

# PHILOSOPHY

# What is philosophy ?

We've never studied philosophy before, yet we've heard all kinds of claims about what philosophy is. When many people talk about philosophy, they often have in mind a philosophy of life, a kind of recipe for happiness and fulfillment. Other people think of philosophy as involving a kind of mystical knowing, sometimes resulting from contemplating riddles without answers. Sometimes people think of philosophy as involving anything occult, as in "New Age Philosophy". Finally, and probably as a result of the above popular accounts of philosophy, many people think of 'philosophy' as little more than just a name, more than expressions of personal opinions made to seem more profound than they really are.

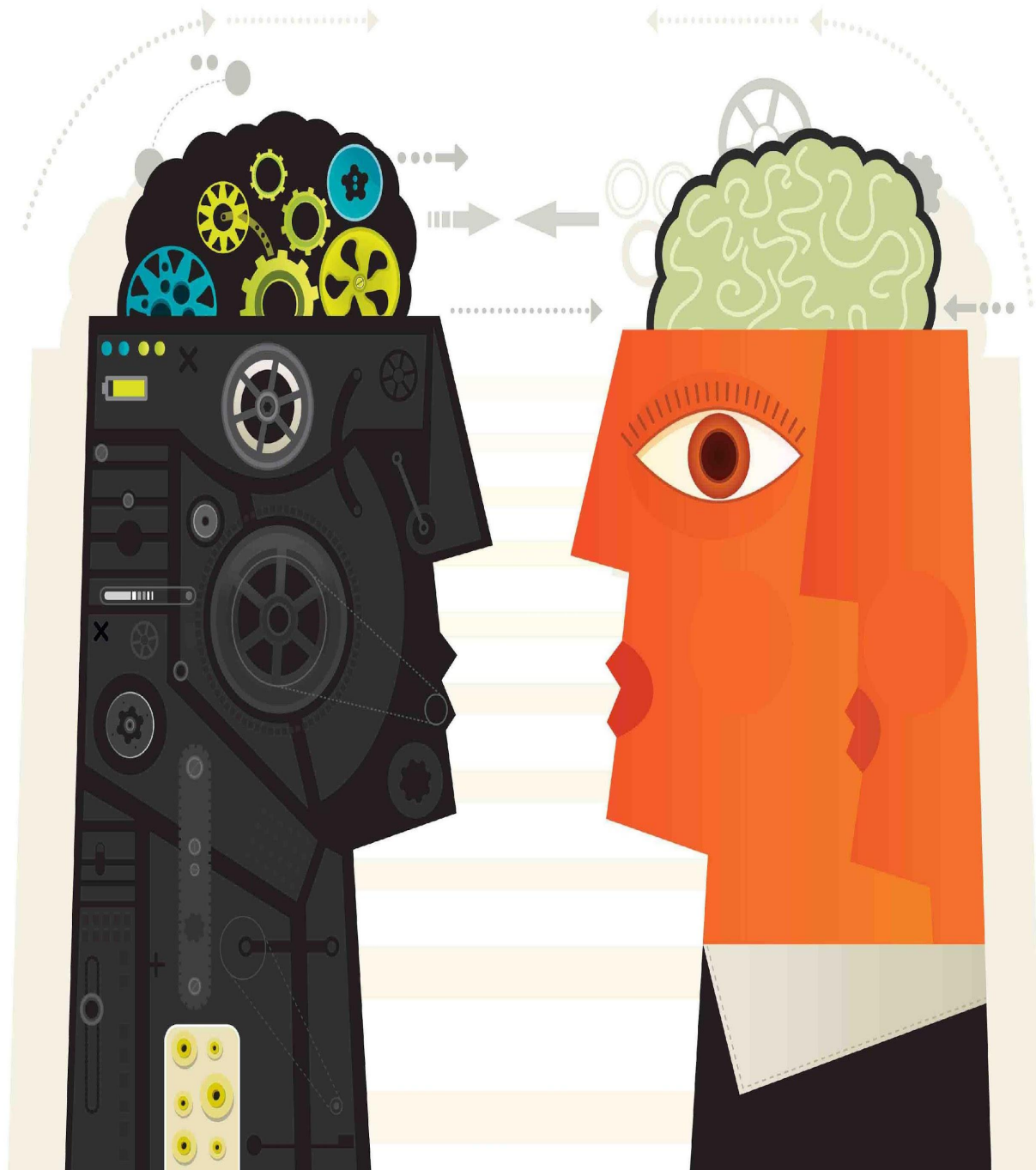


Philosophy is the study of the general and fundamental nature of reality, existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language. The Ancient Greek word φιλοσοφία (philosophia) literally means "love of wisdom" or "friend of wisdom". Philosophy has been divided into many sub-fields. It has been divided chronologically (e.g., ancient and modern); by topic (the major topics being epistemology, logic, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics); and by style (e.g., analytic philosophy).



In very general terms, philosophy is much like science. We can better understand philosophy by comparing the two as follows:

Like science, philosophy is really a collection of disciplines. Science, for example, consists of physics, chemistry, astronomy, archaeology, botany, etc. Moreover, these disciplines are interrelated. For example, archeologists make use of findings in both physics and chemistry to study ancient civilizations.; findings in chemistry may be relevant to findings in physics, etc. It is not as if physics and chemistry could conflict, and yet both be correct. Philosophy also consists of a number of disciplines, each containing various interrelated sub-disciplines



# *Ethics and political philosophy*

Ethics, or "moral philosophy," is concerned primarily with the question of the best way to live, and secondarily, concerning the question of whether this question can be answered. The main branches of ethics are meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Meta-ethics concerns the nature of ethical thought, such as the origins of the words good and bad, and origins of other comparative words of various ethical systems, whether there are absolute ethical truths, and how such truths could be known.

Normative ethics are more concerned with the questions of how one ought to act, and what the right course of action is. This is where most ethical theories are generated. Lastly, applied ethics go beyond theory and step into real world ethical practice, such as questions of whether or not abortion is correct. Ethics is also associated with the idea of morality, and the two are often interchangeable.

# Aesthetics

Aesthetics deals with beauty, art, enjoyment, sensory-emotional values, perception, and matters of taste and sentiment. It is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art, beauty, and taste, with the creation and appreciation of beauty. It is more scientifically defined as the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values, sometimes called judgments of sentiment and taste. More broadly, scholars in the field define aesthetics as "critical reflection on art, culture and nature.

More specific aesthetic theory, often with practical implications, relating to a particular branch of the arts is divided into areas of aesthetics such as art theory, literary theory, film theory and music theory. An example from art theory is aesthetic theory as a set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement: such as the Cubist aesthetic.

## Logic

Logic is the study of what makes reasoning good reasoning, i.e., reasoning which helps us discover truths. It provides techniques for establishing whether claims of any sort are true. It is also concerned with questions such as: can we prove that our methods of reasoning are correct? What is it for something to be possible? or impossible



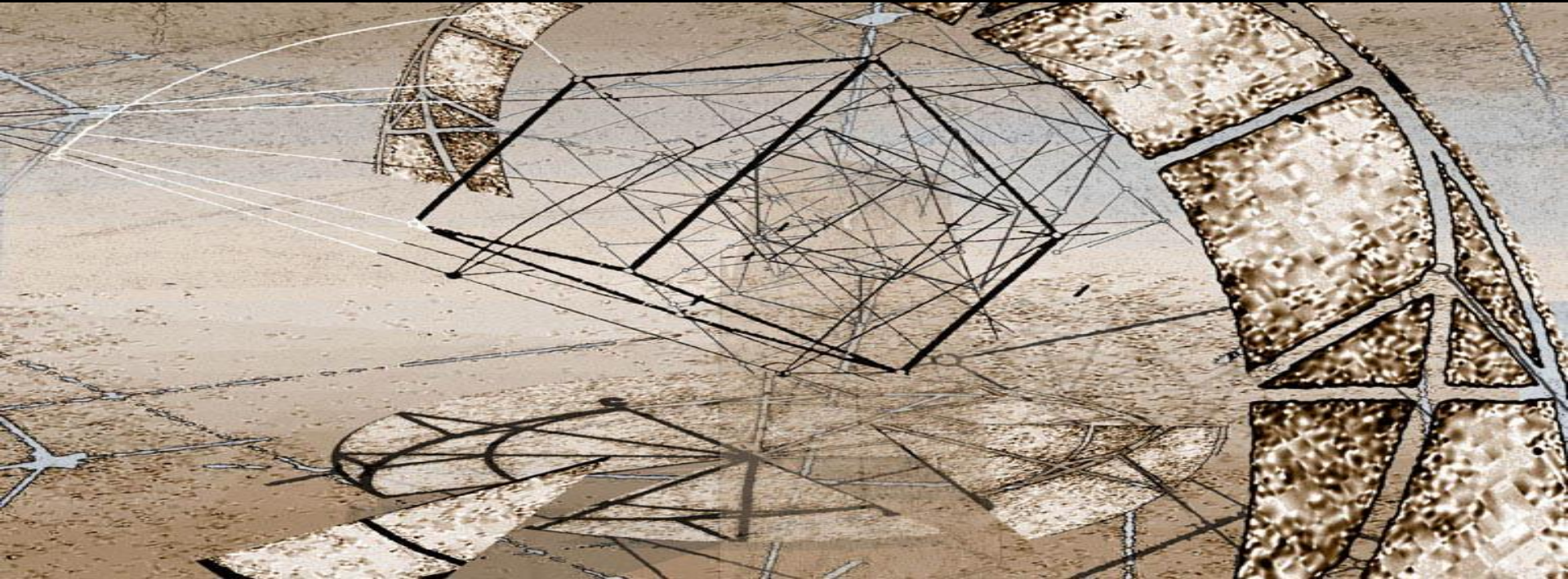
# Metaphysics

Metaphysics is concerned with fundamental questions about what exists. It is concerned with questions such as: What are numbers? Do they have a location in physical space? If so, where? If not, where are they? They certainly exist, so they have to be somewhere, but where? Another issue: consider any two red objects. They are identical in their redness, but are nonetheless two different objects. Is their redness in any sense one and the same thing? If so, how can one and the same thing be in two different places at the same time? Another issue is free will. Do people have free will? Is this compatible with our being caused to do things?

Another important sub-discipline within metaphysics is philosophy of mind, which is concerned with questions such as: Is the mind a physical thing or a non-physical thing? If it is not physical, how can something with no spatial location causally interact with something physical? Do other people have minds? How can we be sure?

Another sub-discipline within metaphysics is philosophy of religion. Philosophers of religion attempt to definitively answer questions such as: Does God exist? What would a God-like creature be like? Is it all-powerful? What is it for a creature to be all powerful? Is it perfect? What is perfection? Could it allow evil? If so, which evils could it allow?

A third sub-discipline relevant to metaphysics is philosophy of language, which is concerned with questions such as how words refer to things, what meanings are, and how words can acquire meaning.



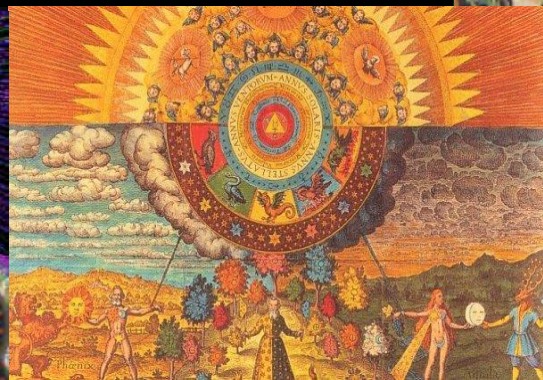


# Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with what knowledge is, how we acquire knowledge, and what it is to have good reasons for a belief. Does knowledge require certainty? If so, can we ever really be certain of anything? Or is it always possible that we have somehow made a mistake? One sub-discipline associated with epistemology is philosophy of science, which is concerned with questions such as: What makes an explanation scientific? When is a scientific explanation a good one? What is a law of nature?



Reading philosophy can be very difficult. One reason for this is that the issues tend to be very abstract. Another is that philosophical writing tends to be very precise whenever a new point is being explained. Thus, philosophy must be read very slowly and very carefully. My students who have come to this realization usually put it this way: "Every word is important." This is a good way to put it. Whenever you come across anything new or controversial, pay attention to every word and its role in the development of ideas. Often, this requires re-reading a passage several times, very slowly and patiently. If you don't understand something, ask your instructor to try to explain it to you. This can require a lot of work, but the reward will be a genuine and deep understanding of what's going on in what you're reading, as well as advanced development of an essential and extraordinarily valuable skill: reading comprehension. And remember: if you ever get stuck on something, always talk to your instructor about it. After all, that's what we're here for!





THANKS FOR WATCHING

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