



What's Wrong with the World, and Who's to Blame?

1. Some Relevant Quotations from Bertrand Russell

- “Many people would sooner die than think; in fact, they do so.”

1. Some Relevant Quotations from Bertrand Russell

- “Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth -- more than ruin -- more even than death.... Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible, thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habit. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid. Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of man.”

1. Some Relevant Quotations from Bertrand Russell

- “Men are born ignorant, not stupid. They are made stupid by education.”

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **Group 1: Bad Things that Are Either Caused by Humans or Preventable by Humans**
- **1. Deaths and suffering related to poverty.**
- “Roughly one third of all human deaths, some 18 million annually, are due to poverty-related causes, easily preventable through better nutrition, safe drinking water, mosquito nets, re-hydration packs, vaccines and other medicines. This sums up to over 300 million deaths in just the 17 years since the end of the Cold War — many more than were caused by all the wars, civil wars, and government repression of the entire 20th century. Children under five account for nearly 60% or 10.6 million of the annual death toll from poverty-related causes (UNICEF 2005: inside front cover).”
- From Thomas Pogge, “Poverty and Human Rights” Summary

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **2. Great inequalities in the distribution of wealth.**
- If one thinks poverty-related deaths and suffering are a bad thing, one might think that great inequalities in the distribution of wealth is also a bad thing.

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **3. Unjust wars, violence against ethnic and religious groups, terrorism.**
- Not all wars and acts of violence are unjustified, but it is surely plausible that most of them are.

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **4. Governments that are bad in various ways.**
- There are governments that fail either to acknowledge or to protect the rights and freedoms of individual. Some examples of failures are as follows:
- (1) There are states that do not affirm that people should have freedom of belief concerning religious matters, and freedom of expression.

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **4. Governments that are bad in various ways.**
- (2) There are states that prohibit actions that do not violate the rights of others, including the use of various drugs, the sale of sexual services, physician-assisted suicide, etc. Here are three cases:
 - (a) Though the population of the United States is less than that of Europe, more people are in prison in the United States for drug offenses than are in prison in Europe for **all** crimes combined. The cost of this American “war against drugs” is truly enormous.
 - (b) Prostitution is legal only in parts of one American state – Nevada.
 - (c) There are only four places in the **world** today that *openly* and *legally* authorize active assistance in helping patients to die. They are Oregon (1997), Switzerland (1941), Belgium (2002), and The Netherlands (2002/1984).

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **4. Governments that are bad in various ways.**
- (3) There are governments that fail to aim at the general wellbeing of their citizens as a whole, usually because there is some socio-economic group – such as the very wealthy –that can influence the government, either because their members have a greater chance of getting elected, or because they can influence politicians, who have been elected, by means of intense lobbying, by campaign contributions, etc. The result is a government that is not really of the people, or by the people, or for the people.

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **4. Governments that are bad in various ways.**
- (4) There are governments, such that of the United States, that allow a single person to lead the country into wars that are never subject to intense scrutiny and debate on the part of the government as a whole. Of the various wars that the United States has been involved in, there were only five cases where there was an official declaration of war, with World War II being the most recent.

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **4. Governments that are bad in various ways.**
- (5) The governments of most countries employ electoral systems that do a much worse job of electing representatives that reflect the preferences of people than would be done by easily implemented alternative systems for electing representatives. (Part of the Australian electoral system, for example, takes into account the **rankings** of different candidates by people.)

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **5. Disastrous media.**

- Thus we have journalists who are uneducated, who are often very emotional, who have superstitious beliefs, and unsound moral values.
- We have television that is a wasteland that fails to educate and improve people, and that has commentators of low intelligence, unsound moral values, grossly irrational beliefs, and an almost complete lack of any capacity for critical thought.

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **Group 2: Bad Things that Are Neither Caused by Humans Nor Preventable at Present by Humans**
- **1. Natural disasters**
- Earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, droughts, and etc.
- **2. Terrible Diseases**
- Cancer, heart disease and stroke, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, AIDS, and so on.
- **3. The existence of carnivorous animals.**
- Much suffering is suffering by non-human animals, and one important cause of that suffering is the existence of animals that are not vegetarians.

2. Are There Some Things that Are Seriously Wrong with the World?

- **Group 2: Bad Things that Are Neither Caused by Humans Nor Preventable at Present by Humans**
- **4. Insufficient land and other natural resources for populations growing at a normal rate.**
- The world could be an enormous place, with unlimited or virtually unlimited fertile land that human and other populations could expand onto, and live comfortably. .
- **5. ‘Design faults’ in human beings.**
- There are what are called “scare quotes” around “design faults” because, even if one sets aside any appeal to the theory of evolution in general, there is extremely strong evidence - – including DNA evidence – for the claim that humans evolved from non-human primates. [The DNA evidence is described in detail in *Relics of Eden* by Daniel J. Fairbanks (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007).]
- These are far too numerous to mention here.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- My basic goal here is to have you consider the idea that there are at least three very important rights that people have that are not only very rarely acknowledged, but that would, I think, be widely rejected, and another extremely important right that is widely acknowledged, but not in anything approaching the full form in which it ought to be recognized.
- What are those four rights that I have in mind here? The answer will emerge as we proceed. My method will to describe six types of situations or issues for you to consider, and to see what you think about those situations or issues.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(1) A Choice of Lotteries**
- Which of the following two lotteries would you prefer?
- **Lottery 1:** 95% of the time you get \$50,000, and 5% of the time you get \$1,100,000.
- **Lottery 2:** 100% of the time you get \$100,000.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(1) A Choice of Lotteries**
- Which of the following two lotteries would you prefer?
- **Lottery 3:** 95% of the time you get \$50,000, and 5% of the time you get \$1,100,000, every year for the rest of your life.
- **Lottery 4:** 100% of the time you get \$100,000, every year for the rest of your life.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- Notice that the expected monetary value of Lottery 1 is \$102,500, whereas the expected monetary value of Lottery 2 is only \$100,000. In terms of expected quality of life, or expected happiness, or expected satisfaction of desires, however, the value of Lottery 2 is surely, for almost every person, much greater than that of Lottery 1. Similarly, though the expected monetary value of lottery 3 is greater than that of lottery 4, the expected **value** of lottery 4 is greater than that of lottery 3 for almost anyone.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(2) Choosing from Behind the Veil of Ignorance**
- In the second lottery, the prizes are ones that one receives every year for life. Suppose, now, that you are choosing which of two societies to enter, and you are choosing – as in a scenario suggested by the philosopher John Rawls, and very familiar to contemporary philosophers – behind a veil of ignorance in which you do not know, for example, what abilities you are going to have.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(2) Choosing from Behind the Veil of Ignorance**
- The choice that you are confronted with is a choice is between two societies that are very similar, except for the following:
 - **Society 1:** 95% of the people who work hard for 40 hours a week earn \$50,000 a year; 5% of the people who work hard for 40 hours a week earn \$1,100,000 a year (People can choose to work fewer hours for propositionally less pay.)
 - **Society 2:** Everyone who works hard for 40 hours a week earns \$100,000 a year. (People can choose to work fewer hours for propositionally less pay.)

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(2) Choosing from Behind the Veil of Ignorance**
- **Question 1:** Which society would you choose to enter?
- **Question 2:** Which society would it be rational to enter?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(2) Choosing from Behind the Veil of Ignorance**
- **Question 1:** Which society would you choose to enter?
- **Question 2:** Which society would it be rational to enter?
- My view is that if it was rational to choose lottery 4 over lottery 3, then it is also rational to choose society 2 over society 1.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(3) Tales of Two Countries**
- **Country 1: The 50/50 split case.**
- Consider a country where the population is split 50/50 between Roman Catholics and born-again Christians, who wind up taking turns being in power, and introducing their own preferred legislation.
- This is not a wildly happy place to live.
- **Question 1:** What is one to say about this first country?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(3) Tales of Two Countries**
- **Country 2: The 90/10 split case.**
- Consider a country where the population is split 90/10 between people who believe in a Christian theocratic state and atheists.
- **Question 2:** What is one to say about this first country?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(4) Place of Birth and Citizenship**
- **Suppose:** Annette was born in Canada, of Canadian parents.
- Consider, now the following three claims:
- (a) Given that supposition, Annette is initially a citizen of Canada, and of no other country.
- (b) Given that supposition, Annette has various Canadian legal rights, and political obligations to Canada.
- (c) Given that supposition, the only way that Annette can be a citizen of a country other than Canada is if some other country freely permits her to become a citizen.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(4) Place of Birth and Citizenship**
- **Question 1:** Do you think that it is true that if Annette was born in Canada, of Canadian parents, then Annette is initially a citizen of Canada, and of no other country?
- **Question 2:** Do you think that it is true that if Annette was born in Canada, of Canadian parents, then Annette has various Canadian legal rights, and political obligations to Canada?
- **Question 3:** Do you think that it is true that if Annette was born in Canada, of Canadian parents, then the only way that Annette can be a citizen of a country other than Canada is if some other country freely permits her to become a citizen?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(4) Place of Birth and Citizenship**
- My view is that the correct answer to question 2, and also to question 3 is “No”. In the case of the second question, I would argue that one has no political obligations to any country unless one has **explicitly agreed** to take on those obligations.
- In the case of question 3, I would argue that each person has a natural right to form his or her **own** country, with whatever institutions **he or she** wants, provided only that no one else’s rights are violated. So I claim that persons have the following natural right, a right that is, I think, not **too** widely acknowledged:
- **Right 1:** Every person has a natural right to form his or her own country.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(5) A Story of One Island, and Two Shipwrecks**
- Bruce is on a ship that sinks, but he manages to make it to an island. Not having eaten for several days, he is very hungry. Bruce notices that there is lots of food growing on trees, but all of it is behind fences with “No trespassing” signs. Bruce manages to find the owner – a woman named Mary who lives in a castle and who is extremely wealthy – and he asks if he can have some food, since there is much more food there than Mary can ever eat. Mary replies that she exports all the food that she doesn’t eat, but that she’ll be happy to sell Bruce some if he can pay the going price. Unfortunately, Bruce lost his wallet in the shipwreck, so that he is unable to pay, and he starves to death.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(5) A Story of One Island, and Two Shipwrecks**
- Alternatively, if one prefers a more compassionate Mary, one can imagine that Mary offers Bruce a job, under which he will work for her 70 hours a week, in return for a living wage – that is, for a wage that allows him to buy just enough food to stay alive.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(5) A Story of One Island, and Two Shipwrecks**
- How did Mary become extremely wealthy? She was shipwrecked a few years earlier, and there was no one on the island when she arrived. She therefore claimed all the land as her own, and she then set up the thriving export business that has made her fabulously wealthy.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(5) A Story of One Island, and Two Shipwrecks**
- **Question 1:** What is one to say about all of this?
- Here are two more precise questions:
- **Question 2:** Is it true that if there are natural resources somewhere that do not belong to anyone, the first person who arrives there can rightfully claim all of them for his or her own?
- **Question 3:** Or, alternatively, can the first person who arrives in a place claim as much as he or she can use in any way – such as, for example, by selling the natural resources in question to others or by using them to manufacture goods that can be sold to others?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(5) A Story of One Island, and Two Shipwrecks**
- **My View:** The time when one arrives somewhere does not affect one's rights to the natural resources found there. One way of arriving on earth, however, is by being born here. So it seems to me that the following is another natural right that is, I think, also not too widely acknowledged:
- **Right 2:** Every person born on earth has a right to an equal share of the world's natural resources.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(5) A Story of One Island, and Two Shipwrecks**
- **Question 4:** Consider a child born in some very barren part of Africa. What would such a child's chance of dying from poverty related causes be if that child were granted an equal share, with everyone else, of the world's natural resources, including oil, gold, diamonds, steel, copper, fertile land, etc.?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(6) Individual Choices Determined or Influenced in Various Ways**
- In some societies it is still the case that a person does not choose who he or she will marry.
- **Question 1:** What is one to say about the practice in which parents decide who their children will marry?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(6) Individual Choices Determined or Influenced in Various Ways**
- Consider, now, the following societies:
- **Society 1:** A Person's Occupation is **Determined** by his or her Parent's Occupations
- The idea is that if both parents are, say, plumbers, then all of their children must be plumbers. If one parent is a plumber, and the other is a farmer, then a coin is flipped, in the case of each child, to decide whether he or she will be a plumber or a farmer.
- **Question 2:** Is there anything problematic about society 1?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(6) Individual Choices Determined or Influenced in Various Ways**
- **Society 2:** Strong Pressure to Choose a Particular Occupation
- In this second society, it is possible to choose an occupation that is different from that of one's parents. But if both parents are plumbers, one is viewed by society as a "plumber" child, and very heavy pressure, and generally very effective pressure, is applied to a child to become a plumber. Suppose, in particular, that more than 90% of people choose an occupation that is the occupation of one of their parents.
- **Question 3:** Is there anything problematic about society 2?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(6) Individual Choices Determined or Influenced in Various Ways**
- My view is that in both societies the **autonomy** of individuals is seriously reduced, with regard to a very important matter, and I think that, as a consequence, both societies are organized in a morally unacceptable way.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(6) Individual Choices Determined or Influenced in Various Ways**
- **Question 4:** Which of the following is more likely to have the greater effect on the way that one lives one's life?
- (a) Having one's choice of **occupation** very strongly influenced by one's parents;
- (b) Having one's **religious beliefs and basic moral values** very strongly influenced by one's parents.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(6) Individual Choices Determined or Influenced in Various Ways**
- My view is that the second has a much greater effect upon a person's life, and thus that allowing parents to exert an influence upon a child that strongly disposes a child to accept the religious beliefs and specific moral values of his or her parents, undermines the autonomy of the child in a very serious matter, and therefore is seriously wrong.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(6) Individual Choices Determined or Influenced in Various Ways**
- I would claim, then, that people have the following right – again, a right that once again is not, I think, widely recognized:
- **Right 3:** A person has a right not to be indoctrinated by his or her parents.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- Virtually everyone would agree that a child has a right to be properly educated, and that parents are under a strong moral obligation either to provide the child with such an education, or to see to it that others educate their children properly. But this apparent agreement conceals deep disagreements – disagreements that emerge as soon as one asks what the goals of education should be.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- Consider, first of all, the following claim:
- **Claim 1:** All children should be given both the intellectual skills that are needed and all of the relevant information that is necessary if they are to be able to think in a critical fashion about important beliefs and basic values.
- **Question 1:** Are you inclined to agree with claim 1 or not?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- Next, consider this claim:
- **Claim 2:** Among the types of beliefs that are important are ones concerning the following matters:
 - 1. Is there an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good creator of the universe? Does God exist?
 - 2. What is the nature of human beings? Are human beings purely material things, or do they have immaterial minds?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- 3. Did human beings arise via a completely natural process of evolution from other primate species? Or were humans instead directly created by a supernatural being, as 45% of Americans believe happened sometime in the last 10,000 years? Or is it the case, as is believed by people such as Kenneth Miller, author of *Finding Darwin's God* (1999), or Francis Collins, the author of *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, that while evolution explains the development of the human **body** (or at least up to a point), there was intervention by a supernatural being who, according to Kenneth Miller (222, 249, 274), endowed humans with “immortal, spiritual souls”, and with “free will”, or who, according to Francis Collins, endowed humans with “knowledge of good and evil (the Moral Law), with free will, and with an immortal soul” [Lecture, UC Berkeley, 2008, quoted by Sam Harris in “The Strange Case of Francis Collins)

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- 4. Do humans survive death, or is death the end of a person's existence?
- 5. Many people believe that the natural world is not causally closed, that there is a supernatural being who intervenes, thereby producing miraculous events. How reasonable is that belief in the light of the evidence?
- 6. How old is the Earth? Is it, as scientists believe, about 4.5 billion years old? Or is it, as about 45% of Americans believe, less than about 10,000 years old?
- 7. There are many different religions that people accept. Is there one religion that, given all of the relevant evidence, is likely to be true?
- 8. Is everything in the Bible, interpreted in a natural fashion, true?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- **Question 2:** Are you inclined to agree, on the whole, that the above are important areas of belief, or not?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- **Claim 3:** Among the questions concerning morality that are important are the following:
 - 1. Is it true that each person has a right to form his or her own country?
 - 2. Is it true that each person who comes into existence on this earth has a right to an equal share of the world's natural resources?
 - 3. Is it true that it is wrong to indoctrinate children?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- 4. Is it true that people are morally obligated to ensure that children acquire both the intellectual skills and the relevant information necessary if they are to be able to think in a critical fashion about important beliefs and basic values?
- 5. What are the most important **arguments** bearing upon the following topics, and which of those arguments are sound, and which unsound: (a) the moral status of abortion, (b) the moral status of physician-assisted suicide, and voluntary active euthanasia, (c) the moral status of homosexuality, premarital sex, and prostitution, (d) the moral status of animals?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- 6. What is the best way to arrive at sound moral views? Is it by consulting some sacred book or religious authority, or is it by philosophical investigation?
- 7. One possible religious book that many would recommend as a source of moral knowledge is the Bible. How good is the Bible in that regard?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- **Question 3:** Are you inclined to agree, on the whole, that the above questions concerning morality are important, or not?

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- I believe that the three claims that I have just advanced are very reasonable. To the extent that you agree with those claims, you have a reason to accept the following conclusion:
- **Conclusion 1**
- **Parents, the elementary and secondary schools systems, and universities are, with very, very few exceptions, failing miserably in meeting the obligation they have to educate children and young adults properly.**

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- How serious is that failure? I think that the right to be properly educated is one of the most important rights that a person possesses. If that is right, then for that reason alone, the failure is a very serious one.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**

- But I also believe that if children were properly educated, the world would be a very different place. In particular, I think that it would be religiously very different, and here is some support for that claim. In a recently conducted survey of the opinions of philosophers – *The Philosophical Survey* – for example, more than 72% of the philosophers who responded indicated that they were either were atheists, or were inclined to atheism, whereas less than 15% said that they were either theists, or inclined to theism. In a 1998 survey in which questionnaires were sent to 517 members of the United States' National Academy of Sciences, it turned out that 7.0% believe in a personal God. This is down from 15% in 1933, and from 27.7% in 1914. (“Leading Scientists Still Reject God”, http://www.lhup.edu/~dsimanek/sci_relig.htm).

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- Turning, moreover, from philosophers and elite scientists to ordinary people, a Eurostat poll carried out in 32 European countries in 2005 found that in 19 of those countries, less than half of the people believed in a personal God. I therefore think it is very plausible that if people were exposed to the relevant information and arguments bearing upon the existence of God, and on particular religions such as Christianity, that most people would cease to be religious. Much of the violence in the world, however, involves religious groups.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- I also believe that, when one thinks the matter through, most people will find it very plausible that each individual has a natural right to form a country with institutions of his or her own choosing, provided that there is no violation of anyone else's rights. Recognition of this right would do much, I suggest, to increase human happiness.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- Finally, I also believe that, when one thinks the matter through, it also turns out to be very plausible that each person who comes into being on this earth has a natural right to an equal share of the world's natural resources. In a world where each year about 18 million people die from poverty-related causes, and ones that are easily preventable, the widespread recognition of such a right should greatly reduce human suffering.

3. Are There Important Rights that Are Not Generally Recognized?

- **(7) A Child's Right to Be Properly Educated**
- **Conclusion 2**
- **Many of the things that are wrong with the world have their root either in irrational beliefs or in a failure to have sound moral views, and to recognize certain fundamental rights that people have. A proper education where children have access to relevant information and arguments, are enabled to acquire the ability to think critically, and then where they discuss questions concerning important basic beliefs and fundamental moral issues, could help to cure many of things that are wrong with the world.**

4. Who Is to Blame?

- Parents have the obligation to raise their children properly, a major part of which is to educate them properly. If what I have argued is right, then almost all parents fail very badly in this regard, for they do not provide their children with either the information or with the intellectual skills that are necessary to arrive at justified beliefs on an enormous number of important issues. Moreover, many parents not only fail to provide such information and skills, they indoctrinate their children with irrational beliefs and attitudes that in many cases cripple the person for life, and that make it extremely difficult for him or her to think critically about his or her basic beliefs and values.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- The vast majority of parents, of course, hand the job of educating their children, in most matters, over to the school system. The elementary and secondary school systems, however, also fail miserably in not providing children with the information that is needed if one is to think critically about basic beliefs and values.
- Moreover, judging from the skills exhibited by students in introduction to ethics classes and critical thinking classes that I have taught, they also fail to develop even the most modest level of critical thinking skills in students.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- What about universities?
- If one takes philosophy courses, one is constantly exposed to alternative views on different issues, and to arguments for and against those alternatives, and I have certainly found that philosophy majors have generally acquire quite good critical thinking skills, along with the habit of exercising those skills.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- What about universities?
- But when I teach courses that are taken by people who are not philosophy majors, including honors students who are often quite talented, I rarely find that students have good critical thinking skills, or that they have been exposed to information that is crucially relevant to many very important beliefs and questions of value.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- What about universities?
- So if I ask such students what reasons might be offered for or against the belief humans have immaterial minds, I usually draw a complete blank, while if I ask what reasons can be offered for or against the existence of God, it is only rarely that a worthwhile argument is produced. So it seems to me that relatively few students who complete a university education are at all likely to emerge properly educated.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- Elementary and secondary school teachers are more likely to have acquired at least some appreciation of the importance of critical thinking, but an elementary school teacher who made a serious attempt to instill critical thinking skills in his or her students, and to have those students apply those skills to any matter that was at all controversial would, I think, soon find that he or she was no longer employed as a teacher, unless such a critical thinking program was part of the school curriculum. But any school that attempted to implement such a program would surely find itself assailed mercilessly by parents, by politicians, and by intellectually challenged members of the media.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- That leaves us with the universities, and it is here, I suggest, that the blame must fall. For the crucial point is that many faculty have tenure, and given that that is so, they can, without serious repercussions, offer courses that will endow students with professional-strength critical thinking skills. They can also provide students with the information and arguments that are crucially relevant to the examination of basic beliefs and values, and they can set students the tasks of exercising those skills on those important questions.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- Are university professors doing that? I fear that the answer is that, by and large, it seems to me that they are not.
- A mathematician could very well object, however, that it is his or her job to educate students in mathematics, not in critical thinking, and similarly for most other disciplines. But there is, of course, one discipline that does not have that excuse, and that is philosophy.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- What, then, should philosophers do?
- It seems to me that we philosophers should insist, first of all, that a university education cannot be merely education for a profession. A university must ensure that all of its students receive a **liberal** education.
- Secondly, philosophers must argue that when it comes to a liberal education, **philosophy rules**: philosophy lies at the very heart of a liberal education.

4. Who Is to Blame?

- Thirdly, philosophers need to offer courses that are designed specifically not only to develop high-level critical thinking abilities in all students, but also to provide students with the information and arguments that are absolutely essential if students are to apply those skills in thinking about important basic beliefs and moral issues of the sort that I mentioned earlier.
- Finally, philosophers need to insist that all students should take such courses.

4. Who Is to Blame?

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What's Wrong with the World, and Who's to Blame?