Why Study Philosophy?

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Philosophy involves the critical study of 'big questions' such as these:

- Are there objective moral truths?

- Does God exist?

- What makes me the same person I was yesterday or several years ago?

- What is science and how far should we trust it?

- Do we have free will and does it matter if we don't?

- Is there a moral difference between having an abortion and killing a premature baby?

Philosophical questions have many variations and implications. Many were also studied by the great thinkers of the past: Plato, Descartes, Wittgenstein, and many others. They continue to exercise professional philosophers working today.

It is difficult to find answers to these questions that will be satisfying to everyone. However, the careful study of such questions is fascinating, intellectually challenging, and an important part of education in the humanities.

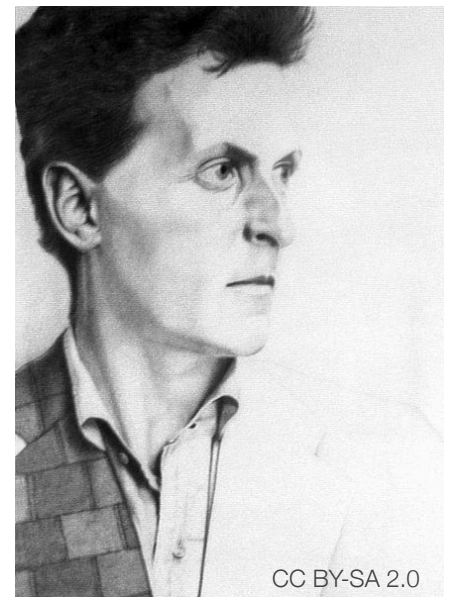## WHAT CAN YOU DO AFTER STUDYING PHILOSOPHY?

When you're trying to decide what to study at university, it's natural to be concerned about how your degree can help you secure a worthwhile career once your studies are over.

Philosophy is unlike certain other subjects (engineering and medicine, for example) whose students tend to find work in very specific industries. And it's true that potential employers usually aren't hiring someone to tell them what Aristotle believed about the soul or prove that one isn't really just a brain in a vat. However, the study of philosophy is a first step down a number of desirable career paths.

Philosophical questions might appear abstract but they shape the way we think about real situations we encounter in our professional and personal lives. Moreover, philosophical inquiry hones core reasoning and critical skills.

Doing philosophical work stimulates one's development of powerful skills in reasoning and logic.

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, Austrian-British philosopher: "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language." Drawing by Christian Tonnis, 1985.

MORE SPECIFICALLY…

Philosophy is unique in its specific focus on the analysis, critique, and development of complex problems. Philosophical study trains students to:

- Analyse the structure of a problem;
- Separate relevant from irrelevant considerations;
- Appreciate the strengths of competing solutions;
- Identify suppressed assumptions, confusions, and other errors in reasoning;
- Engage cooperatively in debate about contentious questions;
- Develop creative solutions to complex problems;
- Write clearly and persuasively.

While all university subjects seek to hone reasoning abilities, philosophy graduates excel in these core analytical skills.

Philosophy graduates outperform graduates from other majors in postgraduate tests, like the LSAT and GRE, which measure skills in analysis, writing, and quantitative reasoning.

These skills equip students to pursue careers in a variety of fields, including government, consultancy, teaching, NGOs and non-profits, accountancy, software development, business, journalism, and law, among many others.

And contrary to popular myth, philosophy majors' mid-career earnings have been found to outpace not just other humanities subjects but also many 'job-ready' subjects like business, economics, marketing, and political science!

You can find out more about studying philosophy and hear from some of our students on our website: https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/school-of-historical-and-philosophical-studies/discipline-areas/philosophy

Martha Nussbaum, Professor of Philosophy and Law (University of Chicago): "Courses in the humanities… often seem impractical but they are vital because they stretch your imagination and challenge your mind to become more responsive, more critical, bigger." Photograph by Robin Holland, 2008.

GRADUATE TESTIMONIALS

Philosophy hones one's theoretical and analytical skills in a way no other discipline does. In my study of philosophy I learned to reason and argue. This skill has been invaluable.

— Sandra Buth, tax manager of a large accounting firm

I got my PR job… because I had done philosophy. Only philosophy can give you both the analytical skills and the ability to see the big picture.

— Rudolf Teuwsen, former ministerial media secretary

I was an artist before I enrolled in philosophy… It has opened up all kinds of possibilities in my work… helping me understand issues about perception, experience, form… For me, making art in many ways parallels doing philosophy.

— Angela Brennan, artist