Why bother?

According to Socrates, the unexamined life is not worth living. According to Aristotle, all people by nature desire to know.

But how should we examine our lives? How can we work out what we should do?

What is it to know something? What is there to be known? And how can we work out whom or what to believe?

If these questions (and their answers) are worth bothering with, then philosophy is worth bothering with.

Contrary to what many think, philosophy is not some difficult, isolated, academic discipline, but rather something that all of us are constantly “doing.” Studying philosophy teaches us to think in a penetrating, organized way and furthermore to make connections between ideas and topics from a myriad of different disciplines. The questioning nature with which philosophy teaches us to approach the world opens us up to radically new and fascinating points of view, and our acceptance (or rejection) of these new viewpoints in turn help to make up different internal “lenses” which color and further inform our view of the world.

Studying philosophy has intrinsic merit. But what about its attractions for the hard-nosed practical type? A major task in our quarrelsome and information-saturated society is sifting fact from fiction, rational opinion from irrational sentiment. Philosophical study sharpens a skill essential for accomplishing this task: critical reasoning. This alone is good reason to study philosophy.

Recommended Readings

- Simon Blackburn—Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy—1999
- René Descartes—Meditations on First Philosophy—1641
- David Hume—An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding—1748
- Anthony Kenny—A New History of Western Philosophy—2010
- Bertrand Russell—The Problems of Philosophy—1912