



Public Lecture Offerings

Hip Hop, Philosophy, and the (Broken) Social Contract

Philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke teach us that a social contract is the origin of political society. To escape the state of nature, which is detrimental to our self-preservation, we must relinquish our natural liberty and submit to the rule of political authority. But what if the government fails to fulfill its responsibilities to safeguard our basic rights and liberties? This lecture draws inspiration from Public Enemy, Queen Latifah, Kendrick Lamar, and other rappers to understand this outcome and ways of responding to a broken social contract. We will listen to rap music in this hip-hop and philosophy lecture.

Creative Genius: Unraveling the Mystery

The world tells us that Leonardo Da Vinci was a genius. It tells us that his Mona Lisa is a work of genius. The world tells us that Ludwig van Beethoven was a genius. It tells us that his Fifth Symphony is a work of genius. The world sends us to the Louvre to see works of creative genius and to Carnegie Hall to hear them. Can we also call hip hop artist Nas a genius? Is his classic album Illmatic a work of genius? Can we go to the Hip Hop Museum to see and hear other works of creative genius? This lecture will demystify creative genius to help answer these and other questions.

Plato Hat Mystery: A Professor and the Phaedo

My memoir blends hip-hop and philosophy to tell a story about creative genius. The first chapter solves the mystery of why a man from Brooklyn, who helped escort Nazis to justice during his service in the American military during World War II and later became a philosophy professor at a small liberal arts college in upstate New York, wore a hat bearing the name "Plato." To unravel the mystery, I tell stories about growing up being inspired by "Gods" in New York City, about visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to study Rembrandt, Goya, and Cézanne, and about how a Frenchman named Andre Malraux helped me dispatch a mysterious way to account for how works of artistic genius are created.

Classroom Discussion Topics

Any of the above lectures can also be discussion topics.