

# THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

Feb '14

*Philosophy is Everybody's Business*

Nº 755

Laughter without a tinge of philosophy is but a sneeze of humor. Genuine humor is replete with wisdom. —Mark Twain



**"Let's begin with a philosophical question:  
who am I and why are you here?"**

---

## PHILOSOPHER PRACTITIONERS?

A small but growing number of American philosophers have opened private practices as “philosopher practitioners,” offering a therapy based on the idea that solutions to many personal, moral, and ethical problems can be found not in psychotherapy or Prozac but deep within the 2,500-year-old body of philosophical discourse.

---

## THE PHILOSOPHER IS IN

Lawrence Douglas & Alexander George

So you say you often feel tired.

That's right.

Anxious?

Constantly.

Any signs of existential nausea?

Uh, I suppose so.

It's as I feared. We're looking at a metaphysical disorder.  
How long have you had these feelings?

It's hard to say. I just haven't been myself lately.

Hmm. So you're also experiencing periodic ontological symptoms. And when you aren't yourself, who exactly are you?

I don't really know.

Epistemological confusions as well.

I couldn't say.

Just as I surmised. We may want to get a second opinion, but it appears that you're suffering from the Sickness Unto Death.

Jeez. Is it—

Yes, fatal. A hundred per cent of the time.

Oh, my God.

At times like this, it's helpful to recall what Kierkegaard said: 'The question whether despair is conscious or not determines the qualitative difference between despair and despair.'

How much time do I have?

Time? Why, none at all.

What!

Remember what Augustine teaches us about time. Because the future is what is yet to come, it has no being; and because the past is what is gone, it doesn't exist any longer. As for the present — well, it has no duration at all. So of course you have no time.

That's depressing. Isn't there anything you can prescribe?

The most potent drug is Reason.

Do you think it might help me with my feelings of inadequacy?

Where psychoanalysis has failed, syllogism is sure to succeed. Tell me more about what's been troubling you.

Well, there's my job.

Yes?

I'm an I.R.S. auditor.

Ahh. And what would you most like to be?

I've always wanted to be an orthodontist — nothing beats

orthodontia.

Let's reflect on this. You'll agree that auditing is better than nothing.

That's certainly true.

And you have just granted that nothing is better than orthodontia.

Yes.

It follows, therefore, that auditing is better than orthodontia.

That makes me feel a little better. I'm starting to see the value of this therapy.

Indeed, at five hundred dollars a session it's a bargain.

Are you nuts?

It's really a negligible sum.

Not to an I.R.S. auditor.

If I charged merely one dollar, you'd agree that that was a negligible amount.

Yes, of course, but —

And if you were to take a negligible amount and add a single dollar, you'd be left with a negligible sum, wouldn't you.

Well, yes, I suppose so.

It follows, *pari passu* and *mutatis mutandis*, that five hundred dollars must likewise be a negligible sum. As Marx said, 'Money is the absolutely alienable —'

I can see I'm going to have to pull out last year's returns and —

'Commodity. Because it's all other commodities divested of their shape, the product of their universal alienation.' What creates unhappiness, you see, is not unresolved childhood trauma but the absence of philosophical examination. And now I'm afraid our time is up.


What? I just got here.

Don't be so sure of that.

But I saw the clock when I arrived.

Don't presume such knowledge! Reflect on the Great Skeptic's claim that the heavens, the earth, colors, figures, sound, and all other external things are nothing but illusions and dreams of which some evil genius has availed himself in order to lay traps for your credulity.

Well, I'm sitting here talking to you, aren't I?

That's something we're going to have to work on. Here, take two meditations by Descartes and get plenty of rest. I'll see you next week. And call me if you experience any sudden loss of Being. 

---

## BEWARE: THINKER'S ANONYMOUS

Submitted by Member Mike Murphy

**I**t started out innocently enough. I began to think at parties now and then to loosen up. Inevitably though, one thought led to another, and soon I was more than just a social thinker.

I began to think alone — “to relax,” I told myself — but I knew it wasn’t true. Thinking became more and more important to me, and finally I was thinking all the time.

I began to think on the job. I knew that thinking and employment don’t mix, but I couldn’t stop myself.

I began to avoid friends at lunchtime so I could read Thoreau and Kafka. I would return to the office dizzied and confused, asking, “What is it exactly we are doing here?”

Things weren’t going so great at home either. One evening I had turned off the TV and asked my wife about the meaning of life. She spent that night at her mother’s.

I soon had a reputation as a heavy thinker. One day the boss called me in. He said, ”Skippy, I like you, and it hurts me to say this, but your thinking has become a real problem. If you don’t stop thinking on the job, you’ll have to find another job.” This gave me a lot to think about.

I came home early after my conversation with the boss. “Honey,” I confessed, “I’ve been thinking...”

“I know you’ve been thinking,” she said, “and I want a divorce!”

“But Honey, surely it isn’t that serious.” “It is serious,” she said, lower lip aquiver. ”You think as much as college professors, and college professors don’t make any money, so if you keep on thinking we won’t have any money!”

“That’s a faulty syllogism,” I said impatiently, and she began to cry.


I’d had enough. “I’m going to the library,” I snarled as I stomped out the door.

I headed for the library, in the mood for some Nietzsche, with a PBS station on the radio. I roared into the parking lot and ran up to the big glass doors... they didn't open. The library was closed.

To this day, I believe that a Higher Power was looking out for me that night.

As I sank to the ground clawing at the unfeeling glass, whimpering for Zarathustra, a poster caught my eye. "Friend, is heavy thinking ruining your life?" it asked. You probably recognize that line. It comes from the standard Thinker's Anonymous poster.

Which is why I am what I am today: a recovering thinker. I never miss a TA meeting. At each meeting we watch a non-educational video; last week it was "Porky's." Then we share experiences about how we avoided thinking since the last meeting.

I still have my job, and things are a lot better at home. Life just seemed... easier, somehow, as soon as I stopped thinking. 

---

---

## THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

Is published weekly for its members by the

### CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT IDEAS

Founded in 1990 by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann

Max Weismann, Publisher and Editor

Ken Dzugan, Senior Fellow and Archivist

A not-for-profit (501)(c)(3) educational organization.

Donations are tax deductible as the law allows.