

The philosophy theory as described by bertrand rusell

[Profession](#), [Philosophers](#)



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Philosophy Essay: Russel, “ The Value of Philosophy”

What is Russell after?

You always have to ask, “ What is the point?” Every time we read something in this class, maybe every time you ever read or listen to anything, you have to want to understand the purpose/goal of the intellectual effort being exerted. In this case, we ask about what Russell thinks the value of philosophy is, and, much more importantly, why he finds it necessary to explain it to us, in the first place. What is he hoping to accomplish?

How do we figure this out? We look for clues as we go. Why, for example does he choose the phrasing “ Goods of the Mind?” What significance is there in calling intellectual knowledge “ Goods?” What is the “ practical man?” How does that concept help us understand the idea of knowledge as capital? What is the difference between a practical man and an instinctive one? And what is similar enough about them that causes them both to have

trouble seeing the value of philosophy? And what is philosophic contemplation, and how does it contribute to the enlargement of self?

What Does Russell Mean

Russell starts by pointing out that we tend to associate value with something practical, like the end result of a scientific investigation being the creation of cell phones. Hence, the idea of goods becomes the measure of value. If I can keep it, use it, store it, sell it, be judged by it, post pictures of myself with it on Facebook, and has some tangible usefulness, then it has value. And since philosophy is often thought of as a sort of mental game more than a useful tangible commodity, people may have trouble seeing why they ought to bother with a discipline that is more historical than it is practical. So, knowing this, he chooses to house philosophy's value in terms that most people can relate to; he calls them goods. And while they do not take up space in the world, they are useful, fruitful, and powerful. They cannot be shared, like my cell phone can, for that is not where the value lies. But a person who employs philosophy will be affected towards enlargement of the self, and in turn, will have an effect on others in a positive manner that might cause them to seek out similar personal growth.

The problem is that a lot of people do not see that value so readily. We have jobs and families, and responsibilities; we don't have time for philosophy.

The practical man wants tangible goods with trade value. He/she wants to raise their social status, and economic liberty, they cannot spare time for frivolous contemplation about abstract ideas, or universal possibilities. Or the instinctive man (of course, when Russell says "man" it is only a figure of

speech, he means person), perhaps, has much more basic concerns like family, health, economic means, personal beliefs. They only care about their circle of meaning, of value, and in doing so, as Russell says, become self-imprisoned by their fear of their foundations coming into question.

It is easier to not question. Some of what people do not like about philosophy, is that it undoes, and tears down, more than it builds. It is seen as a cynical effort, and yet, we do not take the time to realize that it can only undo those things which we do not know. Let me say that another way.

Dogma are groups of beliefs held authoritatively, held as though they are completely true, even though they are only beliefs. Philosophy exposes the fact that most of our beliefs are not demonstrated facts, but powerful hopes about the world. And people do not like having their hopes exposed for what they are. It is easier to hold onto a worldview that helps you make sense of life, rather than go in search of truth about life. Certainly, there is great practical value in that perspective. We have to live, and work, and make memories; what time do any of us non-philosophers have to entertain grand ideas whose answers seem to be beyond our scope anyhow?

But, what is overlooked is that philosophy is, simply put, a pursuit of truth. And is truth not a commodity that reaps benefits? Truth turns into premises, evidence that can be used to strengthen beliefs, create new ones, choose more wisely, discover more likely conclusions about all kinds of things in life. Truth reveals, it changes perspective, by expanding our view of reality. Why would someone consciously choose to see and understand less of the world, and risk drawing conclusions about how to go through life on less evidence

rather than more of it? Only fear will stifle the pursuit of truth, fear and ignorance. But ignorance does not fight off truth; it just doesn't recognize it as such. Fear fights against, runs from, and demonizes truth as a dementor of beliefs.

Russell argues that the exercise of philosophic contemplation grows the mind, strengthens our greatest tool in life, and in doing so, in broadening our subjective views towards objectivity, enlarges our concept of self. What does that mean, to enlarge the self, since it seems to be the main value of philosophy that Russell is referring to? When our compassion and empathy grow, we grow; we enlarge our boundary of self because we feel for others more and more like we feel for ourselves. We understand people better, because we see their efforts and tribulations as our own. We connect with others more intimately, we care more directly and broadly, and in so doing, make choices as citizens of the world, rather than personal, separate, egocentric individuals. We start to want to do what is right, rather than what is right for us. For Russell, while we are subjective beings who will never see the world in its wholly and truthfully objective form the way God might, that should not stop us from trying to see it more wholly, accurately and truthfully every day. Why would we not want to move closer to truth rather than further away? Why would we willing keep our heads in the sand when we have the power to look around, observe, contemplate and conclude based on what the world reveals when we open our eyes, our minds, and be open to possibility.

Lastly, I will talk about another key aspect of the value of philosophy. For Russell, the value in philosophical question asking is not in the answers it provides, since there is not a great deal of certainty to be concluded. People don't like that these big questions provide many more supplemental questions than answers of any kind. But, in creating/discovering more questions, we become more aware of the universe's possibilities, of its vastness, our smallness, our uniqueness, its beauty and mystery, and we can't help but grow humble, more open, feel more connected and learn to appreciate our great cognitive and analytic powers as miraculous. It, at some point, can come to feel almost unethical to not use our minds to their greatest capacity in search of more knowledge, more questions, and in doing so grow closer to God/Truth.

Note: I say " God" above, because Russell used the term. For many philosophers God is used interchangeably with the idea of truth, or reality, or universe (all things). Clearly, the connotation of the word is religious, so we might ask why he employs a typically dogmatic term when he rails against dogma. It is likely because he sees the god concept as the entirety of objective being, which is why he sees philosophy as a path towards that objectivity; in its commitment to truth seeking, it is, in essence a commitment to God seeking: God as the ultimate reservoir of knowledge and experience.

Vocabulary and Key Concepts

Basic Terms:

Philosophy: The love and pursuit of wisdom/knowledge.

Dogma: A principle or belief or a group of them held authoritatively.

Hypothesis: Something taken to be true for the purpose of argument or investigation.

Thought Experiment: A technique used for testing a hypothesis by imagining a situation

and its implications.

Objective: Having or consisting of actual, absolute, pure or fundamental truth/reality.

Subjective: The condition of a particular or personal perspective/experience of reality.

Metaphysics: The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and structure of reality.

Epistemology: The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of knowledge and justification.

Axiology: The branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of values.

Key Concepts in Russell:

Goods of the Mind, Dogma, Practical Man, Instinctive Man, Philosophic
Contemplation, Enlargement of Self, Free Intellect