



The Philosophy
Foundation
THINKING CHANGES

Honorary Patrons
Professor A.C. Grayling
Professor Angie Hobbs

Patrons
Robin Ince
Dr Stephen Law
Dr Catherine McCall
Sir Anthony Seldon
Professor Amia Srinivasan
Dr Nigel Warburton

The Happy Prisoner Festival Freeing the mind through Philosophical Enquiry

Online, Saturday 27th March 2021 – The World's First Festival of Philosophical Enquiry

The Philosophy Foundation will put on the world's first philosophical enquiry festival online on Saturday March 27th. The festival will showcase philosophical conversations rather than two-sides debating and will give attendees an opportunity to think through matters of importance facing us all today, including:

- Education.
- Free Speech.
- Ecological Grief.
- The Value of Work.
- Conspiracy Theories.

A man is taken in his sleep to a room and locked in with a friend whom he is longing to see. Upon awaking the man is so pleased to see his friend that even if he knew he was locked in the room, he would have no desire to escape. In this sense he is a 'voluntary prisoner': he cannot leave the room but he has no will to leave it anyway.¹

This scenario is John Locke's 'voluntary prisoner' thought experiment. It asks us to consider matters of freedom, determinism, voluntary actions and free will and to draw a distinction between different forms of freedom. We are all currently experiencing a lack of freedom due to lockdown – but like Locke's happy prisoner, can we be happy and free in our minds?

This Festival showcases free thinkers engaging together in important questions and gives the audience the opportunity to re-think current issues through philosophical enquiry.

All sessions will be facilitated by a professional philosopher, trained in philosophical enquiry with The Philosophy Foundation. There will be 4 guest speakers who will begin a conversation around the topic we are exploring. This will be the starting circle conversation and after half an hour the facilitator will invite the audience members, who have paid to be there on Zoom (£5 per ticket, limited to 20 per session), into the enquiry circle so they can ask questions, raise points or just continue to listen. These sessions will all be live streamed via The Philosophy Foundation's Facebook page.

This is a festival of ideas and conversations, and we will have a wide range of younger voices speaking as part of the starting circle. Philosophical enquiry dissolves the dichotomy of the usual debating format and takes enquirers and listeners further than you would go normally.

¹ This John Locke thought experiment was adapted by Peter Worley in his book *The If Machine*, and called 'The Happy Prisoner'.



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13:30-14.30 Education

What is education – what do we, as a society try to achieve through education, and why? All parents have had to get used to home schooling this year and are concerned that even more children will be left behind because of the digital divide. Are schools just about improving abilities, or is there more going on in terms of society and culture?

15:00-16.00 The Value of Work

We frequently take the necessity of work for granted. Many of us accept the need to spend at least forty hours a week in paid labour to obtain life's necessities and pleasures. Work is also often seen as something that is *good* to do: an unwillingness to work is associated with laziness. The person who does not work supposedly does not contribute to society. Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, expounded the virtue of hard work to earn one's livelihood.

Covid-19 has upended how many of us think about work. We are newly accustomed to thinking about "essential" and "non-essential" workers, for instance. Many of us now work from home full-time. Many others have lost their jobs or are in limbo. Philosophy can help us work through some of the questions about work raised in the last year: Is work necessary? Is work beneficial, and to whom? Are some kinds of work more valuable than others?

16.30-17.30 Ecological Grief

The impact of climate change around the world is already damaging the mental health and well-being of those facing or fearing its consequences. Some people are now using the term **ecological grief** to describe the "experience or anticipation of ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change".

What are the differences and similarities between ecological grief and the grief we experience in bereavement? Should grief motivate a certain kind of engagement with ourselves, others and the world? How should we understand the relationship between ecological grief and the kind of actions required in the face of environmental disaster? With science at the forefront of tackling the climate crisis, perhaps ecological grief can appear "irrational, inappropriate, anthropomorphic" and, if so, should we aim to subdue or avoid it? Can ecological grief be good for us and good for the planet?

18.00-19.00 Free Speech

It is rare to find anyone speaking openly against 'free speech' in the West. To most, its value is undisputed, talked about with near religious reverence. Indeed, arguing against it is likely to appear ironic and self-defeating. And yet, what actually is this thing we call 'free speech'? Is speech 'free' if everyone has a platform or the ability to speak? Is it free only if there are no meaningful punishments or sanctions as a result of that speech? Or is it possible, as the philosopher Stanley Fish has argued, that no speech is truly free?



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Recently the public debate has largely focused on limits to speech, the disagreement tending to escalate into a full-blown culture war. On one side there are those who argue against 'cancel culture' and 'no platforming', saying that overt censorship hampers the search for truth and stifles democratic debate. Others counter that a degree of censorship is a necessary corrective to the dominant culture, protecting minority rights and preventing harmful and offensive views from receiving a wider audience.

Should we judge speech by its consequences or by some principle? What should count as 'harmful' speech? Are we more likely to guarantee a thriving democracy by having few restrictions on speech or some censorship?

19.30-20.30 Conspiracy Theories

The rise of social media and fake news seems to have given life to new conspiracies. Narratives that used to be confined to private conversations and isolated eccentrics are now shouted out across the internet and anyone can search out a space where their beliefs are given air to breathe and like-minded people congregate. And once beliefs are committed to and become part of an identity, they are hard to unpick. Are there basic beliefs we can take for granted? What's the difference between a conspiracy theory and the truth? What makes a source worthy of trust?



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NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY FOUNDATION

The Philosophy Foundation's (TPF) mission is to bring understanding, wisdom and flourishing to the heart of education for children and adults. TPF train philosophy graduates to conduct philosophical enquiry with nursery, primary and secondary school children, older students and adults. Since forming as a social enterprise in 2007 they have worked directly with over 52,000 young people in schools - nursery, primary and secondary - helping them to develop vital cognitive and affective skills that enhance their schoolwork, and their life beyond school. Over 90% of TPF schools have more than the national average of children on free school meals (with 56% of TPF schools having double the national average) and are in areas that serve communities with a wide mix of language and educational needs.

TPF have maintained an average re-contract rate with schools of 91% since 2010 (when they became a charity) - and this year maintained 92% of their schools. This demonstrates the high level of impact and value schools place on their work, as schools pay for it from their own budgets on the whole.

TPF also work in prisons (where a large proportion of the population come from very disadvantaged backgrounds) and community settings with adults and the elderly. They work in some unique settings where education is not straight forward, including: Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital School; Special education needs schools, with looked-after children and with the homeless.

For more information, please contact

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