

TERMS

Physics vs. Metaphysics

Physics: study of nature (tables, chairs, suns, galaxies, world of space and time around us)

Meta-physics: "above/beyond"+"nature". Set of ideas/entities that exist independent of the world of space and time. Examples: pure ideas, spiritual entities, objects of religious thought, etc. Things existing outside of nature itself.

Ontology & Logic

Ontology: speech about beings. Discipline that allows us to analyze the kind of existence things have. Tables and chairs exist somewhat differently, i.e., have a different status and set of "rights" you might say, and are different kinds of things, than, for example, human beings. When we point to these kinds of differences, we are making "ontological distinctions". We distinguish the kind of beings there are, their different statuses, what we can say about these, etc.

Logic

Logic: daunting word that means something rather plain. Logic is a system of rules for deriving true inferences. If you start with true premises and follow these rules, you will derive true conclusions. See Handout #1b.

Epistemology

Thinking about thinking. What we can know about, and how we can know it. Here we try, among other things, to distinguish different kinds of knowledge. Obviously, knowledge about moral questions is different from knowledge about porpoises. A philosopher concerned with epistemic questions will also be concerned to determine what counts as good thinking, what counts as true knowledge. Of course, this involves her in questions about how we come to know anything, as well as how we come to know particular and different kinds of things. This inevitably leads a philosopher to take positions about what is loosely termed "philosophical psychology", i.e., the study of the mind and how its capacities and functions bear on the possibility and acquisition of knowledge. Most of the philosophers under consideration here are quite concerned with epistemological questions, and so you will hear this mentioned a great deal.

Aesthetics

Theory of the beautiful, the attractive. Asks questions like "Is beauty in the psyche or in the objects where we seem to find them?" How does it bear, if at all, on ethical concerns...is the beautiful related to what is good...the same as what is good...entirely unrelated?

Ethics & Politics (Political Theory)

Ethics is the branch of inquiry that talks about right and wrong, our certainty about what we think we ought and ought not to do, what actions are appropriate/inappropriate for us as human beings, concerned with human choices, with that aspect of human existence which is supra-animal...not directly connected to our status as animals (this does not mean that animals have no moral status, but that we normally do not think that animals are capable of acting morally/immorally.)

Political theory and ethics involve the same concerns, but direct them at different objects. Political theory applies concerns about right and wrong, praise and blame, etc., to the community. Ethics applies these to the individual. Obviously, this makes for deep connections between ethics and politics.