

Introduction to Philosophy – What Does It All Really Mean?

Dear fellow philosophers,

Welcome! I'm so excited to welcome you all to the first issue of Introduction to Philosophy. This program will be a brief introduction to a selection of philosophical questions for those of you, who like me, are intrigued and obsessed with thinking about these problems- whether life has any meaning, and if so, what; whether we can really know anything; whether things could be objectively right or wrong; whether death is really the end; whether anything can exist, etc. I'm almost sure that most of you have wondered about at least one of these questions mentioned above some time in your life. If so, I encourage and invite you to join our philosophical club and we can ponder these questions together! I truly believe that every human being is a natural philosopher at heart. Who wouldn't be curious about all of these wonderful phenomena that govern the world and our beings? As someone who has spent most of her life wondering about all of these seemingly daunting and impossible questions, I certainly don't have all the answers figured out (and I shouldn't)! That to me, is both the beauty and essence of philosophy. The object of thinking about philosophical questions shouldn't come from a place of trying to find THE answer, but rather to think about the world in a new light and along the way, discover new things about the world, yourself, and one another. All of that being said, there are simply too many philosophical questions for us to tackle in one program and also beyond my current knowledge to dive into them. So for the first issue of Introduction to Philosophy, we will be focusing on surveying the following selection:

1. **Free Will**
2. **The Basis of Morality**
3. **The Nature of Death**
4. **The Meaning of Life**

Each chapter will be followed by a few discussion questions to encourage and help you think further about the topics.

Lastly, my hope is not for us to come up with right or wrong answers, but rather to encourage one another to start to or continue to think about these topics in new ways. As my mentor once told me, "the best way to study philosophy is

Introduction to Philosophy Issue 1
to think about them directly." And I invite all of you to join me on this journey!

Warmest Regards,

Kylie

1. Free Will

Picture this: It's a Saturday afternoon and you are at the grocery store picking up some food for the week. You pass through the produce section and saw that apples were on sale. Just as you were about to pick some up, the smell of chocolate chip cookies from the grocery bakery attracted you. The cookies looked so good and chocolate chip is your favorite kind. You were tempted.

But then you remembered that your doctor told you a few days ago that you had high cholesterol levels and needed to cut down on your desserts. "I shouldn't," you thought to yourself, "I should just get apples instead." You hesitated, but the cookies just looked too tempting!

"Oh, what the heck, I can treat myself once in a while!" and so, you end up buying the cookies and eating them despite knowing how bad they are for you.

The next day, you felt really guilty about eating the cookies. You immediately regret not getting the apples instead. "I could have gotten the apples!" you thought.

What did you mean when you say that you could have gotten the apples instead of the cookies? In a sense, you mean that you could have done something different from what you actually did. In other words, you could have made a different choice. But this brings us to another question, what do you mean by when you say you **could have** done something? Part of what it means may be this: Nothing up to the point at which you choose determines irrevocably what your choice will be. It remains an open possibility that you will choose the apples until the moment when you actually choose chocolate chip cookies. It isn't determined in advance. In other words, there were no external processes or forces that forced you to pick the cookies. You were not bound or determined to pick the cookies. And so, when you say you could have chosen the apples instead of the cookies, you may mean that you had the free will to do otherwise. That may not be all you mean, but it

seems to be at least part of what you mean. For if it was really determined in advance that you would choose cookies, how could it also be true that you could have chosen fruit? It would be true that nothing would have prevented you from having apples if you had chosen it instead of cookies. But these ifs are not the same as saying you could have chosen apples, period. ***You couldn't have chosen it unless the possibility remained open to both cookies and apples until you closed it off by choosing cookies.***

This example highlights one of the ways people think about free will. Free will seems to be tied closely to the idea that we could have done otherwise and that all possibilities remain open up until the moment we make a decision.

Some people, on the other hand, hold a completely separate viewpoint. They think that it is ***never*** possible for us to do anything different from what we actually do. In other words, in an absolute sense, they hold the view that all circumstances that exist before we act are determined in such a way that our choices and decisions are inevitable. The sum total of a person's experiences, desires and knowledge, hereditary constitution, the social circumstances and the nature of the choice facing the person, together with other factors that we may not know about, all combine to make a particular action in the circumstances inevitable. Such a view is known as determinism.

The notion of determinism isn't so much about the idea that we can now know what is going to happen because everything is predetermined by all the laws of nature. Rather, it is the theory that because there are laws of nature, like those that govern the why the sun rises every morning or how the planets orbit, which governs everything that happens in the world – and that in accordance with those laws, the events before an action determine that will happen, which then ultimately rules out all other possible events.

If that is true, then even while you were deciding between the getting the apples or the cookies, it was already determined by the many factors working on you and in you that you would choose the cookies. You couldn't have chosen the apples, even though you thought you could: the process of decision is just the working out of the determined result inside your mind. If determinism is true for everything that happens, it was already determined before you were even born that you would choose cookies at that moment in time. Your choice was determined by the

situation immediately before, and that situation was determined by the situation before it, and so on as far back as you want to go.

But if determinism is really true, and that you really couldn't have done otherwise – getting the apples instead of the cookies - it seems then that we can now run into another problem. If it is inevitable that you pick the cookies, then could you have really blamed yourself and subsequently feel guilty about it? After all, you could not *really* have picked the apples. This might seem like it's not such a big deal in the case of merely picking between desserts; however, more serious problems may arise when we start discussing holding people responsible for their actions and the way we talk about crime and punishment.

Suppose now in the hypothetical grocery story, you then decided to instead of paying for the cookies, you are going to steal them. Stealing the cookies in this situation, to most people, would constitute a wrongful action that would result in some kind of punishment. However, if it is the case that determinism is true, then could we still hold the person responsible for stealing the cookies? If so, how?

People disagree about this. Some think that if determinism is true, no one can reasonably be praised or blamed for anything, any more than the sun can be praised or blamed for rising every morning. Others think that it still makes sense to praise good actions and condemn bad ones, even if they were inevitable. After all, the fact that someone was determined in advance to behave badly doesn't mean that he didn't behave badly. If someone did steal cookies, that shows inconsiderateness and dishonesty, whether it was determined or not. Furthermore, if we don't blame the person for stealing, or perhaps even punish the person in some form for it, the person will probably do it again. This is one way to hold both views consistent with one another.

But maybe determinism isn't true. Perhaps if determinism isn't true for human actions, either, this leaves room for free will and responsibility. What if human actions, or at least some of them, are not determined in advance? What if, up to the moment when you choose, it's an open possibility that you will choose either cookies or apples? Then, so far as what has happened before is concerned, you could choose either one. Even if you actually choose cookies, you could have chosen the apples.

But does the rejection of determinism automatically mean that we do have free will? Is this all you mean when you

say, "I could have chosen the apples?" – that the choice wasn't determined in advance? It seems like you must have believed in something more. You must have believed that **you** determined what you would do, by doing it. It wasn't determined in advance, but it didn't just happen, either. **You** did it, and **you** could have done the opposite.

It seems then, free will depends on more than the fact that you can **do** otherwise. It seems crucial that you must also know that **you** are the one who is doing the action, and not something or someone else. How then, can one make sure that this is **your** doing? One possible reply would be that there is no answer to that question. Free action is just a basic feature of the world, and it can't be analyzed. There's a difference between something just happening without a cause and an action just being done without a cause. It's a difference we all understand, even if we can't explain it.

Others might say that this unexplained reply is not sufficient. If it is the case that an action can be done without a cause and we can't explain it, then it once again poses a big threat to the way we think about responsibility. If free action can't be analyzed, then it seems as if we cannot be held responsible for our actions regardless if determinism is true or false. If determinism is true, then our actions are determined by previous events and those events can be said to be responsible. If determinism is false, then our actions have no explanations, and therefore nothing is responsible. Both conclusions are dead ends.

This brings us back to a myriad of questions: Does free will exist? Is free will compatible with determinism? If determinism isn't true, then does that mean we automatically have free will? What does free will require? How can we make sense of responsibility and morality if we don't have free will? If free will doesn't exist, then why do we still **feel** like we do in our everyday lives?

For now, I'll leave you to ponder these questions.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is your idea of free will?
2. What does 'free' in free will mean? Do people who suffer from psychological damage still consider those who have free will?
3. What are some things that could be at stake if we didn't have free will?

4. Is having free will necessary for holding people responsible for their own actions? Or is there a way around it?
5. Are we less 'human' if we lack free will? Is free will a necessary component of what it means to be human?

The Basis of Morality

How do we know the difference between right and wrong? What makes an action right? Or wrong?

Suppose you are a barista at a coffee shop. A friend suddenly comes in when you are on shift and asks to give him a free cup of coffee. At that moment, you feel conflicted for several reasons. You might be afraid that you are going to get caught by your boss for giving away a free drink and get in trouble. You might simply not want to make a coffee for him at that moment in time because you are tired. Or you might believe that what he wants you to do is wrong. Believing in the last case is more complicated. Well, for starters, what does it mean when we say that we think an action is wrong?

To say that stealing is wrong, for example, seems to be more than just saying that it is against the law/rule. Think about it in this way – it is not hard to imagine that some rules/laws can be bad. For example, a rule that requires racial segregation cannot be said to be right. Most would agree that such a rule would be deemed as wrong. Thus, a clear distinction is made between the idea of what is against and not against the law is different than that of what is wrong and right.

This then begs the question, so what does determine whether something is right or wrong? Let's go back to the coffee shop example. You hesitate to give your friend a free coffee because you think it is wrong. If you think it is wrong for you to do so, then you will most likely feel uncomfortable about doing it. In some sense, you won't want to do it, even if you are also reluctant to refuse a friend. Where does the motivation **not** to do it come from? Further, what is the reason for it? One might say in this case, you probably feel that it would be unfair for the other customers who paid for their drinks. You may also feel that by making your friend a free coffee, you betrayed your boss, who is putting his trust in you to **not** do something like this. These thoughts have to do with effects on others – not necessary effects on their feelings, since they may

never find out about it, but some kind of damage, nevertheless. It seems then, the notion that something is wrong is linked closely with how that action impacts the doer and those around the doer.

But suppose that the doer doesn't care about other people and he has no reason to stop himself from doing what other people may view as wrong. What reason, then, does the doer have to not kill, steal, lie, or hurt others? If he can get what he wants by doing such things, why shouldn't he? And if there's no reason why he shouldn't, in what sense is it wrong? If someone doesn't care, then does that mean he's exempt from morality? No, quite the opposite actually. It seems unlikely that most people who give people who simply don't care a free morality pass. A person who kills someone just to steal his wallet, without caring about the victim, is not automatically excused. The fact that he doesn't care doesn't make it all right: **He should care**. But **why** should he care?

There are many ways people have tried to resolve the question. One category of which attempts to link morality to right/wrong via things people already care about – one example of which might be religion. For example, some people believe that even if you can get away with awful crimes on this earth, and are not punished by the law or your fellow men, such acts are forbidden by God, who will punish you after death (and reward you if you didn't do wrong when you were tempted to). So even when it seems to be in your interest to do such a thing, it really isn't. Some people have even believed that if there is no God to back up moral requirements with the threat of punishment and the promise of reward, morality is an illusion: "If God does not exist, everything is permitted."

However, this doesn't answer the question for those who don't believe in God. This population of people still make judgments of what is right and wrong and still believes that killing someone for their wallet is morally wrong. More importantly, God may be the answer to why people avoid doing what is wrong, but it does not appear that God is the answer to what makes an action wrong. God forbids murder **because** murder is wrong in itself. It still leaves the question of what **makes** murder wrong.

If you think it's wrong to kill, cheat, or steal, you should want to avoid doing such things because they are bad things to do to the victims, not just because you fear the consequences for yourself, or because you don't want to offend your Creator. Then, it appears that the basis of morality cannot be separated from a direct concern for

others. But morality is supposed to apply to everyone. And yet we can't make the assumption that everyone has this direct concern for everyone. Some people are very selfish, and even those who are not selfish may care only about the people they know, and not about everyone. So where will we find a reason that everyone has not to hurt other people, even those they don't know?

One way to answer this would be to say, well, most people would not want all of those bad things to happen to themselves. In other words, even the person who's doing the stealing would not want to be stolen from. It's not easy to explain how this argument is supposed to work. Suppose you're about to steal someone else's umbrella as you leave a restaurant in a rainstorm, and a bystander says, "How would you like it if someone did that to you?" Why is it supposed to make you hesitate, or feel guilty? When you are asked how you would like it if someone did that to you, you are supposed to think about all the feelings you would have if someone stole your umbrella. When our own interests are threatened by the inconsiderate behavior of others, most of us find it easy to appreciate that those others have a reason to be more considerate. When you are hurt, you probably feel that other people should care about it: you don't think it's no concern of theirs, and that they have no reason to avoid hurting you. This is the same feeling that the "How would you like that?" argument is supposed to arouse. But if it's a reason anyone would have not to hurt anyone else in this way, then it's a reason you have not to hurt someone else in this way (since anyone means everyone). Therefore, it's a reason not to steal the other person's umbrella now.

Once you admit that another person would have a reason not to harm you in similar circumstances, and once you admit that the reason he would have is very general and doesn't apply only to you, or to him, then to be consistent you have to admit that the same reason applies to you now. You shouldn't steal the umbrella, and you ought to feel guilty if you do.

The basis of morality is a belief that good and harm to particular people (or animals) is wrong or right not just from their point of view, but from a more general view that every thinking person can understand. That means that each person has a reason to consider not only his own interests but the interests of others in decision making.

But this raises another question: does everyone in the world have the same concept of wrong and right? Is morality universal?

We can think about this in a few ways:

We could say that the same things are right and wrong for everybody, but that not everyone has a **reason** to do what's right and avoid what's wrong: only people with the right sort of "moral" motives – particularly a concern for others – have any reason to do what's right, for its own sake. We can then see how this makes morality universal. That being said, despite resolving one problem, it is still not clear what it amounts to say that it would be wrong for someone to commit murder, but he has no reason not to do it.

On the other hand, we can come to believe that everyone has a reason to do what's right and avoid what's wrong, but that these reasons don't depend on people's actual motives. Rather they are reasons to change our motives if they aren't the right ones. This connects morality with reasons for action, but leaves it unclear what these universal reasons are which do not depend on motives that everyone actually has. What does it mean to say that a murderer had a reason not to do it, even though none of his actual motives or desires gave him such a reason?

In addition, many things that you probably think are wrong have been accepted as morally correct by selective groups of people in the past. Think slavery, serfdom, human sacrifice, racial segregation, denial of religious and political freedom, etc. Is it reasonable to believe that there is some single truth about all this – that morality is some universal truth? Even though we cannot know or be sure what that truth might be? Or is it more reasonable to believe that right and wrong are relative to a particular time and place and social background?

Moral arguments tend to appeal to the idea that it must be traced back to something that is present in all of us. Unfortunately for us, it may be deeply buried, and in some cases, it may not be present at all. Moreover, it has to compete with powerful selfish motives and other personal motives that may not be so selfish. The inherent difficulty in justifying morality, and a universal one at that, is not that there is only one human motive, but that there are too many for us to even fathom.

Discussion Questions:

1. Can a psychologically damaged person distinguish between what is morally right or wrong? If not, why do we still hold those people accountable for their actions?
2. Are moral requirements universal? Or are they society/culture-dependent?
3. If a person lacked emotions and cannot feel anything, can we still anticipate the person to understand and make moral judgments?
4. Is understanding morality dependent on the understanding of motivation? Do we have to be motivated by something to do the right thing?

Death

Everyone dies – this, I think, we can all agree. However, the more difficult question comes from whether we all agree on what death is. For one, death can be understood as a life-ending. However, it is far from clear what actually constitutes 'the ending of one's life'. Moreover, even if we can come up with a clear thesis on what death is, how are we supposed to view and feel about death?

It's not an easy task to unpack the nature of death. Ancient philosophers from Socrates to Confucius have pondered about it for thousands of years and it seems as if we still have not come up with an answer that everyone can agree with. To begin our investigation of what death might be, we would need to also consider the nature of life. After all, if death is commonly considered the 'end of life', what then, does life constitute?

Suppose we have a machine that contains all of the physiological components - cellular processes, and homeostasis - of a human. Would we call our machine alive? Many will hesitate to say so. It seems then, by virtue of purely having biological processes doesn't seem to constitute being 'alive'. It is one thing to have the capacity to deploy these processes and another to actually deploy them, just as there is a difference between having the ability to run and actually running. For something to have the property 'alive' seems to be a matter of its having the capacity to sustain itself using processes that are saliently similar to these. If this is the case, then when one refers to

death, do we mean only mean the loss of the capacity to employ these vital processes?

Still, even if one agrees that the loss of the capacity for our body to sustain these vital processes, we don't actually 'die'. One might say, yes, our bodies may physically decay and cease to exist; however, our soul does not. That is, we still survive after the deaths of our bodies, by virtue of going to Heaven, Hell, or someplace else. Others might believe that we would cease to exist entirely. That is, when the body dies, our mind or soul also dies with it.

It is sometimes said that no one can conceive of his own nonexistence, and that therefore we can't really believe that our existence will come to an end with our deaths. But such a view doesn't seem to hold up because of course, you can't conceive of your own nonexistence from the inside. The fact that you can't conceive of that from the inside doesn't mean you can't conceive of it at all: you just have to think of yourself from the outside, having been knocked out, or in a deep sleep. And even though you have to be conscious to think that, it doesn't mean that you're thinking of yourself as conscious.

This applies to death as well. To imagine what happens after you die, we have to think about the body of the person you are. Remember that this is not the same as to imagine how it would feel for *you* to experience it. Rather, how it would look through someone else. Of course, you are alive while you think of your own death, but that is no more of a problem than being conscious while imagining yourself unconscious. The idea of still being 'alive' after death is related to the mind-body problem (dualism) – roughly the question of whether consciousness/mind/soul is separated from the physical body.

If dualism is true, a person consists of a soul that is separate from a body. Then, we can see how our bodies can physically be dead, but our soul would not. Life after death might be possible in this sense. The soul would exist independently of the body and continue to exist even after the body ceases to exist. On the other hand, even if dualism is true, life after death might not be possible. One might believe that the mind and body are separate, but also believe that the body nourishes and houses the soul, thus, if the body is dead, the soul will also die from the lack of vital support from the body.

It's difficult to say how we can decide or prove whether or not we have separate souls. Everyday observations seem to point to the evidence that consciousness depends

heavily on our body functions and nervous system and that the death of the body would mean the cessation of the existence of any life. However, religious doctrines might lead us to a different conclusion. Similarly, the lack of evidence that we cannot know with certainty that dualism is indeed the truth and right maybe just enough for some to believe there is an afterlife.

Let us now turn to another problem we face when discussing death. How do we ought to feel about death? Is it a good thing, a bad thing, or neutral? What is a reasonable feeling about how you should perceive death? Should you look forward to the prospect of death with terror, sorrow, indifference, or relief? This, of course, ties into what you believe death is. If there is life after death, the prospect will be grim or happy depending on where your soul will end up. But the difficult and most philosophically interesting question is how we should feel about death if it's the end. Is it a terrible thing to go out of existence?

Some, like the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, believe that one should not view death as a depressing, dooming thing. When Zhuangzi's wife died, his friend Hui Shih found Zhuangzi sitting on the ground, singing and banging on pots. On asking him how he could be so unfeeling to his wife, he was told by Zhuangzi: "When she had just died, I could not help being affected. Soon, however, I examined the matter from the very beginning. At the very beginning, she was not living, having no form, nor even substance. But somehow or other there was then her substance, then her form, and then her life. Now by a further change, she has died. The whole process is like the sequence of the four seasons, spring, summer, autumn, and winter. While she is thus lying in the great mansion of the universe, for me to go about weeping and wailing would be to proclaim myself ignorant of the natural laws. Therefore I stopped!"

Death is like the progression of the four seasons, a natural part of the ebb and flow of transformations that constitute the movement of the Dao. To grieve over death, or to fear one's own death is arbitrarily to evaluate what is inevitable. It is useless, arbitrary, and foolish to set ourselves against what is natural. We can choose to adopt different perspectives on the experience. Why not choose ones which enable us to see death not as something to be feared and lamented, but as just one more phase in a much larger transformational movement?

In all this, transformation does not necessarily suggest an afterlife or any form of personal immortality. Dead matter

fertilizes the ground and provides the raw material for other living beings to grow and reproduce. Death in general can be said to lead to new life, just as life in general ends in death. Life, in general, goes on, though we may not.

Others say that to be annihilated, to have the possible future course of your life cut off completely, is an absolute evil, even if we all have to face it. Still, others say death is a blessing – not of course if it comes too early, but eventually – because living forever may be really boring and/or painful if you have to watch all those you love eventually passing away.

Many people in western society fear the idea of death – whether for themselves or their loved ones. From a philosophical perspective, the fear of death is puzzling. Now, it is important to distinguish between fear of death and regrets we may have at the end of life. Regrets are easy to understand for most people in that we might want to have more life, more of the things it contains. Fear of death however is a bit more complicated to understand. How can the prospect of your own nonexistence be alarming in a positive way? If we really cease to exist at death, there's nothing to look forward to, so how can there be anything to be afraid of? If one thinks about it logically, it seems as though death should be something to be afraid of only if we will survive it, and perhaps undergo some terrifying transformation. Yet, this doesn't seem to stop many people from thinking that death is one of the worst things that can happen to them.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is death to you?
2. Do you think death is 'the end' for human beings?
3. Do you fear death? Embrace death?
4. Is death an impending evil that we face? Or is it a blessing?

The Meaning of Life

Perhaps the most invoked question in philosophy would be concerning the meaning of life. I'm sure that all of you have wondered about this at least once in your lifetime. You might, at one point in your life, thought that life really didn't have any meaning because, in the end, we are all going to die anyway. However, let us unpack the seemingly

common yet peculiar thought for a second. The idea that life doesn't really have any meaning because we are all going to die eventually doesn't really hold any sustainable ground. It is not at all clear why a future death implies that nothing we do now in the present won't matter. It may have to do with the idea that life seems like some kind of rat race – with us constantly struggling to try to reach toward our goals and make something of our lives. However, this would only make sense if those achievements will be permanent. But we know they won't be. If there's any point at all to what we do, we have to find it within our own lives.

Why is there difficulty in that? You can explain the point of most of the things you do. You work to earn money to support your family. You eat because you're hungry, sleep because you're tired, go for a walk because you want to, etc. If you didn't do any of those things you'd be miserable; so what's the big problem?

The problem is that although there are justifications and explanations for most of the things, big and small, that we do within life, none of these explanations explain the point of your life as a whole – the whole of which all these activities, successes, and failures, strivings and disappointments are parts. If you think about the whole thing, there seems to be no point to it at all. Looking at it from the outside, it wouldn't matter if you had never existed. And after you have gone out of existence, it won't matter that you did exist.

But does it matter that it doesn't matter? "So what?" you might say. "It's enough that it matters whether I get to the station before my train leaves, or whether I've remembered to feed the cat. I don't need more than that to keep going." This is a perfectly good reply.

But it only works if you really can avoid setting your sights higher, and asking what the point of the whole thing is. For once you do that, you open yourself to the possibility that your life is meaningless. The thought that you'll be dead in two hundred years is just a way of seeing your life embedded in a larger context, so that the point of smaller things inside it seems not to be enough – seems to leave a larger question unanswered. But what if your life as a whole did have a point in relation to something larger? Would that mean that it wasn't meaningless after all?

If our lives as a whole seem pointless, then a part of us is dissatisfied – the part that is always looking over our shoulders at what we are doing. Many human efforts,

particularly those in the service of serious ambitions rather than just comfort and survival, get some of their energy from a sense of importance – a sense that what you are doing is not just important to you, but important in some larger sense: important, period.

If we have to give this up, it may threaten to take the wind out of our sails. If life is not real, life is not earnest, and the grave is its goal, perhaps it's ridiculous to take ourselves so seriously.

On the other hand, if we can't help taking ourselves so seriously, perhaps we just have to put up with being ridiculous. Life may be not only meaningless but absurd.

Discussion Questions:

1. What makes your life meaningful?
2. Do we have to find an answer to the meaning of life to make our lives meaningful?
3. If life is an illusion, would you still consider your life meaningful?
4. If life is really meaningless, would that still take away from the feeling that your life can be meaningful?
5. If life is really pointless, can you still find a way to convince yourself and others that it is still a life worth living?

Dear Friends,

I hope you have enjoyed pondering these points Kylie has brought to our conscious thought process in this Intro to Philosophy packet. Please let me know if you want more packets along this line. One way to vote for more philosophy packets is to send in answers to the questions Kylie has posed. She will read through your responses and create a compilation of the most interesting answers. To receive the compilation and read how others view these issues you must respond by answering at least 5 of the 18 questions posed by Kylie. Let us know which questions you are answering. Of course, you can answer more, but to receive the compilation packet I am requiring 5 answers. Deadline is April 1, giving you lots of time to consider.

Share these ideas with others in your facility. See if you can get discussion groups started, and if so write and tell us about it. I can remember being 9 years old and looking

at the stars and wondering about these things, and now 60 years later, I still have the same questions. Maybe I wonder about things differently, and I understand what I believe, but it seems like there is no absolute correct answer to any of these questions. Rather like life, pondering these questions is a journey, and these universal questions point to a path all humans are on.

I find great meaning in supplying you with all the materials I do. Part of my motivation I believe is to make up for all of the abuse I experienced as a child and how having a good book [actually any book] would provide me with an escape from the terror and neglect of my daily life. I wonder if all that horror was just to put me on the path that leads me to all of you and my attempt to give you something I so desperately wanted as a young person. I wanted someone to care and to rescue me from the abuse. It never happened, and I just endured till I was old enough to go out on my own. My character was molded by these experiences, and I don't know that there is an absolute answer as to why me. Is it all a path I have been led down with much greater forces at work, or is it just me believing I can right the wrongs done to me by showing care for others who suffer from deprivation? I do know I find meaning in supporting all of you. I find it interesting that the things that have meaning in my life often compensate for the abuse I experienced. I used to work in apple orchards picking fruit. I thought it grand work and would pick 2 tons of apples on a good day. That people would then eat the apples made me happy. Other orchard workers found it boring and meaningless. Go figure. We can all be doing the same thing, and for some it is a rich activity full of meaning and for another, boring and drab.

I love thinking about these things even if there is no one answer. I think reflecting on these questions help us find our true path in life. While we all have different paths, once we find our own, I believe it is easier to find contentment in everyday life. Prisoner Express offers a variety of diverse programs for this very reason. I hope we can offer you something you find meaningful, so you can follow your heart and find a path of meaning. In this world the only thing we know for sure is that everything is always changing, and nothing can stay the same.

I want to hear from you!!!

Wishing you all the best and sending you a thousand rays of light.

Gary