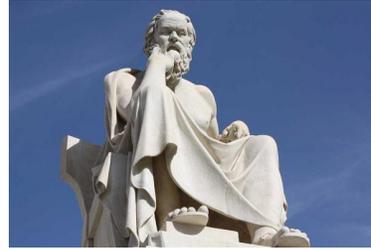


What Good is Philosophy?



Bill Meacham, Ph.D.
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www.bmeacham.com

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Overview

- What is Philosophy?
- Three Questions
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- A Guide to Life
- Conceptual Analysis
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- Other
- The Value of Philosophy

What is Philosophy? (1)

- *Philo* = love; *sophia* = wisdom. The love of wisdom or the love of truth.
- Metaphysics ('after-physics': the books found after Aristotle's books of Physics). The investigation of the underlying nature and structure of reality as a whole.
- Epistemology (*Episteme* = knowledge; *logos* = explanation of). What is knowledge?
- Ethics (from *ethikos*). How should we live? Why should we live like that? What is good and bad/evil? How should we decide that an act is unethical? What is happiness?

What is Philosophy? (2)

- Logic (*logos* = explanation of). What is logical consequence? What makes an argument sound?
- Philosophy of Mind. What is the human mind? How does it think? How is mind related to body?
- Aesthetics (*aisthetikos* = concerning feeling) What is art? What is beauty? Is the beauty of music beautiful for similar reasons to that of a landscape?
- Political Philosophy (*polis* = city-state). What would utopia be like? Is utopia possible? How should society be organized? How should decisions be taken?
- Other areas: philosophy of mathematics, of science, of religion, of language, of social science, of history.

The Three Questions of Philosophy

- From the time of the Greeks, philosophers have been concerned with three fundamental questions:
- What is there? What's real? What kinds of things exist? – Metaphysics or Ontology (the study of being, *ontos*)
- How do we know what there is? – Epistemology
- What shall we do about what there is? How shall we lead our lives? What is our duty? What virtues should we cultivate? How can we be happy? – Ethics

The Three Questions Are Inseparable

- Duty, virtue and happiness all require knowledge of goods and evils, rights and responsibilities. Ethics requires epistemology.
- Knowledge is always knowledge about something. Epistemology requires metaphysics.
- We care about metaphysics because it makes a difference in how we act. Metaphysics has a bearing on ethics.

Metaphysics: An Account of Everything

- Pre-Socratics – Everything is Earth or Air or Fire or Water.
- Plato – What is really real are the Forms, and physical reality is a lesser reality.
- Aristotle – The primary category is Substance. Form is not separate from particular things.
- Descartes – Dualism of material and mental substances.
- Leibniz – A plurality of non-interacting substances.
- Hegel – Idealism. Spirit (*Geist*) or Mind is fundamental.
- Dennett, et. al. – Materialism. Matter is fundamental.
- Whitehead – The fundamental category is Process, not Substance. Processes are both material and mental.

Metaphysics: An Account of Everything

- Whitehead – The goal is to “frame a ... system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted. ... Everything of which we are conscious as enjoyed, perceived, willed or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme.” – *Process and Reality*, 1929

Metaphysics: An Account of Everything

- The rise of experimental science has reduced the scope of metaphysics. We have gone way beyond Earth, Air, Fire and Water.
- But science is based on metaphysical assumptions that are not demonstrated by the scientific method!
 - That there is an objective reality
 - That it is ordered in a rational and intelligible way
 - That it is describable by immutable mathematical laws, laws that are not going to change arbitrarily with the passage of time or in different regions of space
 - That these laws are discoverable by systematic observation and experimentation

Metaphysics: An Account of Everything

- Topics not amenable to scientific explanation:
 - The relationship between mathematics, including logic, and the physical world.
 - The relationship between subjectivity and objectivity.
 - Whether there is a purpose or meaning to it all, and if so what it is.

How We Know

- **Rationalism**
 - Reason from first principles to what must be
 - Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza
- **Empiricism**
 - Observe what actually is, form theories useful for prediction
 - Aristotle, Locke, Berkeley, Hume
- Each requires the other.
 - We don't reason in a vacuum. First principles are suggested by experience.
 - To be useful, theories must be logically coherent and sound.

Ethics: A Guide to Life

- Practical concern with how to live one's life.
- Socrates – What is temperance? Courage? Justice? Piety? Virtue?
- Aristotle – Cultivate the virtues.
- Stoics – Live in harmony with nature; be indifferent to pleasure and pain.
- Epicurus – Seek the pleasure of tranquility.
- Kant – Do your duty according to the dictates of reason.
- Kierkegaard – Have faith while confronting doubt. Subjectivity is truth.
- Sartre – You are radically free. Choose!

Ethics: A Guide to Life

- The practical maxims in each of these systems are based on a view of the system of things as a whole.
- Figuring out how to act requires understanding ourselves.
- Understanding ourselves requires understanding the whole of reality.

Ethics: Goodness and Rightness

- Watch the language people use to talk about what we should do.
- Goodness
 - “Good” and “bad”
 - Benefits and harms
 - “Should” is practical advice.
- Rightness
 - “Right” and “wrong”
 - Obedience to rules
 - “Should” is a moral command.

Conceptual Analysis

- The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of ideas.
- Socrates: What is X? (Courage, piety, etc.)
- Modern analytic tradition emphasizes clarity of argument and a respect for the natural sciences.
- The logical clarification of thoughts can be achieved only by analysis of the logical form of philosophical propositions. Use of modern formal logic.
- Rejection of sweeping philosophical systems in favor of attention to detail or to ordinary language.
- Ungrounded metaphysical speculation is bunk.

Correction of Conceptual Mistakes

- Logical positivism – Only statements verifiable either logically or empirically are cognitively meaningful. The goal is to prevent confusion rooted in unclear language and unverifiable claims.
- Wittgenstein – The purpose of philosophy is to break bad habits of thought, which are typically brought about by misuse of language.
- Pragmatism – Make our ideas clear by focusing on their practical effects.
- Clarity of language promotes clarity of thought and mutual understanding.

Other

- Nietzsche – Unsystematic observations about human nature. Polemic guide to life.
- Husserl – Clarification of aspects of reality from a rigorous first-person point of view. Analysis of subjectivity.
- Heidegger – Ontology from a radically subjective point of view. Ontology of the world as lived in. Guide to life: Be authentic.

The Value of Philosophy

- You can play interesting intellectual games.
- It can be completely trivial and unrelated to real life.
- It can be of vital importance.
- Achieving wisdom, knowledge of how to live a fulfilling life, is the most important thing you can do.
- There are no easy answers.
- Everybody needs to figure it out for themselves.