To the first questions the answers may be obtained by employing the process of 'going and seeing,' and 'catching and counting,' respectively.

The answers to the next questions will not be so easily found, but the method will be essentially the same. It is the method employed by the scientist and involves investigating, measuring and experimenting. This method might reasonably be summed up by the phrase 'going and seeing.'

The final questions would normally be thought of as being **philosophical**, and it would not be easy to find answers to them that would command general agreement. Some people would consider these questions to be unanswerable, but those who have tried to answer them in the past have in the main used the method of speculation rather than investigation, of 'sitting and thinking' rather than 'going and seeing.'

**TUTOR TALK:** It will be useful to the student if at this juncture we take some time to examine more closely what the word 'philosophy' has been and is used to describe.


**FACT FILE:** The word 'philosophy' was first used by the Greeks to mean **"The love of knowledge or wisdom"**.

It is open to conjecture as to whether man's wisdom has increased in the last two thousand years, but there can be little doubt at all about his increase in knowledge. An intelligent, well-educated person of some two thousand years ago could reasonably be expected, if not to know all there was to know, at least to be able to talk sense about any and every subject about which anything was known, into which investigations were being made, on which the 'thinkers' of that time were exercising their minds or their imagination.

**For example:**

Aristotle who is generally considered as one of the greatest philosophers of all time and as the founder of Logic, also wrote on Ethics, on Politics and on Poetics.

He was also a leading scientist and two books of his in particular, *Physics* and *On the Heavens*, are said to have dominated science until the time of Galileo.

The fact is that the 'estate of philosophy,' as it has been generally termed, once included almost all the fields of knowledge there were; in particular natural philosophy included science – what was known of the world about us, the knowledge that we in modern times have sub-divided further into chemistry, physics, zoology, botany and others. Nobody today would classify any of these sciences under the heading of philosophy. Their breaking away from the main estate has been gradual and piecemeal, and not a series of specific events to which definite dates could be attached. On the whole, each subject has achieved its independence as what was known about it grew, and as the method of inquirers in that field became organised and systematic.

**TUTOR TALK:** The student should take note that to some extent it would be true to say that each subject broke away as its problems were seen to be matters for 'going and seeing' rather than 'sitting and thinking' – for investigation rather than speculation.

What was left under the heading of 'philosophy' then, consisted of those subjects in which the problems were still unsolved, or at least not definitely solved, and this is in part the explanation of the complaint that is made against philosophers that they never solve any problems. As soon as a problem or a set of problems is solved, or sometimes even seen to be soluble, the subject of which it forms a part ceases to be included under the comprehensive description of 'philosophy.'

One excellent example of this process of achieving independence is provided by psychology, another by political philosophy which, in breaking away, became known as 'social science.' In both these cases we can see clearly how the fact that they are no longer in the estate of philosophy is due to the growing realisation that the appropriate method of addressing their problems is one of going and seeing rather than sitting and thinking. For the social scientist the emphasis is on the observer with his notebook in the marketplace, whereas the political philosopher has often not stirred much from his study.

It is at this juncture that an astute student might query as to what then is left today to philosophy's estate?

One group of problems, however, have been left for the philosopher to consider and these are connected with our thinking. Firstly, we have:

**The study of valid thinking or argument, which is termed logic.**

And there is also:

**The study of the latent structure of our actual thinking, which is called epistemology.**

The latter, sometimes identified as the 'theory of knowledge,' is a study, not so much of what we know or how we know, but rather of what it is to know.

There is also left for the philosopher:

**The study of good and evil, called ethics**

As with everything that he studies, however, the philosopher is interested in the roots rather than the fruit. He is not concerned an enumeration of good and bad actions or characteristics, nor on the whole is he concerned with making moral judgements or preaching. In his capacity as a moral philosopher he is interested merely in the fundamental analysis, in what it is to be good or evil, right or wrong. He is investigating the concept of morality. It has always been assumed that this is a matter for employing techniques of 'sitting and thinking' rather than for 'going and seeing,' though clearly the thinker must have some knowledge and experience of the behaviour of human beings in contexts where the epithets 'good' and 'evil' are likely to be applied.

It has also traditionally been the task of the philosopher to examine and test the assumptions, explicit or implicit, which form the basis of other subjects. Books have been written about the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of mathematics, and these books attempt to investigate the fundamental, ultimate nature of these subjects.

**For example:**

The concept of number or the concept of measurement is explored. "What really is number?" What is a person really doing when measuring?

Much has also been written about the philosophy of history, attempting to investigate history at a deeper level, to ask just what a historical event or judgement is and to search for fundamental principles and tendencies.

**TUTOR TALK:** The student should be aware that the philosopher is expected to dig more deeply, analyse more clearly, to search for the real rather than the apparent.

However, he is expected to do it in realms where speculation rather than investigation is the appropriate method. And more and more, to quote a modern-day philosopher, G. J. Warnock, in *English Philosophy Since 1900*, Oxford University Press (Home University Library), 1958; it is:

> "…now generally agreed that the proper concern of philosophy is with concepts, with the ways in which and the means by which we think and communicate."

This more or less exclusive concern of many modern philosophers with the handling of concepts is indicative to some extent of a change in method. The tendency now is to look much more carefully at the questions that are asked, and to claim that many of these which puzzled mankind for centuries are either:

a. foolish
b. improper

or

c. unanswerable

**TUTOR TALK:** Bertrand Russell in *Wisdom of the West*, MacDonald. 1959, stated that: "In philosophy, what is important is not so much the answers that are given, but rather the questions that are asked."

This change in method is largely responsible for what seems to be a decline in the esteem in which philosophers and their speculations are generally held. The latter are certainly not regarded as very useful, though they are usually regarded among reasonably educated people as requiring a high degree of intelligence, of perhaps a rather specialised kind. The general view would almost certainly be that one has to be very clever to understand philosophy, though it might also be, as some people believe, that one has to be rather foolish to want to understand it in the first place.

In the past, it is sometimes said, philosophers asked what are obviously very important and fundamental questions, even though they could not answer them. There were weighty, in every sense, treatises on what might be regarded as the Great Insolubles, and it was deemed to be an important part of a gentleman's education to at least go through the motions of perusing a selected few of these tomes. That they were indeed insoluble, only served to engender a proper feeling of what might be termed, general human humility. However, since very few others understood them either, and since understanding led to no solution, such failure could be hardly considered to be of any great importance.

In the present, it is said, that philosophy is reduced to linguistic analysis, a barren pursuit, a series of verbal quibbles, a picking of holes in the thoughts of others – notably the great ones of the past – with no positive contributions to offer whatever.

That is what the detractors say about it. Description by its supporters, which we include for the student's consideration, state:

"Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."
**Wittgenstein, L. J. J., *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell, 1953**

"The very purpose of philosophy is to delve below the apparent clarity of common speech."
**Whitehead, A. N., Adventures of Ideas (1933), Penguin Books 1942**

**TUTOR TALK:** If the student can now begin to think of philosophy in these terms, it will perhaps become apparent why talk of 'the estate of philosophy' would be regarded by many as an inapplicable and misleading metaphor. Instead of thinking of philosophy as a subject or collection of subjects, as a set of problems to be solved, it would be more appropriate to the modern viewpoint to think of it as an activity. In fact it would be more proper if the student were indeed to think of **the activity of philosophising, rather than of the subject, philosophy.**

The object of this course, then, is to assist the student to philosophise in this sense, to show how concepts should be handled, and to show also how concepts have perhaps been wrongly handled in the past – due very often to just that 'bewitchment of language' to which Wittgenstein refers. This activity, we would emphasise, is both more important and less difficult than is often supposed. It is important because we all do it, and it makes a difference whether we do it well or do it badly. We are philosophising whenever we speculate about justice, freedom, or honesty, and whenever we make a judgement to the effect that liberty must be defended or tyranny opposed. But this speculation is often carried out in a very inexpert manner.

The student is far more likely to carry out the activity effectively and sensibly if some attention has been given to certain basic principles and naturally, as with any other activity, physical or mental, the majority of people will perform more efficiently if they have initially practised under guidance. It may matter very much indeed, as a brief glance at history will show us, whether the results of these speculations are clear and sensible or muddled and foolish. To say that to philosophise is less difficult than is often supposed is of course to over-simplify. As with most activities there are grades of difficulty, but it has often seemed to be the case that the student of philosophy has been plunged into the deep end at his or her first introduction to the subject. In consequence, a number of individuals never have the opportunity to discover that there is also a shallow end.