

## Journal 1 re Philosophical Questions

Chapter one of “The Big Questions” by Kathleen Higgins focuses on more than just the basics of asking questions and providing simple facts and supporting details for arguments. It focuses on how to ask intellectual questions and it emphasizes that there should be more to an argument than a simple answer. There are statements that use deductive logic, which guarantee the truth of the conclusion if the premises are true. The premises would be the facts. An example of this would be, Sarah didn’t hit Robert because Jim did it. Sarah was not there that day and Jim was. The premises in this example would be that Robert didn’t do it, Jim did and that Sarah wasn’t there that day. Then there’s its counterpart, Inductive logic, which does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion, but makes it more reasonable for us to believe the conclusion. An example of this would be Jim has the same pair of shoes that an eyewitness said he saw, he’s also the same height, weight and color. He was last heard saying, I’m going to hurt him. This example points out that the guilty one here is Jim. Knowing these two types of arguments, one is able to figure out how to counteract or how to prepare for them.

Going further into the chapter there was one statement that stuck out to me. “Some people seem to think that a single example will serve as a complete argument, but, at most, a single example serves as *part* of an argument. Most inductive arguments require many examples, and they must deal with examples that *don’t* fit the hypothesis, too. Every argument is bound to meet up with several counter arguments and objections, so even a single argument is rarely enough to make one’s case.” (Page 19) One of the issues that we (students) have is that we will present an argument and just provide one fact and then we will repeat the issue and then move on. The quote means to go beyond minimal effort and provide information so we can counter some objections. One example of this would be to say that the ceiling would be better in red than in black. The supporting arguments could be that the surrounding walls are a lighter shade and that black would overwhelm the space. The new owners are not fond of dark colors and therefore they would like a lighter color. It could even go as far as stating a fact that 90% of people distinguish the color red as an attractive color. There are many ways to support this argument, but notice how it wasn’t only one way. All of the facts were truthful and they backed up my argument of why the ceiling should be red rather than black. Of course, this would work and probably have more meaning in an argument that is not about wall paintings and colors.

When we were in middle school, we learned that we needed to come up with the first topic to start out our paragraph, then provide three supporting facts to support that topic. Later on in high school, we learned that there could be more than three supporting facts and that the more that you had the better it could be. This chapter focuses on providing sufficient and informative facts not just random un-supporting facts. “When an argument is both valid and has true premises (a good argument, in other words), it is called a **sound** argument.” (Page 17) In other words, the topic and supporting facts can’t just be random words drawn together. An example that the book used is that “All P’s are Q’s, S is a P, Therefore, S is a Q.” (Page 16) If the premises on this statement are true then the whole basis and conclusion are true as well. Now an invalid argument could be that I am Hispanic, and we are brown, therefore you are Hispanic. The statement makes absolutely no sense and it has no basis to go on. It is just taking one sentence and adding a couple of words to make an invalid conclusion. Although the end result could be realistic, there are still no supporting premises that would make the sentence true. “A good deductive argument, then, has two essential features: 1. It is a valid argument, 2. Its premises are true.” (Page 17) Those are the requirements to thinking about life in a whole new perspective. By learning this, one can start thinking like a true philosopher.

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Questions often arise from an issue/problem and in order to solve the question, one must find an answer/solution. But in order to present a solution that might solve the problem, one must be able to step back and look at the big picture. This means looking at the problem as a whole in totality because as Higgins & Solomon (2010) suggests, “philosophy is, first of all, reflection. It is stepping back, listening to yourself and other people (including the great philosophers), and trying to understand and evaluate what it is that you hear, and what it is that you believe.” (page 5)

Looking at the big picture allows one to see where the top line is and where the bottom line is, allowing one to know its basis and foundation. It also allows one to take a stand because in knowing the different fragments that make up the big picture, one can decide what to believe in. By knowing the different fragments that make up the big picture, it allows one to know arguments for and arguments against. This is because when one looks at the big picture, one inevitably gains knowledge of the big question in its details and as a whole.

Whether it is empirical knowledge or priori knowledge, having knowledge of the question in totality paves the way in helping one’s concept to be succinct and articulate. Being articulate ultimately results in being able to “do philosophy in style” (page 13) because once one is able to crystalize a concept, the concept will be able to capture **the** moment and make a case in an alluring fashion as it will flow in a neat and orderly manner.

The subject of freedom, for example is often seen as a good thing. People often strive “to be free” and often go by the mantra “to live freely.” However, as asked by Higgins & Solomon, “Is freedom always a good thing?” (page 31) “The problem, as in question 14, is that we routinely speak so highly of “freedom,” without qualification and without any attempt to understand its meaning, that, when called upon to do so, we find ourselves simply insisting that “freedom is good.” (page 39)

“Freedom” is almost always used with a positive connotation because it is often looked at as a fragment of a picture and not as a whole. It turns out that as a whole, the word “freedom,” is only sometimes a good thing. The preposition that follows after the word “freedom” determines whether it is a good or bad thing. The book uses the phrase “freedom from many problems.” “Many problems” is a negative thing and the term “freedom from” is often used when one is trying to break away from something that is bad such as freedom from slavery. However, the term “freedom to” is often associated with positivity – the freedom to love, for example.

The issue of freedom is a clear example of how we don’t look at the big picture, we only see freedom as a good thing, as the book implies. However, if we look past the small fragment that we think we know freedom to only be and see the bigger picture, we see that in actual fact, the word “freedom,” is a double edged sword. This emphasizes the importance of one of the fundamentals of philosophy which is, “...first of all, reflection. It is stepping back, listening to yourself and other people (including the great philosophers), and trying to understand and evaluate what it is that you hear, and what it is that you believe.” (page 5)