

My Personal Philosophy on Life

Some people think that philosophy is simply the love of wisdom, based on the literal meaning of the word. The truth is, however, it is much more than that. As Socrates put it, “philosophy is examined living” and as a result of this belief, he held that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” He thought, as I do, that if a person lives life just going through the motions and never takes the time to understand what and why he/she does things, that he/she may as well not be alive because they are living a pointless and meaningless life. I have taken the opportunity through this course, to strictly examine my beliefs on topics such as epistemology/knowledge, self-identity, determinism, metaphysics/ultimate reality, religion, and ethics, in an attempt to gain a window into myself and my true thoughts/beliefs.

Epistemology by definition is the study of knowledge. Traditionally there are two main viewpoints that can be taken on this issue, rationalism or empiricism. Although I do sympathize with some points of a rationalist perspective, I would have to say that I fit more into the empiricist category. An empiricist believes that all knowledge is gained in an outside-in fashion. This means that when a person is brought into this world, nothing is known. There are no innate ideas. Everything must be learned through experience, *a posteriori* knowledge. I agree with this assertion in all cases except for the actions/reflexes of a newborn. Regardless of parenting ability or action, a newborn knows to cry when something is wrong. They know when to suckle to get milk, and they have many innate reflexes. No person teaches a child these things. The child would still perform these reflexes and still have his/her hierarchy of needs to meet independent of anyone else. In the weeks following birth, however, the child learns when and how loud to cry in order to receive the attention that he/she desires. This I believe is an *a posteriori* kind of knowledge, because it is learned through experience and the reactions of the care givers how the

baby needs to act to fulfill his/her wants/needs. Every other kind of knowledge in my opinion requires some kind of experience/explanation. Children are not born with an understanding of language and what meanings are associated with these words. A child must learn them and in doing so he/she builds on past experiences and his/her mind begins to grow. Similarly, you are not born with the idea that a red hot stove will burn you and cause pain. You learn either by touching it and experiencing the pain or by someone else telling you how much it will hurt. It is my opinion that you cannot account for these examples in any way as *a priori* or innate. This is why I lean more towards the ideas of the empiricists than the rationalists.

The problem of self-identity is one thing I had never really considered prior to this class. I had never seen it as something that is problematic. In class we were presented with several ideas or theories of self. The body self, mind self, soul self, memory self, will self, character self, relationship self, universal role self, and divine creation self. With the exception of the universal role self (which I do not fully understand), I believe that the overall theory of self has to stem from a combination of all of these (with the exception of divine creation self, if you are not a theist). I do not believe that anyone can simply say that I am my body, or I am my mind, or I am my memory self etc. Everyone's self identity stems from their opinion of themselves, how others perceive them, and in my case because I am a theist, how God created them. It is inaccurate in my opinion to limit how we think about and view the self to just one theory. We are complex beings that one theory cannot fully explain/justify.

The issue of determinism basically is the argument of whether everything is determined by the past, or whether we as human beings/free agents have the ability to impact and change our future regardless of the past. Four views can be taken on this subject. Hard determinism (everything is determined by the past, no free will, no moral responsibility); Soft determinism

(everything is ultimately universally caused/determined, affirms free will and moral responsibility); Indeterminism (everything is random); and Libertarianism (future is heavily influenced by the past, but not caused, affirms free will and moral responsibility. I would definitely say that I fit into the Libertarianism point of view. I do believe that as human beings we can make decisions and are responsible for our actions. However, it is my opinion that everything in the end is how it “should be” or how it was “meant to be.” I believe that in the grand scheme of things that everyone is destined to turn out in a certain way. We can change how we “get” to this destination, based on our free will, but I believe that if something is meant to be, regardless of our decisions, it will work out and be as it should be.

Metaphysics/ontology is the study of being. It was given the name metaphysics based on the fact that these were the writings of Aristotle that came after his writings on physics. Metaphysics seeks to answer the fundamental question of appearance versus reality. What is the ultimate reality? There are three options generally presented on this subject. Is reality ultimately one thing or is it more than one substance, is reality static (unchanging) or dynamic (ever changing), or is reality ultimately material or non-material? I believe that reality is made up of more than one substance (pluralism), that it is constantly changing (dynamic), and that it is both material and non-material. There was a worldview that was presented in class called supernaturalism. This belief/theory supports the stance that the physical universe is not all there is, and that the greater reality is spiritual (God). I think that I definitely fall into this category which is why I believe that reality is material (physical) and non-material (supernatural).

Philosophy of religion is a desire for wisdom into one’s religious beliefs, values, and practices. This was one of the most interesting areas of study this semester for me because my boyfriend and I do not see eye to eye on this issue. Although he was raised as a Lutheran and

brought up in the church, within the last year he has decided that he no longer believes in God. Learning about theism, atheism, the two types of agnosticism, and the various arguments for and against the existence of God has helped me to better understand where he is coming from while simultaneously solidifying my beliefs. Based on the arguments presented in class, I affirm the teleological arguments for the existence of God. I believe that the Intelligent Design and the Fine Tuned Universe theories make a lot of sense. I do not believe that “life” could have formed from nothing; I believe that there had to be someone (God) that initiated life. This argument also left open the possibility of evolution which I affirm and think is a strength of the argument. Scientific evidence proves evolution so strongly and the resemblance between certain animals is undeniable; therefore I do not believe it can be ruled out.

Concerning reason and faith, I think that reason leads to faith. I thoroughly believe that “science only goes so far, then comes God.” There are medical cases in which, based on science, people should have died due to the injuries they have sustained, yet they live. The best explanation of these occurrences is it was God’s plan for them to survive, not mere chance.

I am most assuredly a Christian, however I am not a young earth creationism theist. I am skeptical about young earth creationism because the creation tale must have been written as a product of word of mouth story telling. No one was around during that time except for God if the story is true, and since God himself did not write about creation I do not see how it can be 100% undisputable. I do believe, however, in the stories that follow after creationism. I believe in Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and so on, because others witnessed it happen and then wrote about it.

Concerning evil and its existence, I affirm a number of the theodicies presented in class and in the text. I affirm that suffering builds character theodicy (states that the suffering of

innocents makes them stronger in the end). I do affirm the limits of human knowledge theodicy (that we humans cannot see the full extent of God's plan nor can we understand it because we are not on His level), and also the contrast theodicy (that evil exists so that we are able to know the difference in good and evil).

Regarding ethics, I favor both the Divine Command Theory of Ethics and the virtue ethical theory. I believe that if something is wrong (something that God forbids) we should never do it. If God commands something, then it is ethically and morally right in all situations. Just because I believe this does not mean that I do not go against what God commands. I am a sinner, as is everyone, but I do repent and ask for His forgiveness. As far as virtue ethics is concerned, I affirm it because I think taking personal relationships into account when dealing with ethical and moral decisions is important. The decision(s) made should still follow God's basic commands, but ultimately it is important to take into consideration how a person's actions will affect not only them, but the people they love. Another aspect of this theory that I am fond of is the fact that a person's character will somewhat determine his/her actions. It will not determine every action, but some will surely be molded by character. In my opinion, this does not rival the Divine Command Theory of Ethics. A person may know what is right or wrong based on what God commands and forbids, but if the person is naturally tainted in his/her virtues/character, this can alter his/her actions in certain situations.

Throughout this course I have been able to refine some of my theories and thoughts about myself and the world around me. I have been able to delve into what I believe and why. I now feel as though I believe as I do because I have entertained other options and affirmed for myself what I feel is true. I no longer believe just because I was raised to believe certain ideas. I am sure

that my view of things will alter as time goes on, but for now I think I have made Socrates proud.

I have examined my life and am no longer living a meaningless and pointless life.