

BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY

While studying the philosophical thoughts of a philosopher, we study his thinking in different branches of philosophy. These branches of philosophy are as follows:

(1) Epistemology.

Philosophy is the search for knowledge. This search is critical. Hence, the first problem which arises before a philosopher is about the nature of knowledge and its limitations. Therefore, epistemology is the most fundamental branch of philosophy.

It discusses philosophically the true knowledge (validity of knowledge), the false knowledge, and limits of knowledge. 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?

(2) 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?

This is the study of existence and reality. Its main branches are as follows:

(i) Cosmogony. This is a study of creation. Is the world created, or is it eternal? How was the world created? (Big Bang Theory) Why was it created? Who created the world? All these are the problems of cosmogony.

(ii) Cosmology. The main problems of cosmology are: Is the world one or it many, or is it both one and many?

(iii) Ontology. It is the combination of two Greek words: Onto means existence or being real, Logia means the study. It is the study of what exists? what is real? A particular theory about the kinds of things that have existence. Ontology is the study of ultimate reality. Is the reality one or is it many or is it both one and many? If reality is many, what is the relation between these many elements? All these are ontological questions.

Examples

what are the fundamental parts of the world?

How they are related to each other?

Are physical parts more real than immaterial concepts? (e.g. Are physical objects such as shoes more real than the concept of walking? In terms of what exists, what is the relationship between shoes and walking?)

Two branches of ontology:

Ontological materialism: According to this belief, the material things such as particles, chemical processes and energy, are more real than the human mind.

Ontological idealism: According to this belief, the human mind and consciousness are more real than the material things. And the belief here that the reality is constructed in the minds of the observers.

Why Ontology is important?

Philosophers use the concept of ontology to discuss challenging questions to make theories, and consequently to better understand the ontological status of the world.

(iv) Philosophy of self. This is mainly concerned with the philosophical analysis of self. What is self? What is its relation with the body? All these are problems of philosophy of self.

(v) Eschatology. It is concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind. a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind. The discussion of the condition of soul after death, the nature of the other world, etc., form the subject matter of this branch of philosophy.

(3) Axiology. Axiology is derived from the Greek to mean “value or worth,” and is primarily concerned with classifying things as good, and how good they are?. Often called the theory of value, axiology is the philosophical study of goodness or the worth of something. This approach is often guided by the question, “if I were a “good” person, what would I do?”. Aristotle, one of the earliest proponents of this orientation, identified justice, and happiness, as key virtues. His ethical philosophy focused on personal character rather than on universal rules or consequences. Core virtues, such as courage, and loyalty guide ethical action and are instrumental in the art of living well. He further advocated that these virtues could only be developed through consistent practice.

This branch of philosophy that philosophically studies value. It has been divided into the following three branches:

(i) Ethics. Ethics discusses the criteria of right and good.

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?

(ii) Logic:

Another important aspect of the study of philosophy is the arguments or reasons given for answers of people 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?

The subject matter of logic includes the methods of judgment, hypothesis, definition, comparison, division, classification and fundamental laws of thoughts, etc.

iii) Aesthetics.

Aesthetics discusses the nature and criteria of beauty. the philosophical study of beauty and taste. It is closely related to the philosophy of art, which is concerned with the nature of art and the concepts in terms of which individual works of art are interpreted and evaluated. Aesthetics is broader in scope than the philosophy of art, which comprises one of its branches. It deals not only with the nature and value of the arts but also with those responses to natural objects that find expression in the language of the beautiful and the ugly.