

What is Public Philosophy?



Academic Philosophy - Discussion of public functions of Philosophy can be found in writings of classic and contemporary academic philosophers. Certain of these people, e.g, Hannah Arendt, who preferred “political theorist,” might choose to describe themselves in terms more closely connected with public philosophy. Academic philosophers engaged in public philosophy would include thinkers like Jurgen Habermas, Martha Nussbaum, or Alasdair MacIntyre.

Philosophy Done by Non-Philosophers - This approach includes those without professional philosophical training who produce work that significantly influences academic philosophy and broader society. These could range from people working in other academic fields, to others who are involved in policy, governance, or advocacy, to still others who are discussing philosophy in more popular manners. Existential Comics would fit into this last category. Others would simply consider non-philosophers having deep conversation as public philosophy, as in when people start “getting philosophical.”

For more, please see: <https://www.theschooloflife.com/>

Philosophy in the Public Interest - This approach to public philosophy is inspired by public-interest journalism, which is in-depth investigative journalism that explores important civic concerns. “It should be *philosophy*, in that it uses philosophical techniques, methods, and concepts. It should also be *in the public interest*, in that it addresses issues of civic import and in ways that are accessible to the general public.” So, it is philosophers doing it, but in a humble and colloquial approach. Further, it is about matters of importance, not mere casual interest.

For more, please see: <https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/06/12/philosophy-in-the-public-interest/>

Philosophy Done (Mostly) Side-by-Side - This approach is closest to SOPHIA’s mission. So, we’ll cite from the national website! “The mission of the Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA) is to use the tools of philosophical inquiry to improve people’s lives and enrich the profession of philosophy through conversation and community building.” Core values are

- A) Building philosophical community and engagement – *Philosophy is for everyone.*
- B) Philosophical inclusiveness – *Philosophers learn from others.*
- C) Respectful communication – *Everyone has a voice.*
- D) Professional excellence and public relevance – *Philosophy goes beyond the realm of academia.*

For more, please see: <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/>

Academic Philosophy Made Plain and Accessible - This approach to public philosophy involves professional philosophers who help novices understand, apply, and discuss central philosophical arguments and themes. Basically, they provide the public with accessible explanations of philosophical texts and philosophical movements. Methods of making accessible can include library talks, podcasts, videos, blogs, and books.

For more, please see: <https://www.youtube.com/user/gbisadler>

Questions

By Gregory B. Sadler and Kreigh A. Knerr of the Milwaukee SOPHIA Chapter, and a few by Eric Thomas Weber.

- 1) Why do you think these different ideas of public philosophy exist?
- 2) Does it matter how we define public philosophy?
- 3) In our community, which sorts of public philosophy do you think could be beneficial?
 - 3) a) Why and how so?
- 4) Has anyone here engaged with one or another of these types of public philosophy?

Additional questions by Eric Thomas Weber:

- 5) The Founding Fathers were arguably very philosophical, like Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, or Alexander Hamilton. Would you call them philosophers?
- 6) How do leaders today raise or address philosophical issues?
- 7) How would more philosophical leaders be received today? Why do you think so?
- 8) Today, there is a History Channel, and a National Geographic Channel. Could there be a Philosophy Channel? If so, what would it look like? If not, why not?
- 9) Should the United States (or whichever is your home country) be more philosophical? If so, what would be the most important factor in making that possible? If not, why not?
- 10) Do we teach any meaningful philosophy in public schools, particularly in kindergarten through high school? Should we? If so, how? At what levels? Would it make people more philosophical?