-made opinions of the church or the state—of the historical medium—in which the philosopher happens to have been born, so much the worse, but there is no help for it.

“The philosopher is like a man fasting in the midst of universal intoxication. He alone perceives the illusion of which all creatures are the willing playthings; he is less duped than his neighbor by his own nature. He judges more sanely, he sees things as they are. It is in this that his liberty consists—in the ability to see clearly and soberly, in the power of mental record.” Amiel, H. 2005. *Amiel's Journal*. Ward, Mrs. H., trans. Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8545/pg8545.html>. Entries for Aug. 29, 1872.

Aristotle: “For it is owing to their wonder that people both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g., about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant; therefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end.” Aristotle. 1941. *Metaphysics* 982b12-23. In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. McKeon, R. ed., W. Ross, trans. New York: Random House. (p. 692)

Aristotle: “I have gained this by philosophy: that I do without being commanded what others do only from fear of the law.” Aristotle. Diogenes Laertius. *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. I (V.20). R. Hicks, trans. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972. (p. 463)

S. Critchley: Philosophy begins “in an experience of *disappointment*, that is both *religious* and *political*. That is to say, philosophy might be said to begin with two problems: (i) religious disappointment provokes the problem of *meaning*, namely, what is the meaning of life in the absence of religious belief?; and (ii) political disappointment provokes the problem of *justice*, namely, ‘what is justice’ and how might justice become effective in a violently unjust world?” (Critchley, S. *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, 2nd Ed. London: Routledge, 2004. (p. 2)

G. Deleuze and F. Guattari: “[P]hilosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts.” *What is Philosophy?* Tomlinson, H. and G. Burchell, trans. London: Verso, 1994. (p. 2)

G. Deleuze and F. Guattari: “The greatness of a philosophy is measured by the nature of the events to which its concepts summon us or that it enables us to release in concepts. so the unique, exclusive bond between concepts and philosophy as a creative discipline must be tested in its finest details. The concept belongs to philosophy and only to philosophy.” *What is Philosophy?* Tomlinson, H. and G. Burchell, trans. London: Verso, 1994. (p. 34)

Descartes: “Nothing can be imagined which is too strange or incredible to have been said by some philosopher.” (Descartes, R. *Discourse on Method* 2.16. In Cottingham et al. eds. 1985. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (p. 118)

Diderot: “The first step toward truth is doubt.” Diderot, D. 1746. *Pensees Philosophiques*. Wikiquote – Denis Diderot, 2011. http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Denis_Diderot

Epicurus: “Let no one be slow to seek wisdom when he is young nor weary in the search thereof when he is grown old. For no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. And to say that the season for studying philosophy has not yet come, or that it is past and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness is not yet or that it is now no more.” Epicurus. 1994-2009. “Letter to Monoecus.” Hicks, R., trans. The Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html>.

Epictetus: “Observe, this is the beginning of philosophy, a perception of the disagreement of men with one another, and an inquiry into the cause of the disagreement, and a condemnation and distrust of that which only ‘seems,’ and a certain investigation of that which ‘seems’ whether it ‘seems’ rightly, and a discovery of some rule, as we have discovered a balance in the determination of weights, and a carpenter's rule in the case of straight and crooked things. This is the beginning of philosophy.” Epictetus, Discourses, II:11. *The Internet Classics Archive*. <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/discourses.2.two.html>.

W. Halverson: “Philosophy is man’s quest for the unity of knowledge: it consists in a perpetual struggle to create the concepts in which the universe can be conceived as a universe and not a multiverse. This attempt stands without rival as the most audacious enterprise in which the mind of man has ever engaged: Here is man, surrounded by the vastness of a universe in which he is only a tiny and perhaps insignificant part - and he wants to understand it.” Halverson, W. 1967. *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy*. New York: Random House. (pp. 18-19)

Heidegger: “*Was ist das, die Philosophie?*” (“What is it to ask – what this thing, philosophy, is?”)¹ Heidegger, M. 1958. *What is Philosophy?* Kluback, W. and J. Wilde, trans. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. (p. 18)

W. Kaufmann: “The intensity of great philosophy and poetry is abnormal and subversive: it is the enemy of habit, custom, and all stereotypes. The motto is always that what is well known is not known at all well.” Kaufmann, W. 1958. *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*. New York: Harper Books. I.5.

Milton:

Vain Wisdom all and false Philosophy
Yet with pleasing sorcery could charm
Pain, for a while, or anguish; and excite
Fallacious Hope, or arm the obdurate breast
With stubborn Patience, as with triple steel.

Paradise Lost II.565-569. *Milton: Paradise Lost – Book 2*.

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_2/index.shtml

T. Nagel: “Philosophy is the childhood of the intellect, and a culture that tries to skip it will never grow up.” Nagel, T. 1986. *The View from Nowhere*. New York: Oxford University Press. (p. 12)

Nietzsche: “[T]he aesthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to the reality of dreams as the philosopher does to the reality of existence; he is a close and willing observer, for these images afford him an interpretation of life, and by reflecting on these processes he trains

¹ Cf. G. Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1987), pp. 19-20. Steiner calls attention to the bafflement expressed in Heidegger’s phrasing, which may be read, “What *is* this thing, philosophy?!”

himself for life.” Nietzsche, F. 1967/1872. *The Birth of Tragedy* §1. Kaufmann, W., trans. New York: Random House. (p. 34)

Plato: “The sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin.” Plato. 1961. *Theaetetus* 155d. In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Hamilton, E. and H. Cairns, eds., F. Cornford, trans. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (p. 860)

Plato: “The one who readily and willingly tries all kinds of learning, who turns gladly to learning and is insatiable for it, is rightly called a philosopher.” Plato. 1992. *Republic* 475c. Grube, G., trans. Reeve, C., rev. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. (p. 150)

Plato: “And is not philosophy the practice for death?” Plato. 2011. *Phaedo* 81a. In *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy* 4th ed. S. Cohen et al, eds. G. Grube, trans. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. (p. 289)

B. Russell: “Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.” Russell, B. 1959. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. (p. 161)

B. Russell: “The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.” Russell, B. 1985. *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*. Chicago: Open Court. (p. 53)

A. Whitehead: “I hold that philosophy is the critic of abstractions. Its function is the double one, first of harmonising them by assigning them their right relative status as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by direct comparison with more concrete intuitions of the universe, and thereby promoting the formation of more complete schemes of thought.” Whitehead, A. 1926. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: The MacMillan Company. (p. 126)

A. Whitehead: “Philosophy is the most effective of all the intellectual pursuits. It builds cathedrals before the workmen have moved a stone, and it destroys them before the elements have worn down their arches. It is the architect of the buildings of the spirit, and it is also their solvent.” Whitehead, A. 1926. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: The MacMillan Company. (p. x)

Wittgenstein: “Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.” Wittgenstein, L. 1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* §4.112. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. (p. 44)

Wittgenstein: “The difficulty in philosophy is to say no more than we know.” Wittgenstein, L. 1958. *The Blue Book*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. (p. 28)

Wittgenstein: “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.” Wittgenstein, L. 1968. *Philosophical Investigations* 3rd ed. §109. G. Anscombe, trans. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. (p. 47)