

Why study philosophy?

A statement by Jordan Kotick, Vice-President J.P. Morgan, Wall Street

While considering what to study in my first year as an Undergraduate, I decided to take a few Philosophy courses. When informed of my decision, those I knew murmured, "Philosophy...what are you going to do with that?" Soon after my first year was complete, realizing that I enjoyed these courses and my intellectual curiosity was peaked and challenged, I decided that one of my double majors as an undergraduate was going to be Philosophy. The echoes grew louder as those I knew grumbled "Philosophy? What are you going to do with that?"

After four years and a Bachelor of Arts Degree under my belt (with a major in Philosophy), I realized there was more Philosophical work to be done. I decided to go to Graduate School. You can only imagine the reaction I received when I announced that I was going to spend the next two years beginning and hopefully completing my Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy. They shouted "Philosophy? What are you going to do with that?" as the cries of derision grew exponentially.

It is interesting to note what has happened since completing my M.A.. To make a long story short, of late, I have been pursuing a top job at one of the leading investment banks in the world. This position was "short listed" to 150 people as interviews went on concurrently in various countries around the globe. At the end of the process, I received the offer and am now working in New York as a Senior Strategist at one of Wall Street's leading firms. After accepting the offer, I asked the Board, who ultimately made the final decision, why I was chosen above the others. Without blinking an eye, the Head of the Strategic Hiring Committee stated a list of reasons, the very first of which was "Out of all the people we considered, you were the only one who studied Philosophy, not to mention having a Masters Degree in it. That told us immediately that you can think outside the box."

I have come to realize the answer to the question perpetually posed, "Philosophy? What are you going to do with that?" The correct response is "Absolutely anything you want." As Robert Frost said, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference."