

IDEAS 54

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Debate
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Advance and Upper Intermediate
Students**



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THE 54th INTERNATIONAL ONLINE TEACHERS SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST

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Philosophy: The Ideologies to life

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Most of us have problems in dealing with philosophy and with life. To many, philosophy is an intellectual study of problems connected to reason, mind, knowledge and values. It is a systematic way of thinking which is based on rational arguments. However, to philosophers such as Aristotle and Confucius philosophy is considered as a state of mind. Philosophy is based on love and wisdom, which can be traced back to the word philosophia.

In reality, philosophy can answer our problems in love, in life and in our other emotions. Philosophy teaches us a profound yet realistic concept that through understanding its ideologies we can ultimately achieve true happiness.

Epicurus, a Greek philosopher (341-270 BC), considered that the concept of happiness can be traced back to several ideologies. For instance, he considered that being with friends and not wanting unnecessary items enables us to have a meaningful life. By spending time with friends, we feel their happiness and we share with their emotions. His theories were derived to both pain and pleasure. He considered that overindulgence or wanting too much of various things can eventually lead to pain. He advocated the belief that if we no longer need pleasure and we do not suffer from pain then we are in a perfect state of mental equilibrium and we can fully achieve a peaceful state of mind.

Several other philosophers who have pointed out the importance of emotions and their significance to everyday living are Socrates, Aristotle and Seneca. Socrates pointed out that we must "Know thyself." By assessing ourselves we can actually gain the ability to know our true wants, desires and we will be able to improve our communication with others. Aristotle also pointed out the relevance of controlling one's emotions especially during times of hardships and war. Such teachings were applied by Alexander the Great, conqueror of Persia and Egypt (356-323 BC), and due to this way of thinking he was able to conquer almost all of the ancient world. For Seneca, he believed that anger is stemmed from man's high expectations, therefore by having realistic expectations we will prevent anger in our lives.

In Taoist religion, a key concept to peace can be expressed through the belief of Wei Wu. Wei Wu is a concept wherein an action can be done through inaction, control through abdicating rule. If we constantly struggling in life we actually move backwards, creating more turbulence in our way. Wei Wu teaches us that through waiting and being patient with life we can gain more. If we wait for the storm to pass, eventually we will be able to collect our strength and move towards the future.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who is the Philosopher who mentioned the saying "Know thyself"?
2. How do we control anger according to Seneca?
3. What is the name of the Taoist belief which concerns the concept of action through inaction?
4. Who conquered Persia and Egypt?
5. What can philosophy answer?



PHILOSOPHY IS A SENSITIVE TOPIC

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It can be difficult to write about philosophy owing to the fact that the study itself is broad and all-encompassing. Aside from the moral and political arms of philosophy, such subjects as religion, ethics and logic are also covered by philosophy. I have always believed that philosophy is more readily studied by taking into consideration one's principles in life and one's beliefs at large.

What we believe in, unfortunately, does not always translate to what we do. There are many of us who are under the mercy of popular opinion. Their concepts, beliefs and principles are so governed by environmental considerations to even become noticeable by themselves. We have been born to have brains above our hearts, so we must learn to use our heads over our emotions. It doesn't prove all too easy, but many have succeeded immensely in this respect. Far be it from us to deign and claim simple ignorance or unawareness. We should learn to devote our time and effort to what is worthwhile and worth supporting.

The Holy Book has advised that we should "neither be hot or cold". We should learn to stand up for something and either reject or support some things. It's no fun being lukewarm; even coffee loses its taste in tepid water. To be undecided is apathetic. To say, "I subscribe to no religion", might be safe and friendly, but hey! Is that real living?

Those who strongly believe in something and some things tend to have a more focused appraisal of things. They are prone to having a clearer perspective because their purpose is more clearly spelled out. However, enmity of the other side is apparent, since such people tend to push too hard or take things too hard. Aggressiveness is not always the key, despite the fact that it has brought about changes of a global scale. See how extremists are strongly inclined to blow things out of proportion, subjugating others with their strong, radical outlooks. The road to hell is infinitely paved with good intentions. It is therefore best to take a careful stance on things, studied but decisive, easy but straight.

Talking about anything will not bring results; it is the actions that count. But ultimately, we are accountable for our own actions. Therefore, our only recourse is to take a detailed approach before putting our thoughts into action. No haphazard planning, no freakish excuses. Just firm, concise, pure and determined systems of actions that count in all aspects as significant. Life is a philosophy in itself. There are times when events defy logic. But we are responsible for the life we live and the lives we influence. Tread carefully, lest ye fall into ruin.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are your beliefs on religion?
2. What factors have influenced your political beliefs?
3. Talk about one ancient philosopher you admire the most.
4. How can philosophy set people apart from others?
5. Why is it never easy to talk about philosophy?



THE PHILOSOPHY OF MY RELIGION

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I have been born and raised a Catholic and will most likely die a Catholic. As such, I have always subscribed to firm Catholic beliefs like: we have been born with the original sin; baptism empowers us to become members of the church; contraception is going against the will of God; Sundays are the Lord's days. There are many other Catholic dogmas that have permeated my life, but for which I have found questions. Can't we adore God without going to a physical church? Which is a bigger sin, contraception or not being able to provide for your children? Is it not possible to commune with God everyday and not just on Sundays with a whole community in attendance?

We Catholics read about idolatry in the Bible, yet how many statues and monuments have we built that we constantly venerate and offer stuff to? Prior to taking certain vital examinations or celebrating special occasions, we advise others to visit this or that shrine to pray for success or a good, sunny day. Don't forget the eggs. My eldest son did just that before taking his licensure exams for his profession. He did pass the exams, though, which has subjected me to another bout of questioning of my doubts. I am thankful, nonetheless, that one simple belief might have been the key. But then again, he did undergo a comprehensive review before the exam period. Hmmmm....

It's not always easy to go to church regularly on Sundays. There have been numerous times when I simply want to sleep in on Sundays because it happens to be the only break I have for the entire week. I am not complaining here, and I hope the Lord never finds reason to do so in the future and starts being less generous. But knowing the Lord, whose love is unconditional, my life would run out before his love for all humanity does. For this, I find many reasons to be thankful. He has never forsaken me during my times of trouble, my darkest hours. He has never seen it beyond Him to pour His grace unconditionally even unto undeserving sinners such as myself. He has never given up on me, and my faith in Him runs stronger than anything else. That is my one and only way of showing how important He has always been to me.

In our daily lives, let us never forget the essential part that religion plays in our philosophies in life. Religion provides us something we can hold on to, something we can uphold. We might find many doubtful aspects about it, but in the end, religion always finds its strong roots in what we believe in and Who we put as the center of our lives: God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you belong to any religious denomination or organization? What conspired to bring you to that religion?
2. Can religion save you? Why or why not?
3. Would you discourage/encourage your own child to have religion?
4. Why or why not?
5. What is the challenge for many religious organizations nowadays?
6. Why is it difficult to stick to a particular religion?



HEAL THE WORLD—NOW!

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I have been interested in this invitation to a certain campaign on my Yahoo home page that says SILENCE THE HATE, which encourages users to get involved at supporting a movement calling for decisive actions against popular prejudicial, divisive concepts like racism, xenophobia and homophobia. I admire whoever launched this in Singapore mainly because he was brave enough to silence the hate, literally. Apparently, his intentions have been born out of a genuine desire to change the world and make it a much better place.

Search the internet and you will easily find videos of unjustified bigotry in whatever form. It could be against old people being openly disrespected by young people, gay members of the community being victims of hate crimes, or worse, handicapped individuals being accorded no respect or consideration. Heck, even animals do not always feel secure anymore. One can only ask: Where has the world gone to? Have our values and philosophies so dramatically changed that we no longer feel it is necessary to feel compassion for our fellowmen and fellow creatures?

I fear even more for my children because they have to live much longer than I do and are therefore going to witness to even more atrocious acts. Kindness to others has been overtaken by competition and the inconvenience of time being too short. Many of us no longer find it fulfilling to stop and smell the flowers because the flowers have simply ceased blooming. It would be much easier to stop and smell the garbage, if the biological hazard of doing so doesn't stop you first.

We have been wrapped in fear and exhaustion from the world's cares and concerns. We no longer find it profitable to stare at the sky and dream of more beautiful things because huge skyscrapers have invaded our horizons in ever increasing numbers. Our ancestors had never dreamed of appreciating the beauty of butterflies in cages, sanctuaries, if you will. We have too few of those while the prairies and meadows get lost in concrete progress and development.

When is it ever going to stop? I recall a song that has the lyrics: They paved paradise and put up a parking lot. Although the song had been meant to be a cry for the environment, it could very well serve as a cry for all that makes us human, too. Many in the world have forsaken ancient values to give way to modernization. The virtual Tower of Babel has grown in large proportions because we no longer see eye to eye and seem to talk in different languages increasingly. Let us join hands in silencing the hate. We were meant to live in this world peacefully together, not extinguish one another in utter hatred.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What philosophies on life do you adhere to?
2. Do you think there's still hope for the world to ever find peace? Why or why not?
3. Is mankind on the road to perdition? How can this be averted?
4. Are ancient values still practicable today? Why or why not?
5. Do you think the writer is being pessimistic or realistic? Justify your answer.



REVISITING BRUCE ALMIGHTY

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I revisited (read: watched again) the movie *Bruce Almighty*, starring great comedian Jim Carrey, Brad Pitt's erstwhile wife Jennifer Aniston, and versatile actor Morgan Freeman. The movie has never ceased to make me laugh despite the fact that I have watched it more than thrice already. What has constantly struck me as wondrous is when the main character, played by Jim, finally comes into the realization of how selfish he had been. He had never thought that his fiancée, played by Jennifer, had always been praying for him.

Despite the apparently comedic orientation, the film touches on several religious and ethical concepts such as Does God exist? What is free will? Is man really free to do as he chooses? How does a Supreme Being control prayer? How does a Supreme God empower man? You know, lots of stuff like that. But the most significant topic tackled in the movie is how man becomes so enamored with power and influence that he forgets other more important things such as love, loyalty and respect.

It's not easy to live in the modern world. One's values and principles can easily be swayed by worldlier considerations that easily take precedence. Constantly theorizing, however, will not solve all of the world's problems. We have to take a decisive yet sensible approach to everything, one that has respect for all other approaches yet still manages to assert itself when the need comes, or when push comes to shove. When we commit mistakes, we have to make sure that those mistakes do not worsen into errors. A mistake is just a miscue, easily rectifiable and therefore correctable. But an error entails wrong judgment, not so easily excusable and therefore graver. Repeated mistakes can prove to be errors of judgment and escalate into conscious wrongs.

In Bruce's case, he granted everyone's wishes because he'd grown too tired of having to answer too many prayers (actually emails), making many, many people satisfied but "confused". Because he had not used wise and sensible judgment, there was no check-and-balance framework that could control the world's affairs. In the end, he had to concede that only a Supremely Intelligent Being could manage to run the world and keep it under control. He had to submit to a Higher Power. God is not a punishing god. He merely bides His time till mankind realizes its folly and is ready to accept its inherent weakness.

We often question our freedom and think that we either have too much or too little of it. Little do we realize that everything that happens in this world does so for a reason. Perhaps our true calling is to try to find whatever that reason is and live to be better persons for it. Perhaps we have been designed to help each other in this respect, more than any other.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is your purpose in life? Do you believe you have already found it? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe in the writer's concept of God? Why or why not?
3. What is your philosophy on free will? Is man absolutely free? Why or why not?
4. What would you do if you became god for a day?
5. Why can religion not save you?



PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY

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Everyone experiences life's ups and downs and it's not too far out to have a personal philosophy that you can call your own. Although we may not really be aware of this, we all have personal philosophies that shape our life and how we view the world that we live in. We all have our own interpretation of all the events that happens to our life. Whether it is good or bad that we are experiencing, what really matters is how we react to these situations. It is the one that really counts most.

Our personal philosophy is the way we live our life, or how we live and go by it. It is finding out what principles in life do you adhere to. It also includes what viewpoints we have in life. Together with our personal philosophy comes our set of values. We are not only talking about a set of doctrines to carry out in disciplinary measures when we talk of philosophy. It is a certain kind of thinking that every individual has.

Personal philosophy is not only our way of life but it is also the frame of our mind which sets our perspective on all the things about life. As a matter of fact, philosophy has shaped the foundations of all human life and thought. It creates a great impact in our life even during our childhood years and it also constantly changes and builds our knowledge and line of thinking. Yes, it develops right from our childhood that is by our parents, in school, in people that we meet and many other things. Our life philosophy is what distinguishes us from the animals. It is our ability to think and use a thought, to elaborate on our ideas and not act on our instincts.

According to how the dictionary defines philosophy, it is the love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means and moral self-discipline. It is a system of values by which a person lives. Our personal philosophy helps and enables us to become a person with a clearer and more logical manner. Philosophy then is one of our defining qualities of what it means to be human. Developing a personal philosophy helps and enables to gain new ideas and will eventually help us reach our goals.

As for me, I have learned to live my life through my personal philosophy, no matter what happens, even if everything goes wrong, I just keep on moving and live for good moments. I just fill my mind with a lot of good things. Yes, move on and be optimistic and lastly, I have learned to do just what is right no matter what cost it will take. So it's about time for us to try and develop our own personal philosophy.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the role of personal philosophy in your life?
2. What influences your personal philosophy?
3. Have you learned to live your own personal philosophy? How?
4. What is your personal philosophy in life? Explain your answer.
5. Does your own personal philosophy define your ideologies in life? Why or why not?



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