

What is Philosophy?

The question is much more difficult than "What is theology?" (Theology is human reflection upon the being and activity of God, in the language and thought-forms of our era, in the light of God's having given himself to us in Israel/Jesus Christ and having illumined us as to the truth and nature of what he has done.)

It is different with respect to philosophy. In philosophy there is no category of revelation as the definitive self-disclosure of an "Other" as ultimate reality.

Philosophers waggishly say, "Philosophy is what philosophers do."
Then what do they do?

Metaphysics:

(*meta*: "after"; *physis*: "nature" -- i.e., after sense-immediacy, after appearances, after (in terms of reflection) the natural, but **not** invoking the supernatural.)

-the investigation of being as such, as opposed to the study of being under some particular aspect; e.g., movement.

-metaphysics attempts to answer the question, "What *is*? What is *ultimately*?"

-metaphysics has to do with first principles; i.e., first in the sense of logical priority, first as foundational, first as being founded in nothing higher or more complete principles available to the human intellect by means of its own natural powers.

-the question of being as such is also known as "ontology."

Epistemology:

(*episteme*: "knowledge"; *logos*: reason, theory)

-epistemology investigates the origin, structure, methods and validity of knowledge. I.e., *epis.* is the philosophical exploration of the nature of truth and the nature of knowledge.

-metaphysics and epistemology are interdependent. (We can know only what is.)

Issues pertaining to epistemology:

[a] the possibility of knowledge. Is genuine knowledge attainable? If we can know, how do we know what we know? How do we know that we know?

[b] the limits of knowledge. What can we know? Can we "know" God?

[c] the origin of knowledge. There are various schools here, such as rationalism and empiricism.

[d] methodology. Deduction or induction? Is there a distinctively philosophical method that is reducible neither to empirical induction nor to mathematical demonstration?

[e] truth. Correspondence theory: truth is the relation between an idea or proposition and its object.

Coherence theory: a proposition is true insofar as it is a necessary constituent of a systematically coherent whole. (Therefore truth is a characteristic only of *one* systematic whole. Otherwise the "whole" wouldn't be *whole*.) It has been argued that all coherence theories of truth ultimately refer to a correspondence theory.

Pragmatic theory: a proposition's truth is measured by what it does, what it effects, how it "works."

Logic:

-logic is the formal discipline of the true principles governing valid reasoning.

-logic is both syllogistic ("All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore S. is mortal.") and mathematical. There are endless subtleties and refinements to logic.

-logic is considered to be a discipline belonging to the "departments" of philosophy and mathematics.

Philosophy of History

-phil. of history probes the principles of historiography (the art of writing history.)

[a] metaphysics of history:

religious: e.g., Augustine, *City of God*; Dante, *Divine Comedy*; Milton, *Paradise Lost and Regained*.

secular: any humanist understanding of history wherein history is the process whereby there is realized the human good, freedom (Marx), the achievement of public welfare through human reason (the Enlightenment.)

nihilist: history means nothing. (Is the Greek cyclical view of history *ultimately* nihilist?)

[b] logic of history:

-what are the historical objects under investigation? What do we attend to in view of the overwhelming welter of events and perceptions facing the historian? How do we make such a selection?

-does history follow natural laws?

Ethics:

[a] judgements of value: the question as to the goodness/desirability of objects, events, experiences, dispositions or states of affairs. E.g., "Knowledge is good."

-is goodness definable? If so, how?

-is goodness relative or absolute?

"emotivists": "goodness" has no meaning beyond the emotions.

intuitionists: "goodness" is itself an intrinsic (i.e., objective.)

metaphysicalists: "goodness" is defined in terms of a metaphysic.

[b] judgements of obligation: what is to be *done*?

Aesthetics:

-the question of the beautiful.

(Note:

Hans Urs von Balthasar:

"There is in the time of the Church no historically influential theology which is not itself a reflection of the glory of God; only beautiful theology; that is, only theology which, grasped by the glory of God, is able itself to transmit its rays, has the chance of making any impact in human history by conviction and transformation."

Mother Teresa: "Something beautiful for God."

Scripture: "The beauty of holiness."