

Study of general and fundamental questions

Philosophy (from Greek: $\phi\lambda\acute{o}\sigma\phi\iota\alpha$, philosophia, 'love of wisdom')[1][2] is the systematized study of general and fundamental questions, such as those about existence, reason, knowledge, values, mind, and language.[3][4][5] Such questions are often posed as problems[6][7] to be studied or resolved. Some sources claim the term was coined by Pythagoras (c. 570 – c. 495 BCE),[8][9] although this theory is disputed by some.[10][11][12] Philosophical methods include questioning, critical discussion, rational argument, and systematic presentation.[13][14][15]

Historically, philosophy encompassed all bodies of knowledge and a practitioner was known as a philosopher.[15] "natural philosophy," which began as a discipline in ancient India and Ancient Greece, encompasses astronomy, medicine, and physics. [17] For example, Newton's 1687 *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* later became classified as a book of physics. In the 19th century, the growth of modern research universities led academic philosophy and other disciplines to professionalize and specialize.[18][19] Since then, various areas of investigation that were traditionally part of philosophy have become separate academic disciplines, and namely the social sciences such as psychology, sociology, linguistics, and economics.

Today, major subfields of academic philosophy include metaphysics, which is concerned with the fundamental nature of existence and reality; epistemology, which studies the nature of knowledge and belief; ethics, which is concerned with moral value; and logic, which studies the rules of inference that allow one to derive conclusions from true premises.[20][21] Other notable subfields include philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, political philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind.

Definitions

There is wide agreement that philosophy (from the ancient Greek $\phi\lambda\acute{o}\sigma\phi\iota\alpha$, $\phi\lambda\acute{o}\sigma$, phlōs: "love"; and $\phi\iota\alpha$, $\phi\iota\alpha$, sophā-a: "wisdom")[22] is characterized by various general features: it is a form of rational inquiry, it aims to be systematic, and it tends to critically reflect on its own methods and presuppositions.[23][24][25] But approaches that go beyond such vague characterizations to give a more interesting or profound definition are usually controversial.[24][25] Often, they are only accepted by theorists belonging to a certain philosophical movement and are revisionistic in that many presumed parts of philosophy would not deserve the title "philosophy" if they were true.[26][27] Before the modern age, the term was used in a very wide sense, which included the individual sciences, like physics or mathematics, as its sub-disciplines, but the contemporary usage is more narrow.[25][28][29]

Some approaches argue that there is a set of essential features shared by all parts of philosophy while others see only weaker family resemblances or contend that it is merely an empty blanket term.[30][27][31] Some definitions characterize philosophy in relation to its method, like pure reasoning. Others

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focus more on its topic, for example, as the study of the biggest patterns of the world as a whole or as the attempt to answer the big questions.[27][32][33] Both approaches have the problem that they are usually either too wide, by including non-philosophical disciplines, or too narrow, by excluding some philosophical sub-disciplines.[27] Many definitions of philosophy emphasize its intimate relation to science.[25] In this sense, philosophy is sometimes understood as a proper science in its own right. Some naturalist approaches, for example, see philosophy as an empirical yet very abstract science that is concerned with very wide-ranging empirical patterns instead of particular observations.[27][34] Some phenomenologists, on the other hand, characterize philosophy as the science of essences.[26][35][36] Science-based definitions usually face the problem of explaining why philosophy in its long history has not made the type of progress as seen in other sciences.[27][37][38] This problem is avoided by seeing philosophy as an immature or provisional science whose subdisciplines cease to be philosophy once they have fully developed.[25][30][35] In this sense, philosophy is the midwife of the sciences.[25]

Other definitions focus more on the contrast between science and philosophy. A common theme among many such definitions is that philosophy is concerned with meaning, understanding, or the clarification of language.[32][27] According to one view, philosophy is conceptual analysis, which involves finding the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of concepts.[33][27][39] Another defines philosophy as a linguistic therapy that aims at dispelling misunderstandings to which humans are susceptible due to the confusing structure of natural language.[26][25][40] One more approach holds that the main task of philosophy is to articulate the pre-ontological understanding of the world, which acts as a condition of possibility of experience.[27][41][42]

Many other definitions of philosophy do not clearly fall into any of the aforementioned categories. An early approach already found in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy is that philosophy is the spiritual practice of developing one's reasoning ability.[43][44] This practice is an expression of the philosopher's love of wisdom and has the aim of improving one's well-being by leading a reflective life.[45] A closely related approach identifies the development and articulation of worldviews as the principal task of philosophy, i.e. to express how things on the grand scale hang

together and which practical stance we should take towards them.[27][23][46] Another definition characterizes philosophy as thinking about thinking in order to emphasize its reflective nature.[27][33]

Historical overview

In one general sense, philosophy is associated with wisdom, intellectual culture, and a search for knowledge. In this sense, all cultures and literate societies ask philosophical questions, such as "how are we to live" and "what is the nature of reality". A broad and impartial conception of philosophy, then, finds a reasoned inquiry into such matters as reality, morality, and life in all world civilizations.[47]

Western philosophy

Statue of Aristotle (384–322 BCE), a major figure of ancient Greek philosophy, in Aristotle's Park, Stagira

Western philosophy is the philosophical tradition of the Western world, dating back to pre-Socratic thinkers who were active in 6th-century Greece (BCE), such as Thales (c. 624 – c. 545 BCE) and Pythagoras (c. 570 – c. 495 BCE) who practiced a "love of wisdom" (Latin: philosophia)[48] and were also termed "students of nature" (physiologoi).

Western philosophy can be divided into three eras:

Ancient era

While our knowledge of the ancient era begins with Thales in the 6th century BCE, little is known about the philosophers who came before Socrates (commonly known as the pre-Socratics). The ancient era was dominated by Greek philosophical schools. Most notable among the schools influenced by Socrates' teachings were Plato, who founded the Platonic Academy, and his student Aristotle, who founded the Peripatetic school.[49] Other ancient philosophical traditions influenced by Socrates included Cynicism, Cyrenaicism, Stoicism, and Academic Skepticism. Two other traditions were influenced by Socrates' contemporary, Democritus: Pyrrhonism and Epicureanism. Important topics covered by the Greeks included metaphysics (with competing theories such as atomism and monism), cosmology, the nature of the well-lived life (eudaimonia), the possibility of knowledge, and the nature of reason (logos). With the rise of the Roman empire, Greek philosophy was increasingly discussed in Latin by Romans such as Cicero and Seneca (see Roman

philosophy).[50]

Medieval era

Medieval philosophy (5th–16th centuries) took place during the period following the fall of the Western Roman Empire and was dominated by the rise of Christianity; it hence reflects Judeo-Christian theological concerns while also retaining a continuity with Greco-Roman thought. Problems such as the existence and nature of God, the nature of faith and reason, metaphysics, and the problem of evil were discussed in this period. Some key medieval thinkers include St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Boethius, Anselm and Roger Bacon. Philosophy for these thinkers was viewed as an aid to theology (*ancilla theologiae*), and hence they sought to align their philosophy with their interpretation of sacred scripture. This period saw the development of scholasticism, a text critical method developed in medieval universities based on close reading and disputation on key texts. The Renaissance period saw increasing focus on classic Greco-Roman thought and on a robust humanism.[51]

Modern era

Early modern philosophy in the Western world begins with thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and René Descartes (1596–1650).[52] Following the rise of natural science, modern philosophy was concerned with developing a secular and rational foundation for knowledge and moved away from traditional structures of authority such as religion, scholastic thought and the Church. Major modern philosophers include Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

19th-century philosophy (sometimes called late modern philosophy) was influenced by the wider 18th-century movement termed "the Enlightenment", and includes figures such as Hegel, a key figure in German idealism; Kierkegaard, who developed the foundations for existentialism; Thomas Carlyle, representative of the great man theory; Nietzsche, a famed anti-Christian; John Stuart Mill, who promoted utilitarianism; Karl Marx, who developed the foundations for communism; and the American William James. The 20th century saw the split between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy, as well as philosophical trends such as phenomenology, existentialism, logical positivism, pragmatism and the linguistic turn (see Contemporary philosophy).[53]

Middle Eastern philosophy

Pre-Islamic philosophy

The regions of the Fertile Crescent, Iran and Arabia are home to the earliest known philosophical wisdom literature.[citation needed]

According to the assyriologist Marc Van de Mieroop, Babylonian philosophy was a highly developed system of thought with a unique approach to knowledge and a focus on writing, lexicography, divination, and law. It was also a bilingual intellectual culture, based on Sumerian and Akkadian.

The Maxims of Ptahhotep, traditionally attributed to the Ptahhotep (c. 2375 â€"2350 BCE) A page oftraditionally attributed to the Vizier â€"2350 BCE)

Early Wisdom literature from the Fertile Crescent was a genre that sought to instruct people on ethical action, practical living, and virtue through stories and proverbs. In Ancient Egypt, these texts were known as sebayt ('teachings'), and they are central to our understandings of Ancient Egyptian philosophy. The most well known of these texts is The Maxims of Ptahhotep.[56] Theology and cosmology were central concerns in Egyptian thought. Perhaps the earliest form of a monotheistic theology also emerged in Egypt, with the rise of the Amarna theology (or Atenism) of Akhenaten (14th century BCE), which held that the solar creation deity Aten was the only god. This has been described as a "monotheistic revolution" by egyptologist Jan Assmann, though it also drew on previous developments in Egyptian thought, particularly the "New Solar Theology" based around Amun-Ra.[57][58] These theological developments also influenced the post-Amarna Ramesside theology, which retained a focus on a single creative solar deity (though without outright rejection of other gods, which are now seen as manifestations of the main solar deity). This period also saw the development of the concept of the ba (soul) and its relation to god.[58]

Jewish philosophy and Christian philosophy are religious-philosophical traditions that developed both in the Middle East and in Europe, which both share certain early Judaic texts (mainly the Tanakh) and monotheistic beliefs. Jewish thinkers such as the Geonim of the Talmudic Academies in Babylonia and Maimonides engaged with Greek and Islamic philosophy. Later Jewish philosophy came under strong Western intellectual influences and includes the works of Moses Mendelssohn who ushered in the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment), Jewish existentialism, and Reform Judaism.[59][60]

The various traditions of Gnosticism, which were influenced by both Greek and Abrahamic currents, originated around

the first century and emphasized spiritual knowledge (gnosis).[61]

Pre-Islamic Iranian philosophy begins with the work of Zoroaster, one of the first promoters of monotheism and of the dualism between good and evil.[62] This dualistic cosmogony influenced later Iranian developments such as Manichaeism, Mazdakism, and Zurvanism.[63][64]

Islamic philosophy

An Iranian portrait of Avicenna on a Silver Vase. He was one of the most influential philosophers of the Islamic Golden Age

Islamic philosophy is the philosophical work originating in the Islamic tradition and is mostly done in Arabic. It draws from the religion of Islam as well as from Greco-Roman philosophy. After the Muslim conquests, the translation movement (mid-eighth to the late tenth century) resulted in the works of Greek philosophy becoming available in Arabic.[65]

Early Islamic philosophy developed the Greek philosophical traditions in new innovative directions. This intellectual work inaugurated what is known as the Islamic Golden Age. The two main currents of early Islamic thought are Kalam, which focuses on Islamic theology, and Falsafa, which was based on Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. The work of Aristotle was very influential among philosophers such as Al-Kindi (9th century), Avicenna (980 – June 1037), and Averroes (12th century). Others such as Al-Ghazali were highly critical of the methods of the Islamic Aristotelians and saw their metaphysical ideas as heretical. Islamic thinkers like Ibn al-Haytham and Al-Biruni also developed a scientific method, experimental medicine, a theory of optics, and a legal philosophy. Ibn Khaldun was an influential thinker in philosophy of history.

Islamic thought also deeply influenced European intellectual developments, especially through the commentaries of Averroes on Aristotle. The Mongol invasions and the destruction of Baghdad in 1258 are often seen as marking the end of the Golden Age.[66] Several schools of Islamic philosophy continued to flourish after the Golden Age, however, and include currents such as Illuminationist philosophy, Sufi philosophy, and Transcendent theosophy.

The 19th- and 20th-century Arab world saw the Nahda movement (literally meaning 'The Awakening'; also known as the

'Arab Renaissance'), which had a considerable influence on contemporary Islamic philosophy.

Eastern philosophy

Indian philosophy

Indian philosophy (Sanskrit: darśana, lit. 'point of view', 'perspective')[69] refers to the diverse philosophical traditions that emerged since the ancient times on the Indian subcontinent. Indian philosophy chiefly considers epistemology, theories of consciousness and theories of mind, and the physical properties of reality. [70] [71] [72] Indian philosophical traditions share various key concepts and ideas, which are defined in different ways and accepted or rejected by the different traditions. These include concepts such as dhárma, karma, pramāṇa, dharma, mokṣa, saṁsāra and mokṣa.[73][74]

Some of the earliest surviving Indian philosophical texts are the Upanishads of the later Vedic period (1000–500 BCE), which are considered to preserve the ideas of Brahmanism. Indian philosophical traditions are commonly grouped according to their relationship to the Vedas and the ideas contained in them. Jainism and Buddhism originated at the end of the Vedic period, while the various traditions grouped under Hinduism mostly emerged after the Vedic period as independent traditions. Hindus generally classify Indian philosophical traditions as either orthodox (Āstika) or heterodox (nāstika) depending on whether they accept the authority of the Vedas and the theories of brahman and Ātman found therein.[75][76]

The schools which align themselves with the thought of the Upanishads, the so-called "orthodox" or "Hindu" traditions, are often classified into six darśanas or philosophies: Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaisheshika, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta.[77]

The doctrines of the Vedas and Upanishads were interpreted differently by these six schools of Hindu philosophy, with varying degrees of overlap. They represent a "collection of philosophical views that share a textual connection", according to Chadha (2015).[78] They also reflect a tolerance for a diversity of philosophical interpretations within Hinduism while sharing the same foundation.[ii]

Hindu philosophers of the six orthodox schools developed systems of epistemology (pramana) and investigated topics

such as metaphysics, ethics, psychology (guá¹+a), hermeneutics, and soteriology within the framework of the Vedic knowledge, while presenting a diverse collection of interpretations.[79][80][81][82] The commonly named six orthodox schools were the competing philosophical traditions of what has been called the "Hindu synthesis" of classical Hinduism.[83][84] [85]

There are also other schools of thought which are often seen as "Hindu", though not necessarily orthodox (since they may accept different scriptures as normative, such as the Shaiva Agamas and Tantras), these include different schools of Shavism such as Pashupata, Shaiva Siddhanta, non-dual tantric Shavism (i.e. Trika, Kaula, etc.).[86]

The parable of the blind men and the elephant illustrates the important Jain doctrine of anÄ“kÄ•ntavÄ•da

The "Hindu" and "Orthodox" traditions are often contrasted with the "unorthodox" traditions (nÄ•stika, literally "those who reject"), though this is a label that is not used by the "unorthodox" schools themselves. These traditions reject the Vedas as authoritative and often reject major concepts and ideas that are widely accepted by the orthodox schools (such as Ä•tman, Brahman, and Ä•Ä>vara).[87] These unorthodox schools include Jainism (accepts Ä•tman but rejects Ä•Ä>vara, Vedas and Brahman), Buddhism (rejects all orthodox concepts except rebirth and karma), CÄ•rvÄ•ka (materialists who reject even rebirth and karma) and Ä•jÄ«vika (known for their doctrine of fate).[87][88][89]

Reference

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