

The Joys of Philosophy— Why Study It?

Dallas Philosopher's Forum

Robin K. Olson



Learning Objectives

- Understand the different definitions of philosophy
- Grasp the reasons to study philosophy
- Understand how studying philosophy has benefited the speaker
- Takeaways

What is Philosophy?



What is Philosophy?

- Literally means the “love of wisdom”
- The study of questions or issues that don’t presently lend themselves to clear-cut solutions
- The attempt to answer “ultimate” questions
- Not a belief but a way of reasoning to answer questions common in human life.

What is Philosophy?

- Demolition activity for the world of ideas (challenge assumptions)
- Systematic form of rational inquiry
- A way of thinking about certain subjects—4 R's—responsiveness, reflection, reason, and reevaluation

Core Branches

- Epistemology
- Ethics (moral philosophy)
- Logic
- Metaphysics

Why Study Philosophy?

- Intellectual growth—encourages questioning one's assumptions and childhood beliefs
- Stretches the mind—look for paradoxes and contradictions in the world; personal growth
- Improves one's ability to grasp complex ideas
- Gain appreciation for unique literary styles

Why Study Philosophy?

- It satisfies our sense of being a human in a unique way and deepens our sense of being human
- It attempts to help us clarify language and the use of words in a more-clear manner.
- Metadiscipline—clarifies the nature and limits of other fields.
- Encourages us to fight our cognitive biases

Why Study Philosophy?

- Recognize the fallibility of human knowledge
- Check our impulses to unwavering or dogmatic attachment to beliefs.
- Improves the ability to see unique connections between different philosophical themes—builds neural connections
- Gain global perspective

Why Study Philosophy?

- Bertrand Russell quote



Why Study Philosophy?

- David Hume quote



My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy—Aristotle (384 BC to 322 BC)



My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Aristotle

- *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Science of the Good for Human Life
- One of the first to focus on happiness (eudaimonia) Flourishing
- Only thing that humans desire for its own sake—ultimate good

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Aristotle (384 BCE—322 BCE)

- World of antiquity—fatalistic view—leave happiness to the Gods
- Happiness is rare—takes a whole lifetime
- Doctrine of the Golden Mean
- Developed a course on this topic for Dallas County jail

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy—Spinoza (1632—1677)



My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Spinoza

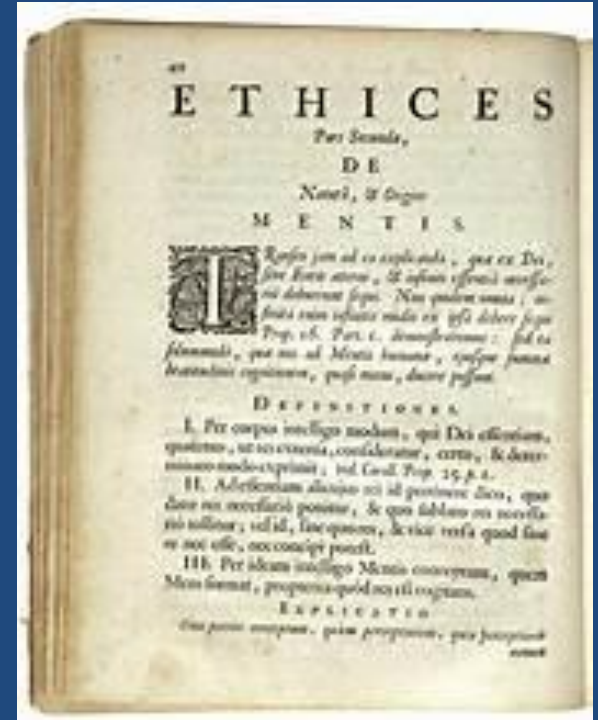
- Russell: Baruch Spinoza is the “noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers. Intellectually, some others have surpassed him, but ethically he is supreme.”
- No transcendent or personal God
- Forget revelation—follow reason
- If you want to be “blessed” and “saved,” let the philosopher guide you, not the prophet.

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Spinoza

- *The Tractatus*—language of the Bible is deliberately metaphorical or allegorical—
- “high literary color and ornament.”
- Apostles resorted to miracle stories (same reason)—a necessary adaptation to the public mind.

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Spinoza

- The Ethics Quote

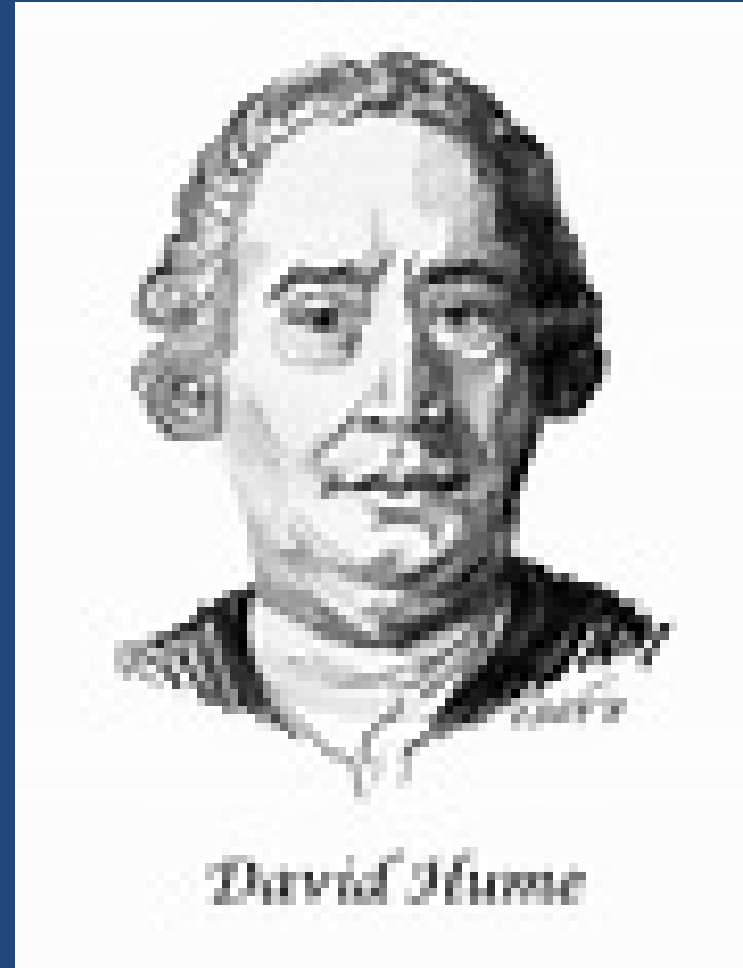


- Deep exploration of abstract concepts coupled with intellectual growth

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Spinoza

- New way for me of looking at religion and ethics
- Philosophical depth
- Intellectual challenge
- Recognize one's place in the universe

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy— David Hume (1711—1776)



My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Hume

- One of the first philosophers to closely examine human nature.
- Empiricist
- Very little is certain except for analytic statements
- Impressions and ideas
- Mind is merely a bundle of sense perceptions

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Hume

- Problem of induction—to draw any causal inferences from past experiences, one must suppose that the future will resemble the past
- Metaphysics is impossible. We cannot know the causes behind things we cannot see.

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Hume

- Argued for a mitigated skepticism--“When men are most sure and arrogant, they are commonly most mistaken.”
- Rethink laws of cause and effect—argued for working hypotheses
- Are ideas clear and distinct?
- Science—an accumulation of probabilities subject to change without notice

My Personal Benefits of Studying Philosophy--Hume

- “Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”
- Recognize the fallibility of human knowledge
- Rejection of the Enlightenment’s Spirit (value of reason)
- Proposes a theory of human psychology

Benefits of Studying Philosophy—George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)



Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Hegel

- Value of history—look at human nature in historical terms
- “We can only think in a way that fits our current time.”
- History is always moving forward.
- Humans are progressing.

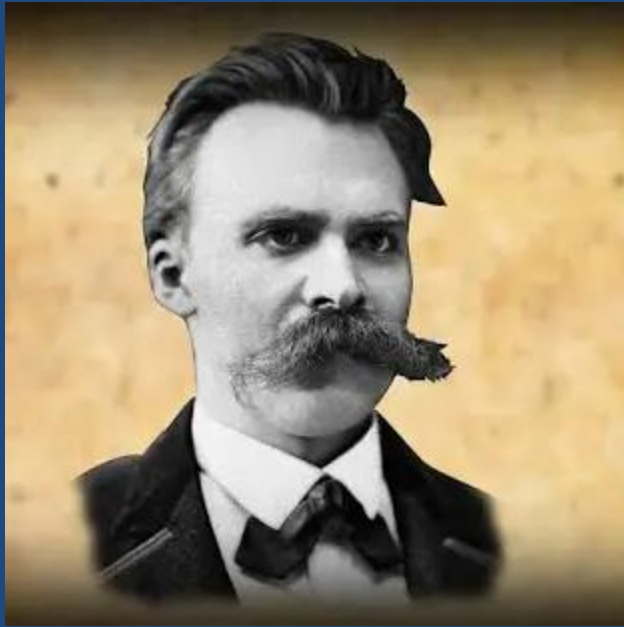
Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Hegel

- Dialectic—concepts of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Opposing forces--new ideas.
- All things have an inherent contradiction between their opposites.
- Used in politics, economics, and science.
- This process has a telos. It is going somewhere. The world works dialectically.

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Hegel

- Dialectic—goal is the greater development of the mind towards freedom and better self-knowledge.
- Freedom--not the absence of constraints but the realization of one's potential. State's just laws are the epitome of rationality; adhering to these laws can bring freedom to individuals.

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)



Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Nietzsche

- Exerted a massive influence on academic thought that arguably shaped the late modern and postmodern eras.
- Does not align with any philosophical tradition
- Demolition activity through a variety of books

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Nietzsche

Demolition activity and reevaluation of all values

- Christian values
- Secular values
- Common herd values
- Ancient Greek values

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Nietzsche

- Challenged Plato's concepts of an unchanging, non-historical and universal truth
- Overthrew the traditional concept of truth--perspectivism
- All values and truths are now created by man, not given from God or the church. No transcendental world.
- "God is dead."

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Nietzsche

- “Will to Power” (taken from Schopenhauer) but he reverses it. Unlike the pessimistic Schopenhauer, it is man’s strength. Drive to achieve self-fulfillment
- Superman—the man who can be produced by any civilization. Rare—but these men are why our society has progressed.
- Challenged the notion of a moral system based on the dichotomy of good v evil.

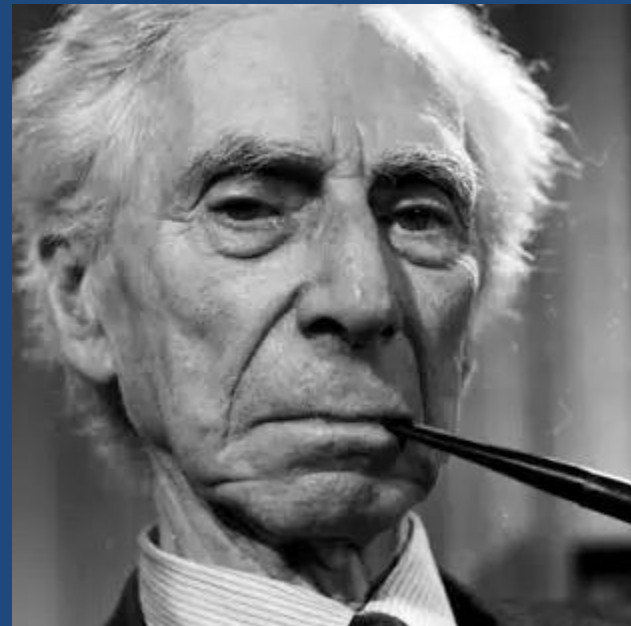
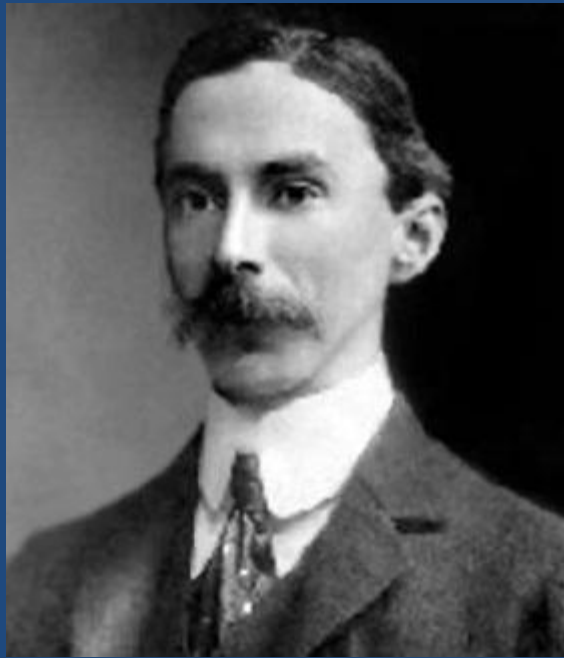
Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Nietzsche

- Opposed the idea of equality—it crushes freedom, will to power, and human advancement
- Influence by Stoicism—obstacles in life are nothing more than opportunities to rise to the Superman level (e.g., moral fortitude)
- Emphasis on unconscious

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Nietzsche

- Literary style of the highest order—fusion of poetry, metaphor and prose
- Quote on man's condition
- Inspiring style—builds neural connections in his writing style

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Bertrand Russell (1872—1970)



Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Bertrand Russell

- *Why I am Not a Christian*—crystalized my growing atheism in a way I had not considered
- Weakness of First Cause argument
- The idea that things must have a beginning is due to the poverty of our imagination.
- Problems of evil and suffering

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Bertrand Russell

- *Problems in Philosophy*—Bibliotherapy for me
- Fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge, reality and existence
- Distinctions between appearance and reality. New way of looking at the world.
- “I would never die for my beliefs because I might be wrong.” Fight cognitive bias.

Benefits of Studying Philosophy— Bertrand Russell

- Science—it reaches only tentative answers—that scientific progress is piecemeal, and that attempts to find organic unities were largely futile.
- How to live one's life quote.
- His three passions quote.

Conclusion and Takeaways

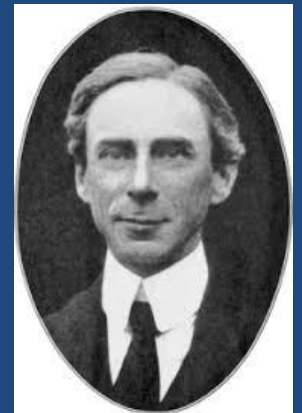
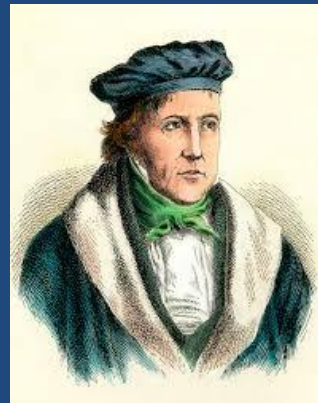
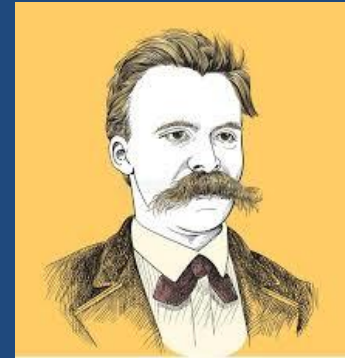
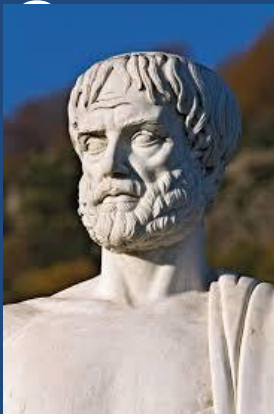
- Reflect on our life's meaning and our happiness (Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*)
- Consider use of words and their persuasive power (Spinoza's *Tractatus*)
- Rethink easy and pat answers with no exceptions; reconsider simple cause and effect arguments (Hume's skepticism)
- Question established maxims and look for contradictions in things (e.g., Hegel's dialectic)

Conclusion and Takeaways

- Consider a problem from a variety of angles (Nietzsche's perspectivism)
- Think of the ideas in philosophy as a tool for self-development and living a meaningful life by gaining wisdom and knowledge (Bertrand Russell's search for understanding)

Conclusion and Takeaways

- So, let us take a penultimate lesson from Spinoza:



Q&A

Rob Olson, CPCU, CRIS, ARM

President

Dallas Philosopher's Forum