

Should Every Christian be a Philosopher?

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Philosophy

Greek: philo-sophia = love of wisdom

Philosophy is the process of examining the foundations of everything we believe and everything we do.

It is important to examine and test the foundations we have inherited.

(1) We need wisdom

Prov 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction

Prov 1:20,33 Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. . . . “those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.”

Prov 29:3 Whoever loves wisdom brings joy to his (or her) father

(2) We are commanded to seek wisdom

Mark 12:30 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

1 Peter 3:15 always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you

(3) We are offered wisdom freely

Jn 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth

James 1:5 If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

Col 2:2–3 I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

What can be known?

Is there any truth that we can be absolutely certain of?

Rene Descartes (1596–1650)

Philosopher, mathematician, scientist.

Two important works:

- *Discourse on the Method* (1637)
- *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641)

The method

Cast doubt on everything which can be doubted.

Anything which has the least suspicion of doubt should be treated as absolutely false.

Begin with the foundations: once the foundations of a building have been undermined, the rest collapses.

- Senses
 - Unreliable and can deceive
 - Dreams and hallucinations give false sense data
- Arithmetic and geometry
 - Chains of reasoning depend on memory: not reliable

What Remains?

Does anything at all remain among all these doubts?

- I have a lot of doubts!
- Doubt is a thought
- I am a thing which thinks
- Therefore: I know for certain that I exist

Summary: *I think therefore I am*

What Remains?

I am a “thing that thinks”, a thing that:

1. **Doubts** almost everything
2. **Understands** a few things
3. **Affirms** some things
4. **Denies** other things
5. **Wants** to know more
6. **Imagines** many things
7. **Is aware of** other things that seem to come from my senses

Certain Truths

So we have two absolutely certain truths so far:

(1) I exist.

(2) I have a lot of doubts: I lack knowledge.

Therefore we can deduce:

(3) I am not perfect!

God

I did not create myself: otherwise I would not lack knowledge.

I cannot even preserve my existence from one moment to the next.

So I depend for my existence on another being.

If this being is also imperfect, then it in turn requires a creator.

The end of this chain of creation (however long or short) must be a being which has many perfections

God

The Creator must be:

- infinite
- eternal
- unchangeable
- independent
- supremely intelligent
- supremely powerful

This Creator we call God.

Therefore:

(4) God exists.

God

Given that God exists, it is impossible that God should deceive me. Although God is *able* to deceive me, He does not *want* to deceive me, since that would be malicious.

Therefore, my vivid and distinct perceptions of an external world, and of other people, must be reliable indications of the existence of this world.

Although there is much doubt and uncertainty about the properties of bodies in the world, I can be sure that I can reach the truth about them: because God is not a deceiver, and has given me the ability to correct errors.

Conclusion

There *are* truths about which we can be absolutely certain.

1. I exist
2. God exists
3. The world exists

Note: we can only be sure that the world exists because we already know that God exists.

Conclusion

At the end of the Third Meditation, Descartes writes:

I want to pause here and spend some time contemplating God; to reflect on his attributes and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light