Lecture No. 1 — What is Philosophy?

Key idea: Philosophy is a rational, systematic search for the foundations of reality, knowledge, and values.

Today we will move «from Mythos to Logos» — from narrative explanations to logical proof and sufficient reason.

By the end you should be able to:

- define philosophy (etymology + modern meaning)
- explain how philosophy differs from science and religion
- name core branches: ontology, epistemology, ethics, logic, aesthetics
- use key concepts in English (with transcription for pronunciation)

Lecture Plan

1. The Birth of Philosophical Thought
2. The Subject Matter of Philosophy
3. The Evolution of Philosophical Inquiry
4. The Nature and Structure of Worldview [ˈwɜːrldvjuː]
5. Philosophy within the System of Culture
6. The Structure of Philosophical Knowledge

Why do people “do philosophy”?

Philosophy begins when we ask questions that cannot be solved by a single experiment or a single calculation:

- What does it mean to exist?
- What is truth and how do we justify it?
- What is the Good and why should we follow it?
- Can we understand reality “as it is”, or only as it appears to us?

In this lecture, we treat philosophy as a meta-discipline: it examines the tools, concepts, and limits of thinking itself.

The birth of philosophy: where and when?

Philosophy emerged around the 6th century BCE in three major centres of civilisation:

- Ancient Greece (Ionian coast — Miletus)
- India
- China

This period is often called the “Axial Age”. In Greece, the key shift is described as the journey “from Mythos to Logos” — a rejection of mythological explanations in favour of rational inquiry and logical proof.

From Mythos to Logos: what changed?

Mythological thinking tends to explain the world through genealogies and divine will (“who sired the cosmos”).

Philosophical thinking searches for internal, essential characteristics:
- impersonal principles instead of personal-volitional forces
- objective law and regularity (Cosmos as an ordered system)
- demand for logical proof and internal consistency

Key term: Logos — rational structure and argument (not merely “speech”).

The demand for sufficient reason

The true boundary between mythology and philosophy is not “no gods”, but the demand for sufficient reason:

- tradition and poetic revelation are no longer enough
- explanations must be logically coherent
- nature becomes an object of understanding, not a set of “whims”

This shift supports the birth of objectivity [ˌɒbdʒekˈtɪvəti] — the idea that reality can be studied as an ordered system.

The Milesian School: the first “physicists”

The earliest Greek philosophers (“physicists”) asked: what is the unchanging foundation of the diverse world?

They introduced a new research style:

- Monism — reduce diversity to one principle
- Arche [ˈɑːrki] — the first principle / source
- A move from images to concepts, from stories to arguments

Main figures: Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes.

Thales of Miletus: “all is water” (method, not naïveté)

Thales’ importance is methodological:

- he explains the whole diversity of existence via one material principle
- the principle should be accessible to observation and rational substantiation
- this is an early form of monism and a prototype of scientific explanation

The key move: explain nature without resorting to the will of the Olympian gods.

Anaximander: Apeiron and abstraction

Anaximander proposes Apeiron — an indefinite, infinite substance — as the primary principle:

- if the foundation were a specific element (water/fire), it would dominate all others
- therefore the source must be qualitatively indefinite and quantitatively infinite

This is an early step toward theoretical metaphysics: true reality may be hidden beyond immediate sensory perception.

Anaximenes: Air and the mechanisms of change

Anaximenes selects Air as the Arche [ˈɑːrki] and explains transformation through:

- rarefaction and condensation
- reduction of qualitative differences to quantitative processes

This becomes a prototype of later scientific reasoning: the world is explainable by regular mechanisms, not by mythic narratives.

From etymology to a modern definition

“Philosophy” [fɪˈlɒsəfi] comes from Greek philo (love) + sophia (wisdom).

Important nuance: philosophy is not a static possession of ultimate truth, but an active striving toward it.

Modern definition (from the lecture):
Philosophy is a systematic investigation of the foundations of reality — a search for answers about being, knowledge, and the values that guide us.

Philosophy vs. special sciences

Each science studies a delimited “slice” of reality (e.g., biology — life; physics — matter/energy laws).

Philosophy refuses such boundaries:

- its subject is the Universal (the Totality)
- it asks what it means “to be at all”
- it connects physical laws, logical structures, and moral values into one coherent worldview [ˈwɜːrldvjuː].

The “Man–World” relation and reflection [rɪˈflekʃn]

The focal point of philosophical inquiry is where human consciousness meets objective reality — the “Man–World” system.

Philosophy is a second-order inquiry:
- a scientist studies cells; a philosopher studies the concepts and methods of “knowing”
- philosophy questions: truth, cause, evidence

Reflection [rɪˈflekʃn] is the core method: thinking critically about our own thinking.

How philosophical questions evolved (a map)

We can read the history of philosophy through its key questions:

- Early Greece: arche, cosmos, being
- Classical Antiquity: ethics, politics, ideas
- Middle Ages: faith vs reason; universals
- Renaissance: human dignity and creativity
- Modern period: the method and criteria of knowledge
- Kant: limits of reason + four fundamental questions
- Contemporary philosophy: language, existence, technology and AI ethics

Classical Antiquity: from cosmos to human existence

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle shift the focus:

- from “what is everything made of?”
  to “what is the Good?”, “what is justice?”, “what is the ideal state?”

Philosophy becomes a tool for refining the soul and society (ethics and politics) and for investigating universal ideas and forms.

Middle Ages & Renaissance: two radical turns

Middle Ages:

- philosophy becomes linked with theology
- central problems: faith vs reason; universals; God and creation

Renaissance:

- anthropocentric shift
- focus on free will, dignity, earthly life
- pathway to secularisation of thought

Modern period: rationalism vs empiricism

Epistemology [ɪˌpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi] moves to the forefront: what is the starting point of knowledge?

- Rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza): priority of reason and innate ideas
- Empiricists (Bacon, Locke): sensory experience is the source of knowledge

This dispute over method becomes a foundation of modern science.

Kant: four fundamental questions

Kant unites the strands of modern philosophy and asks:

1) What can I know? (metaphysics / epistemology)
2) What ought I to do? (ethics [ˈeθɪks])
3) What may I hope for? (religion / philosophy of history)
4) What is man? (philosophical anthropology)

He limits the claims of pure reason and brings practical philosophy to the fore.

Engels: the “Great Basic Question of Philosophy”

Friedrich Engels formulates a central problem in the Marxist tradition:

- What is the relationship between thinking and being?
- Which is primary: spirit/mind or matter/nature?

This divides positions into materialism and idealism and highlights the socially transformative role of thought.

Contemporary philosophy (20th–21st centuries)

Some dominant directions highlighted in the lecture:

- Language as the boundary of our world (analytic philosophy)
- Absurdity, authenticity, and death (existentialism)
- Ethical challenges of technology: AI, survival, human responsibility

The “Man–World” problem reappears in new forms: virtual worlds, digital identities, algorithmic decision-making.

Worldview [ˈwɜːrldvjuː]: nature and structure

A worldview is the totality of views, evaluations, principles, and images of the world and of man’s place within it.

Worldview is not only a passive reflection but an active force that can guide behaviour and transform reality.

In the lecture, worldview is analysed through its internal components and historical forms.

Four components of worldview

1) Cognitive component — everyday and scientific knowledge
2) Axiological component — values, ideals, moral orientations
3) Affective-volitional component — world-feeling that turns knowledge into conviction
4) Praxeological component — readiness for action and behaviour

Together they create a cohesive “picture of reality” that shapes choices.

Types and historical dynamics of worldview

Common types (by level of reflection):
- Ordinary (everyday)
- Religious
- Scientific
- Philosophical (highest level of theoretical reflection)

Historical succession (as a cultural phenomenon):
Mythological → Religious → Philosophical

Philosophy relies on free critical thought and rational argument rather than tradition or authority.

Philosophy and religion: reason vs revelation

Both address “ultimate foundations” (meaning, morality, origin of the world).

Their methods differ:

- Religion: faith, revelation, sacred texts, dogma; often provides ready-made answers
- Philosophy: critical reflection, logical evidence; subjects dogma to the “tribunal of reason”

This difference defines philosophy as a practice of justified belief and argument.

The structure of philosophical knowledge

Philosophy is a complex architecture of disciplines. Core branches:

- Ontology [ɒnˈtɒlədʒi] — the study of being (what exists?)
- Epistemology [ɪˌpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi] — the theory of knowledge
- Ethics [ˈeθɪks] — moral philosophy
- Logic [ˈlɒdʒɪk] — rules of valid reasoning
- Aesthetics [iːsˈθetɪks] — beauty, art, the sublime
- Social & political philosophy — society, the state, justice

Practical Session Plan No. 1 — Assignments (1/2)

1) Discussion: “Common Sense” vs Philosophy
Task: Can a person live without a worldview? Can common sense replace philosophical reflection?

2) The first philosophers’ logic
Read a fragment on Thales (“all is water”). Why is this a breakthrough rather than a myth?

3) Case study: the boundary problem
Task: Sort questions into scientific (empirical) vs philosophical.
Examples: “How does the brain work?” vs “What is consciousness?”

4) Definition workshop
Compare “striving for wisdom” (Pythagoras) with “critical analysis”. Contradiction?

5) Key quotes (choose 1–2 to discuss):
- Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”
- Aristotle: “All men by nature desire to know.”
- Descartes: “I think, therefore I am.”
- Kant: “...the starry heavens above me... the moral law within me.”
- Wittgenstein: “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment... by language.”

6) If science explains how the universe began (Big Bang), does philosophy still need to ask why there is something rather than nothing?

Practical Session Plan No. 1 — Assignments (2/2)

7) Can we study the “World” without the “Man”? Is an objective view possible without human bias?

8) Choose one Kantian question to answer in your lifetime. Why? Can it be answered without the others?

9) Identify the domain (scientific / moral / philosophical). Justify:
- “The universe expanded from a singularity 13.8 billion years ago.”
- “Thou shalt not kill.”
- “Existence precedes essence.”

10) Boundaries of subjectivity [ˌsʌbdʒekˈtɪvəti]
If worldview is like “spectacles”, can we ever remove them to see reality “as it is”?

11) The basic question in the digital age
In virtual worlds, what is primary: physical medium (server) or informational code?

12) Review exercise: connect the concepts (fill in blanks).
Self-check key: Ontology/Epistemology; Arche; Epistemology/Ethics; Worldview/Reflection; Objectivity/Subjectivity; Logic/Aesthetics; Philosophy.

Key Concepts (with pronunciation)

- Philosophy [fɪˈlɒsəfi]
- Worldview [ˈwɜːrldvjuː]
- Arche [ˈɑːrki]
- Ontology [ɒnˈtɒlədʒi]
- Epistemology [ɪˌpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi]
- Ethics [ˈeθɪks]
- Logic [ˈlɒdʒɪk]

- Aesthetics [iːsˈθetɪks]
- Reflection [rɪˈflekʃn]
- Objectivity [ˌɒbdʒekˈtɪvəti]
- Subjectivity [ˌsʌbdʒekˈtɪvəti]
- Mythos / Logos
- Cosmos / Theoria
- “Man–World” relation

Tip: read phonetic transcription in brackets [ ] to improve classroom discussion in English.

Definitions (from the lecture text) — 1/2

Aesthetics [iːsˈθetɪks]: the branch of philosophy that deals with the principles of beauty and artistic taste.

Arche [ˈɑːrki]: the beginning, the first principle, or the primal element of all things.

Epistemology [ɪˌpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi]: the study of knowledge—its methods, validity, and scope.

Ethics [ˈeθɪks]: the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles; right and wrong conduct.

Logic [ˈlɒdʒɪk]: reasoning assessed according to strict principles of validity; the “toolkit” of philosophy.

Definitions (from the lecture text) — 2/2

Objectivity [ˌɒbdʒekˈtɪvəti]: making judgements based on facts rather than personal feelings; reality independent of the mind.

Ontology [ɒnˈtɒlədʒi]: the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being and existence.

Philosophy [fɪˈlɒsəfi]: the systematic study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence; an active pursuit of truth through rational inquiry.

Reflection [rɪˈflekʃn]: the mind’s ability to examine its own processes; the core method for evaluating concepts and beliefs.

Subjectivity [ˌsʌbdʒekˈtɪvəti]: the internal perspective shaped by personal feelings and experience; our understanding is tinted by the subject.

Worldview [ˈwɜːrldvjuː]: a comprehensive framework of beliefs that guides an individual’s interpretation of existence.