



# PHILOSOPHY PERSONAL STATEMENT NIKI

DUKES EDUCATION

From a young age I have found myself considering challenging problems of a philosophical nature. I began to question the compatibility of God's foreknowledge with humanity's free will during an RS lesson in school a few years ago. It seemed to me that God's foreknowledge would suggest humanity's futures are pre-determined, thus negating free will.

This led me on to the problem of other minds and the mind-body problem. For me, philosophy is the link between every intellectual area and an essential foundation to understanding. It stretches the mind, and gives an unusual freedom of investigation and thought more than any other subject.

Philosophy of the mind is my particular interest, especially the mind-body problem. I am attracted to the Dualist view that the mind and what occurs in it are separate from the brain. If you opened my skull and used a brain scanner, you would see my brain's activity and the organ itself, but that's not my thoughts or emotions *are*. I acknowledge that most modern philosophers reject Dualism, but I feel that the debate is not over. Dualism is relevant to life, as we often have to make meaningful decisions that should be considered purely mental processes, separate from the physical body. If we are just brains, a judgement over euthanasia loses all ethical qualities. Dualism does face some problems, however. It invites criticism from those who support the causal closure of the physical, which states that every caused physical event has an adequate physical cause. It seems that the opposition wishes to point out the complexity of the immaterial mind affecting the material body. Still, I think that a reasonable replacement is not offered and that Dualism explains far more about us, as well as preserving the meaning of moral decisions. Philosophy as such can address not only the abstract, but also that which is relevant to our lives and the moral template that we hold dear in our daily lives.

On the more abstract side of philosophy, the problem of external world scepticism also interests me. The sceptic's argument presents the sceptical hypothesis, and concludes that we know less than we believe we know. However, I found Nozick's solution in his *Philosophical Explanations* flawed. He denies the closure principle, allowing him to state that it can be true that I know that I have hands, but don't know that I am not a disembodied brain in a vat. I feel that this statement is paradoxical; it is ridiculous to be able to claim both of these things in one sentence; I can only accept them separately. I prefer the contextualist view: statements of knowledge-attributions can differ in truth depending on the context in which they were said. In a sceptical context, I can truly say 'I don't know that I have hands', whereas in an everyday context I can truly say 'I know I have hands'. This is the main magnetism of contextualism; it tackles the sceptical problem in that it both accepts the sceptic's logic, but also removes its conclusion's sting by denying that there is a problem.

The problem of free will also intrigues me. I have read Frankfurt's argument, and it is definitely an area about which I wish to learn more. In addition, I am enjoying exploring Hume's ideas on miracles, and have read Blackburn's *Think*, Plato's *Republic*, the compilation *What We Believe But Cannot Prove* and Heil's *Philosophy of Mind*, which have furthered my philosophical interests.

Away from the academic, I am an avid sabre fencer, and have competed in tournaments. In addition to this I taught myself Japanese: I now take lessons and lead the Japanese Culture and Language club at my school, where I teach Japanese and the culture of Japan. I spent the summer in a Japanese school in Okazaki, studying towards the national qualification, the JLPT. The immersion in this culture has stirred an interest in eastern philosophy, specifically Buddhism. It seems philosophy will always be present in my life, no matter what my occupation.

**Commented [NW1]:** I think opening a personal statement with how I first encountered philosophy was a good way to start! In my first interview this was brought up and provided a comfortable start to the conversation.

**Commented [NW2]:** This was picked up on in my interview: it seemed to go down very well with the philosophy DoS in my college. I wish I had tightened it up a bit and explained why I could only accept them separately. However, I think the little explanation of his view and what I didn't agree with was decent: it provided good conversation material as well as displaying an ability to digest and comment on philosophical argument.

**Commented [NW3]:** Including a preferred view alongside criticism of Nozick also seemed to down well

**Commented [NW4]:** I wish I had changed this a little to briefly include why I had been enjoying it.

**Commented [NW5]:** I would have taken this off as I wasn't as familiar with this text as I should have been – I was lucky I wasn't asked about it as I feel I wouldn't have sustained a long conversation about it.

**Commented [NW6]:** I wouldn't have written this – Oxbridge really didn't seem to care!

**Commented [NW7]:** This is a bit wishy-washy – looking back I wouldn't have written this to end it, though the prior sentence seems ok to me now as it relates back to the subject at hand.