Teaching Philosophy to Non-Majors: Twelve Words to Guide the Way

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PROBLEM: Non-majors taking an introduction to philosophy course need a simple definition.

Two ways to define “philosophy”:

1. analyze the core task/aim of thinking philosophically
2. synthesize the experience of doing philosophy

First way, analyzing a paradigm for defining philosophy:
Philosophy is the self-defining discipline. How so?
The First Way: 1. Defining any academic discipline is philosophical

- The task of *self-defining* is *the* essential philosophical task: Socrates’ “know thyself”.
- What is history? What is art? What is physics?
  - These questions fall not within the named discipline, but belong to the *philosophy* of history, the *philosophy* of art, and the *philosophy* of physics.
Philosophy is the only discipline where the task of self-definition lies within the discipline itself.
- Defining philosophy is what philosophy is (primarily) about.
- Not true for other disciplines, even though they can illustrate self-defining.
- Cf. Socrates’ famous maxim: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” To what extent is this really true?
  - Socrates’ maxim is a rhetorical device, urging people to enhance the meaning of their life through self-defining (or “self-awareness”).
Philosophy, when done properly, enhances a person’s own self-understanding.

As such, the task of philosophy overlaps with the core task of psychology. I call this overlap “philopsychy”.

“Philopsychy” combines academic philosophy and academic psychology. Both disciplines nowadays often depart from their original core goal by having more objective (“scientific”) aims.
Major problem: philosophers typically disagree with each other about how to define philosophy.

Does my definition imply that “anything goes”?

No: nothing goes, if it fails the test of personal integrity: Does it conflict with my own sense of propriety?

Cf. Sartre’s notion of “bad faith”: we are not doing philosophy when we merely mimic someone else’s self-understanding.

Genuine philosophy maximizes ultimate self-worth.
The Second Way: Twelve guiding words

- *The Tree of Philosophy* (Hong Kong: Philopsychy Press)
- Guiding myth: “Philosophy is a tree, and her name is philosophy”:
  - roots, trunk, branches, leaves
  - metaphysics, logic, science, ontology
- The fruit of the process is *insight*. 
The four branches of philosophy and the goals of philosophizing

I. metaphysics: recognizing ignorance

II. logic: understanding words

III. science: loving wisdom

IV. ontology: silent wonder
I. Metaphysics: recognizing ignorance

- Socrates’ insight: the wise person is the one who knows that we humans are not wise.
- Plato’s idealism vs. Aristotle’s realism: two competing attempts to dig up the roots.
- Descartes’ dualism doubles the trouble: we allegedly know both mental & physical reality as such.
- Metaphysics comes of age with Kant: he clearly defines the knowledge-ignorance boundary.
II. Logic: understanding words

1. three applications of the analytic-synthetic distinction
2. map-making as a practical means of making visible the formal relations between words
3. the centrality of language in three forms of twentieth-century philosophy: analytic philosophy; existentialism; and hermeneutic philosophy
### Analytic vs. Synthetic Logic

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<tr>
<th>Methods of argumentation</th>
<th>Analytic</th>
<th>Synthetic</th>
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<td><strong>Induction:</strong></td>
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<th>Types of proposition</th>
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<td>“Yellow is a color.”</td>
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<td>“This chalk is white.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Kinds of logic</th>
<th>Analytic</th>
<th>Synthetic</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Laws:</strong></td>
<td>Identity: $A = A$</td>
<td>Nonidentity: $A \neq A$</td>
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<td>Noncontradiction: $A \neq -A$</td>
<td>Contradiction: $A = -A$</td>
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The geometry of logic: 1LAR

(1LAR = “first level analytic relation”)

As demarcating a boundary

As opposing limits

Two Ways of Mapping a 1LAR
The geometry of logic: 2LAR

(2LAR = “second level analytic relation”)

NLAR formula: $2^n = C$
where $n =$ level number
and $C =$ number of components

Two Ways of Mapping a 2LAR
Two 1LSRs mapped onto a six-pointed star

(1LSR = “first level synthetic relation”)

$NLSR \text{ formula: } 3^n = C$ where $n = \text{level number}$ and $C = \text{number of components}$

Two of these double 1LSRs makes a 12CR (12-fold compound relation); cf. Kant.
The *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*) mapped onto a 6LAR

Alternative mapping for comparison with Kant:

\[ 64 = 4 + 12 + (4 \times 12) \]
III. Science: loving wisdom

1. Science ("scientia" = knowledge) as the realm of the knowable.
2. Wisdom as knowing how to identify the boundary between the knowable and unknowable in any field of human thought.
3. Three examples: philosophy of science; moral philosophy; political philosophy.
Boundary-conditions for Kant’s theoretical vs. practical standpoints

God, freedom & immortality
space & time
empirical knowledge
12 categories

God & immortality
freedom
moral action
moral law
postulates

Question: where are the limits (Schranken) vs. boundaries (Grenzen)?
IV. Ontology: silent wonder

1. Silence as the ultimate ground of (synthetic) meaning. Plato: “Philosophy begins in wonder.”

2. Paradox is inevitable (and welcome) when we use words (cf. synthetic logic) to try to explain this ultimate ground.

3. An experience of mystery is the ultimate goal: beauty, love, religion, angst, death, etc.
Books by S.R. Palmquist

Three textbooks for teaching non-majors (translated into Chinese as the “Philopsyhy” trilogy)


One book on the theology of politics


Four scholarly monographs on Kant

- **Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason’s Light** (Lexington Books, forthcoming 2019).
- **Comprehensive Commentary on Kant’s Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason** (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).
- **Kant’s Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant’s System of Perspectives** (Ashgate, 2000).
- **Kant’s System of Perspectives: An architectonic interpretation of the Critical philosophy** (University Press of America, 1993).

Five edited anthologies/translations relating to Kant

- **Kant on Intuition: Western and Asian Perspectives on Transcendental Idealism** (Routledge, 2018). 20 essays.
- **Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy** (Walter de Gruyter, 2010). 67 essays.
- **Four Neglected Essays by Immanuel Kant** (Philopsyhy Press, 1994). Edited translations of four essays by Kant, supplemented with several supporting essays.
Path, courtesy Colby Stopa
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Furrows, courtesy sszdl
https://flic.kr/p/dhh1b9

Roots, courtesy Steve Garry
https://flic.kr/p/2RssAw

IMG_1205, courtesy Simon Davison
https://flic.kr/p/4ta3rJ

Jacaranda tree in full bloo, courtesy vijay chennupati
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