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CHAPTER TWO

Branches of Philosophy

Patrick Olujenyo Akinsanya

Introduction

Having been introduced to issues concerning the nature of philosophy in chapter one, this chapter focuses on the core branches of philosophy. Traditionally, philosophy is said to have four core branches, which are – Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and Logic. But there are other branches of philosophy such as – Aesthetics, Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Religion, to mention but a few.

In this chapter, our primary focus, as already mentioned is on the core branches. Two things should be noted in this regard. First is that there are some scholars who see logic simply as a tool of philosophy. However the position here is that since there are philosophers who specialise in logic as an area of scholarly research and there are theories which are products of researches by logicians, then logic constitutes a distinct branch of philosophy.

The second point to note is that the various branches of philosophy do overlap. Hence, it is difficult to discuss one branch of philosophy in isolation of the other. For example, there is Metaphysics in Epistemology and even in Ethics. Also there is some Epistemology in Metaphysics and Ethics; and so on. Discussions on determinism, freewill and conscience, for instance, are metaphysical, but they also have ethical dimensions. The age-long debate on mind-body interaction is purely metaphysical. But when we begin to pose questions like: Is man made up of body and mind?; if he is, what is the point of interaction between these two basic components? how do we know there is mind? and so on, we enter into the world of Epistemology, and Philosophy of Mind. Hence, the branches of philosophy are interwoven; none stands on its own. On the basis of the above, we can say that the compartmentalisation we have in philosophy is just a matter of convenience. With this realisation as a background, let us now discuss the four main branches already identified above, beginning with metaphysics.

Metaphysics

Etymologically, metaphysics is a derivation from a Greek expression meta ta physika – meaning after the physical realities. It is a word that has its origin in Andronicus of Rhodes, Aristotle’s pupil. While arranging Aristotle’s works in the Philosophical School of Alexandria, Andronicus placed the work that Aristotle called First Philosophy after the ones on Physics and called it Metaphysics – After the Physics.

To explicate properly what metaphysics is, we may start by stating what metaphysics is not. Some people equate metaphysics with some occultic practices; the exploitation of hidden powers in nature; mystical dealings with spirits and souls of the dead; a delve into the ideal world and secret powers; a discovery of the Great beyond; or some abstract rationalisations. All these are total misconceptions about metaphysics. Metaphysics, rather, is a systematic study of being in its deepest aspects. It is an ordered investigation into the nature of existence, involving a critical study of the real nature of things through their ultimate causes. For Plato, it is the knowledge of the suprasensible; while Descartes takes it as the knowledge of things which lie beyond sense experience. In Thomas Aquinas’ view, it is the ultimate explanation of the mystery of being, visible and invisible, in the Ultimate being. For Kant, it is, the transcendental analysis of the contents of the human mind.

Metaphysics, also called first philosophy, investigates being as beings; beings in their real state; beings in their apogee. It is the aspect of philosophy that is concerned with the following posers:

- What is being?
- What are its fundamental features and properties?
Is there order in the cosmos independent of what the mind puts there?
What is even the mind? Where is it located in the body?
Do people have freewill or they are some pieces of pre-determined machines/robots?

It also considers distinctions, such as the following:
- Reality and Appearance
- Unity and Plurality
- Essence and Existence

Now when metaphysical questions on beings as beings and on primary divisions and universal properties are posed, they are termed as Ontology. When metaphysics studies the infinitive being, the primordial cause of all things and other supra-sensible realities (e.g. pure spirits), it is called Theodicy or Natural Theology; and at times broadly called the Philosophy of Religion. This consideration, according to Aristotle, makes metaphysics the most perfect and elevated of all sciences.

When metaphysics studies finite, but animate, being, it is either Psychology (Philosophy of the human mind in its structure, origin and operations) or Philosophy and Cultural Anthropology (the study of the human person in his paleontological origins and in his cultural traits). The inanimate aspect of the study of finite being in Metaphysics is Philosophical Biology or Cosmology which has three areas of coverage – Biology, Somatology and Philosophy of Science and Technology.

**Epistemology**

Epistemology, also called Gnoseology, is the theory of knowledge. It is basically an enquiry into the nature, the source, the scope, limits and the justification of our knowledge claims. One could, for instance, pose a question: What is knowledge and What are the sources of our knowledge?. To this particular question, there are some responses, which are categorised into schools thought, such as Empiricism, Rationalism and even Scepticism.

**Branches of Philosophy**

**Empiricism** – This is a doctrine in philosophy that holds that the source of our knowledge is in sense experience. *Nihil in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu.* This means that there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses. (More on this in chapter four.)

**Rationalism** – This doctrine holds that the intellect contains important truths that were not placed there by sense experience. To this school of thought reason is the source of knowledge. (More on this in chapter four.)

**Scepticism** – This is the claim that knowledge is impossible or that we can never be sure that we have attained knowledge.

Coming to the issue of the nature and justification of our knowledge claims, we face some other puzzles, e.g. what is the basis of our knowledge claims? Historically, knowledge was equated with belief; later, it was moderated to a true belief. Subsequently, epistemologists set before themselves the task of looking for what to add to true belief in order that it becomes proper knowledge. This is because if one knows a proposition, one must not only believe that proposition to be true, it must in fact be true; one must have good reasons to believe that the proposition is true. Hence, knowledge is defined as justified true belief (JTB).

Edmund Gettier, later pointed out that JTB is not a necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge, because it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact true, yet does not know it.

Despite Gettier's effort, epistemologists still believe that justification is required in order that a true belief becomes knowledge. As such, the whole of epistemology is centred around the issue of the justification of knowledge. (Theories of justification include forms of Foundationalism, Coherentism, Contextualism, etc). The reason for this is that epistemologists opine that the possibility of epistemology can be established only when the sceptics' challenge has been successfully met.

In summary, then, epistemology is all about the search for the foundation of knowledge, which is certain. This search is an attempt to refute scepticism as the denial of the possibility of knowledge.
Ethics

Ethics, otherwise called Moral Philosophy, is coined out from Greek word – *ethikos* – meaning proper habit, custom or character. It could be defined as the philosophical study of moral judgements which are value judgements about what is virtuous or base, just or unjust, morally right or wrong, morally good or bad or evil, morally proper or improper. Ethics can also be defined as the systematic study of the fundamental principles underlying our morality; or as the normative science of human conduct.

Ethics is a philosophical study of moral facts – including moral evaluations, commandments, norms, virtuous acts, manifestations of conscience, and voluntary human actions. The purpose of doing this is to discover what types of conduct are good, right, bad or wrong. Posers in ethics include the following. Is there a moral law? Are there really such things as good and bad, right or wrong? And if there are, what is it that makes one thing right and another wrong? What is the ultimate justification of moral standards? What are moral judgements? What makes a moral judgement a moral judgement? How are such judgements different from other value judgements, factual assertions and pieces of practical advice? What distinguishes reasoning about moral issues from reasoning about other things? What is freedom? Is man really free or determined? What constitutes the yardsticks or criteria for evaluating actions and for deciding that certain actions are good and others bad?

These, among others, are the questions being grappled with by moral philosophers. Interestingly, these posers have resulted in the formulation of many ethical theories which are: Egoism, Altruism, Hedonism, Eudemonism, Relativism, Subjectivism, Epicureanism, Emotivism, Prescriptivism, Machiavellianism, Fatalism, Determinism, Freewillism, Intuitionism, to mention but a few.

Logic

In conversations, one finds some people making claims without solid support. Philosophers, on the other hand, strive to make their opinions well-articulated, persuasive, and properly backed up with cogent and persuasive arguments. Philosophers support their views with reasons, to make it plain why a reasonable person should accept what they say. It is Logic that ensures and facilitates the attainment of these goals.

Now, when someone supports a belief by giving a reason for accepting the belief, he or she has given an argument. Setting forth arguments is the most basic activity that distinguishes philosophy from merely having opinions. For instance, if I say:

- All bachelors are unmarried
- Ade is a bachelor

Hence, Ade is not married

I have not only stated a case, but I have given reasons for my case. In the other words, I have developed an argument. It is logic that is primarily concerned with the relation between the beliefs we express and the reasons we give as evidence for them. Since not all reasons are equally good, logic determines if the reasons we give are good enough to sustain our beliefs.

Logic is thus concerned with the relation between evidence and conclusion.

More specifically, logic which was coined from the Greek word – *logos* – meaning ‘reasoned discourse’, can be defined as the science and art of correct reasoning, for it directs the mind in the attainment of truth. William Wallace defines it as the art of sound discourse; the science of good reasoning and the science of the laws of thought. Marcel describes it as an intellectual habit or virtue that strengthens the mind for its characteristically human operation – that is, reasoning or understanding and judgement. Logic is a study which enhances clarity of thought and systematisation of principles. It is a study that analyses the nature of correct reasoning in accordance with basic logical canons. An elaborate treatment of this aspect of philosophy comes up later in this book.

Notes and References

2. Ibid.
Chapter Three

Basic Concepts in Philosophy

John Kayode Olusanya

Introduction

The preceding chapters have been devoted to making intelligible the concept of philosophy. The meaning of philosophy and its branches have been given due attention. However, there is another aspect of this discourse that is of paramount importance to anyone having one thing or another to do with philosophy. This concerns the basic concepts or schools of thought in philosophy.

By schools of thought in philosophy, we mean systems of ideas in philosophy with peculiarities which make one differ from the other. Thus, the idea of schools of thought deals with classification based on similarities and differences in what people/scholars opine about a given subject matter or subject of discourse. There are wide-ranging ideas that have been labeled with one nomenclature or another, which expresses the thought of a group of scholars or philosophers. This can be described as “modes of thought or doctrines, which define a philosophical trend ... or “isms” in philosophy” (Adedeji et al, 2003:27)

It should be noted that although schools of thought describe the outlooks, orientations, or worldviews of philosophers on a particular subject matter or another, these schools of thought are not in all cases clearly incompatible systems of ideas. This is because it is possible for a school of thought to incorporate fragments of another school of thought. Some examples of these theories, doctrines, or schools of thought in philosophy are: Idealism, Pragmatism, Rationalism, Empiricism, Egoism, Logicism, Scepticism, and so on.

Considering the fact that there are many schools of thought in philosophy and its various branches, we discuss just some of them here as exemplifications.
The book is primarily an introductory text meant for students of Philosophy and Logic in Nigerian Universities.

It covers the following topics:
* What is Philosophy?
* Branches of Philosophy
* Basic concepts in Philosophy
* Some philosophical Problems
* Issues in African Philosophy
* The Nature, Meaning and Value of Logic
* Informal Logic
* Aristotelian Logic
* Formal Logic
* Logical puzzles and Relational Arguments

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