

Method of philosophy

1 Common sense

The method of common sense is based on the fact that we already have a great variety of beliefs that seem very certain to us, even if we do not believe them based on explicit arguments.[43][44] Common sense philosophers use these beliefs as their starting point of philosophizing. This often takes the form of criticism directed against theories whose premises or conclusions are very far removed from how the average person thinks about the issue in question.[45] G. E. Moore, for example, rejects J. M. E. McTaggart's sophisticated argumentation for the unreality of time based on his common-sense impression that time exists.[10][46] He holds that his simple common-sense impression is much more certain than that McTaggart's arguments are sound, even though Moore was unable to pinpoint where McTaggart's arguments went wrong. According to his method, common sense constitutes an evidence base.[10][45] This base may be used to eliminate philosophical theories that stray too far away from it, that are abstruse from its perspective. This can happen because either the theory itself or consequences that can be drawn from it violate common sense.[10] For common sense philosophers, it is not the task of philosophy to question common sense. Instead, they should analyze it to formulate theories in accordance with it.[45]

One important argument against this method is that common sense has often been wrong in the past, as is exemplified by various scientific discoveries. This suggests that common sense is in such cases just an antiquated theory that is eventually eliminated by the progress of science.[47] For example, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity constitutes a radical departure from the common-sense conception of space and time, and quantum physics poses equally serious problems to how we tend to think about how elementary particles behave.[48] This puts into question that common sense is a reliable source of knowledge. Another problem is that for many issues, there is no one universally accepted common-sense opinion. In such cases, common sense only amounts to the majority opinion, which should not be blindly accepted by researchers.[49] This problem can be approached by articulating a weaker version of the common-sense method.[10] One such version is defended by Roderick Chisholm, who allows that theories violating common sense may still be true. He contends that, in such cases, the theory in question is *prima facie* suspect and the burden of proof is always on its side. But such a shift in the burden of proof does not constitute a blind belief in common sense since it leaves open the possibility that, for various issues, there is decisive evidence against the common-sense opinion.[10][50][51]

2 Ordinary language philosophy

The method of ordinary language philosophy consists in tackling philosophical questions based on how the related terms are used in ordinary language.[3][52][53] In this sense, it is related to the method of common sense but focuses more on linguistic aspects.[10] Some types of ordinary language philosophy only take a negative form in that they try to show how philosophical problems are not real problems at all. Instead, it is aimed to show that false assumptions, to which humans are susceptible due to the confusing structure of natural

language, are responsible for this false impression.[54][3] Other types take more positive approaches by defending and justifying philosophical claims, for example, based on what sounds insightful or odd to the average English speaker.[10]

One problem for ordinary language philosophy is that regular speakers may have many different reasons for using a certain expression. Sometimes they intend to express what they believe, but other times they may be motivated by politeness or other conversational norms independent of the truth conditions of the expressed sentences.[10] This significantly complicates ordinary language philosophy, since philosophers have to take the specific context of the expression into account, which may considerably alter its meaning.[52] This criticism is partially mitigated by J. L. Austin's approach to ordinary language philosophy. According to him, ordinary language already has encoded many important distinctions and is our point of departure in theorizing. But "ordinary language is not the last word: in principle, it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded".[10] However, it also falls prey to another criticism: that it is often not clear how to distinguish ordinary from non-ordinary language. This makes it difficult in all but the paradigmatic cases to decide whether a philosophical claim is or is not supported by ordinary language.[52][55]

3 Intuition and thought experiments;

Methods based on intuition, like ethical intuitionism, use intuitions to evaluate whether a philosophical claim is true or false. In this context, intuitions are seen as a non-inferential source of knowledge: they consist in the impression of correctness one has when considering a certain claim.; They are intellectual seemings that make it appear to the thinker that the considered proposition is true or false without the need to consider arguments for or against the proposition. This is sometimes expressed by saying that the proposition in question is self-evident. Examples of such propositions include "torturing a sentient being for fun is wrong" or "it is irrational to believe both something and its opposite". But not all defenders of intuitionism restrict intuitions to self-evident propositions. Instead, often weaker non-inferential impressions are also included as intuitions, such as a mother's intuition that her child is innocent of a certain crime.

Intuitions can be used in various ways as a philosophical method. On the one hand, philosophers may consult their intuitions in relation to very general principles, which may then be used to deduce further theorems. Another technique, which is often applied in ethics, consists in considering concrete scenarios instead of general principles.[58] This often takes the form of thought experiments, in which certain situations are imagined with the goal of determining the possible consequences of the imagined scenario. These consequences are assessed using intuition and counterfactual thinking. For this reason, thought experiments are sometimes referred to as intuition pumps: they activate the intuitions concerning the specific situation, which may then be generalized to arrive at universal principles. In some cases, the imagined scenario is physically possible but it would not be feasible to make an actual experiment due to the costs, negative consequences, or technological limitations. But other thought experiments even work with scenarios that defy what is physically possible. It is

controversial to what extent thought experiments merit to be characterized as real experiments and whether the insights they provide are reliable.[10]

One problem with intuitions in general and thought experiments in particular consists in assessing their epistemological status, i.e. whether, how much, and in which circumstances they provide justification in comparison to other sources of knowledge. Some of its defenders claim that intuition is a reliable source of knowledge just like perception, with the difference being that it happens without the sensory organs. Others compare it not to perception but to the cognitive ability to evaluate counterfactual conditionals, which may be understood as the capacity to answer what-if questions. But the reliability of intuitions has been contested by its opponents. For example, wishful thinking may be the reason why it intuitively seems to a person that a proposition is true without providing any epistemological support for this proposition. Another objection, often raised in the empirical and naturalist tradition, is that intuitions do not constitute a reliable source of knowledge since the practitioner restricts themselves to an inquiry from their armchair instead of looking at the world to make empirical observations.

4 Pragmatic method;

The pragmatic method assesses the truth or falsity of theories by looking at the consequences of accepting them.[73] In this sense, "[t]he test of truth is utility: it's true if it works".[74]

Pragmatists approach intractable philosophical disputes in a down-to-earth fashion by asking about the concrete consequences associated, for example, with whether an abstract metaphysical theory is true or false. This is also intended to clarify the underlying issues by spelling out what would follow from them.[75] Another goal of this approach is to expose pseudo-problems, which involve a merely verbal disagreement without any genuine difference on the level of the consequences between the competing standpoints.[73][75]

Succinct summaries of the pragmatic method base it on the pragmatic maxim, of which various versions exist. An important version is due to Charles Sanders Peirce: "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object."[75]

Another formulation is due to William James: "To develop perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what effects of a conceivable practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it and what reactions we must prepare".[76]

Various criticisms to the pragmatic method have been raised. For example, it is commonly rejected that the terms "true" and "useful" mean the same thing. A closely related problem is that believing in a certain theory may be useful to one person and useless to another, which would mean the same theory is both true and false.[77]

5 Transcendental method;

The transcendental method is used to study phenomena by reflecting on the conditions of possibility of these phenomena.[78][79][3] This method usually starts out with an obvious fact, often about our mental life, such as what we know or experience. It then goes on to argue that for this fact to obtain, other facts also have to obtain: they are its conditions of possibility. This

type of argument is called "transcendental argument": it argues that these additional assumptions also have to be true because otherwise, the initial fact would not be the case.[80][81][82] For example, it has been used to argue for the existence of an external world based on the premise that the experience of the temporal order of our mental states would not be possible otherwise.[80] Another example argues in favor of a description of nature in terms of concepts such as motion, force, and causal interaction based on the claim that an objective account of nature would not be possible otherwise.[83]

Transcendental arguments have faced various challenges. On the one hand, the claim that the belief in a certain assumption is necessary for the experience of a certain entity is often not obvious. So in the example above, critics can argue against the transcendental argument by denying the claim that an external world is necessary for the experience of the temporal order of our mental states. But even if this point is granted, it does not guarantee that the assumption itself is true. So even if the belief in a given proposition is a psychological necessity for a certain experience, it does not automatically follow that this belief itself is true. Instead, it could be the case that humans are just wired in such a way that they have to believe in certain false assumptions.

6. Methodological skepticism;

Methodological skepticism, also referred to as Cartesian doubt, uses systematic doubt as a method of philosophy.[15] It is motivated by the search for an absolutely certain foundation of our knowledge. The method for finding these foundations is doubt: only that which is indubitable can serve this role.[11][3] While this approach has been influential, it has also received various criticisms. One problem is that it has proven very difficult to find such absolutely certain claims if the doubt is applied in its most radical form.[11] Another is that while absolute certainty may be desirable, it is by no means necessary for knowledge. In this sense, it excludes too much and seems to be unwarranted and arbitrary, since it is not clear why very certain theorems justified by strong arguments should be abandoned just because they are not absolutely certain. This can be seen in relation to the insights discovered by the empirical sciences, which have proven very useful even though they are not indubitable.[10]

7. Geometrical method;

The geometrical method came to particular prominence through rationalists like Baruch Spinoza. It starts from a small set of self-evident axioms together with relevant definitions and tries to deduce a great variety of theorems from this basis, thereby mirroring the methods found in geometry.[16][17] Historically, it can be understood as a response to methodological skepticism: it consists in trying to find a foundation of certain knowledge and then expanding this foundation through deductive inferences. The theorems arrived at this way may be challenged in two ways. On the one hand, they may be derived from axioms that are not as self-evident as their defenders proclaim and thereby fail to inherit the status of absolute certainty.[10] For example, many philosophers have rejected the claim of self-evidence concerning one of Rene Descartes' first principles stating that "he can know that whatever he perceives clearly and distinctly is true only if he first knows that God exists and is not a deceiver".[10][18] Another

example is the causal axiom of Spinoza's system that "the knowledge of an effect depends on and involves knowledge of its cause", which has been criticized in various ways.[19] In this sense, philosophical systems built using the geometrical method are open to criticisms that reject their basic axioms. A different form of objection holds that the inference from the axioms to the theorems may be faulty, for example, because it does not follow a rule of inference or because it includes implicitly assumed premises that are not themselves self-evident.[10]

8 Phenomenological method;

Phenomenology is the science of appearances - broadly speaking, the science of phenomenon, given that almost all phenomena are perceived.[20][21] The phenomenological method aims to study the appearances themselves and the relations found between them. This is achieved through the so-called phenomenological reduction, also known as epoché or bracketing: the researcher suspends their judgments about the natural external world in order to focus exclusively on the experience of how things appear to be, independent of whether these appearances are true or false.[22][3] One idea behind this approach is that our presuppositions of what things are like can get in the way of studying how they appear to be and thereby mislead the researcher into thinking they know the answer instead of looking for themselves. The phenomenological method can also be seen as a reaction to methodological skepticism since its defenders traditionally claimed that it could lead to absolute certainty and thereby help philosophy achieve the status of a rigorous science.[22][14] But phenomenology has been heavily criticized because of this overly optimistic outlook concerning the certainty of its insights.[23] A different objection to the method of phenomenological reduction holds that it involves an artificial stance that gives too much emphasis on the theoretical attitude at the expense of feeling and practical concerns.[24]

Another phenomenological method is called "eidetic variation".[25] It is used to study the essences of things. This is done by imagining an object of the kind under investigation. The features of this object are then varied in order to see whether the resulting object still belongs to the investigated kind. If the object can survive the change of a certain feature then this feature is inessential to this kind. Otherwise, it belongs to the kind's essence. For example, when imagining a triangle, one can vary its features, like the length of its sides or its color. These features are inessential since the changed object is still a triangle, but it ceases to be a triangle if a fourth side is added.

9 Verificationism;

The method of verificationism consists in understanding sentences by analyzing their characteristic conditions of verification, i.e. by determining which empirical observations would prove them to be true.[10][28] A central motivation behind this method has been to distinguish meaningful from meaningless sentences. This is sometimes expressed through the claim that "[the] meaning of a statement is the method of its verification".[29] Meaningful sentences, like the ones found in the natural sciences, have clear conditions of empirical verification.[10][30] But since most metaphysical sentences cannot be verified by empirical observations, they are deemed to be non-sensical by verificationists. Verificationism has been criticized on various grounds. On the one hand, it has proved very difficult to give a precise formulation that includes

all scientific claims, including the ones about unobservables.[10] This is connected to the problem of underdetermination in the philosophy of science: the problem that the observational evidence is often insufficient to determine which theory is true.[31] This would lead to the implausible conclusion that even for the empirical sciences, many of their claims would be meaningless. But on a deeper level, the basic claim underlying verificationism seems itself to be meaningless by its own standards: it is not clear what empirical observations could verify the claim that the meaning of a sentence is the method of its verification. In this sense, verificationism would be contradictory by directly refuting itself.[32] These and other problems have led some theorists, especially from the sciences, to adopt falsificationism instead. It is a less radical approach that holds that serious theories or hypotheses should at least be falsifiable, i.e. there should be some empirical observations that could prove them wrong.[33][34]

10. Conceptual analysis;

The goal of conceptual analysis is to decompose or analyze a given concept into its fundamental constituents. It consists in considering a philosophically interesting concept, like knowledge, and determining the necessary and sufficient conditions for whether the application of this concept is true.[35][36][37][7] The resulting claim about the relation between the concept and its constituents is normally seen as knowable a priori since it is true only in virtue of the involved concepts and thereby constitutes an analytic truth.[10][35] Usually, philosophers use their own intuitions to determine whether a concept is applicable to a specific situation to test their analyses. But other approaches have also been utilized by using not the intuitions of philosophers but of regular people, an approach often defended by experimental philosophers.[35]

G. E. Moore proposed that the correctness of a conceptual analysis can be tested using the open question method. According to this view, asking whether the decomposition fits the concept should result in a closed or pointless question.[10][38][39] If it results in an open or intelligible question, then the analysis does not exactly correspond to what we have in mind when we use the term. This can be used, for example, to reject the utilitarian claim that "goodness" is "whatever maximizes happiness". The underlying argument is that the question "Is what is good what maximizes happiness?" is an open question, unlike the question "Is what is good what is good?", which is a closed question.[40][41] One problem with this approach is that it results in a very strict conception of what constitutes a correct conceptual analysis, leading to the conclusion that many concepts, like "goodness", are simple or indefinable.[10]

Willard Van Orman Quine criticized conceptual analysis as part of his criticism of the analytic-synthetic distinction. This objection is based on the idea that all claims, including how concepts are to be decomposed, are ultimately based on empirical evidence.[10][35] Another problem with conceptual analysis is that it is often very difficult to find an analysis of a concept that really covers all its cases. For this reason, Rudolf Carnap has suggested a modified version that aims to cover only the most paradigmatic cases while excluding problematic or controversial cases. While this approach has become more popular in recent years, it has also

been criticized based on the argument that it tends to change the subject rather than resolve the original problem.[35][42] In this sense, it is closely related to the method of conceptual engineering, which consists in redefining concepts in fruitful ways or developing new interesting concepts. This method has been applied, for example, to the concepts of gender and race.

11. Others;;

Various other philosophical methods have been proposed. The Socratic method or Socratic debate is a form of cooperative philosophizing in which one philosopher usually first states a claim, which is then scrutinized by their interlocutor by asking them questions about various related claims, often with the implicit goal of putting the initial claim into doubt. It continues to be a popular method for teaching philosophy.[87][88][7] Plato and Aristotle emphasize the role of wonder in the practice of philosophy. On this view, "philosophy begins in wonder"[89] and "[i]t was their wonder, astonishment, that first led men to philosophize and still leads them".[90] This position is also adopted in the more recent philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann.[91] Various other types of methods were discussed in ancient Greek philosophy, like analysis, synthesis, dialectics, demonstration, definition, and reduction to absurdity. The medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas identifies composition and division as ways of forming propositions while he sees invention and judgment as forms of reasoning from the known to the unknown.[2]

Various methods for the selection between competing theories have been proposed.[4][5] They often focus on the theoretical virtues of the involved theories.[92][93] One such method is based on the idea that, everything else being equal, the simpler theory is to be preferred. Another gives preference to the theory that provides the best explanation. According to the method of epistemic conservatism, we should, all other things being equal, prefer the theory which, among its competitors, is the most conservative, i.e. the one closest to the beliefs we currently hold.[43][92][93] One problem with these methods of theory selection is that it is usually not clear how the different virtues are to be weighted, often resulting in cases where they are unable to resolve disputes between competing theories that excel at different virtues.[92][10]

Methodological naturalism holds that all philosophical claims are synthetic claims that ultimately depend for their justification or rejection on empirical observational evidence. In this sense, philosophy is continuous with the natural sciences in that they both give priority to the scientific method for investigating all areas of reality.[94][95]

According to truthmaker theorists, every true proposition is true because another entity, its truthmaker, exists. This principle can be used as a methodology to critically evaluate philosophical theories.[96][10] In particular, this concerns theories that accept certain truths but are unable to provide their truthmaker. Such theorists are derided as ontological cheaters. For example, this can be applied to philosophical presentism, the view that nothing outside the present exists. Philosophical presentists usually accept the very common belief that dinosaurs existed but have trouble in providing a truthmaker for this belief since they deny existence to past entities.[96][10][97][98]

In philosophy, the term "genealogical method" refers to a form of criticism that tries to expose commonly held beliefs by uncovering their historical origin and function.[99][100][101] For example, it may be used to reject specific moral claims or the status of truth by giving a concrete historical reconstruction of how their development was contingent on power relations in society. This is usually accompanied by the assertion that these beliefs were accepted and became established, because of non-rational considerations, such as because they served the interests of a predominant class.

Source; Wikipedia
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