



LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

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ask more questions

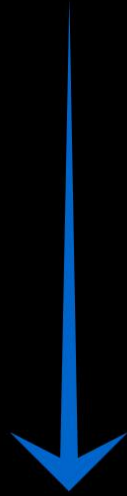


demand better answers



learn more than you think you need to know

≡ YOU ARE HERE ≡



Let me begin with a story. Once upon a time there was a man who stood behind a telescope and was despairing because, as he said, he had searched all around the sky for some planet of the solar system, but could not find it. Specifically, it was a planet whose name was Earth. A friend referred him to a sage whose name was Martin Heidegger.

"What are you searching for?" Heidegger asked the astronomer. "The Earth," the man lamented, "and nowhere in the whole firmament could I find it." "And may I ask you where you have set the tripod?" inquired Heidegger. "On the Earth, of course" was the immediate reply. "O.K." concluded Heidegger. "Here it is."

The subjects we deal with in philosophy are like that; the ground that we stand on but hardly ever think to question. Clearly, the ground is important to what we do seek and for that reason if for no other we should examine from time to time our foundations. Socrates once said "the unexamined life is not worth living." Philosophy is your invitation to examine life and the assumptions we make about it in a critical fashion.



Ideas are the currency of philosophy.

Let's examine some philosophers
and
their ideas for useful insights.

PLATO



Don't
confuse:

APPEARANCE

REALITY



Cultivate curiosity

Always be on the lookout for learning opportunities. What are you interested in? Learn more about it. Find connections to new ideas and explore those. Ideas are the currency of thought and their value increases with more investigation.

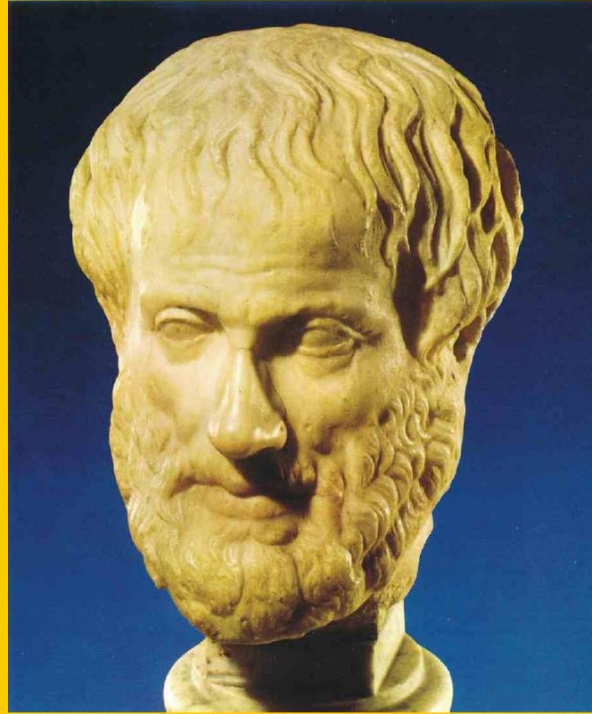
Don't accept claims at face value.

When someone makes a claim, don't just accept it. Look for more information. Look for evidence. What are the underlying arguments behind the claim? What are the reasons for making this claim?

Look beyond appearances to reality.

Plato believed that appearances were quite different than reality. But, we have to look beyond appearances to find the underlying reality.

ARISTOTLE



Question
Authority



Question Authority

Aristotle was one of Plato's students yet he questioned his teachings. It's OK to question those in authority. Continue to hold leaders of all kinds accountable.

Demand better answers!

Don't confuse correlation with causation.

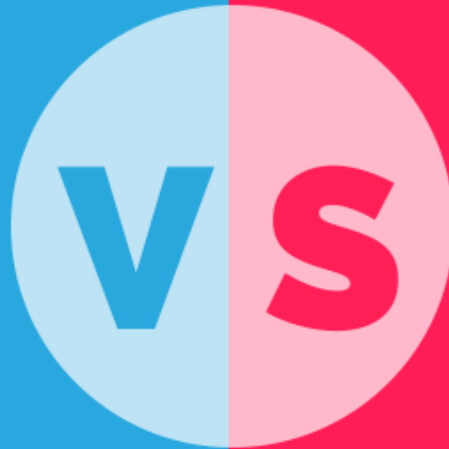
It's easy to confuse causation with correlation and everyday you can find news stories which don't make understanding this distinction any easier. But, a deeper understanding of causation will allow you to ask some useful philosophical questions.

Understand causation.

For Aristotle, causation was a complex process involving several steps. Often causes are more complex than they appear. Look for connections and causes that others might be overlooking.

Epicurus

WANTS



NEEDS

HOW DO WE DISTINGUISH THESE?

3 categories of desires

WANTS

V S

NEEDS

natural / unnecessary:

fancy food, luxury car,
big house, expensive toys

natural / necessary:

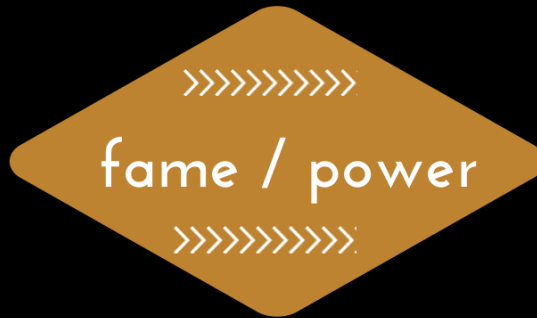
food, clothing, shelter
friendship, freedom

WE NEED THESE TO BE
HAPPY

WE DON'T NEED THESE
TO BE HAPPY



3. UNNATURAL / UNNECESSARY DESIRES



There is a wonderful quote from Einstein about the perils of fame: "With fame, I have become more and more stupid, which of course, is a very common phenomenon. But you have to take it all with good humor. Charlie Chaplin had it right.

When he and I met we were surrounded by people calling our names. 'What does it all mean?'

I asked him. 'Nothing.' he replied."



HELLO
MY NAME IS

Rene Descartes

**You
know
it?**

I doubt
it!



Examine Foundations

You assume you know a lot of things. But, how do you know that you know? That's what Descartes asks us to consider. What is the justification for knowing something? Justification is an important skill and one that can be difficult to master.

Try this exercise:

Write down something you are certain you know.

How do I know this is true?

Now, ask yourself the same question: How do I know *that* is true?

Carry this process as far as you can go.

Start by doubting.

Begin by assuming what you know is false. Now, construct an argument to validate that assumption. In other words, try to disprove what you know.

See where this line of thinking leads!



JOHN LOCKE

• SAYS •

"Be mindful of
sense
experience."

Be mindful.

Take the time to be mindful of your sense experience. Notice how you assemble the world of sense experience from what you see, smell, feel, taste, and touch.

We assemble our experience.

The notion that we assemble sense experience rather than simply passively record it is well-established in psychology and we can thank philosophers like John Locke, in part for this insight. Being aware of this deepens your appreciation of reality.

Try this:

Go outside to a park or place away from the general noise of the city and really observe. Really look to see the different trees and animals around you. Really listen to the various natural sounds you hear. Take note of the smells around you and feel the various textures.

Now try the same thing at home!

All you need is 

HU
ME

Hume famously counsels that we should "proportion our beliefs to the evidence." This is good advice when you are presented with claims that have scant evidence to back them up. Ask for evidence and if none or very little can be provided, be wary of accepting the claims!

When you begin examining your own beliefs regarding topics like religion and politics you may find that you currently accept these beliefs with little or insufficient evidence. What would it be like to proportion your beliefs to the evidence? Well, strong evidence would warrant strong belief but weaker evidence only warrants weak belief or perhaps disbelief.

Pick a topic you have a strong belief about and look at the evidence carefully. But, don't just look at the evidence in favor of your belief. Doing this is falling into the trap called the confirmation bias. Instead, also look for evidence against your belief. Look for this evidence not to dismiss it but to understand it. Does this evidence warrant further close examination? If so, take the time to really understand it and consider how it should impact your belief.

*Immanuel
Kant says:*



Our minds filter



EVERYTHING

Our minds act as filters.

We don't experience reality directly but through the organizing categories of the mind. These include such things as cause/effect, space, time, and substance.

We all construct reality.

We all share these categories in common and we all construct reality. So, even though we have different ideas, customs, and beliefs we are fundamentally the same.

Try this:

When you encounter someone who acts differently than you or believes something different, look deeper. Find the common ground you share with that person. It's there. Ask questions. Dig deeper.



Ludwig Wittgenstein



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7

Believe first.

Proceed to know.

Then doubt.



Certainty changes.



We take much for granted.

Sometimes this is a good thing, sometimes not, but in any case we need to be aware that much of what we take for knowledge is taken for granted without investigation. Realizing this makes us more aware of our own potential for error and helps us guard against it.

We begin by believing.

Children are hard wired to believe. There are good evolutionary reasons for this. But, it can lead to problems if children are never taught to begin questioning their beliefs. If you always believe everything you are told you are more likely to believe many false things and miss out on some truth in the process.

Certainty can change.

The history of knowledge reveals this pretty well. Once we were certain that the Earth was flat. Once we were certain that the Earth was the center of the universe. These certainties have given way to new ones. What we are certain about today may end up being questioned tomorrow.



**KEEP
CALM
AND
FIND
MEANING**

logotherapy



Victor Frankl developed logotherapy to find meaning in life in the face of the "tragic triad: pain, death, and guilt.

There are 3 ways to create meaning in our lives: creative, experiential, attitudinal.

creative

Create something of value through work, parenting, or art.

experiential

Experiences are an important component of meaning: being in love, friendship.

attitudinal

How we face suffering is a powerful way to give meaning to our lives. Be a role model to others in your attitude.

— The 4 Questions —

**What do you want
to learn?**

**What do you
want to experience?**

**What do you want
to contribute?**

**What do you want to
leave behind?**



THANK
YOU
FOR
READING!

REMEMBER

- ask more questions •
- demand better answers •
- learn more than you think you need •

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