I am Barry Lam, host of philosophy podcast Hi-Phi Nation. Ask me anything about philosophy and creating podcasts.

HIPHINATIONBARRY [R/SCIENCE](#)

I am Barry Lam, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Vassar College and the Executive Producer and Host of the[Hi-Phi Nation podcast](#), the first story-driven documentary-style show about philosophy. I just completed production and release of the first season of Hi-Phi Nation as Humanities Writ-Large fellow at Duke University, where the first season covered stories and philosophy ranging from the possibilities of posthumous harm, the morality of war, the referent of religious terms in Christianity and Islam, the philosophy of music, the replication crisis in the statistical sciences, philosophy of gender, Kuhn and scientific realism, and the philosophy of love. I would be happy to talk about any of the substantive issues that arose from these episodes, as well as discuss any issues concerning doing philosophy in a story-driven way.

Here are a few select episodes on Soundcloud:

[Episode 1: The Wishes of the Dead](#)
[Episode 3: The Morality of War](#)
[Episode 4: The Name of God](#)
[Episode 7: Hackademics II (Epistemology of Replication Crisis)](#)

Some interviews and discussions about Hi-Phi Nation:

[My posts about the show at Leiter Reports](#)
[The American Philosophical Association Blog interview](#)
[Vassar's Interview](#)
[Elucidations Podcast, extended discussion of the wishes of the dead](#)

My own philosophical work has been in epistemology and the philosophy of language, particularly on the nature of epistemic rationality, and in experimental semantics and pragmatics. I would be happy to have a discussion about those topics. In the past two years I've set technical research aside to produce what I hope will be an ongoing series of narrative story-driven philosophy akin to the best productions we have for economics and the social sciences, such as Freakonomics Radio and Invisibilia. It is my hope that having a high-production story-driven show about philosophy will open up the field to lots of new people, as well as let existing fans of philosophy appreciate the way it connects with journalism, history, law, and nonfiction writing.

Links:

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CORRESPONDENCE:

DATE RECEIVED:

Hi Barry! (This is Kate.) You probably don't remember me. We went to university together - Professor Maddy's Set Theory and so many other classes. Can't wait to listen to your pod.

[fosseriot](#)

Hi Kate, of course I remember you! Do you still have that Continuum Hypothesis tattoo? Find me and get in touch, it'd be great to catch up! https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/hi-phi-nation/id1190204515?mt=2

What advice would you give someone who wants to make philosophy interesting to people who aren't otherwise interested in philosophy? I'm doing a PhD in philosophy at the moment, and there are many times when *even I* am bored by someone else's work. In fact, it happens more often than I am willing to admit! What hope, then, is there for making philosophy interesting to people not interested in it? We hear a lot about "how the world needs more philosophy these days!" but I doubt relying on the "intrinsic value" of philosophy to capture the minds of the people who need it will work. What sorts of strategies would you recommend employing in order to get uninterested people interested?

voltimand

This is a great question. The entire first season of Hi-Phi Nation is the best I could possibly do to answer your question. I was just like you, for years, and it took until after tenure for me to think hard about what I was in a position to contribute to addressing this problem.

What I became convinced of was the power of audio narrative storytelling, the kind that is bringing millions of people to the brain and psychological sciences and economics (Invisibilia, Freakonomics Radio, Revisionist History, TED Radio Hour). I decided that I was going to use that power in the service of philosophy. I think Matthew Crawford did it masterfully in Shopclass as Soulcraft, where he integrated so much 19th and 20th century marxism and existentialism with a narrative about white-collar versus blue-collar work.

The science of human attention, although in its infancy, suggests a lot of empirical evidence for the idea that the people who find pleasure and appreciate the logic of argumentative structure and thinking in abstraction for their own sake is always going to be small. It is much smaller than something humans all seem to share universally, which is appreciating a good narrative about something happening to someone. For better or worse, that's humanity. Why not take this fact and use it in the service of philosophical thinking? Its not something that we're trained to do in graduate school.

I know this isn't something everyone will be able to do, but I do think that as someone getting a PhD in philosophy with these concerns, there are smaller things. For one, stay broad, even as you specialize. And try to keep thinking, no matter how tenuous, about how all of the technical, specialized work you do hangs together with the broader stuff. Don't commit to any "big picture" views with any kind of confidence, but don't dismiss them as for fuzzy generalists either.

Hi Barry, thanks for coming!

I was wondering how you decide the topics and stories for the episodes. Do you decide that you want to so philosophy of religion, and then find a suitable story like the one in "The Name of God"? Or the other way around, and find suitable philosophical lessons to learn from interesting stories? Both? Neither?

Thanks again for joining us!

ADefiniteDescription

Sometimes, the story comes first, and I have to decide on what pieces of philosophy I want to do around that particular story. This is true with "The Name of God", "The Ashes of Truth", and "The Cops of Pop." These were stories of opportunity I couldn't pass up, but then had to think about what I wanted to say and present about them. More often though, I think about what philosophical questions I want to investigate/think it is important and that people will find interesting, and I try to reverse engineer to try

and find the right story that raises the right questions. "The Wishes of the Dead" is the perfect example of this. I'd really like listeners and just curious people out there to come across either story first or philosophy first and pitch it to me.

Is it important that philosophers whose work deals with scientific issues have a background in the field they're discussing? For instance, can a philosopher of science effectively comment on artificial intelligence without understanding computer science?

mindfulspirals

I asked the philosopher Jeff McMahan whether it was important to know a lot about war in order to work on the ethics of killing in war. He told me "no", but nonetheless he reads a lot about the history of war because its important to him!

I take the lesson to be that it really depends on the philosophy you're doing, who you want the issues to affect, and how curious you are. If its really important to the philosophy you're doing that certain empirical claims be true, or certain methods be assumed to be the ones used in that science, then you should know about those claims and methods. If you're doing the kind of philosophy where "AI" is just a placeholder, just like "killing in war" is just a placeholder for killing people, and really you're concerned with principles of killing, then you can do good philosophy without knowing the details of the empirical science, just like there is good philosophy on war without knowing the details of certain battles. But, you may end up operating at a level of abstraction that may be foreign to the practitioners of the field, and they will ignore you.

So in short, I'd say, its always better to be more curious than less, think hard about whether you want to be in a helpful dialogue with the practitioners of the science you're writing about, but after that, it is possible to do good philosophy without full specializing in a science.

/u/domhwilliams asked in the announcement thread:

Hello, I'd be interested in hearing any thoughts you have on intelligence in relation with multiple intelligences. Is the idea of intelligence much more complex than a set of categories or can it be easily defined?

TheGrammarBolshevik

All of the folk concepts we have characterizing other minds, like "kind" or "courageous" or "intelligence" are likely to be latching onto something, but then getting it quite wrong in the details. The same is true of all our folk concepts about other things in the world, like "animal" or "movement." So the short answer is that the idea of intelligence has to be more complex than we all intuitively think. All of the scientific hypotheses, of which "multiple intelligence" is one, are attempts at trying to get things right in the details. And like a lot of theories in the psychological sciences, its just not clear. The theories that motivated the claim that different children have different "learning styles" doesn't quite hold up to some tests, seems to have success in others, and more often than not the effect sizes just aren't large enough to warrant changes in educational policy. The idea that there are different kinds of "intelligences" borders on truism (of course some people calculate better than dance, while others dance better). If multiple intelligences is just a placeholder for whatever explains differences in performance, then its just true. Its really hard in the psychological sciences to formulate precise testable claims and then get large, stable effects from the testing.

/u/quoderatdemonstranda asked in the announcement thread:

Barry,

Many of your podcasts have involved members of the military and subjects related to their operations. In relation to this, I hardly ever hear anything more than a cursory comment or two in philosophy podcasts, and philosophical discourse in general. I really appreciate that you have chosen to include these topics and individuals in your projects, but wonder why you do. Did you serve in the military? If not, what attracted you to this topic?

TheGrammarBolshevik

Hi-Phi Nation started as an idea while I was sitting in a room at West Point listening to officers returning from the wars talking about just war theory and philosophy. I was taken it by how much passion these soldiers had for a subject I had taken for granted as being relatively removed from the actual experiences of decisionmaking in killing, dying, and war. This was 5 years ago now. Since then, I have not ceased to be amazed by how much I've learned about philosophy from being around members of the military.

I've never served, but having come to know a lot of subjects of those episodes, and having spent more time with Army soldiers, I have come to many lessons about philosophy. There are certain cultural, political, and social institutions where the philosophical assumptions about justice and moral conduct are sophisticated, explicitly stated, taught, frequently challenged, and are more impactful on history that any other. The military is one of them, and I wish more people would think and engage with the philosophy coming out of it. Almost every culture has associated with it institutions of professionalized violence; it is the one right we've abdicated almost completely to the state in the West, and the people inside of those institutions are knowledgeable about the repercussions of this for issues in political philosophy and ethics. The issues should be as central as many others in philosophy.

As someone who considers themselves a philosopher of language, Ferdinand De Saussure's Course in General Linguistics has been a huge influence on me. What are your thoughts about Saussure and the sign-signifier relationship?

exelion18120

Surprising, De Saussure's work does not play much of a role in the philosophy of language. The field begins rather with Frege's distinction between sense and reference, and Frege's distinction between signs, senses, referents, and ideas. This is the starting point in what I teach as well.

Hi Barry! I know a lot about the podcast at this point. Now I find myself wondering the following:

- what topics do you plan to cover in the future?
- how would you compare the costs/benefits of academic philosophy with more story-driven philosophy?
- what did you work on before Hi-Phi Nation?

byrd_nick

Hi Nick! I'm still mapping out the terrain in Season Two, but I do want to make one more episode about music, and one more about art. Those episodes are really fun and fun to learn about. I have a lot of tape about moral responsibility, free will skepticism, and the criminal law, and would like to pursue episodes about that. I will also probably cover Kieran Setiya's newer work on stage-of-life crises, revenge, and who knows what else! I also have tape about the philosophy of mathematics, and I've take up the challenge to find a good story relating to mathematical realism!

Realistically speaking, academic philosophy is surprisingly the safer bet for all of you younger scholars and graduate students. The incentive system in academia is still completely skewed toward spinning

the peer-reviewed publication wheelhouse, APA statements notwithstanding. You'll get more career advancement, more prestige, and more attention. Its up to people who are taking a big risk in trying to make something different to try and do something with story-driven philosophy, which quite frankly doesn't really exist, at least not until now. I'm willing to take that risk, but I'm also in a better position to do it, being a tenured person at a liberal arts college. The benefits are very different; orders of magnitude more people pay attention to the work and appreciate it, but there is no pay day, no promotions, no career advancement, no jobs in this area, and the online criticism can be annoying, although so can academic criticism if you think about it.

Right before Hi-Phi Nation I was working for years on a paper on higher-order mutual knowledge and common knowledge and the pragmatics of communication. I also have a 10-year old paper on relative truth that was never completed. Could you imagine?!

Hello! How do you feel about "armchair philosophers", people that are untrained in philosophy, but try to grapple with its concepts anyway? Do you think these people should focus more on learning what professional philosophers have said/say, or is there value in trying to find your own conclusions from scratch?

ideahaver

More power to you. You aren't trying to make a living publishing or teaching philosophy, so do what you want to get wiser! I think you will find though that reading philosophers, especially the classics like Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Rousseau, will be a lot more enlightening and will really advance your own thinking much more quickly than going it alone.

thanks for creating HiPhiNation and for working hard to connect philosophy to everyday questions. i'm truly grateful. i'm gonna be the person that asks Steve Albini about how he builds the speakers. i'm working on building a podcast like S-Town about a "failed" intentional sustainable community. it will incorporate environmental values, nature writing, oral history, interpersonal conflict, environmental politics, and stuff. i'm wondering if you could give recommendations for technology. what's the best way to record? what kind of microphone? how do you store the information? what's the best editing software? how do you organize your projects? can you outline the nittygritty on the production side so that I don't have to fumble my way in?

JamesMatthiasDow

Most of my interviews are done with two AT 8035 mics plugged into a Zoom H5. That's my mobile gear. I use two tabletop mic stands and shock mounts. This way all of my interviews are on separate tracks for easier editing. In my home/office studio, I use the Shure SM7B plugged into a Mackie ProFX. I record and edit using Hindenburg Journalist Pro and store things on a portable HD, backed up onto Google Drive. I like Hindenburg for its simplicity; ProTools, Adobe Audition are much more powerful, but overkill. I use ExpressScribe for transcription.

1) What's your opinion on Neil DeGrasse Tyson's statement that "philosophy is dead"? 2) Would you rather fight 100 duck-sized horses or 1 horse-sized duck? 3) Will you make an episode on justice/mob justice and law and so on? 4) What are your recommendations for amateur philosophers, who don't have or plan om having any formal academic training (books to read, podcasts to listen to and so on)?

Edit:added 2 questions

TheBatz_

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Besides Hi-Phi Nation, I recommend Philosophy Bites, History of Philosophy without Any Gaps as academically strong podcasts.

I have a lot of plans to look at justice and moral responsibility next season, not quite sure about mob justice but there have been many pitches about that.

In the process of trying to reach out to people in different countries as part of publicizing the podcast, I've come to learn that philosophy really is dead, in many places in the world outside of the industrialized West. It some intellectual areas in the West it is dying, in others it is rapidly growing. What is definitely true is that it is a real struggle in the US to get it on the radar of the pop-academic media (public radio, public television, TED, publishing), better in UK and Australia.

I hope it isn't dead or dying. History doesn't shine a nice light on cultures in which their philosophical thinking is dead or dying.

My own philosophical work has been in epistemology and the philosophy of language, particularly on the nature of epistemic rationality

Have you read the Book "Stories of your Life and others" by Ted Chiang? If you haven't you might have seen the movie "Arrival" which is based on one of the stories in the book.

So, what are your thoughts about language influencing or shaping the mind apparatus? Of course language evolves alongside a species, but what if an entirely different language was taught to us?

In the story, the language that is taught to humanity is a "non-linear" one and the existence of such a language kind of feels like a real possibility that's just too strange to grasp.

Would you agree that a language so different from ours would be able to alter thinking in such a drastic way that we could "skip" the thinking part and jump straight to understanding the everything on a higher level or do you think -thought- has to come first and if it really was that different of a language, it wouldn't be of any use to us with our current understanding?

[Ommmmmmmmmmmmmm](#)

I am not a big believer in the hypothesis that the structure of the language you speak has a big enough impact on the mind that two people of different languages cannot think the same content. Its really hard to test this hypothesis.

First, you need to determine whether two people really are incapable of sharing the same thought. That's hard. Secondly, usually cultures that contain large enough difference linguistically are also very far apart culturally and very far apart geographically. So even if you do determine that two people of two languages cannot share a certain thought, is that due to the language or the many other factors that could be responsible?

Hi Barry! What people inspired you to learn philosophy? Moreover, do you believe in god? If not, why? I thank you in advance should you answer.

[oasis_45](#)

I went college not knowing what I wanted to learn, but I did know I wanted to be some sort of humanities guy. I double majored in English, which I became disillusioned with halfway through college. That was around the time I probably became an atheist too. In college, I was taken in by the fact that philosophy had some pretty clear standards for what constituted good thinking and writing, and that those standards were challenging. I was also very much taken in with epistemological questions about how we know particularly things.

I didn't have an "aha" moment that led me away from a belief in God. My childhood religion was Evangelical Christianity, through a great-aunt who came to the faith in China probably as a result of missionaries in the early 20th century. Looking back, the foundation of my faith was built on threat and fear, of hell, demons, damnation, things I took quite literally, and which I succumbed to quite quickly as a child. This probably isn't a very good foundation for faith, because I just gradually grew out of it.

I'm a self-taught philosopher who seems mostly at home with the different areas of existentialism. How important is it to work through the classics? Any suggestions about doing so?

[twoVices](#)

I'm not an expert on existentialism, but I am a big believer that there is value to working through the classics, with help, especially with all the great free podcasts and courses that are out there now. The Partially Examined Life, Philosophize This! are discussion and lecture shows that aim to guide people through this stuff. Look at them as the discussion group you wish you had, listen to episodes linked to books you want to read (if they exist) first, and then try reading afterward.

Even though you've been disillusioned with English as a subject, do you have a favorite work of fiction? Also, would you consider doing an episode on waste?

[crabrawler](#)

Waste, as in garbage, or as in wasting your life? That sounds interesting. Tell me more. My favorite novel of all time is One Hundred Years of Solitude. That hardly makes me unique!

Hi Barry! Also a Barry, so I know you know all the words that rhyme with Barry too. Please gimme a second to compliment you before asking anything. I just graduated college with an English degree, so I've only looked at philosophy through the lens of stories and human history, which is to say not a whole lot. But as I'm arms-and-elbowsing my way into it post college, I found your podcast through KCRW's Here There Be Monsters and blazed through all of it in two days. The style and presentation of your podcast was perfect for where I'm at with philosophy and how I've absorbed information through podcasts so far. You do such a wonderful job of contextualizing and then expanding the ideas you want to kick around, until they're juuuuuust weighty enough to dissect with the latter half of each episode. I think you have one of the best podcasts out there and I truly hope you can make more. You're so good at it !

Okay anyway, I wanted to ask about your episode on the wishes of the dead and wealth redistribution. So much wealth inequality is tied up in people's ability to hoard wealth for their future family's benefit, and if done right so the brats don't blow it all, and if they use the step-up to do the same for their posterity, it seems like this cycle can happen and has happened ad infinitum. Is the concept of a will and the concept of your family's worth over other family's worth the thing that's creating this money bubble in the upper echelons? Is capitalism still capitalism if laws regarding wills were changed? Your episode just made me think that priming the will to distribute excess wealth into a citizen's fund, like a country wide trust fund, could start deflating that bubble quite well. Sorry for any mistakes, I'm on mobile !

[Nonplussest](#)

Thanks for finding and listening to every episode! What you just mentioned has another name, the Estate Tax, and its been rolled back more and more since the 2000s. A progressive Estate Tax is one way to redistribute money upon death, but there are others. I mention them in the bonus content for that episode on the website. I actually don't think this form of redistribution is incompatible with

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capitalism. Its true that capitalism has at its root the idea of property rights, but property rights can be transferred and dissolved. What are the conditions of its dissolution? With death comes the dissolution of a lot of other rights that a person has, in fact many of them. Why isn't the right to control of wealth dissolved?

What's your thinking at the moment on including or omitting explicit references to philosophers in the podcast? I found it interesting that, if I recall correctly, in your inaugural episode you opted to explicitly reference the relevant philosophers' names whereas in episode four ("The Name of God") you went without mentioning Saul Kripke by name, even though he was clearly relevant enough to the topic that you included Naming and Necessity in that episode's book list. I really enjoyed the dynamic of the first episode where the story of the first half was segued into an introduction to the relevant philosopher, but perhaps foregrounding the story itself through the entire episode makes for a more "listenable" podcast.

[dwgill](#)

Its a tough call, and its sometimes an aesthetic call rather than a rational one. Even in academic philosophy, we don't cite things the way psychologists do. There's a joke going around that if you write "Some people have fingers" in a psych article, it'd be followed with (Smith, et al 1994). In "The Name of God", I felt there was such an abundance of naming and academic content surrounding the theological issues that I was going to use the philosophical portion for the ideas alone. But also, in the other episodes, I had other voices, often the voices of the philosophers themselves, talking about the issues, so mentioning their names and the names they already mention was almost mandatory.

I teach undergraduate philosophy in India. I want to introduce kids in school to philosophy. How do I go about doing that? Thanks

[redryder749](#)

Jana Mohr Lone at the University of Washington is the person to look up and contact. There is an organization here in the US called PLATO that specializes in this. Look up their website for resources. http://www.plato-philosophy.org. Jana can point you to more resources online for free.

I have several broad questions that I would be curious to hear about from your perspective as a professional academic philosopher:

Who are some current philosophers whose work you find interesting, compelling, or innovative? Are there any contemporaries in philosophy who you might want to engage in debate/discourse with eventually?

What are some of the 'cutting edge' ideas/debates currently taking place in philosophy departments? On what matters do you find the most diversity amongst academic philosophers?

Have any phenomena (events, perhaps political, or global) challenged your work, or made you feel like you needed to reexamine some aspects of it?

And now, a question of personal interest:

Your podcasts seem to find a way to make philosophy accessible and engaging through narratives. I am wondering–as someone who was initially drawn to study philosophy by the obscure, challenging narratives of writers such as Deleuze and Heidegger who often require their readers become acquainted with certain other referential texts–what is your opinion on this sort of 'hands on' or DIY

'allure' in approaching philosophy hermeneutically?

Finally, my shameless plug: What are your thoughts on the speculative realist movement? That school of philosophy, particularly Graham Harman's work on object-oriented ontology, I have found particularly compelling.

Neoredditalism

I only have time to respond to some of this, so apologies. The work I find most interesting, timely, and impactful right now is the work on moral and criminal responsibility that is emerging from philosophy, neuroscience, and law. I think we are coming close to an impactful breakthrough about whether backwards looking or retributive conceptions of justice and criminal punishment are right, or if they rest on a conceptual or empirical mistake. There are repercussions.

Hey Barry! I loved the first season of Hi-Phi nation. Are you a teacher and if so, do you use podcasts in your teaching (either as material or production assignments)? As a first-time podcaster, how did you prove your legitimacy to the people you requested interviews from? What is your favorite philosophy podcast besides yours?

a_curious_koala

I have used some podcasts in the past before I started producing them, but not much. I intend to start using Hi-Phi Nation along with other podcasts in the fall and from now on. I would recommend using them accompanied by an article that allows the students to see what an in-depth discussion looks like. For instance, my two episodes on the philosophy of war together with an article from Jeff McMahan or Helen Frowe, or "The Wishes of the Dead" together with Feinberg or Levenbooks articles on posthumous harm.

As for proving legitimacy, I think being a professor already gives you some kind of legitimacy so that people know that you're serious. Surprisingly, I would guess that more philosophers have turned me down than subjects of stories, maybe because they don't find talking on a podcast a high priority, or just scheduling issues. But I describe to people the format of the show, and now I have some samples to point them to; that is usually enough.

I will have to say Philosophy Bites is the other podcast I think is great. As far as interview podcasts about philosophy goes, I'd say they're the gold standard. But I think everyone is doing it well in their own genre.

Have you ever changed your mind in a fundamental way after interviewing people / researching a topic in preparation for a program?

parautilitarian

Absolutely I have changed my mind about many fundamental issues. I started being very convinced of Jeff McMahan's revisionist just war theory, the topic of Episode 3. After meeting and speaking with Major Ian Fishback for many hours, I came away convinced that classical just war theory has a very important mitigating effect on unjust conduct in war, and that such effects can play a role in evaluating the status of a moral theory. This was not a view I've ever had before. I was always a hardcore evidentialist in philosophy; meaning the quality of an argument and evidence for a view is the only thing that plays in its acceptance. I'm not so sure that is true anymore with regards to acceptance of moral theories.

I was in your cog sci seminar at Vassar many many years ago. Can't wait to listen to your podcast!

plumeria9

Was I a good professor? Fair to middling?

/u/iunoionnis asked in the announcement thread:

It's very interesting to see that you do work on the issue of respecting wishes of the dead. I recently developed an interest in this topic, posted a thread on /r/ askphilosophy a while back about it, and plan to write a paper on the topic sometime in the future. https://www.reddit.com/r/askphilosophy/comments/5ivjya/ethics_of_respecting_the_wishes_of_the_dead/

My specific interest is the conflict between the living and the dead. Sophocles explores this in *Antigone*, where the civic law governing mortals comes into conflict with the divine and family law governing the burial of the dead. Hegel, especially, takes up this issue, developing it into a clash of two rights.

Some questions I have on this topic are:

(1) In our secular society, can we still understand the dead exerting their will over the living? Do we still have a moral obligation towards the dead in a society without gods or God? Can mere respect for the dead ground religious notions, such as piety, in our secular society? If even the most atheist liberal finds disrupting native American burial grounds immoral, does this mean that burial rites still involve some notion of secular piety?

(2) In what cases is one justified in violating the ethics or laws governing the living to respect the wishes of the dead? Or better, in what cases do these laws come into irresolvable conflict? I have in mind here, not only *Antigone*, but a story from rock and roll history where friends of the singer Gram Parsons stole his body and carried it to California to carry out his death wishes. When do the wills of the living and the dead come into conflict?

(3) Finally, what is the relationship between respect for the dead and the explicit wishes of such person? Because it seems there are at least conceivable cases where one would violate the wishes of dead *out of respect* for the dead (e.g. someone goes mad before dying, for example, and wishes something horrible be done after their death, but you wish for them to be remembered as they were before their illness, etc.) Do we have duties towards the dead besides a duty to carry out their express wishes?

Thank you!

TheGrammarBolshevik

I don't believe there is any literal sense in which the dead exert their will over the living. Rather, some feeling of moral obligation makes the living exercise the will of the dead on the living. We're doing it to each other. Whether we are justified in doing this is the central question of Episode 1, and my answer in that episode, which I still believe, is that we are not justified in doing this when all things considered, it is better for the living that we not do so. So for instance, if it is really important to a dead person to give all of their money to cure a very rare disease that affects 1 in a billion people, but meanwhile that same amount can be spent to save a billion people, and no one living shares this interest or value, then it is wrong to execute the dead person's wishes.

Oftentimes I think people are identifying with the interests of the dead, making it their own interests because they believe those interests are for the best. If it was important to my father that his book get published after his death, and it is important to me that his book gets published, then it becomes my interest, not just his. What if publishing it comes at a very high cost to me? In that case, I would say it is

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not different than any conflicts of interests between the living, there's no universal answer as to how to address them. But if I have absolutely no interest in his book getting published (and neither doesn't anyone else, say, its a racist book), and it comes at a very high cost to me, I would say I have no obligation to publish his book.

There are a lot of issues that arise in the kind of cases you mention when we accept that there is an obligation to the wishes of the dead. People's wishes change over time during their lifetime, especially toward the end of life. So we have to fix a moment when the living person's wishes count as the wishes people in the future must execute, and this can have all kinds of strange consequences. We do not justifiably charge a later person with harming their previous self for not satisfying the wishes of the earlier self. And why are some wishes to be satisfied, but not others, like if a an art patron decides that a museum wing must house Dutch art, but not a racist who wishes that their money go to a segregated swimming pool.

Is philosophy dead, or is it merely resting in an age of positivism and materialism?

Have you thought about the future nature of philosophy stemming from an age apparently uninterested in deeper, existential questions beyond "Does Neil Tyson think this film is scientifically accurate" or "I can't wait for the next iPhone"?

alcoholictrashpanda

I think philosophy like a lot of other things in the past 15 years has become segregated from the rest of the culture, at least in America. My sense is that it is a little better elsewhere. Enough people are interested in these deeper questions that it is fueling demand, but it is not growing quickly enough compared to economics or the brain sciences. I know at my own institution, enrollments have gone down, but I have heard that at certain select institutions, it has gone up.

If I had to speculate, I would say that the bar is set a lot higher nowadays for just about everything to be of high quality, and that includes the popularizing of philosophy. If we want philosophy to come alive again, we have to do a really good job of representing it well. Philosophy is one of these areas, like maybe poetry or certain ethnic foods, and unlike science, that if someone has one bad experience, they automatically say "oh I hate Brazilian food." They then generalize for life, and don't feel like they're missing out, because there's already really good Italian or Mexican food around them. So its really important for people who are in a position to share philosophy, that are passionate about it, to present it at its best. Its a moral obligation. I feel this way about food too.

What would the philosophers of the past think about our current status in the world today?, would the philosophers of the future think our current issues will be trivial as we do with some issues of the past?

HalfandHoff

I really admire how much current philosophers, or intellectuals of any stripe, can mine the thinking of the past for inspiration. Philosophers of the 19th century that I learned nothing about in college and grad school all of a sudden become heroes again. Sidgwick is a great example here. Carnap was a merely historical figure when I was in college. People have been reviving his ideas for the past 10 years. I think this is a big motivation for why philosophers like to work on topics that seem to be "removed" from the experiences of daily life and news cycles; if the issues you work on have some kind of necessity, then it can last beyond the contingencies of the day. But today finding out those necessary truths is becoming more and more specialized and technical, and so will seem trivial to others.

I'm not one to pass judgments of value on the work of other philosophers in public; of course I have

opinions about what is and is not worthwhile, but I have no confidence about how far these opinions extend. Too much epistemology, just too skeptical.

What's your view on free will/determinism?

commanderzilyana

I'm not a verificationist, but I really want to know what empirical consequences are suppose to differentiate compatibilist free will views with deterministic views, and for that matter libertarianism. What are we supposed to see or feel about human behavior that is supposed to show us that free will exists, or doesn't? When one scientist proposes that its a certain reading on an EEG, or a certain color pattern in a brain scan, they at least are trying to test out a theory. I think we have reason to be cautious about those theories, but they're a start. I don't know what testing a theory amounts to anymore in the philosophy of this area that doesn't look like apologetics for ordinary practices of retribution, practices that I think are very much open for criticism even if you do believe there is free will. My opinion is, the conceptual possibility of free will might end up being an open question, but I think two centuries of scientific understanding shows that at the very least, people have a lot less free will than our folk psychology attributes.

As a student who has been exposed somewhat to philosophy, is Hobbes' or Rousseau's model of government better to run a state in your opinion, Sir?

AmmadSiddiqi1234

I think of Rousseau as Hobbes who is not pessimistic about democracy. Both want to hand over individual rights, particular rights to enforce, and autonomy, to the state. Its just that Hobbes didn't see democracy as being a stable form of government. Both are rather totalitarian in their own way. One to monarchy, the other to democracy.

Hi Barry, I'll be sure to check out your podcast!

I listened to panpsycast (which I also discovered through this subreddit), but then I got increasingly frustrated when they discussed various classical philosophers. To be clear, it wasn't the podcasters' fault; it's just many of these philosophers had views so ridiculously wrong (given what we know today) that I don't see any value for myself in studying their views.

For instance, I enjoyed reading Peter Singer's book on ethics. His views are well-informed, and even if I don't agree with everything, I can easily imagine a reasonable person holding these views.

On the other hand, Aristotle's notion that everything has to have a purpose, or Anselm "proof" of existence of God, can only be excused by the fact that those people lived a long time ago, when the humanity wasn't good at logic and didn't know about evolution. Today, I consider these views as plainly misguided.

I understand that it may be philosophers' job to study the influential thinkers of the past, but... Do you see where I am coming from? Is there a place in philosophical studies for people like me who are only interested in modern philosophy and not in the outdated, even if influential, views?

eizahphu

If you enjoy reading contemporary thinkers, by all means focus purely on contemporary thinkers. A lot of professional philosophers do just that! If you would like to give the classical thinkers a try but keep getting frustrating, try reorienting your relationship with their ideas. Try to evaluate a text not on

the WINNOWER

I AM BARRY LAM, HOST OF PHILOSOPHY PODCAST HI-PHI NATION. ASK ME ANYTHING ABOUT
PHILOSOPHY AND CREATING PODCASTS. : **REDDIT**

whether you think their views are true or false, convincing or unconvincing, but think of what and how
they're arguing as a window into one path human thinking has taken and can take, and assume that
the path is convincing to some people. Then try to uncover what you think you can learn about human
thinking from this fact.

Hi Barry. What's your studio set up like? What mics do you use, mixer, even headphones. What about
editing? What software do you use. Thanks. I thought I'd ask a different type of question

killerfrown

See my response to JamesMatthiasDowd above.

Hey, how could you have published the 'Cops of Pop' podcast without talking to Greg Gillis of Girl
Talk? There's no comparison between him and anyone else who has ever made a mashup. Sure DJ
Earworm is good, but it's just not even close. Did you try and get in touch with him and he didn't want
to talk or what?

Marxshmarx

Agreed, should have talked to him. I went to him. His people turned down my request.

Do you do your own audio editing/engineering or have help there? I am curious about
hardware/software (looks like you use AA) and how you get started re: distribution.

bad_apiarist

I've already answered above regarding hardware and software. But for distribution, I'd give my plug to
the people over at Pippa. They're at (pippa.io). They are a team of former philosophers now entering
the podcast-hosting and distribution business, and they're services and analytics are amazing!

Hey Barry, I have a question which 'grinds my gears' for a while now. Do you think that the media
representation of drugs affects the the public discourse and the legislation regarding illegal substances,
or vice versa? Egg or hen question. Thanks!

bpMillenial

Media representation of anything affects public discourse about it. Legislation of anything comes with
official propaganda. My own view, as an American and citizen, as there is nothing philosophical here, is
that the drug war in its current bizarre form is a remnant of the baby-boomer culture wars, and that
when we get passed the boomer generation in control of many of our institutions, we will see much
more sane drug policies and reasonable evidence-based assessment of individual substances. We are
well on our way there, state by state. Jeff Sessions is a hiccup.