

HS 109: Introduction to Philosophy

“I just want to start a conversation so that we shall all feel at home with one another like friends”(Socrates, 400 BC).

“I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think” (Socrates).

What is Philosophy?

What does 'philosophy' mean?

Etymology

philia (love) + *sophia* (wisdom) = “love of wisdom”

Definitions of 'Philosophy'

- 'Philosophy' is used in a variety of ways. Indeed, dictionaries give multiple entries for 'philosophy'. Roughly, these entries can be divided into 3 groups:
 - 1. 'Philosophy' as an academic discipline
 - 2. 'Philosophy' as a set of beliefs or worldview
 - 3. 'Philosophy' as a study or inquiry

- Definition 1 merely states that philosophy is something that is done at a university, and does not say what philosophy actually is. This, however, easily leads to the common stereotype of philosophy involving two distinct elements:
 - 1. *Mental Activity*: Philosophy is done at a university, and at a university only. Indeed, philosophy is seen by many as a kind of intellectual exercise in futility: absent-minded, bearded, white guys discussing abstract topics having no practical use whatsoever.
 - 2. *Intellectual Bullying*: Philosophers always seem to know better, and constantly plague us with questions.

Philosophy as a Set of Beliefs

- Definition 2 defines ‘philosophy’ as a worldview or set of beliefs. Notice that we can say ‘a philosophy’ in this case. Indeed, there can be *multiple* philosophies in this sense of the word: ‘My philosophy in this regard is ...’, ‘Plato’s philosophy’, ‘Eastern Philosophy’, etc.
- Philosophies provide answers to difficult questions, and thus often serve as a kind of guide or compass to conduct life and navigate the world.
- All ‘isms’ (and all religions) fall under this definition of philosophy: Buddhism, Capitalism, Mysticism, Existentialism, Dualism, etc.

Philosophy as Rational Inquiry

- Definition 3 expresses philosophy as we are going to understand it in this class. Philosophy in this sense is (like definition 1, but unlike definition 2) an *activity*: it is something you *do*. In particular, doing philosophy is using our rationality in trying to figure out the answers to difficult questions (related to *any* subject matter).

- Philosophy is about:
 - Finding answers to serious questions about ourselves and about the world we live in:
 - What is morally right and wrong? And why?
 - What is a good life?
 - Does God exist?
 - What is the mind?
 - What is art?
 - Is the world really as it appears to us?
 - What can we know?
 - What is knowledge?
 - ...and much, much more
 - Questioning existing knowledge and intuitions to get closer to the truth

Some Relevant Questions Related to Philosophy

I. Why Study Philosophy?

II. Is Philosophy Avoidable?

III. How is Philosophy Possible?

IV. Who are Philosophers?

V. The Meaning of 'Philosophy'

VI. The Method of Philosophy

VII. The Characteristics of Philosophy

VIII. Science, Religion and Philosophy

IX. Branches of Philosophy

Some Relevant Questions Related to Philosophy

I. Why Study Philosophy?

- Clarifies concept
- Clarifies doubt
- Clarifies ambiguity
- Clarifies the meaning of 'meaning'
- Explore fundamental questions
- It trains us in critical thinking
- Integrate our ideas
- Abstract ideas

II. Is Philosophy Avoidable?

- Theological state
- Metaphysical state or abstract state
- Evolutionary state is the age of science
- Reality of life

III. How is Philosophy Possible?

- Philosophy sometimes called metaphysics, which means beyond physics.
- The above statement suggests that philosophy begins where science ends.
- Because philosophers construct theories to go beyond the observable.
- World-view construction

IV. Who are Philosophers?

- Definition- “philosophers are critical thinkers who use their intellectual resources to reach the most plausible, tentative answers to philosophical questions.”
- A philosopher does not accept a view
- The philosopher is unwilling to accept anything on human authority
- Commonsense can fail us (Copernicus, Ptolemy)
- Unexamined answers (Blind beliefs, i.e., Epilepsy)
- A philosopher is traditionally called *darshanika*
- *A darshanika* is a man or woman of wisdom and insight

V. The Meaning of 'Philosophy'

- The term 'philosophy' is often used popularly to mean a set of basic values and attitudes toward life, nature, and society.
- The term 'philosophy' is derived from the Greek terms *philo* and *sophia* meaning 'love of wisdom'.
- In India, philosophy is traditionally called *darshana* implying thereby insight into the real nature of the things
- Philosophy is basically an attitude and an activity of the human mind.

VI. The Method of Philosophy

- Many write down their reflections in the form of books and articles, while others present them in the form of lectures and seminars
- Plato favored the dialogue form
- So his *Dialogues* introduces a range of characters, each of whom presents and argues for a particular viewpoint
- Critical thinking:
- Careful attention to the meaning of words and statements and to the consistency of ideas.

- Listing possible approaches to the consistency of ideas
- Being modest in one's claims, admitting the difficulties of each view before others point them out
- The desire to understand the issues as clearly as possible
- The desire to evaluate all positions fairly, without giving preferential treatment to one's pre-existing beliefs
- A willingness to follow complex lines of reasoning

- A willingness to follow complex lines of reasoning
- A willingness to suspend judgment whenever we discover that we have no better evidence for accepting one view instead of another

VII. The Characteristics of Philosophy

- In philosophy there is no progression in ideas as in science, though we have new ways of looking at perennial questions
- Philosophy is concerned with second order language
 - ✓ First order: 'A' caused 'B'
 - ✓ Second order: What does it mean to say that 'A' caused 'B'
 - ✓ First order: It is not right to do this
 - ✓ Second order: what does it mean to say something is right?

- First order: God does not exist
- Second order: How many religious assertions be verified?
- No agreements in philosophy
- It is impossible to decide which philosophical theory is true

VIII. Science, Religion and Philosophy

- Science:
- Science pertains to the knowledge of the physical world
- It relies on observation
- It confirm knowledge through experiment
- It relies on verification before accepting truths about the facts
- It believes that everything has a cause, and nothing happens without a cause
- It struggle against human ignorance, superstition and skepticism

Negative side

- Science has alienated human from nature
- Scientific research is very narrow
- It divides nature into minute units like molecules and atoms
- Religion
- It is identified with beliefs and rituals
- It implies belief in God
- It believes that there is supreme reality
- Religion is identified with feeling, emotion, sentiment, cult, ritual and faith.

- Philosophy
- Philosophers act as a guide to both scientists and men of religion
- Philosophy is not opposed to any knowledge
- It touches every branch of learning, evaluates them and brings to our notice their strengths and errors
- Philosophy is a science of sciences

Science:

- Scientific knowledge is objective
- Science attends to the reality outside
- Its knowledge is based on sensory perception
- Observable
- Scientific knowledge is developing and partial
- Science has given physical power and the amenities to life

Religion:

- Religious knowledge is subjective
- Religion focuses on the inner reality
- Religious knowledge originates in inner realization
- It unify human experience
- Its aim to give us an integral grasp
- Religion gives strength and spiritual fulfillment

- Philosophy
- it pertains to the subtler aspects of life
- It seeks to analyze and interpret various experiences
- Its aim is to analyze and evaluate scientific facts
- Its aim at wisdom because without wisdom scientific knowledge is dangerous
- Philosophy is both analytical and synthetically
- Qualitative

- Science
- It belongs to the physical world
- Observable facts
- Science is content with knowledge of empirical world
- Science is analytical
- Science reduces everything to certain mathematical formulas
- Quantitative

- Philosophy
- Philosophy relies on critical reflection
- It does not take anything granted
- Philosophy can be religious
- Religion
- Religion relies on personal faith
- Religion is comfortable with many presuppositions.
- Religion relies on philosophy for its doctrines

No difficulty in reconciling science, religion and philosophy.

- Science deals with nature without and philosophy deals with the nature within us
- Religion deals with manifestation of the sacred and provides practical and conceptual tools to integrate human life to reality as defined by science and philosophy

Branches of Philosophy

- Metaphysics
- Epistemology
- Ethics
- Logic
- Aesthetic

- Metaphysics: At its core the study of metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality, of what exists in the world, what it is like, and how it is ordered. In metaphysics philosophers wrestle with such questions as:
- Is there a God?
- What is truth?
- What is a person? What makes a person the same through time?
- Is the world strictly composed of matter?
- Do people have minds? If so, how is the mind related to the body?
- Do people have free wills?
- What is it for one event to cause another?

- Epistemology: Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It is primarily concerned with what we can know about the world and how we can know it.

Typical questions of concern in epistemology are:

- What is knowledge?
- Do we know anything at all?
- How do we know what we know?
- Can we be justified in claiming to know certain things?

- Ethics: The study of ethics often concerns what we ought to do and what it would be best to do. In struggling with this issue, larger questions about what is good and right arise.

So, the ethicist attempts to answer such questions as:

- What is good? What makes actions or people good?
- What is right? What makes actions right?
- Is morality objective or subjective?
- How should I treat others?

- Logic: Another important aspect of the study of philosophy is the arguments or reasons given for people's answers to these questions. To this end philosophers employ logic to study the nature and structure of arguments.

Logicians ask such questions as:

- What constitutes "good" or "bad" reasoning?
- How do we determine whether a given piece of reasoning is good or bad?

- Aesthetics: It is the branch of philosophy concerned with the essence and perception of beauty and ugliness.

It further asks such questions as:

- Is there a difference between the beautiful and the sublime?
- What is beauty?
- What is art?

The Value of Philosophy

- What, then, is the value of philosophy? Here are some answers:
 - First, philosophy may provide answers to difficult questions, even if this takes a lot of time. In fact, science is one example where philosophy became very successful ('natural philosophy').
 - Second, even if philosophy does not provide one with any clear answers, it may still be able to say that certain answers are better than others.
 - And third, even if philosophy seems to be going absolutely nowhere, just the act of doing philosophy can still be very useful:
 - Doing philosophy will improve your critical thinking skills, and those can be successfully applied to almost any aspect of life.
 - Philosophy will open your mind, and get us out of our rut. It is, as Bertrand Russell called it, 'liberating doubt'.
 - Philosophy forces one to be precise, clear, and rigorous. These are all useful qualities to have as well.