

College Guild
PO Box 6448, Brunswick ME 04011

PHILOSOPHY

UNIT 1 OF 6

Greetings from College Guild! Welcome to the amazing world of philosophy. Volunteer readers will be giving you feedback on your answers. Here are some guidelines for all CG courses:

1 - Answer all the questions that are in bold print. When we receive a completed unit back from you, you'll be sent the next one, along with your original work and feedback from your reader. You don't need to return the lessons and questions – it saves us both postage.

2 - Take the time to read the questions thoroughly and to think through your answers. Find the most creative way to word your answers. There is no specific deadline to complete any unit, but we would get concerned if we hadn't heard back from you in 2-3 months. You can ask for an extension if your circumstances make that necessary. Remember how often the mail service loses things, and if you don't hear back from us after a month, write to make sure your unit was received and the next unit sent out.

3 - Let us know if you need a dictionary. It is free to CG students who complete the first unit.

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

In true philosophical style, let's begin with a couple of questions:

- 1. When you hear the word “philosophy”, what comes to your mind?**
- 2. In your own words (not using a dictionary) how would you define “philosophy”?**

The study of philosophy is so complex and broad that it would take many, many units to fully cover this topic. It is my hope to provide you with a brief overview in order to stir your curiosity about “the stuff of life”.

Ah, the questions of life! Have you ever wondered about the purpose of life? Have you ever been curious about what you can reasonably believe? Have you ever marveled at the beauty of nature or been upset by suffering? Have you ever thought life is unfair? Have you ever been puzzled by what you ought to do when facing a major decision? These are the kinds of questions philosophers discuss.

- 3. Pick one of the above questions. Write down your thoughts about, observations of, or experiences with the question you chose.**

The word “philosophy” comes from a combination of two Greek words: *philos* meaning “loving” and *sophia* meaning “wisdom”, hence “the love of wisdom.” To the ancients, the philosopher was one who desired wisdom.

4. Who is a wise person in your life? What is it about his or her wisdom you admire?

5. What do you think are the qualities of a wise person?

Historically, the earliest Western philosophers were a group called the Pre-Socratics. From this group the word “philosophy” was coined. The philosophers of this time (around 570 B.C.E.) were interested in nature; wanting to know how the universe was developed. They were also interested in figuring out what things were made of. For these first philosophers, to love wisdom was to search for knowledge about the universe.

The next group of ancient philosophers was called the Sophists or “Wise Ones”. They believed that wisdom is the possession of virtue, which means moral excellence. A virtue is a positive trait or quality deemed to be morally good and thus is valued as a foundation of principle and good moral being. The Sophists felt that virtue was the ability, especially in politics and society, to influence people.

6. Who do you consider to be a person of virtue? This can be someone you know personally or someone (historically or living) whom you admire. Why is this person virtuous?

Then along comes Socrates, a Greek who LOVED to ask people questions about all kinds of things. He was curious about the things people claimed to know, such as knowledge, virtue, justice, and the right way to live. For Socrates, wisdom is an awareness of our ignorance, an awareness of the limitations of our knowledge. Socrates was a lover of wisdom in that he lived his life in pursuit of wisdom. Socrates said, “I know that I know nothing.”

7. The quotation “The life which is unexamined is not worth living” is attributed to Socrates. What does this quotation mean to you?

PART 2 - BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is about asking questions about every aspect of life. We are constantly making judgments (creating opinions) about good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, reality and fiction, beautiful and ugly, just and unjust. Western philosophy is divided into branches in order to study these questions. Three main branches or categories of philosophy are: metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Big words!!

Metaphysics deals with the issues of what is truly real, in other words: What is reality? Some questions asked are: What is really real? What am I? Who am I? Is there a God?

Epistemology deals with knowledge: How is knowledge acquired, and how do we know what we know?

Ethics deals with questions of: What ought we to do? How can I know what is right? How should one live?

In Unit 2 we will explore these three branches in more depth.

8. Which of these three branches of philosophy might you be most interested in and why?

Just as we started today's lesson with questions, we end this unit with even more questions....

- 9. How important do you think it is for a person to study philosophy? Explain your answer.
- 10. Do you think in the study of philosophy the answers to questions are final? Why or why not?
- 11. Given what was discussed in this lesson, would you consider yourself a philosopher? Why or why not?
- 12. And finally...read the poem below by Adrienne Rich. What do you think she is saying to the reader? What does this poem mean to you?

*Transcendental Etude**

No one ever told us we had to study our lives,
 make of our lives a study, as if learning natural history
 or music, that we should begin
 with the simple exercises first
 and slowly go on trying
 the hard ones, practicing till strength
 and accuracy became one with the daring
 to leap into transcendence, take the chance
 of breaking down the wild arpeggio**
 or faulting the full sentence of the fugue.***
 — And in fact we can't live like that: we take on
 everything at once before we've even begun
 to read or mark time, we're forced to begin
 in the midst of the hard movement,
 the one already sounding as we are born.

— Adrienne Rich, 1984.

*An étude is a short musical composition that is short and generally difficult

** An arpeggio is a musical chord

***A fugue a piece of music written for a specific number of parts

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes