

Why Philosophy?

What is philosophy? What do people in a philosophy department do?

Have you ever asked yourself what is truth? What is time? Is there a God? Does life have a meaning? What is rationality? What is beauty? Is there an objective morality and if so how can we know what it is? What does free will mean and does it exist? All these are philosophical questions. A good way to understand philosophy is to see it as a rational, systematic and critical engagement with particularly general and deep questions such as the above. In a philosophy department we become acquainted with the efforts of philosophers to deal with such questions, from the time of the ancient Greeks and until the philosophers of today; and we learn how we can think philosophically ourselves. The best way of studying philosophy is through doing philosophy.

What is it good for?

First, philosophical questions are **interesting and mind-broadening**. Almost everyone thinks occasionally of such questions, and a true struggle with them is fascinating. In the department of philosophy we learn to study the questions in a better way – which is more sophisticated, exact and deep, while learning from the efforts of the best past and present philosophers.

Second, many philosophical questions are not only of inherent value but have **practical importance**. They influence our attitude to life and the way in which we choose to live, as individuals and collectively. Take for example the call for "Social justice". In order to think about this seriously, we must do philosophical work: what is justice? How do we decide what is just? What is the relationship between justice and equality? What is exploitation? Do some people deserve more than others, and whether they do or not – why?

Third, doing philosophy **improves our thinking abilities**. Philosophy teaches us to think in an orderly, critical and clear way. Philosophical thinking opens up new possibilities, provides unique insights and develops our imagination. Philosophical thinking and writing build up abilities of analysis, interpretation, deduction, formulation and accuracy; and develop capacities to argue, to convince, and to communicate verbally in general. Philosophical training thereby develops intellectual abilities that can also serve us well in other pursuits in life. It is not accidental that, as research has shown, philosophy students get on average particularly high scores in entrance and evaluation exams (such as GRE, GMAT, LSAT). We can thus also understand why the Israeli army's Intelligence Branch has decided to require that all those participating in the "Havatzalot" project" (which trains the cutting edge of the IDF's future intelligence research officers) take philosophy courses in our department.

Fourth, there is **special beauty and meaning** in the philosophical search for truth. We doubt and investigate the obvious, and question our most basic concepts and assumptions. We learn to overcome the common biases of thought, thinking habits we received uncritically as children, and superstitions, and to think in a clean, sharp and universal form on the deepest and most general questions. Studying philosophy connects us to the best thinkers during the ages, and to the continuing critical search for truth and meaning.

Why study philosophy (rather than something else)?

There is no substitute for philosophy. The natural and social sciences are important, but they cannot decide the most fundamental questions on what is a human being, the nature of the world, the weight of different values, or the nature of the good life. Literature and art are interesting and meet important emotional needs, but cannot replace clear and systematic thought which allows rational investigation and justification of our beliefs and actions. The law shapes our social life, but it is imbued with moral and other philosophical

assumptions, which themselves require direct and thorough exploration. Actually every human being, and every field of research and occupation, assume certain philosophical assumptions, assumptions that usually go on unchecked; but only philosophy, the "Mother of the sciences", explores these assumptions. Since all fields of inquiry assume answers to philosophical questions, the study of philosophy can deepen and enrich the study of other areas.

Why study in the department of philosophy at Haifa?

The department of philosophy at the University of Haifa is a leading department in Israel. The department, which offers diverse study programs for the first, second and PhD degrees, is one of the best departments in the university. There is no other department in any field of the humanities throughout Israel which has so many teachers who have won the prestigious "Alon Fellowships" (highly competitive fellowships offered by the Israeli Council for Higher education). Although there are some excellent philosophers in every department in Israel, our department stands out: the report of the international evaluation committee for all departments of philosophy in Israel, set up in 2009 by the Council for Higher Education, marked the Haifa department for particular praise both in research and teaching. Most of the department's teachers studied and undertook further research in some of the world's best universities, and have published quality books and articles in the most prestigious publishing houses and philosophical journals. The department's teachers consistently receive high grades in their student evaluations. The combination of research excellence in our academic staff, an open and pluralistic approach to philosophy, a flexible study program providing plenty of electives, a tradition of devoted quality teaching and unusually good teacher-student relations – all these make the department of philosophy at the University of Haifa an excellent place in which to study philosophy.

Can I find work in it?

You will not find many wanted ads where it is written "Philosopher wanted". But the study of philosophy can provide an important edge in finding work, and important capabilities that will serve you in every job you choose, as long as one of the demands of the job is: **think**. In the modern world more and more work places require thinking, and this is what we study in the philosophy department. Studying philosophy will give you tools that will serve you whether you choose to go into politics or into science, the press or the law, computers or psychology, art or business. Studies show that a university degree is usually a good investment, which pays off economically in the long term, and that even from a narrow economic angle, philosophical studies are particularly useful. In fact, it is quite likely that in the BA degree, whatever your first major may be, it would be very much worth your while to add the excellent philosophy department in Haifa as a second major. This is so even if one sets aside for a moment the interest and beauty of philosophy and the value of understanding as such, and thinks only narrowly on acquiring capabilities for high level thinking, argumentation and formulation that will serve you in your future work, and enhance your attractiveness in the eyes of potential employers.