

# Philosophy and philosophical inquiry essay sample

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Man is a rational being. He is naturally endowed to think and to reflect on his thinking process. He is, in a sense, the crowning glory of the entire creation because it is through his rationality that he does not only know and conceive reality, but create and appreciate beauty of all phenomena, which distinguishes him from the rest of beings. With the gift of reason, he understands; and he interprets such understanding. With this interpretation, he is able to give meaning, and hence, makes his own meaning.

In this rational activity, he relates with Nature. The world becomes a human world and he becomes a being-in-the-world. He cannot but to wonder in all things. From wonder, he proceeds to inquire. He seeks explanations and looks for interpretations. He searches for causes. He finds for reasons. He looks for principles. With the use of his powerful reason, he philosophizes. He poses philosophical inquiries. He studies all things and views them in deepest analyses and speculations. He raises basic questions such as: Who am I?

What is the world? What does it mean to be a person in this world? What kind of world do I want to live in? In other words, man with his reason tries to understand the why of existing things and the why of their exercise in this particular manner and not in another. Only through reason that we can arrive at the root of things, and reason alone can open to us the way to an understanding of their reason and of the forces contained in them.

Philosophical Inquiry is a form of thinking that finds its origins in what is uncertain in experience.

It aims to locate the nature of perplexity, and to generate ideas for a solution. It aims not only to solve common problems. The process of inquiry itself is one that cultivates attitudes, dispositions, and habits. Philosophical inquiry deals with uncertainties found in social conditions and social aims, and translates these into conflicts of organized interests and institutional claims. The aim of philosophical inquiry is to criticize existing practices and institutions. It evaluates whether these practices and institutions effect changes to the quality of life.

It tries to identify values which are obsolete and then construct new values, new institutions, and new relationships that would render people a better and more flourishing quality of life. Wonder And Meaning Man wonders why when he is confronted with something that is mysterious and unknown. Socrates, the man of ancient wisdom, believes that wonder is the beginning of wisdom. In Plato's Theaetetus, he remarked, " Wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder". We wonder at the richness, order, and beauty of the world around us.

We wonder at the grandeur and horror of the acts we perpetrate. We wonder at the mystery and elusiveness of our own nature. The student of Plato, Aristotle, agreed with Socrates as shown in his Metaphysics that, " It is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at the first began to philosophize". William James, a 20th Century pragmatic philosopher, repeated the wisdom of the Greeks, and proclaimed that wonder is " the mother of metaphysics". Albert Einstein, the man of this Century, testified that, " The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious.

It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feels amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed out candle". What does it mean to wonder then? To wonder means to realize that there is something strange behind the things that we ordinarily perceive. To wonder is to notice something extraordinary in the ordinary things we perceive. In this sense, philosophy does not stop in wonder. Men reflect on all these matters, trying to understand the world and themselves.

They submit their reflections to critical examination. They do not only outline a vision of how the world is and ought to be but also seek to defend it. For Joseph Pieper, " wonder is not the starting point of philosophy in the simple sense of initium, a mere beginning. It is rather a principium, a source, the wellspring of philosophy. " There is always something to know. Thomas Aquinas commented, " No philosopher has ever been able to discover perfectly the nature of a single fly. The fact is, there is the inexhaustibility of truth.

For example, consider the testimony of Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest men in history, " I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me. " Reason & Rationality Reason is the origin of philosophy and rationality is the seat of human nature.

Philosophy, the loving quest of wisdom, the pursuit of knowledge to its deepest origins and roots, comes into being, first and foremost, because man is forever seeking to know, and to grasp the ultimate hows and whys of what he knows. Man by nature desires to know. This is not merely a desire for mere data, for bare facts and events; it is a desire for data with their explanations, their justifications, their evidence, and their proofs. And if a proof or explanation is not in itself an evident and inescapable reality, the mind looks for a proof of that proof.

So the search for the solid and reliable knowledge which is truth is carried forward towards fulfillment. The mind proves truth by truth and it holds truth in relation and connection. It delves deep to unify and clarify its findings in an ultimate understanding. Man by nature is philosophical. The incessant questions of a child are manifest proof of the natural thirst for knowledge in which philosophy finds its first root. In a full sense we can say that man cannot but to inquire on and about all things philosophically, as part of the demand of his nature.

**Philosophical Inquiry and Scientific Inquiry** Man is fascinated by science. He possesses a wider knowledge of scientific truths. But man's desire to know cannot be restricted to sciences. Science explains existing facts which fall under the observation of the senses and hence are the object of experience. Science presupposes the existence of nature with all its laws, and its purpose is to interpret the laws found in nature and to learn how they are exercised. Scientific knowledge means understanding a fact or a law in the field of science. This is done through scientific method.

With knowledge of the law and the conditions for its exercise, we can put such a law into operation and obtain the same result for our own use. But side by side with scientific knowledge there arises in man the desire for another kind of understanding more profound than that of science. It is the understanding of the why of existing things and the why of their exercise in this particular manner and not in another. When the question is posed of the why of nature, the why of its laws, and the reason these laws operate in a certain determined manner, the limits of science are overstepped, and one enters into philosophy.

This is done through philosophical inquiry, scientific inquiry deals with how nature acts while philosophical inquiry deals with why nature acts in this determined manner. Kinds of Philosophical Inquiry Philosophical Inquiry basically involves four questions: metaphysical, epistemological, logical, and ethical questions. Metaphysical questions primarily deal with the nature, analogy, and attributes of being as such and its relation to nothing. It studies of what there is and how those things relate to each other.

The question, What is there? is a question of deciphering the reality around us. It examines all things in its deepest causes, principles, and reasons. It pushes the human mind to find explanations and truth both in all phenomena and non-phenomena. The question involves issues of maximum generality, such as, What is space? Number? Matter? Mind? What are possibilities? What is reality? What are things? Relationships? Did everything have a beginning? What is death? Life? Meaning? What is God?

Epistemological questions basically deal with the nature of knowing and the criteria that would decide for good judgments.

It relates with theories of knowledge and studies what we know, how we know it, and what if anything lies beyond the bounds of knowledge. It is properly to be called critical questions because it seeks to know what guarantees the same process as fruitful of good judgments and certain knowledge. Some questions are, Can we know? How can we know? Can we arrive at certainty in knowing? Can we have solid, firm, and good judgments? Logical questions deal fundamentally on the correct procedure in thinking things out, that is, human reasoning. Logic sets up standards to be used in correct thinking.

We are after the action of reasoning. We emphasize on the need of consistency in our thinking process and how this consistency reflects on what we say and do. Ethical questions mainly deal with the nature of human actions. It is the question of right and wrong, and of duty in man's conscious and deliberate activity. The principal questions are, What should I do? What kind of person should I be? How should we as a society organize ourselves? It is the pursuit of good judgment about action. Philosophical inquiry is created not only to seek knowledge but most of all to find wisdom. Significance of Philosophical Inquiry

Philosophical Inquiry guides not only the self in relation to oneself as he searches for his meaning and wisdom but it also directs human relationships and activities. Through such inquiry, we form and re-form our constitution of how we perceive our reality as a whole and our society specifically. It

develops a community that is not mediocre for it is a society that not only preserves the status quo, or maintain their practices and traditions, rather it encourages and leads men to be able to critique themselves and all their actions for the improvement of the quality of life of all.

Philosophical Inquiry enriches human civilizations. Truth is one, but subject to interpretations. And man is to find what truth is and what it consists. All forms of inquiry have truth as its object. But it is philosophical inquiry that dares to find its essence to establish its being objective and therefore finds the certitude of its meaning. We want to know what is is. We inquire for the causes, principles, and reasons, to search the truth. Once a philosophical inquiry has found an answer that which convinces reason itself, the inquiring mind is satisfied.

This mental satisfaction leads the intellect to inquire further truths.

Philosophical Inquiry transforms community into a community of inquiry when (1) practices and institutions are questioned and evaluated, (2) social collaboration and cooperation are enriched, (3) community becomes reasonable to the ideas of the members, (4) questions the basic structure, challenges authority and tradition, through appeal to reason, facts, and evidence, and (5) triggers its members to participate actively in building their community and doing their share for such community.

Philosophical Inquiry and Education If we want to have a community of philosophical inquiry, we need to transform first our education. Philosophical Inquiry cannot achieve its aims without education. It is through education that this inquiry can bring about a change of emotional and intellectual



dispositions to prepare the next generations to think and act differently in their daily lives in the light of new, broader, and more satisfying conceptions of existence. If we want to transform our community into a community of inquiry through the training of philosophical inquiry, we need to reform education.

In effect, we also reconstruct philosophy and philosophical inquiry. We need to change our view of education. The best way to start this is to design or redesign an educational program for elementary and secondary education. It should be designed in such a way that a culture of inquiry be created, nourished, and maintained. II Philosophical Discussion What makes a discussion philosophical? From Philosophical Inquiry to Philosophical Discussion Philosophical Inquiry is a form of thinking that finds its origins in what is uncertain in experience.

It aims to locate the nature of perplexity, and to generate ideas for a solution. It aims not only to solve common problems. The process of inquiry itself is one that cultivates attitudes, dispositions, and habits. Philosophical inquiry deals with uncertainties found in social conditions and social aims, and translates these into conflicts of organized interests and institutional claims. The aim of philosophical inquiry is to criticize existing practices and institutions. It evaluates whether these practices and institutions effect changes to the quality of life.

It tries to identify values which are obsolete and then construct new values, new institutions, and new relationships that would render people a better and more flourishing quality of life. We need to bring this form of inquiry into

a higher level that which creates philosophical discussion. Philosophical Discussion paves the way for the aims of philosophical inquiry to realize. Such discussion primarily involves critical thinking and reflection that lead to critical questioning and inventive reflection.

It should clarify meanings, uncover assumptions and presuppositions, analyze concepts, consider the validity of reasoning processes, and investigate the implications of the ideas and the consequences in human life of holding certain ideas rather than others. This discussion becomes fertile source of new ideas. Philosophical discussion should focus on reasoning, inquiry, concept-formation, and communal dialogue. There are two persons in the history of philosophy that gave us some tradition in philosophizing. They are Socrates of the ancients and Gadamer of the present.

Both of them emphasized on the role of dialectic or dialogue in fostering human relationships, in building communal relations, and forming communities of inquiry. Socrates was the first person in the West to advance philosophical inquiry into philosophical discussion through some philosophical arguments. As his student Plato portrays him, Socrates puts forward no theories of his own but uses philosophical discussions to clarify, investigate, and refute the views of others. This is his Socratic Method. Socratic Method is the best way to illustrate a philosophical discussion. Socrates asks what piety, or courage, or friendship, or justice is.

Someone answers. Socrates analyzes the proposed definition and begins asking questions, leading the parties to the conversation to see the definition cannot be right. Sometimes, the definition is clear; sometimes, it includes

too much; sometimes, it does not include enough. Someone then proposes another definition, and the process continues. Socrates himself takes no position. In fact, he maintains that he knows only that he knows nothing, *sapientissimus est qui scit suam ignorantiam*. The Socratic Method is a form of philosophical discussion. It is skeptical, conversational, conceptual, and inductive-deductive in approaches.

The method is skeptical. It begins with Socrates' real or professed ignorance of the truth of the matter under discussion. This is the Socratic irony which seemed to some of his listeners an insincere pretense, but which was undoubtedly an expression of Socrates' genuine intellectual humility. This skepticism Socrates shared with the Sophists and, in his adoption of it, he may very well have been influenced by them. But whereas the Sophistic skepticism was definitive and final, the Socratic is tentative and provisional; Socrates' doubt and assumed ignorance is an indispensable first step in the pursuit of knowledge.

It is conversational. It employs the dialogue not only as a didactic device, but as a technique for the actual discovery of opinions amongst men, there are truths upon which all men can agree, Socrates proceeds to unfold such truths by discussion or by question and answer. Beginning with a popular or hastily formed conception proposed by one of the members of the company or taken from the poets or some other traditional source, Socrates subjects this notion to severe criticism, as a result of which a more adequate conception emerges. His method, in this aspect, is often described as the maieutic method.

It is the art of intellectual midwifery, which brings other men's ideas to birth. It is also known as the dialectical method or the method of elenchus. It is conceptual or definitional in that it sets as the goal of knowledge the acquisition of concepts, such as the ethical concepts of justice, piety, wisdom, courage and the like. Socrates tacitly assumes that truth is embodied in correct definition. Precise definition of terms is held to be the first step in the problem solving process. The Socratic Method is empirical or inductive in that the proposed definitions are criticized by reference to particular instances.

Socrates always tested definitions by recourse to common experience and to general usages. The method is deductive in that a given definition is tested by drawing out its implications, by deducing its consequences. The definitional method of Socrates is a real contribution to the logic of philosophical inquiry. It inspired the dialectical method of Plato and exerted a not inconsiderable influence on the logic of Aristotle. This method of Socrates encourages men to engage in philosophical inquiry and therefore discuss philosophically with others in order for us to discover truths, find wisdom, and lead a good life.

As Socrates would put it, " an unexamined life is not a human life", *ho de anexetastos bios ou biotos anthropos*. There is another person who anchors on the power of philosophical discussion to transform our society. Hans-Georg Gadamer, a contemporary philosopher in the field of hermeneutics, believes in the philosophical dialogue as a means to understand ourselves and others as we build and share our existences. His analogy circulates on

his notion of *horizontverschmelzung*, the fusion of horizons. We need to understand the other as we enter into dialogue. The other should also understand as he enters into such a dialogue.

The two parties should continuously project themselves as they try to understand their language game until they arrive at a consensus. This consensus is the fusion of horizons. During the process, the parties as they engage into a philosophical reflection, clarify the rules of the game. They define, clarify, review, and even revise their concepts. They recognize philosophical arguments and focus on reasoning, inquiry, concept-formation, and on the dialogue itself. This process of dialogue and fusion of horizons created out of such dialogue should always be mutable in character and revisable in nature due to its exposure to other horizons.

In this aspect, the possibility of *horizontverschmelzung* cannot only take place between two parties. It can happen in a society through a communal dialogue. When there is a fusion among the fusions of horizons, we can see a communal dialogue transforming society into a community of inquiry and dialogue. Gadamer's argument that dialogue is an essential element of understanding is that articulation is necessary for understanding and articulation never occurs outside of dialogue. We always need to articulate our ideas as we understand others. Such articulations are the process of philosophical discussions.

Socrates' and Gadamer's contributions to philosophical inquiry and philosophical discussion show us how we should facilitate our community to transform itself into a community of inquiry. This goal should start from

education; the way we should educate our children. If we are serious in building a community of leaders and the righteous, we need to remodel our system of educating people. To educate our children in this way of philosophy is to build a better world for all of us, encouraging better citizens, better constituency, and better governance.

What makes a discussion philosophical? Based on our discussion above, we can say that there are mainly three points that make discussion philosophical. These are: reasoning and inquiry (application of, reflection on, and evaluation of the processes of reasoning and inquiry), concept formation (reference to general concepts which help our understanding and are regarded as contestable), and meaning making (questions and statements which reveal a search for the connections that make for meaning).