

What is Philosophy?

Quite literally, the term "philosophy" means, "love of wisdom." In a broad sense, philosophy is an activity people undertake when they seek to understand fundamental truths about themselves, the world in which they live, and their relationships to the world and to each other. As an academic discipline philosophy is much the same. Those who study philosophy are perpetually engaged in asking, answering, and arguing for their answers to life's most basic questions. To make such a pursuit more systematic academic philosophy is traditionally divided into major areas of study.

Metaphysics

At its core the study of metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality, of what exists in the world, what it is like, and how it is ordered. In metaphysics philosophers wrestle with such questions as:

- Is there a God?
- What is truth?
- What is a person? What makes a person the same through time?
- Is the world strictly composed of matter?
- Do people have minds? If so, how is the mind related to the body?
- Do people have free wills?
- What is it for one event to cause another?

Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It is primarily concerned with what we can know about the world and how we can know it. Typical questions of concern in epistemology are:

- What is knowledge?
- Do we know anything at all?
- How do we know what we know?
- Can we be justified in claiming to know certain things?

Ethics

The study of ethics often concerns what we ought to do and what it would be best to do. In struggling with this issue, larger questions about what is good and right arise. So, the ethicist attempts to answer such questions as:

- What is good? What makes actions or people good?
- What is right? What makes actions right?
- Is morality objective or subjective?
- How should I treat others?

Logic

Another important aspect of the study of philosophy is the arguments or reasons given for people's answers to these questions. To this end philosophers employ logic to study the nature and structure of arguments. Logicians ask such questions as:

- What constitutes "good" or "bad" reasoning?
- How do we determine whether a given piece of reasoning is good or bad?

- **History of Philosophy**

- The study of philosophy involves not only forming one's own answers to such questions, but also seeking to understand the way in which people have answered such questions in the past. So, a significant part of philosophy is its history, a history of answers and arguments about these very questions. In studying the history of philosophy one explores the ideas of such historical figures as:

Plato

Locke

Marx

Aristotle

Hume

Mill

Aquinas

Kant

Wittgenstein

Descartes

Nietzsche

Sartre

- What often motivates the study of philosophy is not merely the answers or arguments themselves but whether or not the arguments are good and the answers are true. Moreover, many of the questions and issues in the various areas of philosophy overlap and in some cases even converge. Thus, philosophical questions arise in almost every discipline. This is why philosophy also encompasses such areas as:

Examples

- 1 Philosophy of Law
- 2 Philosophy of Religion
- 3 Philosophy of Mind
- 4 Political Philosophy
- 5 Philosophy of History
- 6 Philosophy of Feminism
- 7 Philosophy of Science
- 8 Philosophy of Literature
- 9 Philosophy of the Arts
- 10 Philosophy of Language