



## **The Philosophy Café**

Brisbane Meet Up

**2023 Program**

Brisbane Square Library

The Philosophy Café is an informal, non-technical group that encourages philosophical debate and provides a forum for the active exchange of ideas within the loose and broad traditions of philosophy. We invite you to think about ideas, ask challenging questions and build robust arguments. The conversation is suitable for anyone over the age of 12.

### **HISTORY**

The Philosophy Café at The Letter Lounge was a monthly opportunity to ‘do’ philosophy. People got together over afternoon tea to examine basic beliefs and challenge the thinking that underpins our everyday decisions. People asked questions about the concepts that guide our lives and think about the logical links between thoughts. The goal was to inspire each other to develop an interest in philosophy. The original group was coordinated by Peter Ellerton (University of Queensland), Chris Poulsen (Kelvin Grove State College) and Judy Gregory (Northside Meetings). The meeting is now coordinated by Dr Neville Buch, although members of the group are able to nominate and present on topics of their own choosing and preparation.

## CURRICULUM

The freethought approach does not mean that curriculum is not provided. Over the years, The Philosophy Café has had trained educators and teachers. The original group had curriculum drawn from the secondary education program in philosophy, and the university program in critical thinking.

In the first year of the restart, was a thirteen-month chronological survey of western philosophy. The two or so years later addressed the major themes and topics of the philosophy discipline.

In 2023 the curriculum program will go to 'philosophical readings'. It will be a year of discussing a cross-section of the key essays in the history of Philosophy.

A planning committee of The Philosophy Café met on Sunday, 10 October 2022, and voted to produce the list of essays. There were many other readings considered and the list can be reviewed in the middle of 2023, and, if successful, the curriculum might be extended into 2024.

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### 1. Modern Epistemology

Gettier, E. L. (1963). Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? *Analysis*, 23(6), 121–123.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3326922>

Sunday 12 February 2023 1pm-4:30pm

An exercise is logic. VARIOUS attempts have been made in recent years to state necessary and sufficient conditions for someone's knowing a given proposition.

## 2. The Ethics of Belief in Response to the Will to Believe.

Clifford, W.K., 1877 [1999], "The ethics of belief", in T. Madigan, (ed.), *The ethics of belief and other essays*, Amherst, MA: Prometheus, 70–96.

<https://openeducationalberta.ca/pop201/chapter/clifford-the-ethics-of-belief/>

See also James, William (1896, 1912). *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, Longmans, Green, and Co.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm>

Sunday 12 March 2023 1pm-4:30pm

The ethics of belief refers to a cluster of related issues that focus on standards of rational belief, intellectual excellence, and conscientious belief-formation. Among the questions addressed in the field are:

- Are there standards of some sort ("epistemic norms") that ought to guide how we form beliefs and pursue intellectual aims, such as the pursuit of truth or the quest for understanding?
- If so, what kind of norms? Moral? Purely intellectual? Prudential?
- If there are such norms, how strong are they? Are they categorical (i.e., binding regardless of our desires and commitments) or merely hypothetical (applicable only if we have certain desires and goals?) Do they bind absolutely or only conditionally?
- Are beliefs within our voluntary control, or do we more or less automatically believe whatever we think is best supported by the evidence?
- What aims should we have as believers? Achieving significant truth? Avoiding significant error? Achieving knowledge? Pleasure? Peace of mind? Understanding? Wisdom?
- Must one always have sufficient evidence for one's beliefs (a view philosophers call "evidentialism"), or is it sometimes permissible to believe without sufficient evidence—or perhaps without any evidence at all?
- What sorts of "intellectual virtues" (admirable mental traits, skills, and habits) are necessary for intellectual excellence and high-quality critical thinking?

### 3. Religion and Psychology

Plato; Gill, N.S. "The Myth of Er From the Republic of Plato." ThoughtCo, Apr. 12, 2021, [thoughtco.com/the-myth-of-er-120332](https://www.thoughtco.com/the-myth-of-er-120332).

<https://www.thoughtco.com/the-myth-of-er-120332>

Sunday 9 April 2023 1pm-4:30pm

The Myth of Er is a legend that concludes Plato's *Republic* (10.614–10.621). The story includes an account of the cosmos and the afterlife that greatly influenced religious, philosophical, and scientific thought for many centuries.

The story begins as a man named Er (/ɜːr/; Greek: Ἔρ, gen.: Ἑρός), son of Armenios (Ἀρμένιος), of Pamphylia dies in battle. When the bodies of those who died in the battle are collected, ten days after his death, Er remains undecomposed. Two days later he revives on his funeral-pyre and tells others of his journey in the afterlife, including an account of reincarnation and the celestial spheres of the astral plane. The tale includes the idea that moral people are rewarded and immoral people punished after death.

Although called the Myth of Er, the word "myth" means "word, speech, account", rather than the modern meaning. The word is used at the end when Socrates explains that because Er did not drink the waters of Lethe, the account (mythos in Greek) was preserved for us.

### 4. On Human Nature

Schopenhauer, Arthur ( The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer; On Human Nature by Arthur Schopenhauer, Translated by Saunders, T. Bailey

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10739>

Sunday 14 May 2023 1pm-4:30pm

HUMAN NATURE. Truths of the physical order may possess much external significance, but internal significance they have none. The latter is the privilege of intellectual and moral truths, which are concerned with the objectivation of the will in its highest stages, whereas physical truths are concerned with it in its lowest.

## 5. The Social Contract

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1762, 1920). *The Social Contract & Discourses*, Everyman's Library

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46333/46333-h/46333-h.htm>

Sunday 11 June 2023 1pm-4:30pm

For the study of the great writers and thinkers of the past, historical imagination is the first necessity. Without mentally referring to the environment in which they lived, we cannot hope to penetrate below the inessential and temporary to the absolute and permanent value of their thought. Theory, no less than action, is subject to these necessities; the form in which men cast their speculations, no less than the ways in which they behave, are the result of the habits of thought and action which they find around them. Great men make, indeed, individual contributions to the knowledge of their times; but they can never transcend the age in which they live. The questions they try to answer will always be those their contemporaries are asking; their statement of fundamental problems will always be relative to the traditional statements that have been handed down to them. When they are stating what is most startlingly new, they will be most likely to put it in an old-fashioned form, and to use the inadequate ideas and formulae of tradition to express the deeper truths towards which they are feeling their way. They will be most the children of their age, when they are rising most above it.

## 6. Morality and Belief Systems

Nietzsche, F.W. (1918, 2006) *The Anti-Christ*, Translated by H.L. Mencken, Alfred A. Knopf.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19322/19322-h/19322-h.htm>

Sunday 9 July 2023 1pm-4:30pm

Save for his raucous, rhapsodical autobiography, "Ecce Homo," "The Antichrist" is the last thing that Nietzsche ever wrote, and so it may be accepted as a statement of some of his most salient ideas in their final form. Notes for it had been accumulating for years and it was to have constituted the first volume of his long-projected magnum opus, "The Will to Power." His full plan for this work, as originally drawn up, was as follows:

- Vol. I. The Antichrist: an Attempt at a Criticism of Christianity.
- Vol. II. The Free Spirit: a Criticism of Philosophy as a Nihilistic Movement.
- Vol. III. The Immoralist: a Criticism of Morality, the Most Fatal Form of Ignorance.
- Vol. IV. Dionysus: the Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence.

## 7. Logic, Language, and Semantics

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1922) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Translated by C.K. Ogden, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5740>

Sunday 13 August 2023 1pm-4:30pm

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (widely abbreviated and cited as TLP) is a book-length philosophical work by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein which deals with the relationship between language and reality and aims to define the limits of science. Wittgenstein wrote the notes for the *Tractatus* while he was a soldier during World War I and completed it during a military leave in the summer of 1918. It was originally published in German in 1921 as *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung* (Logical-Philosophical Treatise). In 1922 it was published together with an English translation and a Latin title, which was suggested by G. E. Moore as homage to Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670).



## 8. Existentialism and Humanism

Sartre, Jean-Paul (1946, 1989). Existentialism as a Humanism, in *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufman, Meridian Publishing Company

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>

Sunday 10 September 2023 1pm-4:30pm

Sartre asserts that the key defining concept of existentialism is that the existence of a person is prior to their essence. The term "existence precedes essence"

Thus, Sartre rejects what he calls "deterministic excuses" and claims that people must take responsibility for their behaviour. Sartre defines anguish as the emotion that people feel once they realize that they are responsible not just for themselves, but for all humanity. Anguish leads people to realize that their actions guide humanity and allows them to make judgments about others based on their attitude towards freedom. Nevertheless, "It is not the will that gives value to the possibility. Valuation depends on me, that's true, but not on my will. It depends on my project, that is to say, on how I perceive the world, how I experience it." Anguish is also associated with Sartre's notion of despair, which he defines as optimistic reliance on a set of possibilities that make action possible. Sartre claims that "In fashioning myself, I fashion Man.", saying that the individual's action will affect and shape mankind. The being-for-itself uses despair to embrace freedom and take meaningful action in full acceptance of whatever consequences may arise as a result. He also describes abandonment as the loneliness that atheists feel when they realize that there is no God to prescribe a way of life, no guidance for people on how to live; that we're abandoned in the sense of being alone in the universe and the arbiters of our own essence. "There is a contingency of human existence. It is a condemnation of their being. Their being is not determined, so it is up to everyone to create their own existence, for which they are then responsible. They cannot not be free, there is a form of necessity for freedom, which can never be given up." [1] Sartre closes his work by emphasizing that existentialism, as it is a philosophy of action and one's defining oneself, is optimistic and liberating. "Sartre offers a description of human beings as a project and as a commitment."

## 9. Self or Personal Identity

Parfit, D. (1971). On "The Importance of Self-Identity." *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68(20), 683–690. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2024939>

Sunday 8 October 2023 1pm-4:30pm

In this paper I shall first sketch the connections between a certain state of mind and a certain way of thinking about our lives. I shall then discuss Professor Penelhum's doubts about this way of thinking.

The state of mind is a kind of indifference towards a part of our lives. We are in this state of mind when, for example, there is a part of our past that we do not regard with either pride or shame, either pleasure or regret.

*Penelhum's Argument:* In recent literature on personal identity, the immense importance of the notion in our many forms of discourse about persons has been assumed, but not often explored. Apart from neo-Kantian arguments about the necessity of self-identity for the perceptual recognition of continuing physical objects, philosophers have been so preoccupied with the analysis of our various alleged criteria of identity and their relationships to each other, that they have been content with perfunctory references to the relevance of the notion to our judgments of moral and legal responsibility and have ignored their uses elsewhere. There is a danger here that the analysis thus undertaken will proceed in a vacuum and that insufficient account will be taken of the functions that our criteria of identity have to perform.<sup>1</sup>

In a fascinating recent exploration, Derek Parfit has done much to shake this complacency by suggesting, in effect, that the notion of personal identity does not, or need not, have the importance philosophers have assumed it to have.<sup>2</sup> I shall attempt a partial response to this interesting heresy by exploring one role, too little noticed, that our criteria of identity (whatever they are) play in our discourse about persons. I shall then indicate a difficulty that the recognition of this role presents for a proposed way of thinking about persons and their pasts and futures which Parfit offers us as a consequence of his revised estimate of the importance of these criteria. I shall then indicate a similar difficulty which the same recognition presents for some traditional hopes concerning the survival of death.

Penelhum, Terence. "The Importance of Self-Identity." *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 20 (1971): 667–78. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2024937>.



### **10. Ethics, Intuitions, and Rationality**

Singer, P. (2005). Ethics and Intuitions. *The Journal of Ethics*, 9(3/4), 331–352.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115831>

Sunday 12 November 2023 1pm-4:30pm

For millennia, philosophers have speculated about the origins of ethics. Recent research in evolutionary psychology and the neurosciences has shed light on that question. But this research also has normative significance. A standard way of arguing against a normative ethical theory is to show that in some circumstances the theory leads to judgments that are contrary to our common moral intuitions. If, however, these moral intuitions are the biological residue of our evolutionary history, it is not clear why we should regard them as having any normative force. Research in the neurosciences should therefore lead us to reconsider the role of intuitions in normative ethics.

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### **2023 The Philosophy Café Break-Up Social**

Sunday 10 December 2023 1pm-4:30pm