

## **TRACK 1: CHAPTER REVIEW**

### **CHAPTER 1: The Nature of Philosophy**

#### **1.1: What is Philosophy?**

##### **Learning objectives:**

- **Understand the point of Plato's Myth of the Cave**
- **Be able to explain the importance of the philosophical perspectives of women and non-Western cultures**

Philosophy begins with wonder; we wonder about why we are here, and whether God exists, among other things. This wondering begins early in our lives. The word “philosophy” comes from two Greek roots, *philein*, “to love”, and *sophia*, meaning wisdom. Philosophy is the love of wisdom. Philosophy does not end with wonder; it begins there. Its aim is to enable us to seek our own answers to the questions we asked in wonder. Philosophy encourages us to examine our beliefs, to see if there are good reasons to hold them. The goal of philosophy is thus autonomy; the freedom to decide for yourself what to believe using your own reasoning abilities.

**Reading:** a simplified version of Plato's Myth of the Cave

Plato's parable of the Myth of the Cave is important because it explains much about the nature of philosophy. It explains that, unlike a lot of academic subjects, philosophy is an *activity*; philosophical theories are the products of this activity. It is important to "do" philosophy. It also explains, second, that philosophy is *hard work*. The philosophical journey sometimes leads in directions that society does not support. It is also hard because it requires that we think critically, and to examine critically views that we have always accepted. This parable also shows that the aim of philosophy is *freedom*, freeing us from our uncritical acceptance of the beliefs that we share with those around us. Philosophy also *examines our most basic assumptions*—something that is suggested by its name of "love of wisdom". This view of philosophy was endorsed by Perictione, a woman philosopher who we think lived around the time of Plato, and who thought that philosophy was the search for the understanding of why we and the universe are here.

Philosophy can be defined as "the activity of critically and carefully examining the reasons behind the most fundamental assumptions of our human lives".

### *The Diversity of Philosophy*

The search for wisdom is of concern to people of both sexes and all races, so it is a mistake to believe that it is the province of western males. This volume will include both feminist and multicultural approaches to philosophy.

## 1.2 The Traditional Divisions of Philosophy

### Learning objective:

- To be able to define epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics, and explain the kinds of questions each asks.

Another way of understanding philosophy is to look at the kind of questions that it asks.

Philosophical topics have traditionally been divided into three categories which address questions concerned with knowledge, reality, and values. The fields of philosophy that explore these issues are termed epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.

**Epistemology** means “the study of knowledge”. Among the problems discussed here are those concerning the structure, reliability, and extent of our knowledge, the meaning of truth, logic, and a variety of linguistic concerns, as well as the foundation of knowledge. Gail Stenstad argues that male approaches to knowledge assume that there is only one truth, and contrasts this approach to knowledge, which she calls *theoretical thinking*, with feminist *anarchic thinking*.

**Metaphysics** is the study of the ultimate characteristics of reality or existence. These include questions concerning the existence of God, the destiny of the universe, and the immortality of the soul. One of the core questions in metaphysics is that of whether everything in the universe is

determined, or are humans able freely to choose for themselves? One important view on this issue is determinism, the view that all things and all humans are unfree because everything that occurs happens in accordance with regular patterns or laws, a view held by Paul Henri d'Holbach. A contrasting view is held by Viktor Frankl, whose experience as a prisoner of the Nazis led him to believe that people have the freedom to make of themselves the sort of people they want to be. Some eastern philosophers have argued that people can be both free and determined, drawing on the idea of karma to support their views.

**Ethics** is the study of morality. It includes questions about virtue and obligation, what moral principles we should adopt, and questions related to practical issues such as abortion, the merits of capitalism vs. communism, and capital punishment.

### *Other philosophical inquiries*

There is also a wide range of philosophical inquiries known as “The philosophy of..”, or “philosophy and....”, such as the philosophy of science, the philosophy and art, and philosophy and the meaning of life. The list of topics about which we can philosophize is endless!

## **1.3 A Philosopher in Action: Socrates**

### ***Learning objective:***

- **To understand how Socrates' relentless questioning exemplifies the quest for philosophical wisdom.**

The best way to understand the nature of philosophy is to consider a philosopher in action: Socrates. Socrates was preceded by the pre-Socratics who questioned religious authority and tried to provide non-religious accounts of nature. Socrates was born in 469BC in Athens, Greece. He questioned powerful people who claimed to know about such issues as justice or virtue, exposing the emptiness of the opinions they held. Much of what we know about Socrates comes to us from the *Dialogues*, written by Socrates' disciple, Plato. The first of these *Dialogues* (*The Euthyphro*, *The Apology*, and *Crito*) are faithful to Socrates' views.

**Reading:** *The Euthyphro*

In this reading Socrates brings logic and reason to bear on Euthyphro's claim that prosecuting his father for murder is a holy or righteous act. Socrates reveals that Euthyphro does not have a coherent definition of holiness and, consequently, lacks a defensible justification of his actions.

**Reading:** *The Republic*

In this reading Thrasymachus' view that justice consists of whatever is in the interests of the strong and powerful. But Socrates shows that this view of justice is contradictory.

**Reading:** *The Apology*

Socrates' relentless questioning infuriated some people in Athens, and he was brought to trial; here, Plato summarizes the speech that Socrates makes in his own defense.

**Reading:** *Crito*

Here, Socrates discusses with his friend Crito whether he should escape and thus disobey the law. He argues that he should not as this would be breaking a just agreement he has made with the state..

## **1.4: The Value of Philosophy**

**Learning objectives:**

- **To be able to explain how philosophical wisdom is related to freedom, the ability to build one's life and the cultivation of awareness.**
- **To understand the importance of examining our philosophical assumptions about men and women**

*Achieving Freedom*

The Myth of the Cave provided one answer to the question of what value philosophy has: that through it we achieve freedom.

The Buddhist philosophical tradition has suggested that philosophy is the key to a more profound type of freedom, holding that once we understand the true nature of the universe we will be freed from the otherwise unending wheel of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth.

### *Building Your Own View of Life*

By exposing us to different perspectives on the world, philosophy provides tools for us to make sense of our lives and the world, while making us more tolerant and biased.

### *Cultivating Awareness*

Philosophy helps deepen our awareness, especially about how our thoughts are influenced by others; this, in turn, helps make us free.

### *Philosophy: A Male Bias?*

Recently, some feminists have questioned whether philosophy has any value to women. Janice Moulton, for example, points out that most philosophers use an adversarial method of inquiry, while Genevieve Lloyd notes that men have dominated philosophy from the beginning. Lloyd, though, holds that philosophy is useful to challenge the mistaken assumptions about men and women that past male philosophers have given us.

## *The Price of Philosophy*

Part of the price of philosophy is long, painstaking study, and the possibility of unmasking cherished assumptions as mistaken.

## *Learning to Think Critically*

Philosophy helps us to reason well. This is a useful skill in and outside of education, because it enables us to navigate through an information-saturated world where efforts are continually being made to sway our viewpoints.

## **1.5 Historical Showcase: The First Philosophers**

### *Pre-Socratic Western Philosophers*

Thales: Explaining Reality

Heraclitus: Reality is Change

Parmenides and Zeno: Change is an illusion



## *Eastern Philosophers*

The Vedas

The Upshnishads