How Philosophy Pays Off

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Philosophy Pays Off

Philosophy pays off psychologically, morally, and financially. The abstract reasoning skills you gain by studying philosophy are more and more valuable in today's high-tech, information-based economy. Philosophical careers naturally include teaching philosophy, but today more than ever there are many rewarding employment and professional opportunities for philosophers.

The Information Age versus the Industrial Age

The Industrial Age is over. The computer -- not the engine -- is the dominant machine in today's business world. Today's economy is based on information, and nothing is more rich in information than abstract concepts. *Thinking* is the most valuable skill in a post-industrial economy. No wonder philosophers are doing better and better.

Recent News about the Advantages of Philosophy

- "To Beat the Market, Hire a Philosopher" -- that's the striking headline of a recent article in *The New York Times* Mutual Funds Report. Bill Miller, the manager of one of the most successful mutual funds in the country, was a philosophy graduate student at Johns Hopkins University before turning to investing. He uses his philosophical studies in his investment work, applying the ideas of the American thinker William James, examining the value of companies using philosophical thought experiments. Miller's success shows how a philosophical approach pays off finanically to beat the market. *The New York Times*, 10 January 1999, BU 35.
- "For all the jokes about them, philosophy majors appear to do remarkably well" -- so says C. M. Cropper, in a *New York Times* article that explains that philosophy majors are increasingly successful in a world in which business and government depend more and more on abstract reasoning abilities. See C. M. Cropper, "Philosophers Find the Degree Pays off in Life and in Work", *The New York Times*, 26 December 1997, D1.
- The *New York Times Career Planner* reports that "Philosophy is one fundamental area of study that has found a new role in the high-tech world." In an information-based economy, people who can think conceptually are more and more valuable. See E. Fowler, *The New York Times Career Planner* (New York: Random House, 1987).

Employment Opportunities for Philosophers

- Teaching and education
- Management & decision-making
- Software development and design
- Computer programming
- Technical writing
- Information science (librarians & archivists)
- Analysis and research
- Law and politics
- Policy analysis & activism
- Business and medical ethics
- Philosophical counseling

The Professional Importance of Skills

Many people fail to understand that the skills they are able to put into practice often matter more than the particular content they know. Particular concrete techical training quickly becomes outdated; but abstract reasoning skills having enduring value. A student who focuses on a particular technique may find employment more easily if that technique happens to be in demand -- but things change quickly, and the student who knows how to learn new techniques will benefit in the long run.

Philosophical Skills with Professional Value

As everyday life becomes more complex, the skills you gain trying to answer the "Big Questions" become more and more practically valuable.

- **Interpretation & Analysis**
    - The ability to factor complex problems into solvable pieces
    - The ability to analyze purposes and plans, to see beyond superficial categorizations to see the deeper principles: the ability to "see outside of the box"
    - The ability to evaluate plans and projects for their coherence and relevance
    - The ability to discern hidden relationships and connections
    - The ability to evaluate correspondence of concrete products to abstract functional specifications and technical standards
    - The ability to evaluate the functionality and utility of products
- **Abstract Reasoning**
    - The ability to think clearly and logically
    - The ability to find creative solutions to hard problems
    - The ability to objectively evaluate counterintuitive strategies
    - The ability to draw accurate conclusions from confusing data
    - The ability to clarify purposes, principles, and general objectives
    - The ability to formulate an organization's mission and vision

Research & Synthesis

- o The ability to locate information in many electronic and paper media
- o The ability to use creative insight to guide information searches
- o The ability to abstract concepts and summarize information
- o The ability to focus on the big picture, to see the forest and the trees
- o The ability to discern what is valuable from what is irrelevant
- **Communications**
  - o The ability to express difficult ideas in clear prose
  - o The ability to organize complex information into simple and immediately intelligible structures
  - o The ability to use many strategies and tools to convey information

The Uses of Philosophy in the Information Economy

Many erroneously think that bit twisting -- the detailed technical practice of coding up computer programs -- is the only skill needed in today's high-tech world. Nothing could be further from the truth. What is most needed are people who can work with abstract concepts. Some high-tech job descriptions for philosophers are listed below.

- Product conceptualization and visualization
- Software design and architecture
- Analysis of product purpose, functionality, and utility
- Human-computer interface design
- Product positioning and marketing
- Training and technical education
- Web site design & development
- Librarians and archivists
- Computer ethics

Make no mistake: many of these jobs require additional training in mathematical and technical skills. But those are easily gained by most philosophy majors.

For instance, object-oriented programming is the leading software development technique today -- but the logic of object-oriented programmign was developed by philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Porphyry! If you can master the concepts, you can master the details.

Many philosophers are surprised to discover that high-tech jobs are often philosophically rewarding as well as financially rewarding. If you love metaphysics, for instance, you've great future as a software designer: a large software system is just an enormous conceptual structure, not unlike a great metaphysical system.

Success Requires Hard Work

No matter what your major, you shouldn't expect to be automatically rewarded with a job -- particularly one that is both personally and financially satisfying. A good job won't fall into your lap no matter what you major in. It's a sad fact that many think that so-called "practical" majors offer automatic employment after college -- they don't! No matter what you're major, you've got to hustle -- use every avenue to find a job. Research and creativity are your greatest assets -- but you'll have to apply them, to hit the pavement as well as the Help Wanted ads.

It might surpise you to learn that there are plenty of people making lots of money who are miserable -- who hate their jobs and hate their lives, because they get no personal satisfaction from their work. Money isn't everything. A wise man once said, "Man does not live by bread alone", and that applies to all of us. Approach your career philosophically, and you're bound to get more out of it no matter what your major.

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