

Evaluating a Philosophy

There are many philosophies and systems of living that are available to us. How do we evaluate these systems and determine which can guide us best in living our life? This note seeks to provide some benchmarks for evaluating a philosophy.

1. **Fundamentals:** A good philosophy addresses issues at the most fundamental levels of existence. It motivates us to ask the most basic questions about ourselves. Who are we? What is the purpose of life? How can we fulfill this purpose? A complete philosophy would be one that provides satisfactory and acceptable answers to questions like these. The idea behind this is that if the fundamental issues are sorted out, dealing with the grosser particularities of life is rendered easy. On the other hand, if the fundamentals remain nebulous then we are forced to deal uncomprehendingly with the grosser, more conspicuously manifest problems of life that confront us everyday.
2. **Understanding versus Faith/Belief:** A philosophy based on understanding is more likely to be acceptable than one based merely on faith/belief. Indeed, we take recourse to faith/belief only when we do not understand something, or when we believe something to be somehow beyond our conventional ways of understanding. A good philosophy would be one that makes no demand upon our faith/belief and is based on explanations that we can understand.
3. **Communicability:** The best philosophy in the world is likely to be of little use if it is not easily communicable to people. If accessing the philosophy requires difficult regimes of discipline or acrobatic feats of the body or mind, then the utility of the philosophy gets reduced. An ideal philosophy would be easily communicable to any ordinary person without requiring any special abilities.
4. **Universality:** The more culture-specific a philosophy is, the less likely it is to appeal to a wider cross-section of people. Thus a good philosophy would be one which would be universal in appeal and applicability, across cultures and civilizations.
5. **Comprehensiveness/Holism:** The more comprehensive a philosophy is, the more acceptable it is likely to be. A good philosophy would be able to generate guiding principles for all spheres of life, especially contemporary life.
6. **Solutions versus Relief:** An ideal philosophy must lead to a programme of solutions rather than a programme of relief or respite.
7. **Empowerment:** A good philosophy must be empowering. It should be able to infuse hope and confidence in people and prevent them from lapsing into misanthropy or worse.
8. **Realisability (Existential):** A good philosophy must be realisable in the individual. That is, the possibility of the philosophy being manifest in the lives of each and every individual must appear clear and evident.
9. **Feasibility (Social):** A good philosophy must be socially and logistically feasible; and it must be demonstrably so, without any repressive or coercive methods being used.
10. **Open Source:** Like good software, a good philosophy must be open source, so that once the fundamentals are understood, anyone can participate in the process of developing, creating documentation for, and applying that philosophy.