
Providing General Excerpt of Philosophy for the First Time Readers

Agenagn Kebede

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Woldia University, Woldia, Amhara, Ethiopia

Email address:

agenagnkebede@gmail.com

To cite this article:

Agenagn Kebede. Providing General Excerpt of Philosophy for the First Time Readers. *Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 8, No. 6, 2020, pp. 177-181. doi: 10.11648/j.hss.20200806.12

Received: September 10, 2020; **Accepted:** October 15, 2020; **Published:** November 11, 2020

Abstract: The purpose of this writing was to provide general excerpt of philosophy for the first time readers. This general excerpt of philosophy will minimize fundamental misunderstanding of philosophy. As my observation and experience, most of the time, in my country, Ethiopia and in my continent, Africa, individuals who are not study and know philosophy as a discipline, have not idea of what philosophy means. Even if they have idea of philosophy, their idea is out of the truck. For them everything is philosophy. Poem, dance, conversation and etc... are philosophy. The poet, the dancer, the informer and the talkative are philosophers. However, philosophy is not talking of trash events. It does not mean ordinary dialogue rather it is hard science which typically has its own scientific procedure and scientific investigation. Philosophers are persons who deal with science of wisdom: wisdom of knowledge, reality, ethics, politics and beauty. Accordingly, for the purpose, I, roughly, melting together the different topics of philosophy in to different branches of philosophy. Further, the unforgotten point over here is that I did document analysis as a baseline to give general expert of philosophy.

Keywords: Excerpt, Miller, Philosophy

1. Introduction

As Pythagoras was the first who called himself a philosopher (about 600 B.C.) [19]. It is not amplification to say Miller is the first who explains philosophy in cushy way. Miller is the wonder man who makes philosophy as easy task for the readers in his work of Question that Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy. Miller told philosophy itself. Philosophy is coming from Greek word which conveys love of wisdom. When we deal with philosophy out of etymological definition, philosophy means reason, criticism, examination and analysis [23, 26]. Philosophy is a rational and a critical enterprise and it can see from the angle of a speculative, an analytic and an existential approach [23].

Philosophy is a rational and a critical enterprise and it can see from the angle of a speculative, an analytic and an existential approach. Related with a speculative approach, philosophy is dealing with most ultimate and far ranging questions. The analytic approach linked to different views of the nature of philosophy, the sources of philosophical knowledge, the role of language in thought, the relationship between language and the world. Through an existential

approach, philosophy is dealing with to exist reality [27]. When I come to the salient point, philosophy has numerous branches: Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, logic, political philosophy and value-theory [24].

2. Main Parts

Metaphysics: Metaphysics is study of reality in the cosmos¹ and beyond the cosmos. It is defined as the study of the most general features of reality, such as existence, time, the relationship between mind and body, objects and their properties, wholes and their parts, events, processes, and causation. It is expressed as the study of the nature of reality, of what exists in the world, what it is like, and how it is ordered. It is the study of “reality” that is beyond the scientific or mathematical realms [23, 27].

The first theory of reality in Western philosophy came to birth about 600 B.C. [ibid]. Thales, who dealt with to reality and belonged to Pre-Socratic philosophers, traditionally

¹ Cosmos refers to the universe which is seen as a well-ordered whole (Source: Oxford Dictionary (10th ed), Oxford University Press)

called monist, is taken as the first philosopher. Pre-Socratic philosophers classified in three broad traditions: The Ionian (from Ionia, visible now in Turkey), the Italian and the pluralist [14, 15]. Ionians identify reality with sensible substance. Thales said water. Anaximander said hot, cold, moist and dry. Anaximenes noted air. Xenophanes said water and earth. Heraclitus said fire. For the Italian traditionalists everything is number, Pythagoras and Parmenides believed in it. For the Pluralists, like, Empedocles (who said reality is the composition of Earth, air, fire and water) and Anaxagoras (who said reality is the mixture of infinite numbers), reality expresses in a plurality of substances [23, 19].

On the other hand Plato (427-347 B.C.), in his theory of the forms or ideas, introduced two layer views of reality: "becoming"² (Space-time or matter) and "being"³ (transcendent world or form). For Plato reality by "becoming" naturally lacks ideal perfection rather reality in "being" is perfect. Reality in "being" is objective, nominal and absolute [3]. However, Aristotle, who was the student of Plato, progressively developed his idea which is getting antagonism with the idea of his teacher. For Aristotle becoming and being are inseparable. In "being", there is "becoming." In "becoming", there is "being." Reality exists in two inseparable things: "being and becoming" [23, 5].

Further, for some metaphysicians reality is dualism⁴. Dualism is the metaphysical view that all things are reducible two essentially different things: mind and matter [7]. French thinker Rene Descartes (1596-1650) dealt with it. Descartes's view of reality is dualistic. The world is the staff of mind and matter. Matter does not exist out of mind. There is a causal connection between mind and matter. Descartes said that there is necessary inter-connection between mind and matter. Ideas, Thinking, feelings, perceptions and actions are interconnected [23, 2, 10].

As afar of this, others have developed the theory of reality which is called idealism⁵. Idealism is the metaphysical theory which states that all things are constituted by the mind and its ideas. Idealism can be objective and subjective. Objective Idealism believes that all things are made by mind and ideas, but the things exist apart from perception [23]. Plato was the objective idealist. Subjective idealism states that things that made by mind and ideas exist with perception. For Berkeley's *esse est percipi* (To be is to be perceived) means everything's existence depends on perception [28].

On the reverse of the above, for other reality is matter. This philosophy is called materialism⁶. Materialism is the metaphysical doctrine which states that matter, with its

motions and qualities is the ultimate reality of all things [23]. Matters have particular features according to a finite number of fixed physical laws. This view is called mechanistic materialism. The mechanism is the view which conceives of the universe and everything in it as a machine that is governed by a fixed and finite number of laws [14, 23].

Dealing with materialism, a writing which is called "Man a machine" was coming with the deep concept. "Man a machine" is written by the French physician La Mettrie (1748). In this book the writer showed the feelings, thoughts and perceptions of human beings are the matter, the product or the result of different organs of the body (matter). In materialism, everything is determined, albeit this undoubtedly causes moral and cognition problem [23, 13].

Last but not least, for other reality is God. Related with it, Saint Augustine proved that God is the ultimate uncaused cause of all things. For Saint Augustine, God exists and he is real [5, 10]. On the other hand, Descartes, who is well-known by quote "I think, therefore, I am", in his ontological argument proved the existence of God. He reasonably argued that for an idea of perfection there is a perfect being [23]. The perfect being is God. God possesses the sum of all perfections. Moreover, Kant told that how God is the ultimate reality by being the cause of the world. Kant said that for everything God is a transcendent being. "Being" is the cause of the world. Additionally, the theist philosopher argued that we can attain the ultimate reality through Mysticism. Mysticism is a theory which states that a union with God could be attained in an ecstatic state (Sense, intellect and soul) [23, 16].

Epistemology: Epistemology is study of knowledge [25]. Related with knowledge, there are two kinds of views: Rationalism and empiricism. Behind all of this, few philosophers doubt the existence of knowledge itself. Rationalism is the belief which states that knowledge can acquire through reason, intuition and in an innate way, only [23]. That is supported by philosophers, like Plato, Descartes and Chomsky. Plato believed that human distinguishes from other animal through reason and through reason knowledge is possible [3]. Similarly with Plato, for Descartes reason is the source of certainty and knowledge, but by far Descartes added intuition as the source of knowledge. Intuition is the faculty by which truth is grasped without the intervention of sense experience. Intuitionism is a theory which states that reality which is taken as universal and necessarily true is the source of knowledge. In addition to this, for Chomsky knowledge is natural, which exist in our mind. Experience is not such significant things to be the source of knowledge. Chomsky in his essay which is called "Language and The Mind," he stated that language has innate structure, and knowledge is innate [25, 27].

Empiricism is the view that all knowledge of reality is derived from sense experience. In empiricism thought, the process of knowing contains the mind interested to know and the idea known. This process is called Epistemological Dualism [23]. Philosophers of this side have argued that at the beginning human beings born as *tabula rasa* but through

² Becoming refers to reality which is in change.

³ Being refers to reality which is not in change.

⁴ Dualism is also implies to a philosophical theory analysis that relation and the difference between mind and body.

⁵ Idealism: According to Idealism, the external world which exists with either perception or without perception is the manifestation of ideas. Everything (I mean the external world out of mind), like, color and matter are the manifestation of real quality. That real quality is idea.

⁶ Materialism refers to the doctrine that nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications (Source: Oxford Dictionary (10th ed), Oxford University Press).

experience they become knowledgeable in different areas. Supporting this, St. Thomas and Aristotle believed that knowledge comes through sense experience. In *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), an English philosopher John Locke, (1632-1704) who laid the foundation of modern empiricism, takes the experimental model as a new science. According to Lock, ideas in our mind are the reflection and sensation of the experience. The active mind changes reflection and sensation to complex idea [12].

In addition to this, Hume (1711-1776), who is taken as a radical empiricist, in his *"Treatise of Human Nature (1739)"* argued that all we know is the phenomenon, perception or appearance [23]. This process is called phenomenalism. For Hume Knowledge has two bases:

1. Relations of ideas: Logically true but irrelevant in world reality. Example: The sum of a triangle is 180 degrees.

2. Matter of fact: Ideas which have world reality by experience but we cannot certain. Example: Water freezes at 32 degree Fahrenheit or the sun will rise tomorrow.

The latter point is about doubting the existence of knowledge itself. Even though Pyrrho of Elis (about 300 B.C.) and sophists viewed all knowledge as subjective and relative, absolute skepticism denied or doubted the very possibility of knowledge itself. The advocates of absolute skepticism argue that we can know nothing since it cannot be sure about the existence of knowledge [1, 2].

Ethics: Ethics is the study morality. Which action is morally good, and which is morally bad are the central questions of ethics, however the goodness and the badness of morality depend on either the consequence of action or on the action itself [17, 29, 30]. Dealing with this, we will see teleology and the categorical imperative.

Teleology is the belief in the purposes, ends or goals in the universe. Teleological theories are universally understood as hedonism and utilitarianism. Hedonism (from the Greek word hedone means pleasure) is a general ethical theory which views pleasure as the good [23]. Hedonism has two forms: Egoistic Hedonism and Social Hedonism. Egoistic hedonism the most old practice moral philosophy as Cyrenaicism and Epicureanism. Cyrenaicism is coming from the specific word Cyrene. Cyrene is where Aristippus (about 400 B.C.) came from, and Aristippus was the key founder of this school. Cyrenaicism more emphasises on bodily pleasure (Positive Pleasure) [20, 33].

According to Cyrenaicism, marrying, doubling pleasure, doubling fun, eat and drink are morally good because tomorrow you may die. Epicureanism named after its founder, Epicurus (300 B.C.). Epicureanism is taken as pig philosophy along with Cyrenaicism however the Epicureanism is more focus on mental pleasure (Negative pleasure) [33].

Utilitarianism is the theory which states that an action is good when it promotes excellent balance of good over evil. Utilitarianism has a principle which is called Benevolence principle. Benevolence principle states that happiness is to be distributed as widely and as equally as possible among all

people. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was the founder of modern utilitarianism; and his student, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was the utilitarianist too [22, 23].

Deontological ethical theory, which is coming from the Greek word "deon" means to bind, states that an action is morally good when the action by itself is good. For this ethical theory, it is the means which determines the end [23]. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a well-known deontologist. In his work *"Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals"*, he classified duty as conditional and unconditional. The "unconditional ought": You ought to do X, period. "A conditional ought" tell that you ought to do x if you want something or other to happen. For Kant "unconditional ought" is moral ought. Kant supported "unconditional ought" which is genuinely morally good. Kant's deontological ethical theory is governed by Categorical imperative (principle of Universalizability). Categorical imperative is a criterion to test our action is either moral or not [32].

However, within the statuesque meaning of morality, morality by itself is getting challenges. For logical positivism morality is meaningless. For logical positivism, a morality taken as good is neither true nor false. Emotivism, which is usually associated with logical positivism, argues that morality makes no claims about reality, but, rather, merely express the likes and the dislikes of the speaker [23]. In addition to this, even though ethical absolutism affirms that moral values are fixed reality common to all, ethical relativism holds that morality is cognitively meaningful with subjectivity. Related with it, the French existentialist, Jean Paul Sartre stated that existence precedes essence and subjectivity must be the starting point. Since, existing individual is the source and the criterion of all values and meaning, morality can see from the humanity perspective. On the other hand, moral irrealists, like Ayer, argued that morality has nihil cognitive meaning since it is non-cognitive expressions of emotion or commands [26].

Determinism is also the other challenge of morality [23]. For this theory, morality is determined. That means yours either morally good or bad action is already determined. Determinism can be hard or soft. The hard determinism states that everything is determined by the external force and you cannot control it. Soft determinism states that our action is determined by our desire, inclination and attitudes [17].

Aesthetics: It is study of art and beauty (ideal beauty, poetic beauty, moral beauty and art beauty). It raises a various question related to art and beauty. How do we judge artistic works? Can we have universal and objective justification of beauty? Who is beauty? How art, reality, beauty and truth connected? And other questions are raised by aesthetics [11, 20, 23].

Logic: Logic is the science of reasoning. In logical reasoning there are three laws of thought. The law of non-contradiction: Nothing can both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect. The law of the excluded middle: Something either is or it is not. The law of identity: Something is what it is [9, 23].

Logic is argumentative by its nature. An argument is an attempt to show something is true by providing evidence for it. More technically, it is a group of propositions. The proposition which follows from the others is called the conclusion. The proposition from which the conclusion follows is called premises. The Premise and the conclusion are taken as elements of argument. In any argument, we may have more than one premise, but the conclusion remains one [23]. The existing connection between premise and conclusion is called inference. In a given argument, it is possible to identify premises from conclusion in different ways, but the best method to do that is mind calculation [18]. In mind calculation, the main idea in an argument is taken as conclusion. The statements which support the conclusion are taken as premises [9, 31].

E.g. A. It is immoral to kill persons.

B. Abortion is the killing of persons.

C. Therefore, abortion is immoral.

“A” and “B” are premises which support the conclusion but C is the main idea which is taken as conclusion and it is supported by “A and B”.

An argument is classified as deductive and inductive. Deductive argument is an argument, in it if we assume that the premise is true, the conclusion must be true. A deductive argument which has two premises and a conclusion is called syllogism. Syllogism can be categorical, disjunctive and hypothetical. In categorical syllogism, both of the premises are categorical propositions. Disjunctive syllogism refers to an argument with ...either... or... Hypothetical syllogism is an argument with an antecedent and consequent. Deductive argument will be valid, if it does not commit structural error and if the statements do not show definitional default. Deductive argument will be sound, if the argument has historical, scientific and universal truth with valid value [18, 23].

Inductive argument is an argument in which the connection between a premise and a conclusion is probable. Inductive argument will be strong, if the premises support the conclusion by more than some (50 + 1) degree. Inductive argument will be sound, if the argument has historical, scientific and universal truth with strong value. After all if all deductive arguments and inductive arguments cannot be sound and cogent, respectively, they will commit fallacy. Fallacy refers to misuse of logic. Fallacy can be formal and informal. Formal fallacy occurs because of the mistake in structure of argument. Informal fallacy occurs because irrelevance relation between premise and conclusion; and lack of clarity of language [12].

Political Philosophy: Political philosophy deals with the different political questions of society. It raises related question of government, political ideology and justice. Related preferable kind of government, it is important to introduce with Plato, who wrote the “Republic”. For Plato aristocracy is the best government since Aristocrats are in touch with truth and reality. However, for Aristotle monarchy is the best since the monarch has virtue [23]. Dealing with democracy, Plato hated the mob rule since it is handled by

coward and foolish politicians. On this spot, Aristotle himself shared Plato’s idea, however he argued that for the sake of a representation of common interest democracy (mob rule) is good among the perverted [3, 4].

However, when we come early modern political philosophy for thinkers, like, John Stuart Mill, it is important to consider the attributes of population, economy and geopolitics of the country to adopt the ruling system, for instance, for peoples who are uncivilized, economically poor; heterogeneous in ethnicity, language and culture within giant country democracy is impossible [21].

On the other hand, there are two well-known political ideologies: Liberalism and Marxism. Liberalism is the ideology of freedom. It allows private ownership and individualistic life. Markedly, some liberalists, like, John Hospers, suggests a state which should not interfere in public service. Liberalism supports the economic system of capitalism. John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith were liberalists. Marxism comes after the name of Karl Marx. Marxism believes that economy is the base of all things and the cause of class division. In Marxism, the community is the owner of the properties. Life is collective. Marxism supports communism which is the socio-economic system [14, 21, 23].

Now let us turn to justice. Justice is fundamental to social-political philosophy. Justice conceived as fairness, equality before the law and fair distribution of resources. For philosophers, like Rawls justice should be guided by the principles of equal basic liberty and the difference principles (is about reducing inequalities) [4].

Value-theory: It is the study of value. We human beings, insects, any instruments, ideologies, laws, ethics and so on have values, but what kind of values they have is the main concern of value-theory [8, 11, 23, 28].

3. Conclusion

Here-above, I promptly did mini short excerpt in crudity since my interest was to show what philosophy means for non-philosophy disciplined university students, roughly, from Ionians to contemporary philosophers. Philosophy is systematic, scientific and rational inquiry of knowledge, reality, ethics, politics, art and beauty. Finally, I believe that introducing major fields of philosophy in a brief summary may encourage the readers (non-philosophy students) for further investigation of philosophy.

References

- [1] Alvin Goldman. (1987). *Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology, in Human Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [2] Annas, J., and J. Barnes. (1985). *The Modes of Scepticism*. U.K: Cambridge University Press.
- [3] Baldwin, A. and S. Hutton, eds. (1994), *Platonism and the English Imagination*. Cambridge.

- [4] Barker, E. (1918). *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*. London.
- [5] Barnes, J. (1984) (Ed.). *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [6] Bonner, G. (1986). *St Augustine of Hippo: We and controversies*. Norwich.
- [7] Bosanquet, Bernard. (1913). *The Distinction between Mind and Its Objects*.
- [8] Broad, C. D. (1952). *Ethics and the History of Philosophy: Selected Essays*. London: Routledge.
- [9] Carnap, R. (1956). *Meaning and Necessity: A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago, Phoenix Books.
- [10] Clanchy, Michael and Abelard. (1997). *A Medieval Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [11] Eaton, Marcia and Merit. (2000). *Aesthetic and Ethical*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [12] Frederick Copleston, S. J. (1963). *A History of Philosophy*. London: Search Press.
- [13] Hume, David. (n.d.). *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. London.
- [14] J. S. McClland. (1996). *A History of Western Political Thought*. London and New-York: Routledge.
- [15] J. W. H. Atkins. (1934). *Literary Criticism in Antiquity*. Cambridge, V. 1.
- [16] Joy E. Beatty, J. S. (2009). Philosophy and Education. *Journal of Management*.
- [17] Jonathan Barnes. (1984) (Ed). *Nicomachean Ethics. In The Complete Works of Aristotle*. NJ: Princeton University Press.
- [18] Le Blond, J. M. (1939). *Logique et methode chez Aristotle*, Paris.
- [19] Kirk, G. S., and J. E. Raven. (1957). *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. U.K: Cambridge University Press, p. 143–162.
- [20] Long, A. A, and D. N. Sedley.(1987). *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. U.K: Cambridge University Press.
- [21] Mill, John Stuart. (1859). *On Liberty. Unlicensed Printing is the Life Blood of Literature*.
- [22] Mill, John Stuart, and Jeremy Bentham. *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*. Edited by Alan Ryan. London: Penguin Books, 1987.
- [23] Miller. (1984). *Question that Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*. McGraw-Hill.
- [24] Nik Rushdi Hassan, J. M. (2018). Philosophy and Information Systems? Where are We and Where Should We Go? *European Journal of Information*, 263-277.
- [25] Nobis, M. M. (2004). *Truth in Ethics and Epistemology: A Defense of Normative Realism (Dissertation)*. New-York: University of Rochester.
- [26] Payne, R. (2015). *An Introduction to Philosophy*.
- [27] Ramiz, R. (2016). New Perspective for the Philosophy: Reconstruction and Definition of New Branches of Philosophy. *Philosophy Study*, 6 (6).
- [28] Simashenkov, P. D. (2019). Ideological Surpassing of Philosophy. *Modern European Research*, 4.
- [29] Singer, P. (1993). *Practical Ethics. 2nd ed*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [30] Studies, I. I. (Ed.). (2011). *Paper for Conference on Rethinking Development: Ethics and Social Inclusion*. Erasmus University.
- [31] Wason, P. C. (1966). *Reasoning*. England: Penguin.
- [32] Williams, B. (1985). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London.
- [33] Woolf, Raphael. (2009). *Pleasure and Desire. The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.