

**Second Online Session of Society of Positive Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies (SPPIS)
Haryana**

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Life is Philosophy and Philosophy is Life

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Introduction

We have conflicting views about philosophy. Some believe it is a battle against custom, while others believe that it is a problem for every solution. A third set among us believes that it is a presentation of unintelligible answer to insolvable problems.

Philosophy is the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence¹. That is why the philosophy of one century is the common sense of the next. Philosophy will serve us better if it becomes common sense quickly, maybe within a few months from which it has come into existence.

Philosophy of one century becomes common sense a century later due to intellectual inertia in human beings. We happily start using alcohol, tobacco and drugs, but we will be suspicious of the excellence given to us by others.

Philosophy

The word philosophy is derived from the Greek word *philosophia*, which means 'love of wisdom'². Wisdom is the quality of showing experience, knowledge, and good judgement.

Here it becomes necessary to know the meaning of the word intelligence as well. There are reasons for it. First, intelligence and wisdom complement each other. Second, the two create a perfect understanding, when used together. Third, and foremost, most of us have vague understanding of words. This may not harm us on its own. The harm comes when we use the word to mean the opposite of what it ought to.

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Intelligence is the ability to gain and apply knowledge and skills⁴. We all are endowed with sense, reason, and intellect. Somehow we are unable to use them consistently to live with contentment.

This happens because we are not born with the ability to use our minds wisely. We have to be taught to use them well. We have random and chaotic sensations as children. Our senses provide us with information as we grow older. This information is an incessant flow. It is so huge that we cannot use even one per cent of it. The ability to use this information has to be learnt by us. Without precise learning how to use available information makes us succumb to even the ordinary pressures of existence.

The Terror of Knowledge

Knowledge can be very false, and false knowledge can be more damaging than ignorance. Those who believe that knowledge is power, in reality, advance false as well as true knowledge. False knowledge is of two kinds; one that does us harm and the second that is not required by us. The world has over one billion books. We read no more than two hundred books in our lives. This is no more than a drop in the ocean. This drop helps us only if we choose wisely what we read, otherwise this information causes mental clutter.

Perception and Cognition

Perception is the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. It is also the ability to understand the true nature of something⁵.

Cognition is the process of obtaining knowledge through thought, experience and the senses⁶. Our consciousness develops in three stages: the stage of sensations, the perceptual, and the conceptual. Sensations are not retained in our memory; nor are we able to experience a pure isolated sensation. Our sensory experience is an undifferentiated chaos as a child. Discriminatory awareness begins on the level percepts.

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A percept is a group of sensation's automatically retained and integrated by our brain. It is in the form of percepts that we grasp the evidence of our senses and apprehend reality. The knowledge of sensations as components of percepts is acquired by us much later. It is a scientific, conceptual discovery⁸.

Our senses do not provide us with automatic knowledge. They only provide us the material of knowledge. Our mind has to be trained to integrate this knowledge to suit our purpose. We have to omit what is irrelevant and then we have to learn how to use what is left. Just knowing is not enough. We may know a hundred books on cooking. They can make us excel in any examination, but they cannot make us capable to even bake a loaf of bread. We have to learn the skill to cook. In addition, and more importantly, we have to apply our minds to cook nutritious, balanced and hygienic food. The need of a child is different from an adult, as are of an athlete or an old man. It requires wisdom and creativity to produce health out of food without compromising on its taste.

As a child, our awareness is similar to a higher animal. We can see and hear but we cannot mentally separate attributes. Like animals, our range of perceptual awareness is also limited. We cannot visualize more than four or five objects. As we grow older, our perceptual awareness grows, but is still limited. We cannot visualize a thousand trees or a distance of ten light-years. We can deal with knowledge of that kind only through our conceptual faculty; where we are able to deal with abstract ideas.

Wisdom and Intelligence

We create things. The source of these products is our intelligence. Intelligence is our ability to grasp the facts of reality and then deal with them in order to create things. This is why intelligence is our most precious attribute. We cannot create without it.

Human beings are ill and poor in such large numbers because this attribute of creation is neither recognized nor rewarded by society. It systematically extinguishes it in a growing flood of

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irrationality. This happens everywhere. Religion asks us to believe in the unknowable. Our homes are places of great solace but they are also places of prejudices and stern control. Our education applauds mediocrity. It advances inert facts. It induces shyness and a higher grade of prejudices. It forces children to indulge in mechanical learning and tests this mindless accumulation of facts through periodical examinations.

Wisdom and intelligence complement one another due to their ability to provide ways to us to upgrade knowledge into purposeful action which helps us to achieve what we want.

This ability to achieve what we want should be the only purpose of education. At present, it is obsessed with cluttering our minds with knowledge. It must put knowledge in front of students and then create a technique which inspires them to use this knowledge to create and fulfill desires.

The art of being wise is to choose precise information. It is also the art of knowing what to overlook. There is no such thing as collective wisdom of individual ignorance. Wisdom is meaningless until our own experience has given it meaning, and there is wisdom in the selection of wisdom. Knowledge is just a range of information. It is important, provided it is useful for our purpose. For this, we have to search a needle out of mountain of hay. Once we have that needle, we have to learn to stitch clothes with it which are comfortable and elegant. If stitching is not what we want, we may have other needs for the needle. We may become a cobbler or a surgeon. We have to throw away the needle if it gives us nothing and go to the right mountain of hay.

However, finding a needle is the beginning. So is becoming a surgeon. A good surgeon has acquired precision in skills by learning from others. He has as yet only fulfilled a very miniscule fraction of his mind. He excels when he decides that he would improve his skills with every breath he takes on what he has done earlier. This provides him the impetus to improve his thoughts. This leads to creative ideas, which lead to improved solutions. This is how he improves the quality of the life of his patient. He also improves his own life if he extends this attitude to

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every aspect of his existence. This, in essence is true wisdom. What is true for a surgeon is true for every human being. This is how food gives us health and medicine gives us freedom from disease. This is how we provide clean water and air. This is how everything that touches our lives becomes a source of unending joy.

Creativity and Discussions

Creativity is our ability to use imagination or original ideas in order to create something⁹. We progress when good ideas replace ordinary ones. We have to also use our imagination to see what these ideas will achieve for us.

Creativity does not come to us naturally. We have to train ourselves to be able to use it; the best place to acquire this ability is in the classroom. All we need to do in the classroom is discuss every word available in our course material. This discussion provides us with an opportunity to give new dimensions to ideas and words. This creates a dynamism which is many times greater than the effort involved.

Discussions are different from arguments. They are exchange of ideas in order to create excellence; arguments are an exchange of ignorance. They are worst kinds of conversation.

Studying the Fundamental Nature of Existence

Philosophy should study the fundamental nature of existence, and our relationship to existence if job is to provide us with a comprehensive view of life. This view tells us the nature of the universe which we have to deal with, the means with which we have to deal with it, i.e., the means of acquiring knowledge, the standards by which we are to choose our own goals and values, in regards to our own lives and character, and in regards to society.

Our Goals

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We need reason to establish what we want and we need reason to achieve what we want. We succeed when productive work becomes our central purpose and the central value that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all our other values. Reason is the source and the precondition of our productive work. Satisfaction is its result.

We drift at the mercy of chaotic sensations and unidentified urges when we do not have a clear aim. This is when we become capable of any evil, because we are totally out of control. Since we have to act, we either flay our hands helplessly or struggle with what we think are the terrors of life.

Values

Our goals become unproductive or perilous when we choose them or aim to achieve them without knowing the difference between right and wrong. There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or nonexistence. We need abundance of many things in order to exist. This includes health, money, sleep, peace of mind, and the ability to think creatively. There is only one value. It is that which we act to gain and keep. Virtue is the action by which we keep it¹⁰. Value is the importance or usefulness of something. Values are the standards of behavior required to achieve what is important or useful to us.

Character

Character is strength or originality in our nature. Originality is an extension of creativity, both in thought and action. Strength is ability to be secure and stable while we think or act, and when we are faced with pressure. Character thus is just doing the right thing all the time, where right is decided by own purpose and the limitations laid down by the law of existence and of the land.

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Evil

There is only one evil: having a low or vague aim. The standard by which we judge good and evil in our lives is intimately linked what we need for our survival. That which is proper to the existence of our rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes or destroys it, is the evil.

Thinking is our only basic virtue. Evil is the act of blanking out our thoughts or not acting to our own benefit. It is also the refusal to see and hear, or the refusal to absorb and integrate what we see and hear.

Evil is a negation of life. It is our impotence to think and act creatively. It is the absence of wisdom, with or without pressure from others. It is living in a vacuum, in indifference to life, or contrary to our right to survival. Evil is compromising precision to the approximate, someone else's whims in place of our own excellence, or loyalty to our own mind to a random thought.

Wholesome Work

We have to act in order to live. We cannot act without making choices. We win when we make correct choices. These choices depend on our needs and our objectives. They also depend on what is right and wrong. These are decided by what we are, how we acquire knowledge, how we use it, the nature of the universe, and how we can act in it without breaking its laws.

An existence without productive work is worse than death, because to live means to have something worthwhile to do. We cannot be happy without committing ourselves to excellence.

The quality of our work is decided by our education and how we apply our mind to use its knowledge. We can also get education from everything we see and hear. In fact, our surroundings are a bigger source of education than the classroom.

This kind of education requires us to make choices. We have to use only the information which is needed for our purpose. We cannot accumulate everything that is available. This creates clutter

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in the mind, which confuses us and reduces our ability to think properly. We must never acquire knowledge randomly. It creates chaos. We have to acquire it with precision. This precise knowledge, acquired over years, then takes shape of what the *Bhagavad-Gita* calls *swadharma*,¹¹ our natural duty. It is superior to, and always takes precedence over our *dharma*,¹² our duty. In order to succeed we have to give preference to *swadharma* over *dharma*. It is our *dharma* to be non-violent but for a soldier his *swadharma* is to wage war. We have to serve our parents and our society. This is our *dharma*. However, the best way to achieve it is through our *swadharma*. An engineer must build good roads and bridges. A doctor must heal patients and keep them diseases free. This world becomes an exceptional place if we do our *swadharma* with creative efficiency.

Philosophy and Pragmatism

The pragmatists want philosophy to be practical. They often mean that we should do away with principles and standards while dealing with life. There are others who believe that values should be subjective and must be fine-tuned to please the collective. What they do not tell us is what precisely does the collective want, and how an aircraft on a railroad be built on a collective whim. It can be built for safety of the people but the ability to create it comes from the mind.

There is, in fact, no conflict between philosophy and pragmatism. We win if the two blend into an inviolable truth. Without it, we shall continue to produce sub standard ideas and things.

Conclusion

The source of philosophy is our senses and our thinking mind. Our senses collect information, and knowledge. These may come from books, from nature, or from life. We then choose what is necessary for us. This necessity is decided by our objectives. We then use our mind to use this knowledge in order to achieve our objectives.

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We win when we constantly replace ordinary ideas with good ones and when we constantly find better ways to improve efficiency. All we need to do is to pledge to improve with every breath whatever we do. We may not succeed every time. In fact, we may fail most of the times. However, if we manage to improve even a hundred times in our lives we shall become many times more efficient than what we are. This should be the essence of our philosophy.

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