

Module One:

Meaning, Origin and Scope of Philosophy

Meaning of Philosophy

The word philosophy is derived from two Greek words-‘Philos’ and ‘Sophia’. Philos means love and Sophia means wisdom. Thus literally, philosophy means love of wisdom. Search of wisdom or truth is called philosophy and the man who engages himself in this search is called a philosopher. Philosophy gives comprehensive view of life and help man to search into the nature and reason of things. Philosophy is therefore, the study of general and fundamental questions about existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language.

Oxford Dictionary defines philosophy as "that department of knowledge which deals with ultimate reality or with the most general causes and principles of things." It is presumed here that science, inheriting the cosmological tradition, does not offer us the knowledge of ultimate reality; only philosophy can do this. Science can only tell us how, whereas philosophy can tell us why, things happen as they do. Although science too speaks about the why or the causes, the "general causes and principles" of the philosopher are "higher" and "more ultimate" than the causes and principles that science reveals to us. There are two very different forms of activity now go under the name of "philosophy": one is essentially rational and critical, with logical analysis (in a broad sense) at its heart; the other (represented by Heidegger, for example) is openly hostile to rational analysis and professes to arrive at general conclusions by a phenomenological intuition or hermeneutical interpretation. The various schools of thought, belonging to these two branches, make use of different procedures or methods, which will be taken up in another Unit. We clarified the meaning of philosophy by referring to ‘wisdom’. Thus there is a close relation between philosophy and wisdom.

Philosophy has 3 modes or styles:

(i) Speculative

(ii) Prescriptive

(iii) Analytic

(i) Speculative: It is the way of systematic thinking of everything that exists or whole. Speculative philosophy means to see things as a whole. Search for wholeness but it is not applied to a particular item or experience. All knowledge experiences are included. In brief speculative philosophy is the attempt to find coherence in the whole realm of thought and experiences. In short speculative philosophy is saying that knowledge generation begins with suspicion.

(ii) Prescriptive: Prescriptive philosophy means to establish standards for assessing values, judging conduct and appraising art. It examines what we mean good and bad, right and wrong,

beautiful and ugly. It seeks to discover and recommend principles for deciding what actions and qualities are worthwhile why they should be. Many people ascribe whatever they want to believe or do to religion, culture and many of such values.

(iii) Analytic: Analytic philosophy examines such notions such as cause, mind academic freedom, equality of opportunities in order to assess different meaning what they carry in different contexts. People generate knowledge by asking questions.

Origin of Philosophy

Philosophy was born in Greece; the term 'philosophy' too has its roots in Greece and in Greek language. It is quite commonly known that philosophia etymologically means 'love of wisdom' (Philia + Sophia). But sophia had a much wider range of application than the modern English "wisdom." Wherever intelligence can be exercised—in practical affairs, in the mechanical arts, in business—there is room for Sophia. Herodotus used the verb philosophēin in a context in which it means nothing more than the desire to find out. We can find a gradual growth in the meaning of philosophy, as we go through the history of thought.

According to a tradition, Pythagoras was the first to describe himself as a philosopher. He speaks of three classes of people, attending the festal games: those who seek fame by taking part in them; those who seek gain by plying their trade; and those who are content to be spectators. Philosophers resemble the third class: spurning both fame and profit, they seek to arrive at the truth by contemplation. Pythagoras distinguished the sophia sought by the philosopher (knowledge based on contemplation) from the practical shrewdness of the businessman and the trained skills of the athlete. Plato points to Socrates as the philosopher. Plato gives a few characteristics of philosophical wisdom, such as ability to enter into critical discussion, having direct access to "true reality," knowledge of the purpose of life, etc. As evident from above, although philosophy is etymologically defined as 'love of wisdom', the meaning of wisdom is taken in a wider sense. We will be dealing exclusively with the notion of wisdom in this Unit itself.

Aristotle considers philosophy as "the first and last science"—the first science because it is logically presupposed by every other science, the last because deals with reality in its ultimate principles and causes. He defines it as follows: "There is a science which investigates being as being, and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences, for none of these treats universally of being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attribute of this part"

Scope of Philosophy

By relating philosophy to wisdom, we have already implied that the scope of philosophy cannot be put within precise boundary, but within the widening horizon of wisdom. Thus the scope of philosophy embraces the whole of reality. Although philosophy claims to consider everything in general and nothing in particular, we can still point out some of the areas that are generally

accepted as typically philosophical. By taking a quick glance at them, we will have clarified the scope of philosophy.

Western philosophy can be divided into six branches that have assumed various importance over time as follows:

- Metaphysics
- Epistemology
- Ethics
- Logic

Traditionally metaphysics sets the questions for philosophy. Epistemology asks how do we know? Ethics and politics have to do with action and quality of life. Aesthetics or value theory has to do with beauty, balance, and harmony. Logic has to do with the relations of things. Epistemology sometimes replaces metaphysics these days, because it has fewer religious overtones. Among Eastern European and continental philosophers, philosophy tends to be the study of politics. Logic is critical for analytic philosophers, who are deeply suspicious of ethics, politics, and metaphysics.

Epistemology

The theory of knowledge, from the Greek words episteme (knowledge) and logos (word/speech/study), is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, origin, scope and (possibility/study) of knowledge. Dealing with nature is one of the branches of philosophy. But before anything is done, the meaning of philosophy should be understood. A philosopher of religion must be objective. Anyone who is ready to study philosophy should be able to attack and defend. In other definition logic is the study of reasoning. It can also be described as the study of strength of the evident links between the premises and the conclusion. Logic is further divided into deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning proceeds from a general statement to a particular statement. It is mostly a valid argument given that is tautological in nature. This means that the conclusion bares no new knowledge that it (conclusion) is missing in the premises. Inductive argument: This reasoning perceives from a particular statement to a general statement. This reasoning is mostly utilized in the scientific researches.

Metaphysics

Metaphysics however (derived from the Greek words "meta & physika") - meaning 'after physics'. It was the way students referred to a specific book in the works of Aristotle, and it was a book on First Philosophy. (The assumption that the word means "beyond physics" is misleading) Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of "first principles" and "being" (ontology). In other words, Metaphysics is the study of the most general aspects of reality, pertaining to subjects such as substance, identity, the nature of the mind, and free will. It is a study of nature, the nature of reality, and the nature of the world in which humans live. Metaphysics is generally concerned with the basic causes and nature of things, it also deals with laws that govern the physical world, it describes what is beyond physics.

Logic

Logic (from Classical Greek (logos), originally meaning the *word*, or *what is spoken*, but coming to mean thought or reason is most often said to be the study of arguments. Logic is the study of correct reasoning. However the subject is grounded, the task of the logician is the same: to advance an account of valid and fallacious inference to allow one to distinguish.

Ethics

Ethics is a general term for what is often described as the "science (study) of morality". In philosophy, ethical behaviour is that which is "good" or "right". The Western tradition of ethics is sometimes called moral philosophy. It's the study of right and wrong in human endeavors. Philosophers divide ethical theories into three: Meta-ethics (which investigates the source of our ethical principles); Normative (which takes a more practical task) and applied ethics.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that explores the creation and appreciation of beauty through critical analysis and reflection.