

Value of philosophy



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Philosophy is the study of questions and reasoning which leads to the betterment of the individual who studies it. Philosophy differs from other sciences as it does not lead to practical knowledge, but that isn't the point. Philosophy, when studied for the sole purpose of increasing knowledge, leads to an enlightened mind which opens the mind to new possibilities. In addition, philosophy provides other benefits, such as better decision making and a sense of oneness with the universe.

Those who do not understand philosophy may only understand material needs in the world and do not recognize the mind also requires stimulation to grow (Russel, 1969, p. 153). In addition, they may miss the point of philosophy, which according to Russel (1969) is to enlighten the individual who studies it which may then indirectly impact others (p. 153). Physical sciences, on the other hand, aim at bettering the lives of mankind through the creation of inventions (Russel, 1969, p. 153). An engineer who is required to build a bridge requires only practical knowledge such as the tensile strength of materials, the densities, and the weight the bridge is required to carry. This knowledge is useful in constructing a bridge, and would not be considered philosophy. A 'true' science focuses on things we can measure, whereas philosophy focuses on cultivating intellectual creativity. In fact, many fields which were once considered philosophy, such as astronomy, became sciences once the means to study and measure them became available (Russel, 1969, p. 154). A scientist who studies a physical science would be able to list practical knowledge that has been produced in her field, whereas a philosopher would be hard pressed to come up with a single piece

of knowledge (Russel, 1969, p. 153). This could account for the apparent lack of utility philosophy is known for, but philosophy attempts to answer “ those questions... which, at present, no definite answer can be given” (Russel, 1969, p. 154). These questions which have no definite answers, however, are important for spiritual growth and well being (Russel, 1969, p. 154).

Philosophy increases one’s ability to reason, which directly increases one’s capacity to make more informed decisions in life. Since philosophy is concerned with a universal truth, and not a relative truth, it is valuable in removing various ideologies and beliefs from the mind. This naturally clears the way for more logical and rational decision making. This is very important, especially in today’s world where poor economic conditions are creating political strife as well as a focus on issues which are not the source of our problems. In addition, fake news makes it even more difficult to believe what one hears. Traditionally, media outlets have brought a balance to our democratic political system by exposing the truth. Today, the truth is becoming harder to ascertain as fake news is running rampant. This increasing complexity in today’s world requires one to have a strong ability to reason and think for one’s self. This is where philosophy is especially useful, as it focuses on the universal truth. In addition, the problems of today’s world are more complex than in the past. Scientists are required to solve problems which have multiple causal factors, such as the cure for cancer. The problems of the past included how to grow more food or make light, but due to today’s material abundance much of society is focused on existential issues. Thankfully, philosophy provides a means to not only increase intellectual creativity which increases one’s ability to solve today’s

complex problems, but it also provides a means to reduce the existential strife that is so common today. Philosophy does this by questioning everything, which naturally leads the mind to doubt much of what it assumes to be true (Russel, 1969, p. 154). Although this may sound self-destructive, it is liberating as it opens yourself up to new “ unsuspecting possibilities” (Russel, 1969, p. 154). In addition, it allows one to remove the barriers which separates oneself from the outer world, which, if not done, will ultimately lead to self-destruction (Russel, p. 155).

To remove the barriers to the outside world, one must attain knowledge for the sake of knowledge (Russel, 1969, p. 155). Philosophic contemplation is one way to attain this knowledge, but it must be done in a specific way as Russel (1969) explains, “ Philosophic contemplation, when it is unalloyed, does not aim at proving that the rest of the universe is akin to man” (p. 155). What this means is one must find the essence of the universe, and try not to relate the things or qualities back to oneself. This allows one to remove the ‘ us vs them’ mentality which humans have naturally developed through evolution. Coincidentally, this mentality, although helpful for survival, is the source of much human suffering. By dividing the world into different categories, it reinforces beliefs and prejudices which cause poor judgement and decision making. In addition, as one becomes more skilled at philosophic contemplation, the mind will naturally desire more abstract knowledge as opposed to knowledge derived from the senses, as abstract knowledge is free from fear or personal history which may distort the true nature of the universe (Russel, 1969, p. 155). Naturally, this will lead to an ‘ enlightened mind’ which is more open to new possibilities, thus leading to enhanced

intellectual creativity. In addition, existential problems such as life after death will become easier to cope with as one is able to apply rational reasoning and thought to an otherwise unknowable thing. Furthermore, a sense of one-ness with the universe will reduce existential anxiety, since the barriers that were once in place will have fallen, allowing one to contemplate all aspects of the universe without personal bias.

Although philosophy does not directly increase mankind's knowledge of the world, it improves the world indirectly through the betterment of the individual. The enhanced creativity that results from philosophical contemplation is important in today's world as our problems are becoming more complex and require solutions which stretch the mind's creative power. As a result, it is important for everyone in society to have at least an understanding of what philosophy is and why it has been studied for centuries.

References

- Russell, B. A. (1969). The value of philosophy. In *The problems of philosophy* (pp. 153-61). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.