
Hello, and welcome to this tutorial on Philosophy as a Way of Life. Today, we'll be pulling together some of the essential threads of this course taught to us by some of the greatest thinkers in history, the value of the pursuit of truth, especially in answering the big questions of what is the nature of reality, what we can know and what is right, the use of truth to develop a worldview, and then acting according to belief. So let's get started with the value of truth.

Recall that philosophy pursues truth. The implicit assumption, then, is that truth has value, that truth is worth knowing. And while the immediate knee-jerk reaction is to say, of course, truth has value. This is to look at things superficially. Put at its most forcefully, the philosopher maintains that it is always better to know. But is this what we really believe?

Start with an extreme case. Would you wish to know whether your spouse of 10 years cheated on you once years ago? It seems like all such a truth could do is cause harm. Or more relevant to the point at hand, think of Socrates' requirements that we examined all our beliefs. How eager are you to discover that you are wrong?

If you believe that American's right to own guns reduces crimes or makes you safer, how willing are you to objectively perform the research and determine whether these beliefs are correct? Are you willing to try your best to prove yourself wrong? Notice, then, that the call to valuing truth is also a rallying cry against bias. If we treat all of our beliefs as fair game for scrutiny, then no belief is held as sacred or even given preferential treatment.

But think of the advantage in this. There are two possibilities. Either your dearly held belief will turn out to be correct or incorrect. If your belief turns out to be incorrect, then you may be upset for a time, but, ultimately, you will be better for knowing you were wrong. For instance, you will no longer look like a fool for defending falsehoods in conversations with others. Knowing more about the world will help you better navigate the world. And you will now be less biased and more understanding as a human.

If, on the other hand, your belief turns out to be correct, then you move your belief from the category of mere opinion into that of genuine knowledge. You not only know that it is true, but you also know why it is true, allowing you to defend it properly and making you all the richer for examining the belief more closely. Meeting the Socratic challenge, then, is a win-win.

Notice the role of logic, reason, and reasoning. These are the tools and methods of philosophy. Reason discovers truth and resists bias and emotion. One of the unique aspects of pursuing philosophy is that we are often both subject and object. As the subject, we are the ones doing the thinking. But as philosophy covers the really big questions, we are usually part of the object of study as well.

For instance, in pursuing ethics, we determine how one ought to act. But that also entails how I ought to act. If I am engaged in metaphysics of free will and assess that, in fact, free will is an illusion and the will is determined, that also includes my will. If I philosophically determine that there are no supernatural entities, then I have also confirmed that my death will be the end. Hence, by doing philosophy, by trying to figure out what is true about the world, I situate myself as part of the world, as living within the system as a part of it, rather than outside of it looking in.

But why is this an advantage? In addition to the advantages of pursuing truth, mentioned previously, it forces us to be consistent. Consider an example. If I determine that we should have separation of church and state, that applies to all religions equally, including my religion. Push people on their beliefs in this matter for a bit, and you will usually discover that what they really want is for other religions to stay out of government, but not their own.

But if government and religion are and should be separate entities, that should entail no religion be given a preference. Hence, if you believe there should be separation of church and state, you should believe that the government shouldn't spend money endorsing Christianity, whether it is through millions spent in the military to do just this, maintaining a national chapel, or local money is spent on Christmas decorations.

You should evaluate a political candidate who wants to bring Christianity into US courts no differently than one that wants to bring Sharia law into them, et cetera. A belief about religion and government is a belief about all religions in government, not all but mine.

Philosophy places you inside this system, rather than on the outside looking in, and, therefore, prevents this kind of inconsistent thinking. It does not allow you to turn yourself into the exception to the rule. This leads us to the last major thread of philosophical thinking, which is acting according to belief.

As we saw with Socrates, the philosopher can't just talk the talk, but must walk the walk as well. Philosophy develops this in the following way. First, remember that philosophy pursues truth, including truths in ethics. Hence, a philosopher has beliefs about what is true of right and wrong and, therefore, of how one should act.

But remember, the philosopher will not just have an opinion here. That opinion will have been dissected and analyzed, which means, if it is still believed after such scrutiny, the philosopher not only believes it, but knows it, holding it with a much higher degree of certainty than any unexamined belief. If you are relatively certain that something is right to do, you are less likely to act upon it than if you were very certain that it is the right thing to do. This is especially true when the action is demanding.

For instance, imagine a dangerous situation, such as a major accident on the highway with cars whizzing past.

Being somewhat sure that an action that puts you at great risk is the right thing to do is unlikely to make you act. But knowing for certain what is right in this situation is much more likely to move you to action. In this way, knowing what is right rather than merely believing what is right, leads to acting according to belief.

But thinking things through carefully, one will also be more aware of when one is acting inconsistently with beliefs. For instance, if I determine that it is morally wrong to eat meat because of the suffering it causes to animals, that means it is always immoral to contribute to the suffering of those animals. This is true no matter how good the food smells.

But it might also mean harder knocks than that. If butchering cows is wrong, then you must give up dairy as well, since cows only produce milk when they are calving. But all those extra calves, male calves especially, must be disposed of. And as such, a belief that killing cows for meat is wrong should also entail belief that consuming most dairy products is wrong.

Or consider an even harder example. Most of us also believe that we do something wrong in allowing a child to die when we could have easily prevented it. And yet, we find ourselves in that situation all the time. Right now, you can use your smart phone to make a quick donation of \$50 to Oxfam, and that saves children's lives. It is, in fact, extremely easy and cheap to save children's lives in this way. But most of us will use our money elsewhere. Would you rather buy a new pair of shoes instead?

Are you genuinely saying that a pair of shoes is more important than a child's life? Or are you simply choosing not to think about it or maybe convince yourself that it is someone else's problem, that someone else should save that life instead? We can go on and on. But the general point is that most of us hold beliefs. But because we have not examined those beliefs at anything but a superficial level, we don't act according to them.

But note that, when considering this, not every philosopher is Socrates. No one is perfectly rational. No one is perfectly objective. And no one acts according to their beliefs perfectly. But philosophy helps us to maximize rationality, minimize bias, and increase consistency of thought and action.

All right, so let's recap. In this tutorial, we learned that the pursuit of philosophy is not just an academic discipline, but should make us better people. Pursuing truth and examining our beliefs through reason has value, as does developing a worldview and acting according to that belief. But all of these skills are honed and leveraged in the proper pursuit of philosophy. Thanks for watching, and we'll see you next time.