Philosophy and Activism

Dear MSU Student,

I came to Michigan State thinking that I would study physics. I had been very good at it in high school, but I had serious questions about what good it would really do. As I slowly lost interest in it and the hard sciences in general, I started to ask myself questions about who I was and what it meant to be human. Particularly, coming from a fairly religious background, I had questions about what it meant to be gay. Sophomore year, I took a class in abnormal psychology where there was an emphasis on psychoanalysis. This field seemed to have the potential to answer a lot of the questions I had. It dealt with questions of what it meant to be a person and a member of society. I decided to major in psychology.

As I progressed in my psychology major, I started to discover that psychology didn't have the potential I initially thought it had. As psychology is considered a "Social Science", psychologists are expected to use empirical evidence to confirm all claims and not answer deep questions about what it means to be human. This view is useful for some things, but I was interested in more depth, especially because I was interested in thinking more radically about how we live and what that means. Social Science tends to have a hand in this type of thing, for instance in understanding facts about a way of living once it is established, but it doesn't possess the potential to think as creatively as I would like.

I took a few philosophy classes and they seemed more up my alley. In philosophy, we talk more about the history and the basis of conceptual frameworks that are used in other fields, rather than directly using those conceptual frameworks without much thought about them. We talk about the basis of knowledge instead of only talking about things we have enough funding to measure. We look at how we interact with our world, and how things like ideology and power influence us in ways that are invisible in other fields. More importantly, we critically interrogate those ideologies and try to find more solid basises for them so that we can build a better world.

Philosophy has also given me other skills. It's helped me as I've become an LGBTQ activist, not only in arguing for my cause but in understanding exactly what my cause is and the forces in play that need to be addressed. I've become a much better writer. I've learned how to argue, but I've also learned how to listen to others. It's helped me become more confident about what exactly science is good for – and what it's not.

If you are considering majoring or minoring in philosophy, don't just take my word for it. I implore you to take a few classes in the subject. I suggest PHL 200 because it gives a brief overview of a large portion of the field so you can see what areas you might like, but most classes are very interesting as long as you are willing to put in some work and do some reading.

Justin Lippi

Sincerely,
Justin Lippi