

Epistemology, Language, Logic, Metaphysics

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Language - logic - epistemology

c 200,000 BCE

- Before language:
 - Learn by *observation* - observe patterns, *infer* completion when they reappear
 - Learn by *imitation* - see one, do one, teach one
- With language:
 - Singing and Story telling - transfers knowledge without observation or imitation
 - Must be *meaningful* and *objective* to be useful
 - Enables *cultural* evolution - much faster than genetic

Fundamentals which come with language

- **Meaning** - words do not make a language until they have meaning
- **Objective Truth** - without this, communication does not transfer knowledge
 - (Even lies don't work)
- **Logical deduction**
 - language not understood unless you can perform elementary deductions
- The (**epistemological**) distinction between *logical* and *empirical* knowledge
 - A deductive inference does not need confirmation by observation
 - Claims about the world must arise from experience
- **Metaphysics** is preceded by superstition and religion which paper over gaps in knowledge

Fundamentals of Language

- **Pragmatics** of language concern how it is *used*
- **Semantics** of language concern what it *means*
 - ***Truth conditions*** are an important aspect of semantics
 - Truth conditions tell us the conditions under which each sentence is true
 - Truth conditions tell us which sentences have *empirical* or *descriptive content*

Fundamentals of Logic

- Sometimes truth conditions are trivial:
 - If a sentence is *always* true (whatever the facts) then we call that an **analytic** sentence
 - Analytic sentences are *broad logical truths* and can be established by deductive reason
 - If a sentence is never true (whatever the facts) then we call it **contradictory**
 - Contradictory sentences are *broad logical falsehoods* and can be disproven by deductive reason
- Otherwise (sometimes true, sometimes false) the sentence is **synthetic**

Fundamentals of Epistemology

- Descriptive propositions can be established by one of two principle methods:
 - By *reason*, in which case they are called *a priori* truths
 - or. By *observation*, in which case they are called truths *a posteriori*
- Meaning and Epistemic status are coupled:
 - *Analytic* sentences are *a priori*
 - *Synthetic* sentences are *a posteriori*
 - ***This coupling is disputed*** (as twitter might say)
- analytic truths are *necessary* (true in every possible world) and *certain*
- synthetic truth is *contingent* (true in this possible world) and *uncertain*

Fundamentals of Metaphysics

- Philosophy is armchair (*a priori*) “science”:
 - many philosophers want to believe that by reason they can discover what the world is really (and necessarily) like
 - Such truths are called *metaphysical* and they are *metaphysically necessary*
- Others tell us that *by reason* we discover only (broad) *logical* truths
 - They believe that all truths about reality are *a posteriori* and *contingent*
 - And that *metaphysics* is *meaningless* or *lacking empirical content*
- An important part of metaphysics is *ontology* the study of *being*
- Metaphysics is important because of the desire for authority which is conferred by logic, the desire to attribute certainty to philosophical doctrines

What is Rationality?

- *Instrumental* Rationality:
 - The adoption of means to an end which are likely to realise that end; which one has good reason to believe will achieve the desired end
- *Epistemic* Rationality:
 - The acceptance as true of just those propositions for which one has good grounds, or good reason to believe true.
- These two are related:
 - *epistemic rationality* probably is generally *instrumental*
 - *a true belief system* helps one to chose means which *will realise our ends*.
- Evolution yields rational results (by and large):
 - Life forms (or genes) well adapted to survive and proliferate
 - Language facilitates sharing of knowledge - over distance and time

Language - Logic - Epistemology - Metaphysics

Subject matter	How known	Reliability	Status
abstract, ideal, logic, math	<i>a priori</i> , deductive proof	certain	objective necessary
concrete, material, real world	<i>a posteriori</i> , observation, induction	hypothetical/ variable	objective, contingent
moral values	conscience? reason?	?	absolute/relative? normative
personal values	preferences Introspection	good	subjective

Ethical Theories

Meta-ethics, Moral epistemology

- ***Consequentialism*** - best = maximising aggregate ? of consequences
 - E.g. utilitarianism (? = pleasure), Singer (? = happiness)
- ***Deontological*** ethics - normative rules for *actions* regardless of consequences
- ***Virtue*** ethics - judging by *moral character*
- ***Care*** ethics - centres on interpersonal relationships
- ***Minimalist*** ethics - do no harm (and live by example?)