

David Hume

PHILOSOPHICAL HONESTY

1. I am philosophical.
2. Being philosophical is a way of being oriented to the world. (Imagine seeing the world as a very honest person does. Compare this with the world of the habitual -- or even casual -- liar.)
3. Doing philosophy honestly means having a certain approach to the discipline, and a certain approach to the world -- like, for instance skepticism, phenomenology, or analytic philosophy. Unlike these examples, doing philosophy honestly should not be looked upon as a 'school' of philosophy; it is instead characterized by its free-play amongst the divisions in the discipline. (The one kid in high school who could hang out with the preppies, the skaters, the jocks and the geeks.)
4. Doing philosophy honestly means asking genuine questions. This also means it is having the ability to receive genuine questions.
5. Genuine questions reveal both the ability to ask for help and the ability to offer help. They are intended to build understanding, though are often the most difficult to ask. (The student who, after having a concept repeatedly explained to him, still manages to say: "I still don't get this.")
6. Genuine questions emerge out of deep puzzlement. They reflect a serious commitment to the problem at hand.
7. Doing philosophy honestly entails risking vulnerability. It entails a willingness to expose one's self to reproach or ridicule, to seem foolish, to fall flat on one's face. It entails a willingness to try.
8. In philosophy, this vulnerability exposes the way one thinks.
9. In risking vulnerability, fears arise.
10. I fear being wrong.
11. I fear having nothing useful to say.
12. I fear appearing incompetent.
13. I fear loss.
14. Pride, in this case, underlies all my fears. It is a clinging to an image of myself. Humility is a kind of letting go.
15. Honesty is part of letting go. It is seeing the need to let go. (The desire for humility comes from admitting that one is prideful.)
16. Knowledge and understanding are better sought once one begins to overcome pride. Once can then approach problems unencumbered, from any direction.
17. Courage is necessary to muster the will to overcome my fears and thus my pride. Courage is therefore necessary for doing philosophy honestly.
18. Doing philosophy honestly requires that I see myself in a new light.
19. It is necessary to doing philosophy honestly that our philosophical investigations involve one's identity, one's sense of self. This should come as no surprise, since philosophy in the Western European tradition has always been heavily inflected by introspection -- Socrates' emphasis on "knowing himself," Augustine's Confessions, Descartes' cogito, Kant's apperception.
20. Epistemology, too, is concerned with identity. To ask the question, "Can I have knowledge of the world?" is to point to a relationship between 'the world' and the 'I'. For my current

purposes, what is interesting is traditional philosophy's tendency to reify this 'I' as a sponge (or a tabula rasa) -- the self seems merely to absorb experience. Such reification ignores the importance of personality, temperament or lived experience in how we come to know the world. To do philosophy while ignoring these things is, on the view I am pushing, philosophical dishonesty.

21. Doing philosophy honestly requires that one recognize and involve oneself in knowing the world. This means acknowledging the philosophical usefulness of intuition, emotion, and lived experience, and bringing them to bear on my knowledge of the world in concert with logic, rationality and skepticism. Doing so will broaden and deepen my understanding of it, and make me a better philosopher. (Compare drawing water from a well with a bucket to drawing water with a teacup.)
22. Identity and selfhood, however, are not constituted in isolation -- they come to be through our relationships. (Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Freud.)
23. To have a relationship is to have a connection.
24. Doing philosophy honestly means having a relationship and thus a connection to the world -- the notion of love in 'Philosophy,' eros in Lilburn.
25. What draws in this commitment is the aesthetic.
26. 'Aesthetic,' in its original Greek sense means, "of or having to do with perception and the senses." Aesthetic experiences, in my view, are those of heightened awareness. They are deep experiences of a connection, of a relationship to our surroundings.
27. Honesty is demanded from me when I engage with the world in this way. This closeness to the world is a kind of intimacy. In human relationships, intimacy is created when someone is honest.
28. Doing philosophy honestly means being aware that we are embodied. We are only aesthetically aware if we feel as well as think, only if we are in the world. To do philosophy honestly is to dissolve any notion of a genuine and permanent dichotomy between thinking and feeling. Thinking and feeling involve one another on this model. They are integrated.
29. This integration is honest because it is recognition that a philosopher is a human being. No one is wholly rational; no one is wholly emotional.
30. Doing philosophy honestly doesn't mean you have to tell everyone your life story, though it might help. We will be more capable of understanding you if we understand what events have shaped your life and thought; similarly, we will more capable of understanding you if we understand how your thought has shaped the events of your life. (Thus the importance of biography: St. Augustine, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Muhammad Ali, Jesus Christ).
31. Doing philosophy honestly means letting your life change your thoughts.
32. Doing philosophy honestly means letting your thoughts change your life.
33. When one does philosophy honestly, arguments are no longer matters of ego (i.e., matters of who wins and who loses), but are matters of education, of learning.
34. Paradoxically, if you approach arguments as a means of learning, it is amazing how many more arguments you win. This is because doing philosophy honestly means listening -- the ability to receive genuine questions.
35. Doing philosophy honestly means assuming that all questions and statements are genuine -- the principle of charity.
36. Dishonest philosophy is done with a rigidly enforced agenda in mind -- any view contrary to or different from its own is simply dismissed, or ridiculed as inconsequential.
37. Under the pretence of pursuing truth, dishonest philosophy rants and raves, shakes its fingers and cuts down arguments wherever it passes. Its behaviour is destructive, and never considerate. (Imagine someone deliberately smashing an ugly but sentimentally kept piece of

pottery, bellowing, "Now! I've done you a favour! Clean up the mess!" and then leaving.)

38. Dishonest philosophy has no interest in affecting the way we live our lives. It only wants to look smart.
39. Doing philosophy honestly means just wanting to know -- its motivation is pure, its method is simple.
40. Philosophy, after all, is about Truth. But what good is Truth if we can't first be true to ourselves?