

## Basic Philosophy Terms for Counseling Students

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Presented is a selection of basic philosophy terms aimed at helping counseling students develop their own theory of counseling. These terms are taken from several sources, sometimes as direct quotes and should NEVER be attributed to the author of the website to which this document is attached. The sources include the following:

*"Dictionary of Philosophy"* (1961) Published by Littlefield, Adams and Company.

*"Philosophy Made Simple"* (1993) Authors R.H. Popkin and A. Stoll. Published by Doubleday.

*"Contemporary Models of Psychotherapy"* (1998) D.H. Ford and H.B. Urban. Pub. by John Wiley & Sons.

*"The Oxford Companion to Philosophy (new edition)"* (2005) Published by Oxford University Press\*.

*\*This reference is considered to be the most reliable source for defining philosophy terms and it has been noted that it sometimes conflicts with how terms are defined in psychological literature and in common language. Quotes are taken from this reference and referred to as OCP – Oxford Companion to Philosophy.*

These terms are given to help the student think about different points of view. What is not included in this list are common terms such as brain, mind, body, soul, justice, goodness, morality, choice, truth, causation, and other terms that are generally known to most college students. This is not to say that such terms have been defined within a consistent philosophy of the student's design. In addition more complex philosophy terms, math/logic terms, and Eastern terms are not included in the list below.

**Absolutism**: Absolute truth is possible.

**Activism**: Activity, particularly spiritual, is the essence of reality.

**Aesthetics**: An examination of aesthetic value which may be interpreted as beauty or the sublime.

**Angst**: Anxiety, but more appropriately existential anxiety – a universal anxiety connected to human existence. *Points to consider: the shaping of culture and the environment of our development.*

**A priori and a posteriori**: Knowledge is considered a priori when it does not depend upon the evidence of experience, while a posteriori does. A priori knowledge is considered to be universal and necessary but is not always the same as innate. *Points to consider – absolutism, archetypes, genetics (survival), reincarnation, divine creation, cultural influence, essence, phenomenology, instinct, tacit knowledge, universals.*

**Associationism**: Ideas seem to be tied to each other and also tied to our sense experiences, often linked to the idea of a "stream of consciousness".

**Bayesian Confirmation Theory:** In the logical positivist tradition, the background of beliefs and expectations of an investigator determine the extent to which any given evidence supports a hypothesis. *Points to consider: the argument of objective and subjective reality versus perception.*

**Biological Naturalism:** Consciousness is a natural biologic phenomenon related to mental phenomena. Mental phenomena are “emergent properties” in that they arise from the interaction of lower level biologic elements. An analogy would be a concert, where the symphony emerges from all the individual parts. *Points to consider: the idea of a “prime mover”.*

**Being:** The focus of ontology, and within psychology it is generally sentient being and existence. *Points to consider: the kinds of being (or qualities) and the process of being (or becoming), also the mind (relation to brain) – body – soul question. See also dasein.*

**Belief:** A mental representation where one is taking a “true-false” stance and combined with other mental states (desires, fears intentions) this directs action and thought. *Points to consider: the power of belief to shape owns philosophy of life, the power of belief to influence both suffering and healing.*

**Care, ethics of:** “This term refers to a group of moral reflections about moral emotion and virtue of care that emerged from feminist theory. The hypothesis that ‘women speak with a different voice’ – the voice of care – rose to prominence in Carol Gilligan’s book *In a Different Voice* (1982). Through empirical research, she claimed to discover a female voice stressing empathic association with others and a sense of being responsible and caring. Gilligan thus defined two modes of relationship and two modes of moral thinking: an ethic of care and an ethic of rights. Allied developments then occurred in philosophical ethics. For example Annette Baier, *Moral Principles* (1994), argued that reasoning and methods of women in ethical theory is noticeably different from traditional theories... She criticizes the near exclusive emphasis in traditional moral philosophy on universal rules and principles, to the neglect of sympathy with the concern for others. The ethics of care therefore promotes traits in intimate personal relationships such as sympathy, compassion, fidelity, discernment, love and trustworthiness.” – From OCP, p. 126.

**Chaos Theory:** Random behavior occurs within complex systems that result in observable changes. *Points to consider: the unpredictability of weather, random genetic mutation.*

**Cogito ergo sum:** Descartes’ statement ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’.

**Common Sense:** Frequently used in general discourse but difficult to accurately define. *Points to consider: a priori, social constructivism, personal perspective of a world view.*

**Compassion:** Compassion is defined as empathy plus wisdom (from the website [www.CompassionSpace.com](http://www.CompassionSpace.com)).

**Connectionism:** “An approach in artificial intelligence and cognitive science aimed at producing biologically realistic models of the brain and mental processing; sometimes called PDP (parallel distributive processing).” From OCP, p. 160. *Points to consider: functional neuroanatomy, neural networks, AI, mind as computer, neurophilosophy.*

**Consciousness:** a term difficult to define precisely but contains some general assumptions in that it includes being self aware, ability to think, feel and perceive. *Points to consider: locus of occurrence, stream of, the subconscious, altered states (including disassociation), NDE and OBE, transcendence, related to being.*

**Contextualism:** “The dependence of important features of language (or thought) on the surroundings in language or reality.” From OCP, p. 169. *Points to consider: social constructivism.*

**Correspondence Theory of Truth:** “Whether what is said about the world is true surely must depend on how the world is... propositions are true if and only if they correspond to the facts”. From OCP, p. 178. *Points to consider: what determines a fact? Or the nature of “correspond”?*

**Cosmology:** A branch of metaphysics dealing with the features of the whole universe (the cosmos) and the nature of the “real” world. *Points to consider: Newtonian mechanics, quantum physics, space –time relations, objective versus subjective reality, big bang theory, the “prime mover”.*

**Dasein:** An important ontological concept coming from the German parts **da**, meaning there, and **sein**, meaning to be – being there. It is a term that shows in some of the greatest philosophical writings and interpreted as “determinate being in space and time”, “a person’s life”, “the existence of something”. But the most interesting explanation is that it is the “locus of being” the point at which being enters into there (or here). *Points to consider: ontology, existence, determinism.*

**Determinism:** Generally meant to mean that all events are tied to other events in a causal relationship that can be determined. It is not the same as predestination and in Divine will. *Points to consider: quantum mechanics, free will, chaos theory, pure chance.*

**Double Aspect Theory** (also called dual aspect theory): Certain states of living beings possess both mental and physical characteristics. They are different aspects of one thing (monism). *Points to consider: ontology, mind-body problem.*

**Dualism:** Mind and matter are two distinct things. Substance dualism states that the mind or soul, is a separate non-physical entity and allows for a causal interaction between the two. It is an attempt to speak to subjective experience, the perception of self and consciousness.

**Eclecticism:** Drawing upon multiple doctrines to define a position. In counseling it is the most common position taken by beginning practitioners where they extract parts of different theories, add in preferred techniques, and call it an eclectic approach. Such an approach should be distinguished from an integrated approach where various doctrines are molded together under the umbrella of a core construct that helps the divergent pieces to merge.

**Egoism and Altruism:** “Does morality require a person to act for the good of others, or can its requirements be consistently seen as a means to self-fulfillment for the moral agent? ... If as an egoist I propose an ethical theory that everyone should understand the object of moral endeavor to be the pursuit of his or her individual good, the proposing of such a universal policy must conflict with my own pursuit of my individual good. I cannot WANT others to attend to their good, as distinct from my own...”

The beginning of altruism is the realization that not good and bad are good-for-me and bad-for-me: that certain others – my close friends, say – have joys and sufferings distinct from mine, but for which I have a sympathetic concern – and for their sake, not my own. I may then acknowledge that others beyond my small circle of friends are not fundamentally different... It is neither impossible nor irrational to act simply for the sake of another... (Further moral altruism) involves the recognition of others as more than instrumental to my own fulfillment. I may promote my own interests as long as I do not encroach upon the pursuit by others of their fulfillment. That is to recognize other persons as limits to my action: altruism may, of course, go beyond that in seeking positively to advance their good". From OCP, p. 237.

**Empiricism**: Knowledge is constructed from information we acquire through the traditional five senses. "We must observe it neutrally and dispassionately, and any attempt on our part to mould or interfere with the process can only lead to distortion and arbitrary imagining. " From OCP, p. 243. Empiricism can be viewed as a theory of mind but it can also be viewed as a theory on how we justify knowledge. In the later it serves as a foundation for the scientific model. *Points to consider: a real world for the senses to perceive, can we know something beyond the senses?*

**Epiphenomenalism**: The workings of the mind are by-products of things that are happening in the world (real phenomena), a dualist position. *Points to consider: links between mental events and causality.*

**Epistemology**: The theory of knowledge, the nature of knowledge, its scope, and foundations. It is more simply "How to we know?" There is often an applied form of skepticism used when seeking answers in this domain. *Points to consider: a priori, intuition, divine inspiration, the creative "eureka", relationships, developmental process, emergent properties, the nature of scientific discovery/acceptance and learning – including memory, attention and generalization.*

**Essence**: In general terms it means that there is a quality that an object has that defines its nature and it the same for all similar objects. Water has an essence, a set of qualities that is the same regardless of where and how we encounter water. *Points to consider: its connection to the nature of being.*

**Existence**: This is a fundamental term in ontology and distinguishes something as "being" as opposed to fantasy. In psychology it is often related to human being and human existence. *Points to consider: a prime mover, multiple dimensions (e.g. spiritual), creation, and nothingness. Also the idea that Dasein precedes essence.*

**Existentialism**: "Kierkegaard insisted on the irreducibility of the subjective, personal dimension of human life. He characterized this in terms of the perspective of the 'existing individual'. And thus it is from this special use of the term 'existence' to describe a distinctively human mode of being that existentialism gets its name... The basic idea here is that one is able to make sense of one's life as a whole only through personal conduct and relationship with others which manifest the virtues... For each of us 'our own being is an issue', and the way in which we face up to this issue determines the nature of our existence. There is no fixed human essence which gives a structure to human life." From OCP, pgs 277-279. *Points to consider: angst, Dasein, existence, essence.*

**Fatalism:** The belief that making plans and acting toward some goal are pointless because the future (our fate) will be the same no matter what we do. This is to be distinguished for determinism.

**Freedom and Determinism:** This is a philosophic argument about the nature of free will, or choice, and personal responsibility in our actions. In what ways do we have actual choice? Or is there a causal sequence of determined events, governed by universal laws or Divine intervention, already in motion which predicts an outcome no matter what we choose to do? *Points to consider: history repeats itself, chaos, God's will, justice.*

**Good Life, The:** A perennial philosophical question, "What is the good life?" Some proposed answers follow. Plato – If one has knowledge of the good life then one will live it. Aristotle – It is a life of happiness. Hedonist – The good life is one of pleasure (and absence of pain). Cynics – The world is full of evil and the good life is found by separating from it (ascetic). Stoics – Learn to be indifferent to external influences (quietism). Christian – The good life is following the Way of Christ. Kant – The good life is one of correct moral action and attitude. *Points to consider: the connection to justice and to meaning of human existence, what is the definition of good.*

**Hedonism:** Pleasure is the focus of the good life, the seat of desire and purpose (what we ought to do), and thus is what makes pursuing anything rational. *Points to consider: definition of pleasure.*

**Hermeneutics:** In general it means the art of interpretation using heuristics, but it is also considered to be the analysis of how we go about doing an analysis. What is the structure of our problem solving approach? What is the structure of how you interpret what you have read in the definition provided here? *Points to consider: epistemology.*

**Humanism:** "The tendency to emphasize man and his status, importance, powers, achievements, interests or authority. Humanism has many different connotations, which depend largely on what it is being contrasted with... Humanism is often called scientific humanism, then becomes associated with rationalism... Humanistic ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God." From OCP, pgs 401-402.

**Idealism:** Reality is mental or spiritual or at least not physical. It is an effort to provide some explanation of the existence and reality of one's own subjective mind. *Points to consider: representationalism, realism.*

**Innate Ideas:** These are ideas that exist in the mind without having been derived from previous experience. *Points to consider: Which aspects of knowing are learned and which are there to begin with before birth?*

**Instrumentalism:** "The doctrine that scientific theories are not true descriptions of an observable reality, but merely useful instruments which enable us to order and anticipate the observable world. *Points to consider: the development of scientific knowledge, absolutism.*

**Interactionism:** "The view that some mental events cause some physical events and some physical events cause mental events, closely tied to the commonsense idea that thoughts and desires cause

various physical events, such as limb movements, and physical events cause visual experiences and the like. The view is therefore different from epiphenomenalism, which regards all mental events as causally inefficacious themselves and as effects of physical events.” OCP, p. 439. This is a dualistic view and it is not the same as saying everything is tied to brain/neuron action.

**Intersubjective**: “This term refers to the status of being somehow accessible to at least two (usually all, in principle) minds or ‘subjectivities’. It implies that there is some sort of communication between those minds; which in turn implies that each communicating mind is aware not only of the existence of the other but also of its intention to convey information to the other. The idea, for theorists, is that if subjective processes can be brought into agreement, then perhaps that is as good as the (unattainable?) status of being objective-completely independent of subjectivity.” From OCP, page 441. (see also reference: D. Davidson. Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective. Oxford, 2001).

**Intuition**: The mind seeing something, often an abstract concept, which is not directly observable by the senses.

**Logical Positivism**: This doctrine is tied verification and the language we use in doing so. Basically, when seek verification we do so by relying on the structure of language and our senses. Often tied to empiricism (and science).

**Materialism**: Everything is made of matter. In modern times it often refers to whatever can be studied by science which is more appropriately naturalism. “Materialism concerns the composition of things, while naturalism, though concerned with what exists, ranges more widely, covering properties as well as substances, and its concern with studying things is more direct and central.” From OCP, p. 564. *Points to consider: the existence of the immaterial, naturalism, definition of matter,  $E=MC^2$*

**Mind**: An extensive topic which requires the student to do both a personal inventory of his/her own thoughts on the concept and then follow that with support from other authors. Consider also the mind-body problem and the nature of existence in such an analysis.

**Monism**: Everything comes from one source, there is one “substance” that accounts for everything. *Points to consider: the mind – body – soul problem.*

**Mysticism**: “The concept of mysticism is closely related to that of religious experience, but probably they should not be thought to be identical. It seems useful to distinguish mystical experience from numinous experience of the sort described by Rudolf Otto, and for the more ‘ordinary’ sort of experience of the presence and activity of God, which is well illustrated by John Baillie.” From OCP, p. 635. The mystical experience involves BOTH a shift in perception and insight (see W. David Hoisington, “The Mystic Relationship). It has been part of the mystic teachings of cultures for thousands of years. It is possible to have a shift in perception (for example drug induced) which may seem mystical but which lack the authenticity that one comes to understand through years of study in the ways of mysticism. *Points to consider: consciousness, epistemology.*

**Naturalism**: Everything is natural and it can be studied as such. One does not need to call upon the “supernatural” to explain phenomena in the natural world. It is generally considered to be an adherence to science – in all forms.

**Neurophilosophy**: A doctrine linked to a model of the mind that is based on neuroanatomy. The term was initially proposed by Patricia Smith Churchland.

**Ontology**: In general it is the study of being and the nature of existence. In psychology it generally refers to human being and human existence.

**Parallelism**: “The thesis that mind and body never influence one another, but nevertheless progress along parallel paths, as though they interacted.” From OCP, p. 681. It is a dualist position of immaterial versus material.

**Phenomenalism**: Physical objects can be described using sensory experiences, this includes both actual and possible phenomena. *Points to consider: compare to phenomenology.*

**Phenomenology**: It is basically a theory of knowledge that makes a distinction between perceptual properties and abstract properties. The theory includes “eidetic intuition” or knowledge of the essential features of the world – its essences. In addition to knowing the essence of things we also have perception of things in the moment. There is indirect and direct knowledge, a dualist epistemological position. The phenomenological method is particularly aimed at discovering the indirect knowledge associated with essence and often includes the method of phenomenological reduction. *Points to consider: dualism, essence, absolutism.*

**Positivism**: It is similar to naturalism and empiricism. Positivism emphasized not only the importance of science but the developmental nature of science within cultural influences. A categorical methodology was developed which led to Logical Positivism and its application to the study of language. In the sciences positivism generally means the unity of all the sciences under the umbrella of reducibility and verification.

**Pragmatism**: Generally it refers to an analysis of consequences and their practical application to the “good” of society. In morality it asks the question “What is the best decision?” or “What is the best way of thinking and behaving?” and then what practical evidence is there to support this.

**Predestination**: All events in one’s life are predetermined by a Deity.

**Prime Mover**: “This is a label given to the ultimate cause of motion or change in the universe.” From OCP, p. 757.

**Quietism**: “The philosopher diagnoses conceptual confusions. Although the results of such therapy can be profoundly liberating, philosophy does not itself advance human knowledge, but ‘leaves everything as it is’”. From OCP, p. 779.

**Rationalism**: The view which places an emphasis on reason and not on the senses, the feelings or any authority. The development of logic, hermeneutics, mathematics and the analysis of language can be considered part of this approach. We acquire some knowledge through the processes of reason that does not need to rely on the senses and it is how we “make sense of the world”. *Points to consider: a priori, intuition, the role of the senses, God, justification of knowledge.*

**Realism**: There is a real objective world that and it exists separate from the mental. Realism is often viewed in two ways. One is that there are descriptions of the commonsense observations of the world and that most of these descriptions are true. The other is that there is a real world that exists whether we have it or not (there are real things that we do not know). *Points to consider: justification of a reality we don't know, justification of their existing only t he reality we know, a priori.*

**Reductionism**: “One of the most used and abused terms in the philosophical lexicon.” From OCP, p. 793. There are various ways to apply the term. 1) The nature of being can be reduced down to a select set of components. 2) Science is always seeking to explain things in ever more minute pieces. 3) mental reductionism – facts about mentality are reducible to facts about the material.

**Relations, the nature of**: This “became an important metaphysical issue in modern philosophy with Leibniz. He regarded it as a problem where the relation R which links individuals a and b is located. It cannot just be in one of them, for it would not then link them, nor can it be is some kind of void between them... A rather simple puzzle about the location of relations figures in the rationale of some forms of metaphysical monism... if every item in the world is related to every other, then, according to a fairly obvious line of argument, the relations between them collapse into gestalt properties of that all inclusive whole to which they all belong, i.e. the Universe, the One, or the Absolute... A relation between two (or more) terms is said to be ‘internal’ if its holding is either necessitated by or necessitates the so called ‘natures’ of these terms; otherwise it is external... There are real metaphysical problems about relations essential to dealing with what William James (in “A Pluralistic Universe”) described as ‘the most central of all philosophical problems’, the problem of the one and the many.” From OCP, p. 799. *Points to consider: relation between mind and body, empathy, representation.*

**Relativism**: The idea that truth is relative is the simple definition. The commonsense sense notion that if I think the taste of chocolate ice cream is best, then that is “truth” for me. This is probably better stated as personal taste or preference, yet the concept has been expanded to ‘global relativism’ (everyone defines truth for themselves). But there is a much deeper way of looking at the idea of relativism and that is to apply hermeneutics to how one decides. Are there ways in which we solve perceive, and solve problems, which are similar and serve as a foundation for knowledge? Is there a prior knowledge which is not relative? Is there a process of justification that is of benefit to society as well as to the individual? Can anything be considered reliable (even the term relativism)?

**Scepticism**: “Philosophical scepticism questions our cognitive achievements, challenging our ability to obtain reliable knowledge... When I put something forth as true, I present myself as making a legitimate claim and able to resist intelligible challenges that may be made to it... An alternative structure of sceptical argument points out that, whenever I make such a claim, I can be asked for its ground or

justification..." From OCP, pgs. 839-840. Having a sceptical attitude may be part of how we make meaning and a natural part of coming to knowledge. Yet we also arrive at some level of certainty about what is a valid claim and what is not. An unending scepticism eliminates certainty and ultimately leads to the conclusion that we can't know anything with certainty. So where is the balance between what someone decides is a valid claim and what is held with scepticism? Are we to be sceptical of scepticism?

**Social Constructivism**: "Analysis of 'knowledge' or 'reality' or both as contingent upon social relations , and as made out of continuing human practices, by processes such as reification, sedimentation, habitualization... Social constructionists do not believe in the possibility of value-free foundations or sources of knowledge, nor do they conceptualize a clear objective-subjective distinction, or a clear distinction between 'knowledge' and 'reality'." From OCP, p. 873. The following is from "Social Constructivism" by Vivian Burr (2003): It is a skeptical position which states that the way we understand the world is historically and culturally specific and is sustained by social processes.

**Tacit Knowledge**: "Thinkers often perform complex rule-governed tasks even though they have no conscious or explicit knowledge of the rules involved... thinkers have unconscious knowledge, or tacit knowledge of the rules for executing the tasks." From OCP, p. 907.

**Teleology**: A theory which seeks to explain the actions and properties of things by linking them to goals to be reached or states to be obtained. It is the idea that actions, like my eating, are linked to the goal of satisfying my hunger or the action of going to college is linked to an improved state of intelligence. Teleology is also the practice of looking at historical patterns and making predictions about how history will repeat itself – linking the behavior to the outcome or goal. Is rain linked to the goal of better crop production? *Points to consider: determinism, predestination.*

**Universals**: "Universals are supposed referents of general terms like 'red', 'table' and 'tree', understood as entities distinct from any of the particular things describable by those terms... that which is common to all and only red things is precisely the universal red." From OCP, p. 933. These universals form the basis for describing the nature of reality. *Points to consider: essence, dasein – also consider that our natural inclination to categorize things may either be linked to the structure of the brain or to our education (in the broadest sense).*

**Utilitarianism**: An approach to morality that ties pleasure to what is good. If an action produces an excess of beneficial effects (resulting in pleasure) over harmful ones (resulting in pain) then it is the 'right' action (as opposed to the 'wrong'). The practice of right action leads to the good life. *Points to consider: acting in a way that contributes to the greater good (pleasure for the majority) versus acting simply for personal pleasure.*