

Why Critical Thinking is Important

In this set of lectures I talk about **four distinct reasons** why developing critical thinking skills is important.

We'll start off with reasons that appeal entirely to self-interest, but as we go down the list we'll see that the scope of the reasons expands and becomes a bit more philosophical and abstract. So even if you don't care so much about the more abstract motivations, we should still hit on some themes that matter to you.

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1. Logical Self-Defense

To begin, I think a **martial arts analogy** is useful here. Why do people sign up for martial arts classes? Well, some do it just for the exercise, some enjoy the sporty aspects, but obviously a lot of people take martial arts because they want to be able to defend themselves against physical attacks ... they do it to learn "self-defense".

Why do we feel the need to learn self-defense? Because we know that, no matter how kind-hearted or cautious we are, the world is a big place with lots of different kinds of people in it, and we might find ourselves in situations where we're confronted by people who aren't as kind-hearted or as cautious as we are, and where violence is a real possibility. And in those situations we want to be able to protect ourselves and avoid getting hurt.

The situation is exactly the same when it comes to critical thinking, but people don't often think of it in this way. In this case we're not talking about people wanting to do us physical harm. We're talking about people wanting to influence our beliefs, and our values, and our actions. We're talking about people with a vested interest in getting us to believe what they want us to believe, to value what they want us to value, and to do what they want us to do.

Who are we talking about? We all have an interest in exerting our influence on the world. Parents have a special interest in exerting influence on their children, peers have influence over peers ... there's no escaping it, it's part of being human.

But in thinking about the self-defense analogy, I'm thinking more about powerful social institutions, like **political parties** and **advertising companies**, who you can think of as being in the "**influence business**", whose *job* it is to get you to think and do what another person or group or institution wants you to think and do, and who have enormous resources and expertise at their disposal to be effective at their job.

What's crucially important to understand about these kinds of institutions is that, as institutions, *they don't have any interest in your personal well-being, for your sake*. They care about your well-being only to the extent that it affects their goals and interests.

In the case of politics the goal is to acquire enough support to gain and maintain political power, right? In the case of advertising the goal is to sell you a product or service. In both cases, your needs and interests only matter to them insofar as you're instrumental to meeting these goals.

Now don't get me wrong. There certainly are *people* in politics and *people* in business and advertising who are good hearted and genuinely want to serve your interests. My point is just that the *institutions themselves* don't and can't care about you in this way, they can't know or care about what matters to you as an individual, what fulfills you, what's meaningful to you, what you value.

So what we have are these powerful institutions, that have a logic and dynamic of their own, that are in the "influence business". They survive not by threat of physical violence, but by getting us to believe and value what they want us to believe and value, so that we then behave in ways that conform to and reinforce their goals.

But of course they're not alone. They're in competition with other powerful institutions, with similar incentives and resources, to gain influence over our beliefs and values.

So we find ourselves constantly bombarded by influence messages and being pulled in different directions, and being asked to take sides on ideological issues: Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, Protestant or Catholic, religious or non-religious, Coke or Pepsi, Mac or PC, and on and on and on.

This is the world we live in, where it's not an exaggeration to say that **powerful social forces are engaged in a pitched battle for influence over our beliefs and values.**

But wait, we're not done, it gets better!

The art of influence may be as old as human society, but over the past hundred years, and especially over the past thirty years, there has also arisen **a science of influence that has dramatically increased the power of institutions to gain control and influence over our minds and actions.**

I'm talking about cognitive and behavioral and social psychology, I'm talking about behavioral economics, I'm talking about a host of scientific specializations dedicated to understanding, predicting and influencing human behavior.

It's important for all of us to understand that governments, businesses and political parties hire PhDs in these fields to help them craft their influence strategies, or they outsource it to third-party firms who specialize in this kind of strategic consulting.

And here's the other important thing to understand. Influence strategies can often be very effective in getting you to believe or do something, **but your beliefs may still be completely unjustified from a rational standpoint, and your actions may have nothing to do with your own true rational self-interest.**

Think of the techniques used by effective sales people, think of the rhetoric of charismatic leaders, think of the crude appeals to emotion and the manufacture of discontent that is the bread and butter of advertising. All very effective, and all of it as likely as not to run counter to your most genuine needs and interests.

This is the environment that we find ourselves in. Now, for most of us it doesn't strike us in quite this way. I think this is because we're so socialized to it, it's ubiquitous. But it's there, and acknowledging it is important if our goal is to become independent thinkers who can legitimately claim responsibility and ownership of our beliefs and values.

So, the first reason I'm offering for caring about critical thinking, is **self-defense** — self-defense against the sophisticated manipulations, the bad arguments and the non-arguments that are the weapons of choice in the battle for influence.

What am I saying here? I'm saying that **a good education in principles of critical thinking can help to sensitize us to the presence of these weapons, and immunize us, to a certain extent, from their effects, by learning to discriminate between good and bad reasons for belief and action.**

But this isn't the end of the road. This is just the first step in becoming an independent critical thinker.

Our goal isn't just to detect manipulative rhetoric and fallacious reasoning whenever we encounter it. That's important, that's vital, but it's not our ultimate goal.

Our ultimate goal is to be able to construct good reasons for the positive beliefs we hold. We want to be able to justify and claim ownership of the worldview that guides our understanding of the world and our interactions with other people and that informs our choices.

2. Personal Empowerment

In part 1 I talked about critical thinking in terms of *self-defense*, as a means of protecting ourselves from the false rhetoric and bad arguments that are often used by people and institutions to get us to believe and do things that aren't really in our best interest. This is the situation when tools of persuasion are directed *at us*, when we're on the *receiving end* of an argument from a friend, or an advertising pitch, or a sermon, or a political speech, or a newspaper editorial, or whatever, and we have to distinguish between good reasons to believe something and bad reasons to believe something.

Now I want to talk about the flip side of the situation, when *you're the one doing the persuading*, you're the one in the position of having to give the argument or write the pitch or deliver the sermon or write the editorial.

What I want to claim is simple: *if someone is well-versed in the elements of critical thinking then they're more likely to be effective persuaders in situations like these*. This is what I mean by "**empowerment**" — we're empowered by our ability to organize our thoughts in a logical way, and to craft an argument that gives our audience the strongest reasons possible to accept our conclusion.

But as good critical thinkers we're also going to be empowered by *our understanding of human psychology and the psychology of influence and persuasion*, so that when we give this argument, we're in a position to maximize its chances of being heard and acknowledged and responded to.

Now, not everyone associates critical thinking with these kinds of positive qualities, and especially this last bit about the psychology of persuasion, or at least it's not the first thing that comes to mind when they think of critical thinking. There are a couple of reasons for this.

One reason is that more often people associate critical thinking with the "self-defense" aspects that we talked about above

Another reason (and one that I think is more interesting to talk about) is a view that many people have — that critical thinking is, and should be,

about good logic and good argumentation, *and that's it*. They associate the psychology of belief and persuasion with the techniques of manipulative rhetoric that we're warning people against. From this point of view, logic and argumentation is "white magic", it's what the *good guys* use. And rhetorical techniques and psychological strategies is "black magic" or "dark magic", it's what the *bad guys* use — these are the tools used by advertisers and politicians and spin doctors to manipulate information and control public opinion.

I understand this point of view, and I agree that it's important to clearly distinguish good argumentation from persuasive rhetoric. They're not the same thing.

However, I think it's a mistake to think that the theory and techniques of persuasive rhetoric do not belong, do not have a proper place, in the critical thinker's toolkit. They do. But they're just like any tool, they can be used for good ends or for bad ends. What ends you use them for is up to you, the tools themselves aren't to blame for the evil uses to which they're put.

But more importantly, *the psychological dimension is unavoidable.* Every argument you give in the real world, to a real audience, is defined in part by the social and psychological context within which the argument is given. And in that context, the persuasive power of the argument is determined by an array of factors. The logic matters, but the logic needs to reflect the argumentative context of what is at issue, who you're trying to persuade, what they bring to the table in terms of background beliefs and values, why they care about the issue, what's at stake in the argument, and so on.

And these are *psychological* and *social* factors. If you don't understand these factors, if you can't get inside the head of your intended audience, if you can't see the issue through their eyes, and tap into what they care about, what motivates them, then you'll never be able to persuade them to accept your point of view.

Good argumentation isn't just about good logic, it's also about good psychology.

Now, just to make the point a different way, **think about what goes into crafting a great argumentative essay and delivering it as a speech.** We outline the argument in a kind of shorthand, focusing on the key premises, identifying background assumptions that might be contentious, anticipating possible objections, coming up with replies to those objections, until we've got the logical structure of what we want to say laid out.

Then we've got to think about HOW we want to present this. We've got to make choices about wording, about the order of presentation, about pacing, about vocabulary, about sentence and paragraph structure, and so on.

Then we've got to think about delivery (this is a speech after all) and we've got to think about speaking technique and all those factors that go into public speaking, and all the while we're motivated by the goal of making this the most effective and persuasive argument we can.

Now, in this context, it seems a mistake to think about this thought process in terms of white magic and black magic, right? *Thinking about rhetorical technique and the psychology of persuasion is an inseparable part of the crafting of a great persuasive argument.*

So, my view is that a good training in critical thinking needs to pay attention not only to logic and argumentation in the abstract, but also to logic and argumentation in real-world contexts, where rhetorical choices and psychological factors inevitably come into play when you're engaged in argumentation with real people.

It follows, then, that if you're well-versed in all these aspects of critical thinking, then you're going to be in a better position to have your voice heard, to be effective in the role of influencer.

3. Liberal Democracy and Civic Duty

In the last two lectures we've been talking about the value of critical thinking in terms of rational self-interest. On the one hand, it can help to protect us from bad arguments and manipulative rhetoric, and in so-doing give us a space to think and deliberate about what we really believe and care about. That's critical thinking functioning as a kind of *self-defense*. It can help us with our "defensive game".

We also talked about how it can help us with our "offensive game", and by that I mean that it can help us to be more articulate and effective spokespeople for our own goals and values; it can give us a voice and strength of influence that we might not otherwise have. That's what I'm calling critical thinking in the service of *personal empowerment*.

Now, this is all well and good, but **the value of critical thinking doesn't stop with individual self-interest**. If we look past our noses we see that we're not isolated islands, that we actually live in community with other people, and these communities form a society with institutions and governments that are designed to serve the needs of the people.

Or at least, that's the way it's supposed to work in so-called "liberal democratic societies". What I want to talk about on this episode is *the role of critical thinking specifically in liberal democratic societies, and what duties we as citizens have to try to be critical and independent thinkers*.

What I Mean By "Liberal Democracy"

As a point of clarification, when I say "liberal democratic society" I'm not using the term "liberal" in the sense in which the term is commonly used in political discussions, where it's contrasted with "conservative", like when we say that Michael Moore is a liberal and Rush Limbaugh is a conservative; or pro-choice activists are liberal and pro-life activists are conservative; or support for universal health care is liberal and opposition to it is conservative. That's not what the term "liberal" means in this context.

When we call a society a “liberal democratic” society, we’re using the older sense of the term, where “liberal” refers to *liberty or freedom*, and “democratic” refers to *rule or governance by the people*. So we’re talking about forms of government where political power is vested, ideally, in the people, and they get to elect officials whose job it is to represent their interests and make policies and laws that serve those interests. These are *democratic societies, rule by the people*.

What makes them *liberal* democracies is a specific conception of what the role of the state is with respect to its citizens. And part of this role is captured by what is sometimes called the doctrine of *liberal neutrality*. What does this mean? **“Liberal neutrality” is the view that individual citizens should be free to pursue their own conception of the good life, their own conception of what is ultimately good and valuable and important.** That is, the state doesn’t impose any particular conception of the good life on its citizens, it’s “neutral” on this question. That’s what “neutrality” means here.

So what’s the job of the state? The job of the state is to ensure that you have as much freedom as possible to pursue your own good, your own happiness, consistent with everyone else having the same freedom to pursue their own good. That’s the “liberal” part, the “freedom” part.

Now, when it’s phrased like this, liberalism sounds more like classical 18th and 19th century liberalism, which is closer to *libertarianism* than to modern 20th and 21st century liberalism. That’s partly right. We’re talking about liberalism as it was understood by people like Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), which has a libertarian slant to it.

But it’s not entirely right. This concept of “liberal neutrality” is also consistent with the “welfare liberalism” of someone like John Rawls (1921-2002) and contemporary “progressive liberals”, who argue that justice requires a certain amount of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. *What’s at issue between welfare liberals and libertarians is just what is required for individuals to actually have and be able to exercise their basic*

rights and freedoms. There's a real disagreement here, but it's a disagreement about what liberal freedom demands and how it can best be achieved, *not about the value of freedom per se, and not about the importance of liberal neutrality;* on these issues, they're in agreement, they're all variations on a theme within family of liberal democratic political philosophies.

Critical Thinking in Liberal Democracies

So, getting back to critical thinking, there are two questions I want to ask:

1. **what role does critical thinking play in maintaining liberal democracies?**
2. **do citizens of liberal democracies have a civic duty to cultivate their critical thinking faculties?**

I'll give you my answers up front: the answer to 1 is "a BIG ONE", and the answer to 2 is "YES". To my mind this is obviously true, but I know it's not to a lot of people (certainly not my students) so here goes.

Ideally, democracy is government by the people, for the people. We, the people, are charged with electing officials to represent our needs and interests, and if we don't like how they govern, we have the power and the responsibility to vote them out of office. As citizens we're not normally involved in drafting laws and policies, but we're responsible for assessing the laws and policies that our elected and appointed officials propose and vote on. And doing this well requires both an informed citizenry and a citizenry capable of critically assessing arguments, pro and con, that pertain to the laws and policies in question.

So that's one obvious reason why critical thinking is important. It's important because it's necessary to participate fully in the democratic process.

But I think it goes even deeper than that. There's always been a kind of tension between democratic rule and classical liberalism. Liberalism emphasizes respect for individual rights and liberties, freedom of thought and expression, and so on. But democracy carries with it the potential for mob rule, the tyranny of the majority or the privileged classes, and the

state-sanctioned oppression of minority classes. Think of the status of women, or people of color, or indigenous peoples, or gays and lesbians, in ostensibly democratic countries over the past 150 years.

Now, when we think about the women's rights movement, or the civil rights movement, or other liberation movements, I want us to consider the importance of independent critical thought in making those movements possible.

When it was illegal for women and people of color to vote and participate as equal citizens government and society, the cultural norms and social pressures of the time made it easier to follow along and not question the rationale for those norms.

But think now about what it would mean to ask, at that time: how can this situation be *rationaly justified*? What are the *arguments* for this position? Are they *good* arguments? Are all the premises *plausible*? Does the conclusion *follow*? Do they rely on *background assumptions* that can be challenged?

In asking these questions *we're just doing elementary argument analysis*, but in this context, these are *subversive, dangerous questions* — they threaten an entire social order.

So it's not surprising that in social groups that are deeply invested in perpetuating an oppressive social order, this kind of critical inquiry isn't going to be valued. It's going to be controlled or suppressed if it's seen as asking people to question the foundations of the established social order. George Orwell wrote about this at length in his essays and novels. Socrates was put to death for asking questions that challenged the worldview of the established authorities of the day.

Now, my claim is not that teaching critical thinking will magically wipe away oppression and human injustice. Of course there's no guarantee that simply raising these questions is going to cause the scales to fall from people's eyes and see the error of their ways.

My claim is simply that it's *harder* for oppressive policies and beliefs to gain a foothold in a democratic society that openly supports the value of critical thinking and Socratic inquiry. Not that it's impossible, just that it's harder.

So, to the extent that we care about freedom and equality and justice and the ideals of liberal democratic governance, I think we should also care about critical thinking and the values of Socratic inquiry. I think they go hand-in-hand, you can't value one without valuing the other.

Now, I also think it's obvious that we in fact live in a very non-ideal world, where principles of liberal democratic governance can be undermined by internal corruption, excessive nationalism, corporate lobbying, geo-political threats, globalization, war, resource scarcity, you name it.

But I think these challenges just make the case for critical thinking even stronger. **If liberal democracy survives and flourishes through this century, it will be because we somehow managed to foster and exercise our capacity for critical and creative thinking in tackling these problems.**

Do We Have a Duty to Cultivate Our Critical Thinking Skills?

We've been talking about the importance of critical thinking for liberal democracy. The second question I wanted to ask was, in light of all this, *do we as citizens have a duty to cultivate our rational, critical thinking faculties?*

I hope it's clear now why I think the answer is "yes". It's not a legal duty of course, we can't force anyone to study logic and argumentation, any more than we can force people to vote on election day. But it's plausible to think that we still have some kind of moral duty to vote; the system just doesn't work properly unless enough of us participate. I think the same is true with critical thinking skills. *The system just doesn't work properly unless enough of us take up the challenge of staying informed and thinking critically about the issues that matter to us.*

Now, the distressing thing to me is that despite all this, we don't (generally) teach critical thinking in the public school system. Even here in the US, the home of liberal arts education that stresses general knowledge and thinking skills, only a tiny fraction of students are ever exposed to basic principles of logic and argument analysis, beyond the elementary theorem-proving you might do in a geometry class. You'll find very little, if any, discussion of the distinction between good and bad arguments in the public school curriculum, from kindergarten to 12th grade.

It's a bit better in college and university, where you'll actually find dedicated critical thinking courses, but it's still the case that nationally only a fraction of students are required to take such courses.

And the trends in higher education aren't very positive in this regard. Globally, we're seeing less and less support for the liberal arts and humanities, and more and more support for business, management and applied science and technology. The trend is toward education with economic impacts in mind, rather than human development in mind. I see this in my own university in the United States, but there's evidence for a global shift in educational philosophy in Europe and India and other parts of the world, that is marginalizing the humanities even more than it does in the US¹.

I'm worried that these trends may have the unfortunate side-effect of actually stifling the development of important critical thinking skills. I think this is bad for business in the long run, but I'm even more worried that it's bad for liberal democracy in the long run.

1. For more on these issues, see Martha Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010, Oxford University Press).

4. Philosophy and the Search for Wisdom

In this lecture I want to talk about the importance of critical thinking for philosophical thinking and the pursuit of “philosophical wisdom”. What I’m going to say here is probably obvious to anyone who’s studied philosophy for any length of time, but for those who haven’t, I hope this will be helpful in understanding what the study of philosophy is all about.

A Definition of “Philosophy”

When you look at the word “philosophy”, you see that it has two Greek roots — “philo”, which means *love*, and “sophia”, which means *wisdom*. So philosophy is, literally, the *love of wisdom*, and a philosopher is a *lover of wisdom*.

Now, what do we mean by “wisdom”? It’s a term that doesn’t have a precise meaning, so for the sake of discussion I’m just going to stipulate a meaning that suits our purposes.

Wisdom, I think we can all agree, involves knowledge. But we want to distinguish the knowledge that the wise person has from mere information, or knowledge of empirical facts.

Here’s my slogan definition: **to have wisdom is to have Knowledge of the True and the Good, and to act wisely is to act on the basis of this knowledge.**

This isn’t the only way to define wisdom, but it’s helpful for us because it captures something that’s distinctive about philosophical wisdom, the wisdom associated with philosophical insight or understanding.

Let’s unpack this slogan a bit further. Wisdom involves knowledge of the True. This expression, “the True”, with a capital T, is just a shorthand for *reality*, the way things *actually are*, behind the scenes.

Wisdom also involves knowledge of the Good, and by that I mean knowledge of what has *intrinsic value*, and therefore *worth pursuing for its own sake*. I’m actually using this as an umbrella term for anything have to do with values and ultimate goals.

So, putting this all together, *the wise person has (i) knowledge of reality, the way things really are, and (ii) knowledge of what is ultimately good and valuable, and (iii) is willing and able to act and make decisions in accordance with this knowledge.*

The philosopher is someone who loves and pursues this kind of wisdom. But we can't be done yet. Because if we just leave it at this, then there are lots of people who would qualify as philosophers who we wouldn't normally want to place in this category. Philosophy, as a discipline, is devoted to the pursuit of wisdom, but it's not the only game in town. There are other professions, other disciplines, other intellectual traditions, that are also in the "wisdom game", who claim to have wisdom, to have a deep knowledge of the True and the Good.

Other Wisdom Traditions

I'm thinking here specifically of two traditions.

One is the tradition of **Western religion** that focuses on **REVELATION** as the primary means of acquiring wisdom. In this tradition — and here I'm trying to be specific, in the tradition of REVEALED religion — wisdom is *given* to human beings, *revealed* to us, through divine acts, like the divinely inspired writing of texts, like the books of the old and new Testament bibles, or the Koran; or sometimes through visions or personal communication with a divine presence of some kind. Either way, human beings aren't responsible for this wisdom, human beings didn't work it out for themselves by deliberation and reason — *it's delivered to us.*

In this context, we *wouldn't* describe this wisdom as *philosophical* wisdom, as a product of philosophical reflection. We should distinguish this sort of revealed wisdom from the wisdom that might be obtained through philosophical inquiry.

The other wisdom tradition that I'm thinking of is the one we associate with various forms of **MYSTICISM**. Now, I'm not comfortable generalizing and lumping all forms of mysticism together, but for our purposes I sort of have to, but all I'm talking about is those traditions

where the goal is some form of *enlightenment*, an awareness of deep metaphysical truths, and *this enlightenment is experienced as a firm of direct intuition or insight, a conscious awareness of a deep, ultimate, transcendent reality*; and where the *methods* for attaining this state of awareness don't involve, primarily, rational argumentation, but rather various forms of disciplined practice, like meditation, or other ways of getting your mind to transcend the rational ego, so that your mind becomes suitably receptive to this arational (not irrational)² awareness.

The wisdom that comes out of this tradition, I want to say, should be distinguished from the wisdom that comes from philosophical reflection.

Philosophical Wisdom

So, what exactly is the secret sauce that makes for *philosophical* wisdom? In a nutshell, the secret sauce is **RATIONAL ARGUMENTATION**.

In philosophy, the primary means by which wisdom is acquired is through rational argumentation, which is an inherently public and social activity. Someone offers reasons for holding a belief, these reasons are presented in some public way, through speech or writing, so that anyone could, in principle, examine them and assess them, objections are raised, replies are offered, and so on, and the dialectic³ evolves over time.

This is the tradition that begins with the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers; this is the tradition that flourishes with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle; this is the tradition that continues into the Medieval era with Augustine and Anselm and Aquinas and many others; this is the tradition associated with the writings of Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Russell, Wittgenstein, and so on, up to the present day. There may not be much that all these philosophers agree upon, but argumentation is central to their methodology. *Logic and*

2. Irrational = runs counter to accepted norms of reason. Arational = norms of reason don't even apply.

3. Dialectic = very broadly, the method of examining and discussing opposing ideas in order to find the truth.

argumentation are central among the tools that philosophers use to construct and evaluate their views.

So, having said all that, let's get back to our main question, which is "What is the relationship of critical thinking to the pursuit of philosophical wisdom?".

The answer, of course, is that it's **CENTRAL** to the pursuit of philosophical wisdom.

Logic and argumentation are key elements of critical thinking. It's like asking "what is the role of mathematics in the practice of physics?" The answer is "everything", its foundational! Mathematics is the language through which the claims of physical theories are expressed. *Logic and argumentation and critical thinking are to philosophy what mathematics is to physics.* If you're ignorant of the former than you simply can't *understand* what's going on in the latter, much less *contribute* to it.

So that's my final word on the importance of critical thinking. If you have any interest in reading or understanding what philosophers have written and said about the big questions, then you'll need to acquire some basic critical thinking skills. And if you want to think critically and independently about the big questions for yourself, it's unavoidable.

Disclaimers

Now, before I wrap up this discussion I want to offer **a few disclaimers and qualifications**, since I know if I leave it here I'll get jumped on.

1. Nothing that I've said here implies sharp boundaries between philosophy, religion and mysticism.

In each of these you'll find overlap and interpenetration. There are philosophical traditions in every branch of Western religion, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, that focus on argumentation. There are philosophical traditions in every branch of Eastern religion. There are also mystical traditions within every branch Western religion. And there are plenty of philosophers within the Western tradition that have been

influenced by various forms of revealed religion or mysticism. Nothing that I've said here implies anything to the contrary.

- 2. Nothing I've said here implies that the philosophical approach to wisdom is *superior* to the religious or the mystical, or that the philosophical approach is incompatible with revealed religion or mysticism.**

That may or may not be true, but I'm just saying that nothing I've said here entails a position on this one way or another.

- 3. Nothing that I've said here implies any particular philosophical position on any particular question (as far as I can tell).**

In particular, it doesn't rule out various forms of *skepticism*. It may be that the rational pursuit of wisdom leads us to conclude that our knowledge of the True and the Good is extremely limited, that *we can't know* the True and the Good with any certainty. But that too would be a kind of wisdom, wouldn't it — the wisdom of knowing that you *don't* know, and maybe *can't* know? This kind of thinking has a long and venerable pedigree in philosophy too. But there's no need to prejudge such questions.

- 4. Nothing I've said here implies that all philosophers have the same views about the role and importance of logic and argumentation in philosophy.**

There are some philosophical traditions that want to problematize logic itself, and some that view the goal of philosophy as something quite different from the search for wisdom in any traditional sense of that word. But I don't think the existence of these sorts of philosophical traditions undermines much of what I've said here. Philosophers who hold these critical positions typically don't go around saying that they came to them through some mystical insight or by the revealed word of God. They hold these positions because they've *thought* about them, they've subjected them to *rational scrutiny*, and they *try to convince others through rational discourse of one form or another*. In this respect we're all playing on the same field, if not always following the same rules.