

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy is the activity of seeking wisdom. In Greek, which was the first language of Western philosophy, “philosophy” means love of wisdom. One loves wisdom by trying to figure out what it is. There are many ways human beings seek wisdom, including art, religion, and lived experience. Philosophy is distinct because it seeks wisdom through the systematic use of reason.

Philosophers focus on ideas, the meaning of ideas, and beliefs by analysing them. They break them down into their parts and then build them back up again and combine them in new ways. In addition to analysis, philosophers reflect on what goes on in the mind and the world; they seek wisdom through intuitions of whole structures of thought or experience.

Task: Match the following specializations and subfields of philosophy to their right definitions:

Aesthetics, Philosophy of science, Post-modern philosophy, Social and political philosophy, Medieval philosophy, Metaphysics, Ethics, Ancient philosophy, Philosophy of mind, Modern philosophy, Analytic philosophy, Epistemology.

1. How human beings ought to behave in matters involving human well-being or harm.
2. Answers to questions of what science is, how science progresses, and the nature of scientific truth.
3. Accounts of how society and government work as institutions, what their purposes should be, how they came into being as institutions and how their problems can be fixed.
4. Answers to questions about what knowledge is, how we know that something is true, and the relation between sense perception and abstract truths.
5. The most general questions and answers about the nature of reality, what physical things

are, what relations exist between different kinds of things, and the connections between the mind and the world.

6. How the mind works, whether it is dependent on the brain, how it is connected to the body, the nature of memory and personal identity.

7. The study of art toward an understanding of what beauty is and how artworks are different from natural things and other man-made objects.

8. The birth of Western philosophy from about 800 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.; it is composed mostly of Greek and Roman thought before Christianity.

9. The development of philosophical thought, from about 400 C.E. until the Renaissance in the 1300s in Europe in which Christianity provided the dominant world view and organizing principle for daily life.

10. The foundations of contemporary philosophy from the 1600s through the 1800s. Nineteenth century philosophy: The “classical period” of modern philosophy, in which Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill wrote.

11. Style of professional philosophy, which is abstract and technical that developed during the twentieth century.

12. School of thought that, in the second half of the twentieth century, consisted of reactions against many of the shared assumptions held by philosophers over the centuries.