

LECTURE 1.1 – WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

This being the introductory week for the course, and for those of you who may be taking a college-level philosophy class for the 1st time, it is a good idea to begin with the most basic: the origin (or **etymology**) of the word “philosophy.” So, our 1st e-lecture is on this issue. Please read on and learn about the origin of the word “philosophy” and get to know the philosopher who 1st referred to himself as a “**philosopher**.”

ETYMOLOGY (origin) of the WORD “PHILOSOPHY:

Let us talk about the **origin of the word “philosophy.”** The word “philosophy” has its origin from 2 Greek words. The 1st is “**philein**” which is an infinitive verb that means “**to love.**” From “**philein**,” ‘**phile**’ is derived which means “**love.**” The 2nd word is “**sophia**” which means “**wisdom.**” So, putting these 2 Greek words together (**phile + sophia**), we have “**philosophia**” which means “**love of wisdom.**” **A philosopher therefore literally means a lover of wisdom.**

The Greek philosopher (and more popularly known as mathematician) **PYTHAGORAS** was the first to call himself a philosopher, even though there were already other people at that time doing philosophy but they were not yet referred to as philosophers. It was Pythagoras who first officially referred to himself as a philosopher.

The STORY TOLD by PYTHAGORAS:

There is a **story** as to how Pythagoras came to refer to himself as a philosopher. Let me tell you that story.

In the place (city/state/town) in which Pythagoras resided, there was a king/ruler. This king was concerned with being wise. He thought that he would be a better king/ruler if he acquires wisdom. So, he ordered his staff to go around the place, talk to the people, and find out from the people who they consider to be wise. The people they talked to pointed them to Pythagoras. The people consider Pythagoras, probably because of his mathematical skill, to be the wisest. So, they went to Pythagoras, and took Pythagoras with them to present him to the king.

When the King met Pythagoras, he (the King) explained to Pythagoras his intention. He (the King) told Pythagoras that he (the King) wants to be wise and since the people considered Pythagoras to be the wisest among them, that maybe Pythagoras can teach him (the King) how to be wise. The King asked Pythagoras: “Can you teach me how to be wise?”

Upon learning of the intention of the King, Pythagoras answered the King by saying: “I am sorry but I cannot teach you how to be wise.” The King couldn’t believe what Pythagoras said, so the

King asked: “But why not? Aren’t you supposed to be the wisest (i.e., a **sophos, meaning one who has wisdom**)? Isn’t that how people regarded you?”

Pythagoras answered: “**I am not a Sophos. I am only a “philosopho.”** (NOTE: Pythagoras is saying: I am not someone who has wisdom. I am **only/merely** a philosopher.)

That was the very first time the word “**philosopher**” was uttered, so naturally the King had to ask: “**What do you mean by a philosopher?**”

PYTHAGORAS’ METAPHOR:

To answer the King’s question (**What do you mean by a philosopher?**), Pythagoras told the King a **metaphorical story**. It goes like this – “Imagine a room. Imagine that its doors and windows are all close. Imagine that inside the room, you will find gods and goddesses. Imagine, outside the room, standing at the door, there is a human being. This human being knocks at the door. Someone inside, a god or a goddess opens the door just a tiny bit, just enough to see who is knocking. And upon seeing that the one who is knocking is only a human being (neither a god nor a goddess), the door is shut closed. The person knocks again, and again, and the result is the same, that is, the door is opened just a tiny bit, just enough to see who is knocking, and upon seeing that it is only a human being, the door is shut closed.”

After telling this metaphorical story, Pythagoras turned to the King ready to answer the King’s question.

According to Pythagoras (based on the metaphorical story) the philosopher is like that human being who is constantly knocking at the door.