Philosophical Frameworks
InterQuest - Introduction to Philosophy (PHL201)

What is your Weltanschauung?
Since Socrates (470-399 BCE), a main job of philosophy has been to encourage individuals to examine their own thoughts. A very large scop of this task is to examine those thoughts and concepts that shape how you experience life and the world. The German word Weltanschauung; which means "world view" or "an overall view of the world from a particular point." Sometimes people express their Weltanschauung (what I call a "Philosophical Belief System") by stating,"My philosophy is...." Often this declaration is followed by an aphorism or a brief expression of ideas. Even from such little clues, it is possible to start an investigation into the individual's Belief System.

An investigation into your own belief-system is a primary objective of InterQuest (PHL201). The aim is to get you to think as much and as deeply as possible about the beliefs and values that shape your own thinking.

All you really need to undertake this investigation is honesty, patience, and courage. It may help to know that changing your values and challenging your beliefs is not the primary purpose of this investigation. How could we know what beliefs we should change until we know what those beliefs are? Changes and challenges are probably inevitable, but it is more informative to study the case for your view, at least initially. Of course, one can effectively stop change and avoid challenge by not thinking. This is Dogmatism, and many social movements have relied on the willingness of their followers to not think. The intention here is to foster an environment where it is OK to think. Hopefully you will find such thinking interesting enough to pursue seriously. If you find your own thinking boring, what in the world ever could hold your interest?

Systems of Belief
Here is our starting assumption: the belief and ideas that a person has form a system. The parts of that system are related in various ways. That system is dynamic in that it changes as new information is added and in that all new information is modified by the system. This, I believe, is an incredibly powerful idea. If this is true, then it is possible for an individual to change the information that they receive in order to protect and maintain their existing belief system. Do you know anyone who is so rigidly stuck in a set of beliefs that they cannot see anything outside of that framework? American philosopher C.S. Pierce (1839-1914) calls this The Method of Tenacity. You can observe this method at work in yourself as well as others.

If our beliefs form a dynamic system as described above, it is also possible that an individual
may purposely act to alter that system. We can change our own minds - rewrite the scripts that lead the roles we play in life - reprogram our mental software. These metaphors may seem over the top, but it is hard to over estimate the power that we may have if we were able to redesign our own belief systems. If our belief systems control how we experience the world, what we admit as possible, and what we dismiss as impossible, then whatever controls the belief system is a mighty power. I am here suggesting that we are capable of controlling our own belief systems to a significant degree. I also maintain that few people ever consciously set out to revise their own minds and stick to it. Our belief systems are naturally self-preserving and have many sophisticated techniques for defeating change.

Consider your own system of beliefs, ideas, feelings, and motivations. As I am describing it, this expanded system is the primary factor that make up your individual identity. What you believe, what you feel, and how you act (or are inclined to act) defines who you are. Do you need evidence of this? Well, how do you react when other people try to change your beliefs? Many people react strongly to such attempts. Some students, for instance, come into this course - InterQuest - with a strong statement of resistance before anything has happened at all. They make it clear that nothing that happens here can change their basic beliefs. I am always gratified that these folks have the awareness that philosophy is an activity in which basic beliefs are to be challenged and revised. So even though they are set against change, it is positive that they recognize it as possible. Some other students are not passionate about this at all, and of course we recognize indifference and apathy (i.e. withholding attention) as a very powerful self-defense mechanism of the belief system. As a caveat for learners in InterQuest (PHL201) I have to admit that a key purpose of this course is to enable individuals to examine and revise their own belief systems - but I am entirely sincere in my intention not to prescribe what any individual is to think and believe. I am mainly concerned with how you think (i.e. the process of thought) which is different from what you think.

Here is a simple model for how a belief system may be structured: we receive information about the world in various ways; that information works to create our beliefs, but the information is also modified by our existing beliefs; our beliefs give rise to feelings (which involve evaluations of the information); how we feel determines how we are inclined to act in response (which may be actions in word, deed, or merely in the imagination). There are other models of belief formation and maintenance, but this one gives us one possible explanation for we hold our beliefs.

Right now, begin an investigation into your own belief system. Start with these questions:
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- What beliefs do you have?
- How are those beliefs related to one another?
- How are your beliefs related to your feelings and actions?
- Which, if any, of your beliefs are most important and basic (i.e. such that the other beliefs depend on them)?
- How far back can you trace your basic beliefs? To childhood?
- Where did you get your beliefs? Did you create them? Did you inherit them?
- Have you experienced major changes in your belief system? What was that experience like?
- Can you draw a diagram of a particular cluster of information, ideas, feelings, and actions? If so, I'd like to see it.

The Structure of your own Beliefs

Philosophers are often interested in identifying and examining the reasoning that leads people to hold the beliefs that they have. Here is a point I am very interested in making clear: we can gain much about how we and others think by attending to the structure of the system of beliefs. In my experience, many people are well able to identify and react to the beliefs of others. They are much less used to examining the structure underlying the beliefs. The later is one skill that philosophers are good at, and I hope to help you further develop that skill.

Let's consider what a belief is. Beliefs can be expressed as claims or statements. Yet, we can make a claim or a statement without believing it (we can be doubtful or uncommitted or faking it). To believe, is to have both the claim and an attitude towards that claim. The attitude towards the claim can be summed as saying "this statement is true." We can call this attitude "assent." To have a belief is to have at least two things: a claim and assent. We can represent this picture of belief as follows:

\[
\text{IDEA} + \text{ASSENT} = \text{BELIEF}
\]

This conception of belief opens many possibilities. We can see that a statement and our assent to it may be separated. We can also see that our assent may come in degrees of strength: a very strong belief has a high degree of assent, weaker beliefs have lower degrees of assent. It is also possible that our interpretations of the statements involved may vary; from person to person and also from moment to moment for ourselves. Obviously, belief is complex matter (note how often you hear people say about beliefs something like; "it is very simple." I think that what they mean by this is essentially; "my assent for this claim is very strong.")

Adding to the complexity is the relations that beliefs have to one another when they form a system. We can investigate the structures of belief systems by examining how the parts fit together. Let's consider an example that was posted on the course discussion board in a previous
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term;

K: "A lot of people think that there place in the world is to dominate it. I think we are Stewards of the land. God put things on the earth for our use, and God put us here to take care of it, and protect it. Being part of a greater whole is to know what we are here for. I don't think that letting go of fear and desire would make life any better. Fear gives us limitations and restraints on what we do. With out fear we would not have a fear of using up all of our resources. And with out desire we would not have motivation. Universal harmony would be a wonderful thought but it is all ready too late for that, we need to protect and live with what we have."

J: "You say; "Universal harmony would be a wonderful thought but it is all ready too late for that". Can you fill us in more on what you are thinking here? How do you know it is too late? Was it once possible?"

K: "What I mean when I say that it is too late is that there is so much hate and violence in the world it would be pretty much impossible to reverse that. There are so many different beliefs that to have universal harmony everyone would have to agree on one belief. We should not force people into thinking one way, it would never work. I also think that there are so few natural resources to live in universal harmony. We can never rebuild what we have already destroyed."

This interaction involves the expression of several beliefs - even an indication of a whole system of beliefs. A philosopher can do several things with such expressions. One of these is to analyze the structure of the reasoning involved. A chain of reasoning in which one of the claims is supported by others is known as an argument. This is a different use of the word "argument" than you may be used to. What is of importance is to figure out, from the words provided, what the individual beliefs are and how they fit together to form a system of reasoning. I think that the main belief being supported here by K has this statement; "Universal harmony is not possible." Several of other statements given are connected to this main belief. You can see that they are connected because they use common words (i.e. they conceptually overlap) and there are logical relations among them (i.e. some follow from others, or are presented as if they do). I've draw a picture of the two chains of reasoning -- arguments -- that I find in these passages.
The boxes show individual claims. Some of these claims are taken directly from the text, others are constructed as implicit in the text (they are needed to make this interpretation of the arguments work). This analysis is my interpretation of the author's words and reasoning.

Please note how different this approach is from that of debate and verbal contest that we witness daily in public life. In making this analysis I am doing my best to give a fair and accurate interpretation of the author's thought. I am reading between the lines, making my own judgments, and rephrasing aspects of what the author said. But I am doing this in order to gain a better understanding of the structure of the author's beliefs. In logic this approach is called The Principle of Charity.

How can I tell whether I am close to the author's intended meaning? Well, I can ask her and show her my interpretation and we can discuss my interpretation and her meaning. In this way we can come closer to understanding one another. Much closer, I think, than we can by simply accepting and rejecting one another's beliefs.

Perhaps people's beliefs are so different and individual that we cannot ever share a universal set of beliefs. From a philosophical perspective, however, that does not prevent us from pursuing better
understanding of the beliefs of others and our own. To do so will involve an effort to see and figure out the structure and system of beliefs.

TRY THIS: can you do the same with an instance from this course? Do this - take a posting or a group of postings from another thinker in the course, from the discussion board. Analyze an argument (chain of reasoning) that you find in it. Post your interpretation of that chain. Note that interpreting the structure of a chain of reasoning need not involve your evaluation (your agreement/assent or disagreement/dissent) about it.

Drawing the picture of the reasoning structure will be best. Do this with paper and pencil. If you can scan it and post it, or develop with a image editing tool, great. If you cannot do so, then another method will work fine. Use the Standard Form for argument analysis which is simply to list the premises (support statements) and the conclusion (the main statement being supported). The above arguments will be rendered in standard form as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument 1</th>
<th>Argument 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premise 1: To have universal harmony everyone would have to agree on one belief</td>
<td>Premise 1: There are few natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premise 2: There are many different beliefs</td>
<td>Premise 2: People compete for resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premise 3: People disagree about the different beliefs</td>
<td>Premise 3: competition for resources causes disharmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premise 4: It is not possible to force everyone to agree with on one belief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion: Universal harmony is not possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard Form does not show the structure of the arguments as well as the diagram method does, but it is very effective in identifying all of the parts. Use Standard Form and Diagram Form as ways to represent the structures of beliefs and you will achieve a new level of communication with others. Try it.

**What is your Framework?**

The following are sets of ideas that relate to to how we frame our apprehensions. If any of these strike you as very true or very false, then you have identified a part of your belief system that belongs to your philosophical framework, your Weltanschauung.

Weltanschauung is a German word (welt = world, anschauung = awareness or perception). A Weltanschauung is a "world view" or "an overall view of the world from a particular point." This idea can be applied to individuals, groups, cultures, and even periods in history. It a conceptual framework that conditions the way that we view things. Typically people are aware of the things
in the world that they apprehend, but are not aware of the frame through which they make that apprehension.

Read the following all the way through; more than once so that you really understand them. Then select one of them that is closest to your own beliefs. None of them are exactly what you believe and you have the opportunity to revise in order to fashion a closer fit.

Supplied here are passages, each of which (roughly) expresses a belief system in very general terms. Probably none of these fit anyone's beliefs and values exactly. They are more like caricatures of ways of thinking. Never the less, I'll bet that you can relate to and agree with some of them more than others. It is hard to imagine how anyone could believe ALL of them at once! Even if you feel you can agree with more than one, each of them projects a different emphasis as to what is important.

Your challenge is to pick the one that comes closest to your personal philosophy. You probably won't agree with everything it says and it may leave some important ideas out. You will have the opportunity to improve upon it. Read each passage and consider whether you agree with the view a lot, kind of agree, don't think much of it, disagree a lot, or absolutely hate it. Make notes for yourself (using your hardcopy notebook) on the aspects of these views that strike you as important, relevant, obvious, interesting, etc. In the end, settle on the one passage that seems closest to your thinking.

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Self-Interest is Central
Without conflict, life would be a bore. In all of nature we see a constant struggle to survive. Human life is structured by the same struggle which is the basis of all values. Competition brings out the best in people. It provides the challenge required for people to find their true potential. Dreamers and idealists go on and on about how the world should be or could be, but they can't back it up with hard fact. We need to be realistic; deal with what is here and now. Competition is the reality we have to deal with. Some people imagine that we can avoid the struggle of life altogether. They dream of an ideal world without conflict or injustice. That is neither realistic nor desirable. So long as human nature is what it is, there will always be war, poverty, and crime. When one person possesses something, that automatically means other people are denied it. Our very existence puts us in competition with others. Competition means that there must be winners AND losers. You can't have one without the other. The best thing a person can do, then, is to learn to come out on top.
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We are all parts of a greater whole
The world is full of conflict and unhappiness because so many people are out of touch with universal harmony. We are all part of something much greater than ourselves. To live well is to learn how to function as a part of the whole. The world could be joyful and vibrant if people could just find their place in it. Of course, what gets in the way of finding harmony is the human ego. People act selfishly because they think they can become happy by obtaining immediate goals and satisfying present desires. Even if we attain those goals and objects, we find that we are still not satisfied. So we keep on seeking and striving in an ever increasing spiral of dissatisfaction. Blind materialism and frenzied consumerism are the social results of unlimited ego. The entire planet and human kind are suffering from this addiction to desire. The solution is to put the self aside and to accept life as it is. To let go of one's ego is to appreciate the oneness of the universe. There is an essential mystery to existence. We cannot know everything, but we can have a sense of the universal order. To cultivate that sense is to grow spiritually. Being spiritual does not require any particular religious belief or organized religious practice. Inner spirituality means accepting the limitations of life; letting go of fear and desire. Everything that happens, happens for a reason. We cannot expect to always know what that reason is, but we can be sure that what goes around comes around. When we let go of the struggle and begin to enter the universal harmony, we start to find inner peace and real happiness.

Faith is focal
The world is in a real mess because too many people lack the values that come from faith. Without faith in God, there is no way to find direction or purpose in life. Loving God, serving God, and knowing the word of God is what makes life worth living. God tells us to love others as he loves us. If we all followed that truth, the world could be a paradise. But selfish motives and lack of faith get in the way. People think they can do it on their own, without divine guidance. That's impossible. All of creation proceeds according to a great and beautiful plan. There is no way we can understand that plan, and to act without understanding is to act blindly. We need light to find our way. Of course, we are only human. Even the best of us loses sight of the path and falls. But God is always there to help us get back on track. Everybody has the same opportunity to live a life of faith. Unfortunately, many people will not accept that opportunity and are on the road to unhappiness. There are many forces in the world which turn people away from true faith. The best we can do is to resist those forces and try to show people the truth of God's word. They have everything to gain and nothing to lose (except fear and confusion)! To open one's heart to God and live one's life according to his word is to find true joy, security, and peace.

Reality is relative
The vast mass of conflict in the world stems from people seeking to impose their beliefs and ways of life on others. The deep tragedy of this battle of beliefs is that there is ultimately no
way of proving any one belief to be better than any other. All beliefs are equally valid. We all have our own truths, just as we all have our own definitions of what "truth" is. It's all a matter of your point of view. Of course, throughout history there have been many people who claimed to know the universal Truth: that is, a belief that is true for everyone. Convinced that they had found ultimate reality, these people set out to make others accept it. Typically, they ran into people who already had what they claimed was the real universal Truth and it was a different one. So starts a war, revolution, schism, or whatever. If people could just realize that every culture and each individual has their own "truths," we could avoid a lot of bloodshed. The best reason for believing something is that it works for you. An ancient philosopher wrote: "Man is the measure of all things." It is like what happens when three people see an accident. All three may give different descriptions of what happened. That's because each is seeing the situation from their own perspective. Each has his/her own unique set of perceptions and those perceptions are true for the individual. So there is no point in asking what "really" happened. What each person perceived is true for them. It is worthwhile to study the different beliefs of the world, because to understand them helps us to better respect them. But there is no use in comparing these beliefs or seeking to find which is "truest." If everyone could just temper their belief with tolerance and humility, the world would be a much happier place. The bottom line is: There are no absolutes.

Objectivity is truth
There is a real and objective reality that is there no matter what we think or do. This reality existed before humans came into existence and will be here long after we are gone. Reality consists of all of the facts that exist, have existed, and will exist. All of these facts are combinations of matter and energy and that is all there is. Our knowledge of truth is based in our awareness of the facts of reality. We are learning more about reality all of the time, though human-kind has limits and likely will never know more than a small fraction of all of reality. But what we do know is certain because it matches up with objective reality. Humans are parts of this reality and everything that we think and feel is the result of material causes. What we call our “mind” and “consciousness” are simply chemical relations in the brain. We may feel like we have the freedom to choose our futures, but in reality we and everything about us are the results of cause and effect reactions just like everything else that exists. The most genuine way to live life is to seek objectivity in our judgements and recognize our subjective thoughts and feelings as just artifacts of being human.

Knowledge is negligible
Some people believe that "there is some absolute truth," others say that "there are no absolute truths," the real story is that we just do not know. Moreover, we cannot know. Human knowledge is limited and the best we can ever say is that some claims are more probable than other claims. We might even say that some claims are very probably true, but that is different from saying that we know them for certain. We cannot be certain about
anything. The human condition is basically a state of ignorance. Everything is open to doubt. For example, it is possible that everything I am experiencing now is a vivid dream from which I will soon wake up. That may not sound very plausible, but there is no way to prove it false, so it remains possible. A lot of what we take to be knowledge depends on our senses. But our senses can be fooled. In the desert, people see mirages. Most people have probably seen a kind of mirage on the highway in summer. Way up ahead, there appears to be a large pool of water on the road. Little children are surprised when they get to the spot and the "water" has vanished. These are just a few examples of the many ways we can be tricked into thinking something exists or is real when it is only an illusion (or appearance). If we are to have any genuine knowledge, we have to be able to distinguish appearance from reality. There is no completely reliable way to do so because we can always be mistaken. Genuine knowledge is forever out of our grasp. Of course, science provides a sound method for approximating truth. By scientific study we can determine what is most probable. But a necessary part of science is that every claim it makes is open to doubt. People used to believe that the earth was flat. We believe it is round. Science gives us some good reasons to think so, but it is possible that another theory will come along and show that the earth is a four-dimensional hypersphere instead of a round ball. The case is never closed on any issue, doubt is always possible, and final knowledge is forever out of our grasp. This view will probably upset people who believe in "an absolute truth" and people who believe "there is no absolute truth." After all, both claim to know something. But the only thing we can know is that we know nothing.

Nothing is

The mass of humanity cling to various dogmas in the attempt to make sense out of the world and find meaning in life. The blunt truth is: it doesn't and there isn't. Life has no ultimate meaning. We are just the result of cosmic accident in a universe that has no more concern for us than a speck of dust. Trying to make sense out of events in the world is like searching for the "hidden order" in a pile of randomly thrown cards. For a lot of people it is necessary to believe that the universe has some design and purpose. Some even believe that the designer has them in mind specifically. These are merely superstitions borne out of fear and ignorance. Nothing is eternal. Everything we value will eventually fade away into the obscurity of nonexistence. A million years from now, or so, the sun will explode leaving no traces of our frenzied efforts to make a mark on the universe. Death is nothingness. Even life doesn't offer that much. The world is a mechanism set in motion by random forces. Whatever happens is the result of those forces, and there is nothing we can do to change it. Human beings like to think that we have power to create events and shape the future. That's just more arrogant ignorance. Perhaps the pebbles tumbling about in a stream think that they are responsible for the current's flow. We are just bits of matter tossed around in the currents of time and space. Nothing more. What will be, will be and there is nothing we can do to change it. Even if we could, it wouldn't matter in the end. This isn't a pretty picture. Most people find it...
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depressing. Even I do when I think about it, but at least I'm not deceiving myself.

**Now make a choice**
So what do you think (or feel)? Do any of these strike a chord in you; positive or negative? Do you recognize yourself in any of them? Do you recognize people that you know in them? I’ve never met anyone who did not have a significant reaction to these passages. Try these out on your friends and family to see how they respond. It will likely result in a discussion. If it does, then that discussion will be a philosophical one. It is philosophical because it is about the precepts, assumptions, frameworks, background beliefs, or Weltanschauung that structure individual systems of belief.

Note also that none of these passages contain arguments (in the philosophical or logical sense), reasons for belief, or evidence for claims. They are all sets of assertions and statements of the form “I believe X”. Authentic philosophy always goes beyond mere assertion. Authentic philosophy employs reason and explanation to validate our assertions and to test our beliefs.

That’s my dear philosophers is the territory to which we now embark....