

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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CHAPTER 2

METHODS OF PHILOSOPHIZING



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To realize that philosophizing will lead to wisdom or truth
2. To distinguish opinion from truth
3. To use a philosophical method in the search for truth
4. To evaluate situations that demonstrate the difference between opinion and truth

INTRODUCTION

There are times that we react to a certain situation without consciously understanding what we mean to say. Sadly, when confronted with certain ideas that might be the opposite of our beliefs, we get hurt and attack the person instead of the argument. We tend to support only those aligned with our beliefs, even if it lacks truth-value. Let's take a look at the situation below.

On a Sunday night, Juana posted his filtered picture of her Sunday's best on Facebook with a caption: "I think there is no class on Monday." Many of her classmates commented on her post and asked if it was true. One of her close friends, Pedro, shared the post. Eventually, many of their classmates believed that there would be no class the following day since Juana and Pedro were among the top ten students in their class. Also, Pedro's mother is the principal of the City Senior High School.

If you saw the post of Juana and you know her too well, how would you react? Which button would you hit: "haha", "like", "heart", "angry" or "wow"? Why? Would you share Juana's post? What would be your comment?

These days, we are bombarded with a lot of information. In social media, some information being shared and circulated are true while some are not. How do we know that something is true? How do we differentiate truth from opinion? How can philosophy help us to arrive at a certain truth?

DISCUSSION

OPINION VS. TRUTH

When people engage in a debate and later get tired of arguing, one of them would perhaps resort to saying, "That's your opinion!" By saying this, it often settles the conflict of the opposing sides. One can also observe that when one expresses an opinion, he/she is confident to say it because opinions are usually understood as neither 'right' nor 'wrong'. Thus, many netizens would unreflectively post something about an issue on their social media accounts and defensively claim that it is just an opinion. Some would even say that since we are in a democratic country, everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion.

But what is an opinion? Generally, an opinion is a personal claim, a belief, or a personal stance on a particular subject matter. For instance, the statements, "My teacher is the best!" or "I think there is no class on Monday" are examples of opinions. These opinions are based on personal experiences and, therefore, relative. However, opinions are sometimes based on facts. If they are based on facts, do they equate to the truth?

John Corvino (2015) offers a philosophical distinction between an opinion and a fact. For him, a statement of fact has objective content and is well-supported by the available evidence. On the other hand, a statement of opinion is one whose content is either subjective or not well supported by the available evidence. In short, an opinion refers to what a person thinks about something but is lacking evidence. In this sense, the criterion of objectivity, which is a necessary condition of facts, is what separates an opinion from a fact.

Another problem that arises is how to understand truth statements. People would simply state an opinion using the

phrase, “it is true that...”, as if it automatically makes the statement true. We have to note that not all those who claim that they are telling the truth are revealing the truth. We see many people on social media, claiming that their position on an issue is correct and true. We may be deceived if we do not verify whether these claims are indeed true or not. What is essential is to doubt the things we see on social media to investigate further their veracity.

Truth has been one of the main questions in philosophy, and many theories have dealt with this question. One of these theories is the Correspondence Theory. This theory maintains that both the knower's mind and the thing being perceived must correspond to each other. Truth is grasped when there is conformity between the mind and the thing outside the mind. However, since our senses may get easily deceived, it is necessary always to inquire if what we have in mind is not a mere illusion. This is why we need to discern matters seriously to know the truth. We should consider both what we think and what the thing reveals to us. Truth is neither an opinion nor a fact. It is universal, undisputed, verified through facts, and even transcendent, beyond a reasonable doubt. In other words, the truth will always be true no matter what a person thinks and says. Truth does not change; an opinion, however, usually changes through time. Thus, the truth remains, no matter how convincing an opinion is. The question that remains now is how to seek the truth.

METHODS OF PHILOSOPHIZING

The methods of philosophizing are the various ways of attaining truth or wisdom. Let us not forget the literal meaning of philosophy: "love of wisdom" or the search for truth. But there is not only one way of searching for the truth. In this section, we explore several methods used by

philosophers. From ancient philosophy to contemporary philosophy, these methods are varied and evolving.

Socratic Method

The Socratic Method is named after Socrates, who was the teacher of Plato. This method refers to a process of asking open-ended questions that are committed to finding the truth. It usually takes the form of a dialogue in which people discuss and analyze a specific subject matter. It is like a cross-examination. It is also a strategy of teaching any subject matter between a teacher and a student. (Zack, 2010)

How does one employ the Socratic Method? Usually, Socrates would ask questions based on what the person believes. Let us read this dialogue:

Santiago: Maria, what is your comment on the Facebook post of Juana?

Maria: I commented on her post, saying, "Yehey!"

Santiago: What does that mean?

Maria: I agree with her, and I am happy about the fact that there is no class on Monday.

Santiago: Did Juana say that there is no class on Monday?

Maria: I don't think so.

Santiago: What did she say?

Maria: She stated in the caption: *I guess there is no class on Monday.*

Santiago: Will there be really no class on Monday?

Maria: I don't know.

Santiago: Then, why did you say *Yehey* when Juana did not declare that there is no class on Monday?

Maria: I was just happy to think that there is no class on Monday.

Santiago: If you like the idea that there is no class on Monday, do you mean to say that you like your thought about having no class on Monday?

Maria. I think so.

Santiago: Is it correct to say that you are glad about what you think – that is, having no class on Monday – rather than what is posted by Juana?

Maria: Yes, I am happy to think that there is no class on Monday.

Santiago: Do you think Juana is telling us that there is no class on Monday?

Maria: I'm not sure about it.

Santiago: That only means that Juana is not declaring that there is no class on Monday. Do you agree that the "Yehey" refers to your thought of having no class on Monday?

Maria: Mhhmm. I cannot disagree.

In this dialogue, one question leads to a series of questions to arrive at a particular conclusion. The dialogue may go as far as the question is satisfied or as far as the truth is revealed. Maria's comment, "Yehey", is quite ambiguous. Santiago discovers that her comment on Juana's post, which expresses delight and agreement, does not totally refer to Juana's post but to her own thought of having no class on Monday.

In this connection, the Socratic Method may often disappoint us when we discover something we did not intend to say. Sometimes, we become uncertain of our beliefs once we start to question them. That is why Socrates urges us to examine ourselves, including our beliefs and assumptions in life, when he said, "An unexamined life is not worth living."

At first, the Socratic Method seems to be annoying because the questions seem to be unending. Nevertheless, a person has nothing to be afraid of when being asked about

anything and discovers something new and realizes his ignorance. Let us remember that Socrates' wisdom proceeds from his awareness of his own ignorance. But asking questions intelligently is a way to resolve our own ignorance, and the Socratic Method will lead us to find the truth.

It has to be emphasized that this method is different from asking questions for the sake of asking them. Rather, the Socratic Method is the art of asking a question that is committed to the truth. It aims for moral improvement, to make us wise and virtuous persons (Cain, 2007; Kreeft, 2014). Sometimes this method may result in one feeling ashamed. However, when one uses this method, he/she does not seek to harm or destroy a person; instead, the goal is to correct one's opinions and lead him/her to the truth.

Peter Kreeft (2014) suggests some points on how to apply the Socratic Method, especially with difficult people, such as those who do not believe in finding the truth together, those who are subjectivists, or those who refuse to believe that they lack the truth and the other has it.

1. Establish a Socratic relationship. You are not the teacher, but you are the listener. You are not the one who knows what is right, but you are the one who needs to be shown what is right.

2. Get the person's belief, contention, or conclusion (What is the person really saying?)

3. Understand how the person uses the terms that he uses to avoid ambiguity (What does the person really mean?).

4. Ask for reasons or supporting evidence. Take note that you have to maintain the attitude of a person who wants to be led by the master or teacher to clarify the claim, not as someone who will ask for reasons for the sake of refuting it. (Why do you say that...?)

5. Once the person has given his claim, terms, and reasons, make sure to show your understanding of them by rephrasing them in your own words. In this way, you will let

the person feel that you are on the same track and not letting the person be alone, as if nobody understands him/her.

6. When the person sees that you are on his side, you can start the next level: exploration. You may go either 'upstream' or 'downstream'. Explore the person's original argument, that is, either go with his/her premises or reasons, or with the conclusions and their consequences. Suppose that the problem is not the terms or the logic of the argument but the propositions (or the statements themselves in the given reasons and conclusion) that need to be investigated. Suppose you believe that the conclusion is false. In that case, you may take either the two paths: a) *Upstream strategy* is to show the person what questionable premises or reasons are necessary to prove his claim, or b) *Downstream strategy* is to show the person what questionable conclusions entail when the claim or conclusion is taken as a reason or premise.

7. Use options to give the person a choice. You may provide constructive dilemmas to not let the person perceive the inadequacy of his/her reasons.

8. You may also match your style with the personalities of the person you are inquiring.

Dialectical Method

The Dialectical method can be traced back to Socrates' or Plato's method. The term 'dialectics' is derived from the Greek word *dialego*, which means to debate or discuss. Although the dialectical method has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, the dialectical method emphasized here is the one developed mostly by modern philosophers, such as Hegel and Marx. It is a method of studying and understanding the real development and change (Cornforth, 2015).

Reality is in constant conflict. The dialectical method arises from the opposing realities, and even contradictions

are derived from applying the philosophical categories (Borchert, 2006). Hence the formula of the dialectical method is a thesis versus antithesis results in synthesis. On the one hand, a thesis refers to a claim. It may be a hypothesis, speculation, declaration, belief, conclusion, or a certain reality.

On the other hand, an antithesis refers to a thesis that negates or opposes the given thesis. Once the thesis and the antithesis clash, another thesis will arise, called a synthesis. Synthesis is the result of the conflict of the thesis and antithesis. However, a synthesis becomes a new thesis that will be opposed by another antithesis, which will result in another synthesis. This process goes on and on until it reaches its pure synthesis.

It has to be noted that the result of thesis-antithesis conflict should not be regarded as favoring one side as if one side wins over the other. Unlike a debate that has a winner and loser, the dialectic method, on the other hand, is not concerned about winning or losing but about seeking new ideas that arise from a conflict. Thus, the dialectical method admits the presence of the conflicts, proceeds from the whole truth of the conflict and gives birth to a new thesis: the synthesis.

Philosophers may have differences in using the dialectical method. However, they all agree on the relevance of this method in searching for the truth or discovering a new idea.

Phenomenological Method

The word phenomenology comes from the two Greek words: *phainomenon*, which means appearance, and *logos*, which means study or reason. A phenomenon is that which appears to the consciousness of the mind. In this sense, Phenomenology investigates the essence of nature of the

things that appear to a person. For Edmund Husserl, phenomenology is "the science of the essence of consciousness" (Smith, 2006).

Husserl's phenomenological method is the most original or also called pure phenomenology. It emphasizes the person's lived experience to get to the true meaning of reality. One has to note that Husserl distinguishes 'natural attitude' and 'phenomenological attitude'. Natural attitude refers to the belief that the reality outside the person is relative to and separate from the person who experiences it. However, the knowledge that a person will gain from this kind of attitude is not real or true knowledge. On the other hand, a phenomenological attitude refers to the process whereby a person suspends his/her beliefs or the things he/she has learned from the natural attitude. Here is how to apply the method of Husserl's phenomenology (Zahavi, 2002):

- a. *Bracketing*: This process is also called *epoché*, which means to abstain. The person's experience, beliefs, and learnings are bracketed or 'set aside' to see the thing in itself. It is like peeling an onion; one has to peel off the outer layers to get its innermost part. In philosophy, this refers to the unpacking of a certain reality. Thus, one has to let go of his/her biases and prejudices, enclose them, and put them aside.
- b. *Eidetic reduction*. This is the movement from fact to essence, a transcendental reality that refers to the immateriality of things, such as thoughts, feelings, memories, etc. This process seeks what is necessary to a thing, such as, 'what makes a chair a chair' or 'what makes a book a book?' It collects only those attributes from which a thing cannot be without them.

Let us say, for instance, what is a chair? From our own experience, a chair may be green, white, or brown; it is also hard; it is used for sitting, etc. A person has to bracket those ideas that do not necessarily constitute a chair. Does it have four legs? Is it fundamentally used for sitting? Is it made up of wood? Also, one has to ask questions such as: Would it still be a chair without those legs? Would it be a chair without those woods? Would it be a chair without its shape? The more the person investigates the chair in itself, the more that the person finds the essence of the chair. Thus, in this example, the chair is a four-legged tool made up of woods or hard materials and used for sitting on. At this time, a person will experience the 'Aha' moment, wherein he/she realizes the meaning of the thing in itself, the essential nature of the thing as experienced.

All these processes belong to the consciousness where it always points at something. It is for the person to find out the true meaning of the thing presented to him/her. In that case, the phenomenological method helps a person to examine his/her own experience of something. In this way, the personal experience is taken into account to understand a certain phenomenon better. How each person sees things may differ from one another, but with this phenomenological method, one can understand the essence of one's lived experience. For instance, as a student, one will understand his/her student life through the phenomenological method and draw a realization that explains the universal and necessary elements of the experience of something. Indeed, one's experience is never taken for granted in the search for truth.

Hermeneutics

The term hermeneutics is usually associated with the Greek god, Hermes, who was the messenger between gods and humans. It is derived from *hermêneueîn* or *hermêneusai* and *hermêneia*, which means interpreting or interpretation (Keane & Lawn, 2016 & Malpas & Gander, 2015). This process refers to the understanding of a particular reality. As a method, hermeneutics "offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts, and other meaningful material (Mantzavinos, 2020)."

There are various systems of hermeneutics. For this discussion, let's focus on the hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's system is called romanticist hermeneutics. The aim of hermeneutics is "to capture the truth of the text." The truth is taken from how the author originally meant something. To achieve this, one starts from the subjective interpreter (or the reader himself), then considers the historical and the cultural context to grasp the original authorial intention (Demeterio, 2001). The reader should check the author's historical background and the period when the author said/wrote something. Hence, considering those factors will make the reader/interpreter dig out the truth of the text.

There is an interplay between the subject, object, and the truth/meaning. This process only means that in seeking the truth of what the person has said, one must aim for what the person has intended to say, considering the history and cultural background. The subjective part may come from the interpreter because he/she is the one who reveals the meaning. Still, the interpreter's meaning is objectively taken from the text itself and how the author of the text (words) is trying to convey.

CONCLUSION

The search for truth is like a vocation – a calling. There may be only one call, but there can be different ways of answering the call. In other words, the methods of philosophizing may vary, but they are all guided by and directed towards the truth. A person may encounter opinions, facts, and truth while facing a certain problem, but it is a challenge to determine each one of them. The methods of philosophizing do not settle with mere opinions and facts, but they always love to transcend and attain the truth. Hence, a person must be open to the call for truth even if it is against one's opinion; and from here, he/she must consider examining the immaterial element of the human person: the embodied spirit.

ASSESSMENT

1. Look at the image below. In 250 words, write your opinion about the picture.



Source:<https://opinion.inquirer.net/files/2020/06/Opinion58652.jpg>

2. Read the quoted statement of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte on his 5th State of the Nation Address on July 27, 2020.

“Not to count the victims of crimes perpetrated by people addicted to shabu. That is the reason why I’m so vicious in my — galit talaga ako kasi nilalaruan tayo. Well, I don’t know any other president might — pero ako ayaw ko yon. Ayaw kong lalaruan ang Pilipino. Do not do it in my country because I will really kill you. That is a commitment.”

What does the president truly mean by saying: "I will really kill you" in the SONA 2020? Choose a method of philosophizing to arrive at a conclusion. Remember that it does not matter whether you believe that your output has arrived at ‘the truth’. The important thing is how you use the method(s) of philosophizing in investigating the given statement. The point of this task is to apply the method(s) of philosophizing.