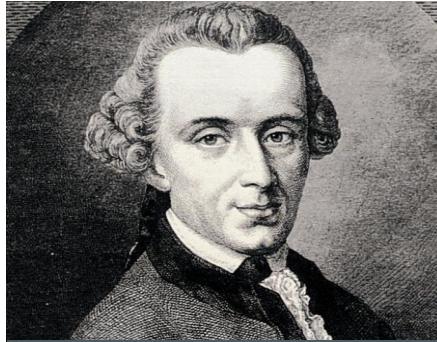




David Hume
(1711-1776)

David Hume, Edinburgh's most famous philosopher, approached philosophical thinking in a **sceptical** way. Hume was suspicious of philosophies that attempt to discover deep truths through reason alone. Our philosophical thinking should be grounded in **experience**; however, once this constraint is taken seriously, it turns out that we must be willing to admit we know a bit less than we thought. A famous example here involves **causation**. We often claim that we see one thing causing another. But what have we really seen? Hume says that all we really see is one event and then another, and we never actually experience any additional 'causation' that links the two events. The idea of causation is just something our mind adds to what we experience.



Immanuel Kant
(1724-1804)

Before Kant had thought about what Hume had to say about causation, he assumed that philosophical thinking can put us in touch with how the world is. But reading Hume led Kant to consider that he needed to *prove* that philosophical thinking was actually up to this job! In fact, Kant thought so hard about this issue that he didn't write a single thing for 10 years, while trying to work out his answer. Finally, he published *The Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he put forward the idea that the world has to conform to the rules that our thought follows, because those very rules spell out what it takes for there to be a world present for us to think about in the first place.



What questions would you ask if you were doing the **philosophy of mathematics** rather than just mathematics?

Stephen Hawking recently upset philosophers by saying that science had replaced philosophy as a way of answering all the important questions about ourselves and the world. Do you think there are questions that science cannot answer, but that philosophy could?

Come up with an argument where the premises entail the conclusion, but where at least one premise is not true.

What is the best way to respond to the argument about free will on this leaflet? Which premise should be denied (if any), and why?

Whose approach to philosophy are you more sympathetic to, Hume's or Kant's?

PHILOSOPHY

* Philosophy is an **activity**, and to understand what it is, the best thing to do is to engage with philosophical problems, questions and arguments.

* We can characterise philosophy as the activity of working out the right way to think about things.

* Philosophy is closely related to many academic disciplines, since they also aim at thinking about things in the right way. But we can distinguish between doing those subjects and doing philosophy, by distinguishing between the thinking that goes on in those subjects and the activity of stepping back to assess whether the methods and presuppositions of that way of thinking are the right ones.

* These points about philosophy mean that philosophical questions can arise almost anywhere, can often concern giving reasons or justifications for ways of thinking and acting that we take for granted, and can often be difficult to answer.

* The question of what it means to think about things in the right way is a difficult one (see Hume and Kant).

How do we do philosophy?

Philosophers provide *arguments*, but not the kind of arguments that must be bad tempered or confrontational. Philosophical arguments involve providing **evidence** and chains of reasoning that aim to demonstrate the truth of some claim or position. See below for an **example argument**.



Premise 1: The way the world was in the past controls exactly how it is in the present, and how it will be in the future.

Premise 2: We are part of the world, just like everything else around us.

Premise 3: We can't control how things were in the past, or the way the past controls the present and the future.

Conclusion: Therefore, we don't control anything that happens in the world—including all the things that we think, say and do.

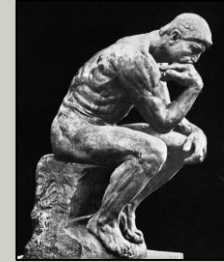
Problem

The argument seems to be *valid*. If so, this means that *if* the premises are true, *then* the conclusion must be true as well.

Options

- (i) Accept the conclusion.
- (ii) Deny one of the premises.
- (iii) Deny that the argument is valid.

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY MOOC



What is Philosophy?

Is philosophy something anyone can do? Is it just a matter of believing certain things, or is it an activity? How does one learn how to do it well?

