Introduction to Philosophy

Origins & Branches

PDF generated using the open source mwlib toolkit. See http://code.pediapress.com/ for more information.
PDF generated at: Wed, 23 May 2012 21:43:25 UTC

Contents

Articles

Origins of Philosophy 1
The Branches of Philosophy 4

References

Article Sources and Contributors 7
Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors 8

Article Licenses

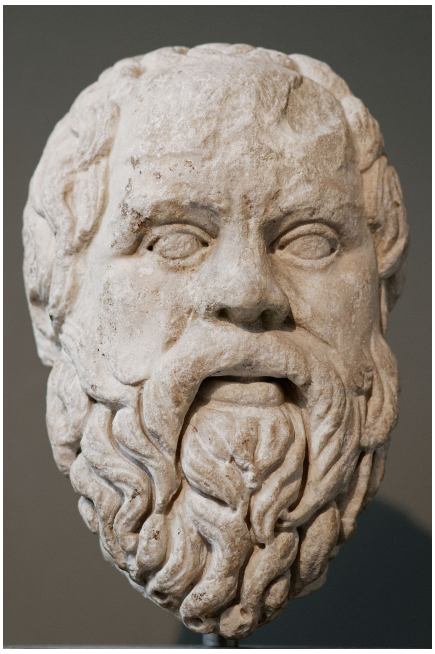
License 9

Origins of Philosophy

Origins

Etymology

The term philosophy is taken from the Greek word "φιλεω" (phileo) meaning "to love" or "to befriend" and "σοφια" (sophia) meaning "wisdom." Thus, "philosophy" means "the love of wisdom". Socrates, a Greek philosopher, used the term philosophy as an equivalent to the *search for wisdom*. Also, the term **wisdom** is used as a general term for describing the intellectual probing of any idea.



Bust of the philosopher Socrates. Roman copy of Greek original (c.380-360 BC)

Introduction to Philosophy

The study of any discipline, such as Philosophy, should begin with its definition. Webster's dictionary defines philosophy as:

"the rational investigation of questions about existence and knowledge and ethics"

The definition highlights the nature of philosophical inquiry. Philosophers ask questions. These questions try to understand the metaphysical and physical world of man. Philosophy is considered to have developed as a form of rational inquiry in the cities of Ancient Greece.

Pre-Socratics

The history of philosophy in the west begins with the Greeks, and particularly with a group of philosophers commonly called the pre-Socratics. This is not to deny the occurrence of other pre-philosophical rumblings in Egyptian and Babylonian cultures. Certainly great thinkers and writers existed in each of these cultures, and we have evidence that some of the earliest Greek philosophers may have had contact with at least some of the products of Egyptian and Babylonian thought. However, the early Greek thinkers added at least one element which differentiates their thoughts from all those who came before them. For the first time in history, we discover in their writings something more than dogmatic assertions about the ordering of the world -- we find reasoned arguments for various beliefs about the world.

Thales

Thales (in Greek: Θαλης) of Miletus (circa 635 BC - 543 BC), also known as Thales the Milesian, was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher. Many regard him as the first philosopher in the Greek tradition. He has also been traditionally considered the father of science, although it is also contended that the beginnings of science may be traced to Ancient Egypt.

Life

Thales lived in the city of Miletus, in Ionia, now western Turkey. According to Herodotus, he was of Phoenician descent.

The well-traveled Ionians had many dealings with Egypt and Babylon; Thales may have studied in Egypt as a young man. In any event, Thales almost certainly had exposure to Egyptian mythology, astronomy, and mathematics, as well as to other traditions alien to the Homeric traditions of Greece. Perhaps because of this, his inquiries into the nature of things extend beyond traditional mythology.

Several anecdotes suggest that Thales was not solely a thinker; he was involved in business and politics. One story recounts that he bought all the olive presses in Miletus after predicting the weather and a good harvest for a particular year. Another version of this same story states that he bought the presses to demonstrate to his fellow Milesians that he could use his intelligence to enrich himself. Herodotus recorded that Thales advised the city-states of Ionia to form a federation.

Thales is said to have died in his seat, while watching an athletic contest.

Theories and influence

Before Thales, the Greeks explained the origin and nature of the world through myths of anthropomorphic gods and heroes. Phenomena like lightning or earthquakes were attributed to actions of the gods.

By contrast, Thales attempted to find naturalistic explanations of the world, without reference to the supernatural. He explained earthquakes by imagining that the Earth floats on water and that earthquakes occur when the Earth is rocked by waves. Herodotus cites him as having predicted the solar eclipse of 585 BC that put an end to the fighting between the Lydians and the Medes.

Thales's most famous belief was his cosmological doctrine, which held that the world originated from water. It is sometimes assumed that Thales considered everything to be made from water. According to others, however, it's likely that while Thales saw water as an origin, he never pondered whether water continued to be the substance of the world.

Many philosophers followed Thales's lead in searching for explanations in nature rather than in the supernatural; others returned to supernatural explanations, but couched them in the language of philosophy rather than myth or religion.

Thales is credited for having first popularized Geometry to ancient Greek culture, mainly that of spatial relationships.

The best explanation of Thales's view is the following passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (983 BC). The passage is given in translation with key phrases transliterated from the Greek for the reader's benefit. The reader will see in the transliteration words from the theory of matter and form that were adopted by science with quite different meanings. The translation is somewhat literal, for purposes of accuracy.

> "That from which is everything that exists (ta onta) and from which it first becomes (ex hou gignetai protou) and into which it is rendered at last (eis ho phtheiretai teleutaion), its substance remaining under it (tes men ousias hypomenouses), but transforming in qualities (pathesi metaballouses), that they say is the element (stoicheion) and principle (archen) of things that are (ton onton)."

And again:

> "For it is necessary (dei) that there be some nature (physin), either one or more than one, from which become (gignetai) the other things (t'alla) of the object being preserved (sozomenes ekeines)... Thales says that it is water (hydor)."

Aristotle's depiction of the change problem and the definition of substance could not be more clear. If an object changes, is it the same or different? In either case how can there be a change (metabollein) from one to the other? The answer is the substance (ousia or physis), which "is saved", but acquires or loses different qualities (pathe, the things you "experience").

A deeper dip into the waters of the theory of matter and form is properly reserved to other articles. The question for this article is, how far does Aristotle reflect Thales? He was probably not far off, and Thales was probably an

incipient matter-and-formist.

The essentially non-philosophic DL states that Thales taught as follows:

> "Water constituted (hypestesato, "stood under") the principle of all things."

Heraclitus Homericus (Quaes. Hom. 22, not the same as Heraclitus of Ephesus) states that Thales drew his conclusion from seeing moist substance (hygra physis) turn into air, slime and earth. It seems clear that Thales viewed the Earth as solidifying from the water on which it floated and which surrounded it as Ocean.

Thales applied his method to objects that changed to become other objects, such as water into earth (he thought). But what about the changing itself? Thales did address the topic, approaching it through magnets and amber--which, when electrified by rubbing, attracts in the same way.

How was the power to move other things without the mover's changing to be explained? Thales saw a commonality with the powers of living things to act. The magnet and the amber must be alive, and if that were so, there could be no difference between the living and the dead. When asked why he didn't die if there was no difference, he replied "because there is no difference."

Aristotle defined the soul as the principle of life, that which permeates the matter and makes it live, giving it the animation, or power to act. The idea did not originate with him, as the Greeks in general believed in the distinction between mind and matter, which was ultimately to lead to a distinction not only between body and soul but also between matter and energy.

If things were alive, they must have souls. This belief was no innovation, as the ordinary ancient populations of the Mediterranean did believe that natural actions were caused by divinities. Accordingly, the sources say that Thales believed all things possessed divinities. In their zeal to make him the first in everything they said he was the first to hold the belief, which even they must have known was not true.

However, Thales was looking for something more general, a universal substance of mind. That also was true to the polytheism of the times. Zeus was the very personification of supreme mind, dominating all the subordinate manifestations. From Thales on, however, philosophers had a tendency to depersonify or objectify mind, as though it were the substance of animation per se and not actually a god like the other gods. The end result was a total removal of mind from substance, opening the door to a non-divine principle of action. This tradition persisted until Einstein, whose cosmology is quite a different one and does not distinguish between matter and energy.

Classical thought, however, had proceded only a little way along that path. Instead of referring to the person, Zeus, they talked about the great mind:

> "Thales", says Cicero, "assures that water is the principle of all things; and that God is that Mind which shaped and created all things from water." (Cicero:"De Nat.Deorum,"i.,10.)

The universal mind appears as a Roman belief in Vergil as well:

> "In the beginning, SPIRIT within strengthens Heaven and Earth,
>
> The watery fields, and the lucid globe of Lina, and then --
>
> Titan stars; and mind infused through the limbs
>
> Agitates the whole mass, and mixes itself with GREAT MATTER"
>
> (Virgil: "Aeneid," vi., 724 ff.)

Socrates

Socrates (c.470 – 399 BC) (Greek Σωκράτης Sōkrátēs) was a Greek (Athenian) philosopher.

Like Thales and the other pre-Socratics, Socrates too had the ambition to ask questions of life. However, where the pre-Socratics were more concerned with the cosmological questions, Socrates was concerned with questions of the following nature: What is piety? What kind of life is worthwhile for a human to live? Can virtue be taught? What is justice? Is there more than one's virtue? What is human excellence?

Socrates did not actually write any of these ideas down. The only written information about his philosophy can be found in the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon. These dialogues deal mostly with questions of the good life, human excellence, and the cultivation of knowledge. One of Plato's most important and best known works is "The Republic" in which we find the allegory of the cave, a parable that explains the difference between perceived reality and "real" reality which, according to Socrates/Plato, can only be found in the realm of ideas. More: Greek Philosophy: Socrates [1]

Return to Index | Discuss this Chapter | Next Chapter

References

[1] http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GREECE/SOCRATES.HTM

The Branches of Philosophy

The Branches of Philosophy

In order to narrow the aims of discussion philosophy was broken into branches. Traditionally philosophy has been broken into four main branches; however we would like to add a fifth branch in our text

Epistemology

Epistemology, from the Greek words episteme (knowledge) and logos (word/speech) is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge.

Metaphysics

Metaphysics (derived from the Greek words "ta meta ta physika biblia") - meaning 'the book that follows the physics book'. It was the way students referred to a specific book in the works of Aristotle, and it was a book on First Philosophy. (The assumption that the word means "beyond physics" is misleading) Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of "first principles" and "being" (ontology). In other words, Metaphysics is the study of the most general aspects of reality, such as substance, identity, the nature of the mind, and free will.In other way is a study of nature and the nature of the world in which man lives

Logic

Logic (from Classical Greek λόγος (logos), originally meaning the word, or what is spoken, but coming to mean thought or reason) is most often said to be the study of arguments, although the exact definition of logic is a matter of controversy amongst philosophers (see below). However the subject is grounded, the task of the logician is the same: to advance an account of valid and fallacious inference to allow one to distinguish good from bad arguments.

Ethics

Ethics is a general term for what is often described as the "science (study) of morality". In philosophy, ethical behavior is that which is "good" or "right." The Western tradition of ethics is sometimes called moral philosophy.

Other Branches

Philosophy of Education: Fairly self-explanatory. A minor branch, mainly concerned with what is the correct way to educate a person. Classic works include Plato's Republic, Locke's Thoughts Concerning Education, and Rousseau's Emile.

Philosophy of History: Fairly minor branch (not as minor as education), although highly important to Hegel and those who followed him, most notably Marx. It is the philosophical study of history, particularly concerned with the question whether history (i.e. the universe and/or humankind) is progressing towards a specific end? Hegel argued that it was, as did Marx. Classic works include Vico's New Science, and Hegel and Marx's works.

Philosophy of Language: Ancient branch of philosophy which gained prominence in the last century under Wittgenstein. Basically concerned with how our languages affect our thought. Wittgenstein famously asserted that the limits of our languages mark the limits of our thought. Classic works include Plato's Cratylus, Locke's Essay, and Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.

Philosophy of Law: Also called Jurisprudence. Study of law attempting to discern what the best laws might be, how laws came into being in the first place, attempting to delimit human laws from natural laws, whether we should always obey the law, and so on. Law isn't often directly dealt with by philosophers, but much of political philosophy obviously has a bearing on it.

Philosophy of Mathematics: Concerned with issues such as, the nature of the axioms and symbols (numbers, triangle, operands) of mathematics that we use to understand the world, do perfect mathematical forms exist in the real world, and so on. Principia Mathematica is almost certainly the most important work in this field.

Philosophy of Mind: Study of the mind, attempting to ascertain exactly what the mind is, how it interacts with our body, do other minds exist, how does it work, and so on. Probably the most popular branch of philosophy right now, it has expanded to include issues of AI. Classic works include Plato's Republic and Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, although every major philosopher has had some opinion at least on what the mind is and how it works.

Philosophy of Politics: Closely related to ethics, this is a study of government and nations, particularly how they came about, what makes good governments, what obligations citizens have towards their government, and so on. Classic works include Plato's Republic, Hobbes' Leviathan, Locke's Two Treatises, and J.S. Mill's On Liberty.

Philosophy of Religion: Theology is concerned with the study of God, recommending the best religious practises, how our religion should shape our life, and so on. Philosophy of religion is concerned with much the same issues, but where Theology uses religious works, like the Bible, as it's authority, philosophy likes to use reason as the ultimate authority.

Philosophy of Science: Study of science concerned with whether scientific knowledge can be said to be certain, how we obtain it, can science really explain everything, does causation really exist, can every event in the universe be

described in terms of physics and so on. Also popular in recent times, classic works include Hume's Treatise on Human Nature, Kripke's Naming and Necessity, Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions.

Article Sources and Contributors

Origins of Philosophy *Source*: http://en.wikibooks.org/w/index.php?oldid=2264577 *Contributors*: AdRiley, Adrignola, Dallas1278, Destrogal, Geocachernemesis, Jguk, Muhaxhiri, Pazouzou, Phreek, QuiteUnusual, Recent Runes, Sluffs, Sonia, Trooper209, Whiteknight, WithYouInRockland, 58 anonymous edits

The Branches of Philosophy *Source*: http://en.wikibooks.org/w/index.php?oldid=2292763 *Contributors*: AdRiley, Destrogal, Hagindaz, Jguk, Jomegat, Sluffs, Snw7, Whiteknight, Xania, 26 anonymous edits

Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors

File:Socrates BM GR1973.03-27.16.jpg *Source*: http://en.wikibooks.org/w/index.php?title=File:Socrates_BM_GR1973.03-27.16.jpg *License*: Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 *Contributors*: User:Jastrow

License

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
//creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/