

OXFORD IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME



# PHILOSOPHY: BEING HUMAN

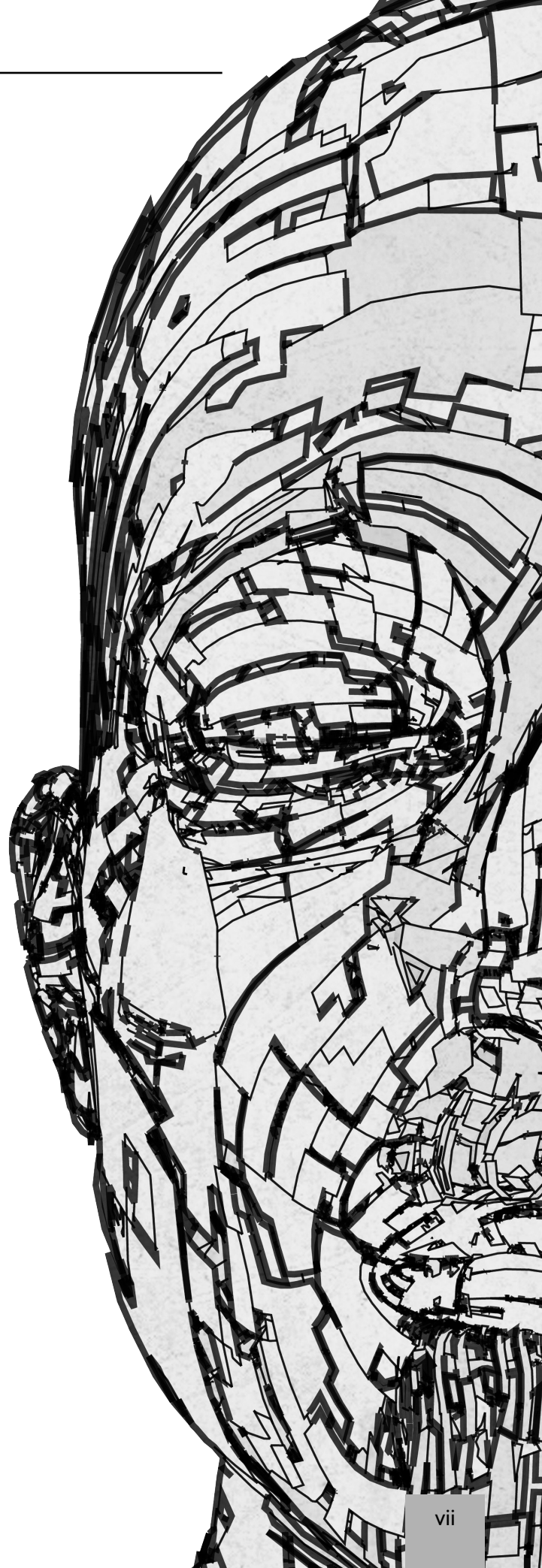
COURSE COMPANION

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# BEING HUMAN

## 1 Introduction

Welcome to philosophy. The IB Diploma's philosophy course is an exciting option as part of the Diploma Programme. It is a subject that seeks to challenge you in ways that are at the heart of the educational ambitions of the IB Diploma - as critical inquirers, global citizens with international mindedness, and compassionate action-takers. Philosophy has these ambitions as part of its practice. This book focuses on the core theme of **being human** that all students undertaking the subject must complete at part of the prescribed course. The core theme explores the fundamental question of what it is to be human and does so by looking at the six **key concepts** that are at the heart of exploring the question.

The key concepts encourage us to seek answers to the following questions:

- What does it mean to be human?
- Is there such a thing as the self?
- Can we really ever know the other?
- Is how we interact with others what makes us human?
- Has what it means to be human been changed/shaped by technologies such as the internet?
- What can discoveries in neuroscience tell us about what it is to be human?<sup>1</sup>

However, before this systematic investigation is undertaken, it is worth reflecting on philosophy as both a discipline and as an activity. This allows you to engage with the ambitions of the course while preparing yourself for the final assessments from your first experience of philosophy.

### What is philosophy?

#### Philosophers as plumbers

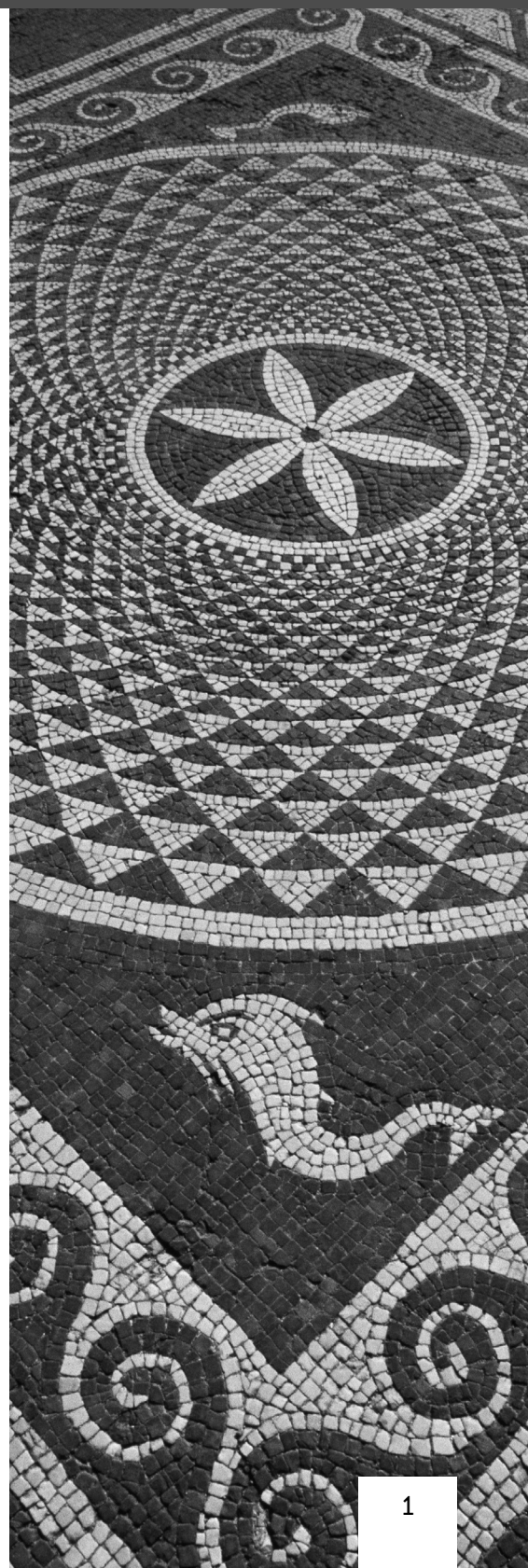
"We cannot learn philosophy; for where is it, who is in possession of it, and how shall we recognise it? We can only learn to philosophize"

—Immanuel Kant - Critique of Pure Reason

Immanuel Kant, one of the greatest philosophers of all time, provides a clear insight into the ambitions of the IB Diploma philosophy course. However, Kant makes it sound as if philosophy is something that just happens and that everyone can do it. In a sense this is true but it does

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<sup>1</sup> International Baccalaureate, *Philosophy Guide* (Diploma Programme) [Geneva: International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014], p. 15.



not mean that everyone can do it well. There is a focus which defines philosophy. As Woodhouse has put it,

... what catches the philosopher's eye concerning the statement "Ralph told the truth" is not the potential issue of whether Ralph actually told the truth. Instead, the philosopher's curiosity is aroused by the challenge of determining the standards that any sentence in principle must meet in order to merit the label 'truth' - that is, of inquiring into the meaning of the concept of truth.<sup>2</sup>

Woodhouse's point is simple; philosophers are interested in what lies behind the words, ideas and concepts that we tend to use without thinking about their deeper meaning. Mary Midgley once made a rather controversial claim that philosophers were like plumbers:

Plumbing and philosophy are both activities that arise because elaborate cultures like ours have, beneath their surface, a fairly complex system which is usually unnoticed, but which sometimes goes wrong. In both cases, this can have serious consequences. Each is hard to repair when it goes wrong, because neither of them was ever consciously planned as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

### Philosophy and international-mindedness

When Midgley referred to 'cultures like ours' she is addressing a western audience but there is no doubt she would now extend her point to all cultures. Every culture or tradition of thought has a set of concepts that underpin their understanding of the world around them. Sometimes they are unique to that culture or tradition though often comparable concepts are found in other cultures as they too seek to respond to satisfy a desire to understand the world and issues that emerge out of these attempts. Philosophy as a tool is used across cultures and is an excellent way of increasing your international-mindedness.

While some commentators were concerned that philosophers were being compared to 'intellectual sanitation workers', the point she is making is very insightful. The philosophical plumbing refers to the network of concepts that underpin our understanding of the world and therefore the way we live, how we make decisions and interact with others. Perhaps, the analogy would be more contemporary if it was replaced with electricity and the electrician. We are usually only concerned with our electrical supply when the power goes off and our lights, computers and televisions become obsolete.

### 'Doing' philosophy

Perhaps Professor Simon Blackburn is right when he says "[t]he word "philosophy" carries unfortunate connotations: impractical, unworldly,

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from <http://philosophy.louisiana.edu/what.html> (accessed 20 October 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Mary Midgley, *Utopias, Dolphins and Computers: Problems of Philosophical Plumbing* (Oxford: Psychology Press, 2000), p. 1.



weird.”<sup>4</sup> To a certain extent this is still true. Have you ever had anyone ask you why you are studying philosophy as part of your Diploma, or comment that philosophy is impractical? It can be an interesting conversation.

Still, the word philosophy is a translation of the ancient greek word, ‘*philosophia*’ and is usually translated as ‘the love of wisdom’. As a practice philosophy found its foundation in Socrates and his dialectic method of inquiry. However, while the actions of Socrates, and the writings of his student, Plato, are commonly perceived as the foundation of the western tradition of thought, each culture has pursued wisdom using different methodologies and with different areas of interest. Consequently, not all pathways to wisdom require the centrality of rationality and argumentation to be called philosophy. Instead, wisdom can be expressed through poetry, storytelling, even in song, while using analytical strategies that are not based on dispute or refutation to develop an understanding. There are numerous occasions where the purpose of thinking and the conceptual frameworks used are so far apart there is limited commonality to enable valid contrast between different traditions. Despite these differences, there are significant areas where direct comparison can occur, enabling a student to look at issues from different perpectives, bringing insight into these traditions and their cultures and being able to assess the viability or sustainability of their own prevailing understandings. These different perspectives occur in a number of the key concepts covered in this book.

The focus of philosophy is questions that continue to intrigue people; perennial and perplexing questions (that often confound us with their simplicity). They tend to be big questions with equally big answers. Often understanding the question is an equal challenge to understanding the answer.

Philosophy asks you to think about the questions, how to answer them, how to present the answers, and to do so as a philosopher. Consequently, the emphasis of the Diploma Programme philosophy course is on “doing philosophy”, that is, on actively engaging in ‘philosophical activity’ and in the process allowing your own philosophical voice to emerge and ‘to grow into independent thinkers’.

This not a straight ‘history of ideas’ course. It seeks to equip you with the understanding that will help you to appreciate your own thinking and the thinking of others. The course will enable you to engage with the debates that will shape the future of humankind, the ecosystem, and therefore the planet. Some of the debates are yet to emerge, as societies face new challenges on a number of fronts. Advances in technology and science impact upon the way we live, and what we can achieve in our lives. The changing nature of the world through globalisation brings the need to reflect on our morality, our laws, our expectations, and our relationship with those we are connected with in an increasingly contracting world. To do so requires sensitivity to different ways of thinking, appreciating the assumptions that are then used to reflect upon and offer a particular solution to an issue.

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<sup>4</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 1.

## What do philosophers do?

### Philosophers as conceptual engineers

Perhaps Midgley's association with plumbing is not how we want to leave our picture of doing philosophy. Blackburn, when asked what he does, replies that he prefers "to introduce myself as doing **conceptual engineering**. For just as the engineer studies the structure of material things, so the philosopher studies the structure of thought."<sup>5</sup> The ambition is therefore to understand these structures or frameworks and

[u]nderstanding the structure involves seeing how parts function and how they interconnect. It means knowing what would happen for better or worse if changes were made. This is what we aim at when we investigate the structures that shape our view of the world. Our concepts or ideas form the mental housing in which we live. We may end up proud of the structures we have built. Or we may believe that they need dismantling and starting afresh.<sup>6</sup>

This is an important endeavor and not one to be taken lightly. It is part of a dialogue that has been going on for many millennia. Occasionally, these structures have been dismantled dramatically and rebuilt although not all believe these rebuilds have been successful. These bring about disputes, creating even more dialogue as each participant pursues greater understanding and clarity of the issues and the positions being taken.

With this mind, is it fair to suggest that philosophy is all about ideas? Peter Hacker expresses this idea of doing philosophy, while comparing the knowledge pursued and obtained in science with that in philosophy, and this leads him to claim that

[p]hilosophy does not contribute to our knowledge of the world we live in after the manner of any of the natural sciences. You can ask any scientist to show you the achievements of science over the past millennium, and they have much to show: libraries full of well-established facts and well-confirmed theories. *If you ask a philosopher to produce a handbook of well-established and unchallengeable philosophical truths, there's nothing to show.* I think that is because philosophy is not a quest for knowledge about the world, but rather a quest for understanding the **conceptual scheme** in terms of which we conceive of the knowledge we achieve about the world. One of the rewards of doing philosophy is a clearer understanding of the way we think about ourselves and about the world we live in, not fresh facts about reality.<sup>7</sup>

It is hard to believe that after at least 3 millennia of debate, philosophy has nothing to show for itself. However, Hacker's point is that the

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<sup>5</sup> Blackburn, *Think*, p. 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in "Peter Hacker tells James Garvey that neuroscientists are talking nonsense". Originally published in *The Philosophers' Magazine* but now available at <http://jamesgarveyactually.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/hackers-challenge.pdf> [accessed 20 October 2014].



nature of knowledge in philosophy is different to the empirical sciences. Philosophy can change the world, hopefully for the better. Philosophy should, and often does, lead to action. Ideas change the world and good ideas change the world for the better.<sup>8</sup>

### The relationship between TOK and philosophy

As you might realise there are some aspects of TOK evident in this discussion. The *Philosophy Guide* explores the relationship of TOK and philosophy. It is worth reflecting on the differences to ensure you are aware of their similarities, the differences and their shared features. The following is an extract from the *Guide*:

Philosophy allows us to explore and reflect on the nature and meaning of being human. By presenting an opportunity to engage in these activities, the DP philosophy course shares many common concerns with TOK. Like TOK, philosophy places a premium on the development of critical thinking skills, on encouraging students to reflect on their own perspectives, and engaging with a diverse range of perspectives and interpretations. However, TOK is not intended to be a course in philosophy, and care should be taken not to turn the TOK course into an overly technical philosophical investigation into the nature of knowledge. While there might be a degree of overlap in the terms used, the questions asked, or the tools applied to answer these questions, the approach is quite different.<sup>9</sup>

## Why philosophize?

In *A Preface to Philosophy*, Mark B Woodhouse provides an indication of the potential benefits of studying philosophy when he asks, “what’s in philosophy besides the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake?” He provides a practical response:

A critical involvement with philosophy can change our fundamental beliefs, including both our general view of the world and our system of values. The change of these can change our personal happiness and our goal within a chosen profession or simply our general lifestyle. However, such benefits are generally by-products, and not the specific goal of philosophical investigation.<sup>10</sup>

Philosophy can be empowering, exposing an individual to insights about the way the world works, generating an understanding into important matters that affect an individual, their community and global events. This provides a greater sense of awareness and security. However, what is particular about philosophy is that it engages with the ideas, and therefore concepts, that underlie these matters; key concepts such as

<sup>8</sup> It is tempting to say that philosophers are not plumbers or engineers but conceptual architects, seeking to build a better world that also takes into consideration our ‘lived world’ not just our structural world.

<sup>9</sup> IB, *Philosophy Guide*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Mark B. Woodhouse, *A Preface to Philosophy* (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2003), p. 31.

truth, causality, justice and beauty. This is why philosophy is regarded as the first subject; the subject all others have emerged from, particularly in the west. These are the specific goals of philosophical investigation that make up the purpose of this textbook.

### Philosophy and international-mindedness

A philosophy course is well-placed to support your development of a global perspective and increase inter-cultural understanding. The Philosophy guide provides the following insight into this potential:

The DP philosophy course develops international-mindedness in students by encouraging them to engage with multiple perspectives and to carefully consider alternative points of view. The course encourages dialogue and debate, nurturing students' capacity to interpret competing and contestable claims. In addition to encouraging students to explore and draw upon a wide range of traditions and perspectives, the course also provides an opportunity to engage in an examination of concepts and debates of global significance.<sup>11</sup>

### Philosophizing with attitude

In *Philosophers*, contemporary philosopher Geoffrey Warnock asks a simple but far-reaching question 'What is the aim of philosophy?' He answers not with an exact destination but with an expectation,

[t]o be clear-headed rather than confused; lucid rather than obscure; rational rather than otherwise; and to be neither more, nor less, sure of things than is justifiable by argument or evidence.<sup>12</sup>

But what do you philosophize about? Any philosopher, including a young philosopher such as yourself, is required to engage with a number of different traditions of thought as they explore themes, issues and questions that are becoming more and more pertinent to society in the 21st century. Issues such as advances in medical research, including transplants and genome technologies, new claims in science such as the multiverse and neuroscience, and the issues of consciousness and artificial intelligence. Many of these are central to the key question of the core theme of the IB Diploma Course; the question of what it means to be human. In a similar expectation of any philosopher, you are expected to take a position on these themes and issues as you increase your understanding, develop your own philosophical voice and sustain an argument on any number of questions.

It is therefore important to understand the context of philosophical debates and the way they draw upon the dialogue that has been established over thousands of years, responding to contributions in the form of clarifications and new perspectives. In order to philosophize

### What is philosophy? (<http://vimeo.com/14348757>)

This video makes two important points:

- Philosophy is an activity defined by the use of specific skills which focuses on a variety of important themes, issues and questions.
- Philosophy focuses on the importance of formulating questions rather than just answering them.

<sup>11</sup> IB, *Philosophy Guide*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Steve Pyke, *Philosophers* (London: Zelda Cheatle Press, 1995).





though, knowing how to enter into these debates is equally important. This can be quite a daunting task at the beginning of the course. The nature of philosophy is in some ways similar to the Internet – there is no clear starting point as each concept or idea is interconnected with many others. Consequently, this philosophy textbook aims to equip you with not just knowledge of philosophical ideas and concepts involved in these debates but also with the skills and understanding required to *do* philosophy and enter into these debates with confidence.

With this in mind, the core theme presents an excellent opportunity to begin an engagement with philosophy and, through reflection, start to develop an appreciation of how to think philosophically and understand the interconnected ideas and concepts that make up philosophy. The study of philosophy is not just a matter of reading a textbook; philosophy as a reflective activity is also an attitude. For philosophy to be truly rewarding, it requires an attitude of inquiry into key themes and issues based on reflection, looking for connections as well as justifications while keeping an open mind in order to understand different perspectives and sources of ideas that could inform your own.

Then, there is philosophy as a discipline, a practice of thinking. Reflective activity involves systematic and critical exploration of concepts and issues. This exploration focuses on the positions taken by philosophers on these themes and issues – both their understanding of the themes and issues and the justification of the positions they have taken on them. In the process you become part of an ongoing dialogue that has been going on for many millennia and will continue to go on. The exploration involves an analysis and evaluation of the justifications offered to support the positions taken. This is an analysis of the assumptions or its foundations; the quality of the argument and its justifications; as well as an assessment of its implications.

## So, why do philosophy?

Finally, it is worth returning to the broad question, ‘why do philosophy?’. First of all, philosophy will be an enriching experience. You will be able to not just scratch the surface but look behind events, understanding their complexities to a much better extent, evaluate other people’s opinions and as well as your own and develop your understanding of the world. There is a saying that guns don’t kill, people do. While this is true to a certain extent, as people do pull the trigger, it is ideas that prompt them to do so. It is ideas that are at the heart of the many crises that confront humanity at this start of this century. It is understanding those ideas - and the concepts they reflect - that is the purpose of philosophy. Similarly, it is through understanding the issues that solutions can then start to emerge and change the world for the better.

### You as philosopher

“Philosophy is simply thinking hard about life, about what we have learned, about our place in the world... Philosophy is nothing less than the attempt to understand who we are and what we think of ourselves. And that is just what the great philosophers of history, whom we study in philosophy courses, were doing: trying to understand themselves, their times, and their place in the world... But philosophy is not primarily the study of other people’s ideas. Philosophy is first of all the attempt to state clearly, and as convincingly and interestingly as possible, your own views. That is doing philosophy, not just reading about how someone else has done it.”

—Robert C. Solomon<sup>13</sup>

### Reflection Questions

How can understanding other people’s views from different times help us understand who we are now?

How should we form our own views? Is it only in relation to other philosophers’ views?

Can you ‘do philosophy’ without having studied philosophy?

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *The Big Questions: A Short Introduction to Philosophy*, 9th edition (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2013), p. xv.

### Philosophy and leadership

Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and Laureate Professor at the University of Melbourne, noted in an article published on the Project Syndicate website that

GDI [Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute] recently released a ranked list of the top 100 Global Thought Leaders for 2013. The ranking includes economists, psychologists, authors, political scientists, physicists, anthropologists, information scientists, biologists, entrepreneurs, theologians, physicians, and people from several other disciplines. Yet three of the top five global thinkers are philosophers: Slavoj Žižek, Daniel Dennett, and me. GDI classifies a fourth, Jürgen Habermas, as a sociologist, but the report acknowledges that he, too, is arguably a philosopher.<sup>14</sup>

Philosophy can also benefit your achievements in your other Diploma subjects. As the first subject, or the subject from which all other subjects emerged, it offers insight into these other subjects. This is primarily done by providing an understanding of the foundational conceptual frameworks used in each discipline (similar to TOK, though with greater range). As such, philosophy is often referred to as a metadiscipline because it goes beyond individual disciplines. It is also a subject that focuses on the development of your skills in argument and therefore analysis and evaluation. Each of these aspects of philosophy should provide you with a firm foundation for success across your Diploma. In return, they can also provide your studies in philosophy with evidence that can be used to determine positions and make arguments as philosophy frequently draws upon the research done in science, mathematics, literary studies, and so on.

It also can be a worthy contribution to your professional career. Recently the Australasian Association of philosophy blog reflected on Singer's article where he says that

Doing philosophy – thinking and arguing about it, not just passively reading it – develops our critical reasoning abilities, and so equips us for many of the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Perhaps that is why many employers are now keen to hire graduates who have done well in philosophy courses.<sup>15</sup>

These critical reasoning abilities are transferable skills, not bound to discipline specific content-based knowledge. They are skills that allow you to think outside the box (so you need to know what the box looks like, why it looks like that, how and what can be changed with the budget, even when to throw the box out). These include creative thinking, or the ability to develop new insights into established issues, ask new questions of the established issues, even identify new issues in a rapidly changing world. These transferrable skills include those skills that are central to your assessment.

### Philosophy at work

Over the last ten years it has been consistently noted that the study of philosophy is growing and employers are increasingly appreciating the qualities that trained philosophy student bring to their professional role. Stephen Law states that the skills that are developed and appreciated by employees in exciting, innovative companies are:

- The ability to spot errors in reasoning
- The ability to make a point with clarity and precision
- The ability to analyze complex issues and arguments
- The ability to think independently and creatively (to 'think out of the box')
- The ability to build a strong, rigorous case.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Peter Singer, 'Philosophy on Top', *Project Syndicate*, 9 April 2014, available at <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/peter-singer-explains-why-the-world-s-leading-thinkers-are-philosophers> (accessed 20 October 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Law, "Why Study Philosophy?", *Think* 33, no. 12 (Spring 2013): 5.



## How do you start philosophizing?

It is now common to hear the claim that everyone is a philosopher, mostly because they have asked the question ‘Why?’ While there is some truth in this broad statement, asking ‘Why?’ does not necessarily make you a philosopher. A philosopher adheres to certain standards of intellectual inquiry and argument.

This defines a set of skills that are very important to being a good philosopher. While knowledge is also important to good philosophy, the emphasis is on the use of this knowledge not just its acquisition and therefore on argument and the correct use of evidence.

This skill set is outlined in the marking criteria which have been designed to reward good philosophy in the IB course. (These are discussed in greater detail in the Assessment chapter.) They are the skills of philosophizing and getting into the habit of doing philosophy throughout the course is ideal preparation for your final assessments. Your assessments will ask you to explore concepts in response to questions by taking a position and assessing its validity, often in relation to positions taken by others.

As you proceed through your course it is worth remaining conscious of the demands of good philosophy. One such way of outlining good philosophy is to require the 6 Cs – (1) conceptual *clarity*, (2) *consistency*, (3) rational *coherence*, (4) *comprehensiveness*, (5) *compatibility* with well-established facts and theories, and (6) having the support of *compelling* arguments.<sup>17</sup>

These 6 aspects of good philosophy demonstrate the complexity of sound philosophy. While each of the 6 Cs require further unpacking, above all they require you to take a position that is sustainable and communicable and with philosophical reasoning evident in a your work.

The final one can cause concern. What is a *compelling* argument? It is an argument where philosophical reasoning is supported by the use of quality evidence.

## Argument in philosophy

Often when reading a philosopher’s work it is hard to evaluate an argument being put forward. Sometimes this is due to the complexity of an argument, or sometimes the abstract nature or the depth of knowledge being offered. It is important to appreciate what a philosopher is doing other than asserting an abstract position on an issue. They are often seeking to offer a justification for this position based on numerous forms of evidence that leads them to draw a conclusion about a concept, or a system of concepts. It seems initially that philosophers only argue with other philosophers, picking over their arguments, seeking to counter them in a pedantic, overly critical manner. But philosophical argument is often explanatory as well, seeking to offer a common sense understanding of the world through the treatment of an issue, even if the complexity of this explanation can be

<sup>17</sup> This list comes from <http://faculty.mc3.edu/barmstro/somelogic.html> [accessed 20 October 2014].

quite challenging. Remember the idea that philosophy is like plumbing. Given the nature of philosophy, philosophers use a diversity of evidence from other disciplines drawing upon them to assemble an understanding and then invite you to appreciate the validity of this understanding as a solution to the issue identified. Observations or empirical evidence is also important when assessing alternative perspectives with which to contrast their own position.

A. A. Milne writes:

It had HUNNY written on it, but, just to make sure, he took off the paper cover and looked at it, and it looked just like honey. “But you never can tell,” said Pooh. “I remember my uncle saying once that he had seen cheese just this colour.” So he put his tongue in, and took a large lick.<sup>18</sup>

Winnie-the-Pooh uses a variety of evidence to assess that it was honey in his pot but in the end his recourse is to sense perception or the experience of honey. In philosophy this is not always possible, so sometimes a philosopher has to draw a conclusion that seems to fit.

## What is evidence?

This leads to the question, ‘what is sound evidence in philosophy?’. Evidence does not only have to come from the tradition itself. Evidence can come from subjects studied in the IB Diploma such as economics, anthropology, psychology, physics, biology, history, literature as well as numerous other disciplines.

Quite simply, all evidence can be valid as long as it is explained, made relevant and integrated into the argument. Good evidence supports the points being made that in turn support the argument and are ultimately judged by the reader as to whether they convince them that your position is sound. Examples can also be evidence if they are used correctly.

## Understanding the process of philosophical analysis

Philosophy as an activity seeks to identify issues with our understanding of the world and offer reasonable, well thought-out solutions. An analysis of a philosophical issue involves the analysis of the relevant arguments put forward to identify the issue, the nature of the issue, and its solution. Philosophical arguments need to be justified. Generally, arguments are justified using evidence that is shown to support a point that, in turn, supports the argument or at least an element of the argument.

This expectation, which is a key foundation to doing philosophy, also defines the process of analysis. In broad terms, philosophical analysis involves the systematic investigation of three elements of a philosophical argument. These are the **assumptions**, the **quality of the argument** and the **implications** of the argument and resulting position.

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<sup>18</sup> A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (London: Methuen & Co., 1926), pp. 61–62.



## What is analysis?

Analysis has always been key to the philosophical process. At a basic level it involves dismantling an argument or a position to reveal its constituent parts and assess them. In philosophy this involves identifying and understanding the concepts, methodology, and evidence used to justify the argument or position taken.

The first phase of an analysis is the identification of the assumptions on which the argument is founded. A philosopher, or school of philosophy, will explicitly or implicitly use these assumptions to engage with the issue.

The analysis of the assumptions involves looking at the **concepts** and resulting **conceptual framework** involved, the **methodology used** for their investigation being utilized, and the nature of the evidence used to support the argument.

The next stage of analysis is to look at the **quality of the argument** and therefore the quality of the justification of the position taken by the philosopher. This allows you to develop an understanding of the validity of the position being outlined (including the assumptions, methodologies and evidence). A key element of any argument is the quality of the evidence being used to support the point being made, how successfully it is used to support the point, and therefore the overall argument.

However, you need to measure the quality of an argument and this is the evaluative framework. For example, the following questions capture the idea of an evaluative framework. What assumptions are valid assumptions? Which methodology is a valid methodology?

The final stage of the analytical process involves the implications of an argument and therefore position on a philosophical issue. What impact does the position have on the broader philosophical worldview? This can be extended to society; such as the recognition of difference, the accountability of the actions of individuals and so on.

The best way of understanding philosophical analysis is to think about your favourite food treat. What was the best example of that food treat you have ever eaten? Ask yourself, why was it the best? Was it because of the:

- **Ingredients?**
- **Recipe?**
- **Presentation?**

In other words,

- Did you like the treat because of the quality of the ingredients?
- Did you like the treat because of the way the ingredients are brought together to produce it?
- Did you like the treat because of the way it is presented?

This is analysis – breaking something down in an ordered way to better understand it (with the intention of evaluating it).



In exactly the same way, in philosophy when we analyze a philosophical position we look at the following:

- **Assumptions** (the foundations of the position such as concepts, methodologies and evidence)
- **Argument** (the quality of the argument/how it is supported. How well were the concepts, methodologies and evidence used to support the position?)
- **Implications** (what is the impact of the argument on other arguments and even on individuals and society?)

## Evaluation

Having completed the process of analysis you can now start to argue the reasons why it was the best treat you had ever tasted. Your analysis develops into your evaluation and the establishment of a set of criteria to judge the argument or position by.

Each of these three phases of analysis produces an understanding of the argument or position being taken on an issue. This allows an evaluation of the argument. At a basic level the questions are as follows:

- Are the assumptions valid?
- Is the evidence offered sufficient to justify the argument being made?
- Are the implications of the position acceptable?

## Developing the skills of analysis

The following activity provides an opportunity to experience philosophy. It is a simple question and completing this activity provides an insight into the comments and advice given below about doing philosophy.

**Question:** Whose life is more important – your life or an insect's?

### What is your answer?

How would you justify it and demonstrate your philosophical skills at the same time!

Three sides to the argument

1. You are more important
2. The insect is more important
3. You are equal to the insect

### Understanding the question and the answer

#### Undertake analysis

What is important to answering this question from your given perspective? Or what are the key concepts, methodologies and evidence?



### Undertake evaluation

How do you decide what is important? Or the criteria to judge the answer by?

Do the three positions agree on what is important in terms of concepts (and their interpretations), the methodologies (and their worth) and relevant evidence (and its significance)?

This is now getting to the heart of good philosophical analysis; an understanding of the different perspectives and their analytical and evaluative frameworks.

The expectation in philosophy is that you will develop your own position as part of your study of the philosophers and philosophical schools you cover in your course of study. These positions, on issues in the topics you study as part of the core theme, as well as optional themes, prescribed text, and “What is philosophy?” (higher level only), will form the basis of your evaluation of these philosophers and philosophical schools.

Your position should be an outcome of your evaluation. In philosophy you should approach finding a resolution to an issue with an open mind. However, when you evaluate something – whatever it is – you have to develop a **reference point** from which you can judge it. What should the reference point be? Well, this is your own philosophically informed position on the issue being examined. This position involves a well-thought out **criterion or set of criteria** with which to assess the positions offered on the issue. These enable you to evaluate the validity of another position or argument, even suggest how to improve an aspect of it, and equally evaluate your own position with the same intention.

### Establishing your own position

It is sometimes hard to know where to start. Often we have an opinion about basic issues in society but not necessarily about metaphysical or epistemological matters. However, as your philosophical investigations proceed, you will become more aware of the context in which philosophical debate occurs.

Initially our positions on issues are influenced, sometimes significantly, by other positions. Yet, the more you do philosophy the more you are able to understand the elements that contribute to philosophical analysis and start to be able to take your own positions.

In a similar way to analysing another philosophical position you should also establish your own position using the **Assumptions – Quality of Argument – Implications** framework. This involves answering some basic questions:

- Are the assumptions valid?
- Is the evidence offered appropriate and, if so, sufficient to justify the argument being offered?
- Do I accept the implications of the position?

This is the context in which you will be undertaking analysis and evaluation. When you evaluate something you have to have a

reference point with which to measure something. This enables you to measure the validity of a position or argument, even suggest how to improve it in some way. What should the reference point be? Well, this is your own philosophical position on the issue being examined.

## The core theme and this book

The core theme in the DP philosophy course is “Being human”. It encourages exploration of the fundamental themes, issues, and questions associated with the question, ‘what it is to be human?’, both as individuals and as members of communities. It is designed to focus around six key concepts: Identity, Personhood, Freedom, Mind and Body, The Self and Others, and Human Nature. Each of these is interrelated in a number of ways and they can be studied in any order. The structure of this book is not the only way of learning about the central issue of being human. Nonetheless, as you continue through your course you will start to recognise the connectedness of the key concepts and start to appreciate how they contribute to each other and occasionally have a clear overlap.

## What do we mean by concepts?

A concept is a feature or characteristic of something. These concepts are often expressed in abstract terms but they are frequently at work in the world. Solomon provides a key insight into the nature of philosophy as well as the role of concepts.

Concepts give form to experience; they make articulation possible. But even before we try to articulate our views, concepts make it possible for us to recognize things in the world, to see and hear particular objects and particular people instead of one big blur of a world, like looking through a movie camera that is seriously out of focus. But in addition to defining the forms of our experience, concepts also tie our experience together.<sup>19</sup>

Other than truth, important concepts could include time, beauty, being, identity, and cause; all evident in everyday life, they make up the pipes in Midgley’s ‘philosophical plumbing’. An equally important dimension to this investigation as Solomon notes is to understand their relationships with other concepts; ‘[c]oncepts rarely occur in isolation; they virtually always tie together into a **conceptual framework**’.<sup>20</sup> These conceptual frameworks provide a picture of the world or a worldview within which we make decisions. As Solomon continues,

These all-embracing pictures and perspectives are our ultimate conceptual frameworks—that is, the most abstract concepts through which we “frame” and organize all of our more specific concepts. The term conceptual framework stresses the importance of concepts and is therefore central to the articulation of concepts that makes up most of philosophy.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In Solomon and Higgins, *The Big Questions*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



## The six concepts explored in this textbook

The key concepts that form the core theme all relate to the central question of what it means to be human. This textbook is divided into six main chapters, each focusing on one of the six key concepts prescribed by the IB Programme. Although they are all important, it is not necessary, or even possible, for you to know everything about all six concepts. Your teacher may choose to focus on certain chapters, or some aspects of the chapters.

The more you study the key concepts, the more you will see that they are deeply connected to one another. Your understanding will deepen and you will get a better grasp of the complexity that underlines the question of what it means to be human. In that sense, you could probably read this textbook in any order and also re-read chapters after a few months, and get a slightly different understanding every time, as you relate the content to your previous knowledge. As outlined in this introduction, your learning to do philosophy is just as important as what philosophers have said until now.

Having said that, this textbook was not structured randomly! Despite the freedom you and your teacher have in choosing what to study and in what order, there is no doubt that Chapter 2: Human Nature and Chapter 3: Personhood are an excellent way to get you started, because they lay down some important definitions and ideas that are central to the entire core theme. Equally, the last two chapters are perhaps a little more complex and may require a bit of knowledge and experience before you dive into them.

Finally, the activities provided in this textbook are there to ensure that you practise philosophy as well as read about it. They have been chosen to help you become a philosopher in your own right and make connections between the history of ideas and their contemporary application. There is also, of course, a focus on assessment, with assessment tips peppered all along the textbook and specific assessment exercises at the end of the chapters. You will also find a full assessment chapter at the end of the textbook, with a bank of stimulus material that will allow you to practise turning non-philosophical material into good philosophical arguments.

While assessment is essential at this stage of your life and school career, the hope is that this book and IB course will also help you become a better thinker, a skill that will stay with you long after you have finished taking school examinations.

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