

Summary of Topics Covered in Philosophy 1
G. J. Matthey
March 17, 2014

I. Ethics and Political Philosophy

Socrates. The unexamined life is not worth living, and wisdom is the key to the best possible life, which is that with the healthiest possible state of the soul. One should act with integrity in all matters, even submitting to death. One is bound by the laws of a society in which one has been the beneficiary.

Plato. Virtue is composed as having parts such as justice and temperance. Justice is not a matter of giving each his due or of the strong dominating the weak. Justice of the soul is to be discovered by examining justice in the city. And justice in the city is a matter of each citizen carrying out his appointed role, so as to promote harmoniously the good of the city. Justice of the soul is the harmony of the rational, emotional, and spirited parts of the soul. The virtues of the parts of the soul are wisdom, temperance, and courage, respectively. Justice is more valuable than injustice

Aristotle. The highest good for human beings is happiness. Happiness is attained primarily through the exercise of virtue, though external goods are needed as well. Pleasure is a consequence of the exercise of the virtues, rather than an end to be sought in itself. The virtues justice, wisdom, temperance, and courage, are states of the soul that are developed as the result of their habitual practice. The virtues themselves are means between extremes. The life of study is the best life—better than the life of action. Ultimately, the study of the good for individual human beings is subordinate to political science, which studies the good of the state. The state's role is to instill the virtuous habits that in turn benefit the state itself.

Hobbes. Humans are naturally egoistic, and in the absence of the state would be engaged in a miserable “war of all against all.” We have a right to defend ourselves and in fact should try to arrange our relations with others so as to preserve our safety and security. This is accomplished only by an implicit agreement to give up one's right of nature to the extent necessary to attain peace. Agreements in general are the sources of all justice. Authority, by agreement or force, is placed in the hands of a sovereign, whose will is then the will of the people. Humans are free insofar as they are able to do what they want to do, but their actions are causally determined. The laws of the commonwealth explicitly restrict the individual's freedom to an extent, and any law promulgated by the sovereign is to be obeyed so long as the sovereign fulfills his duty to protect the people. There are many threats to the commonwealth, and the sovereign should take measures to counter them. The immense power granted to the sovereign is required to prevent an even worse evil—civil war.

Kant. The only thing that is good in itself is a good will. A good will is one that acts out of duty, without regard to—or in opposition to—its sensuous inclinations. The only remaining basis for action is out of respect for the law itself. The moral law is to be investigated *a priori*. We can know *a priori* that there are two kinds of imperatives or *oughts*: the hypothetical, which prescribe means to ends, and the categorical, which does not take ends into account. A categorical imperative is one which can be “universalized” or willed to apply to all rational beings. From the categorical imperative we can derive the commonly-acknowledged duties, such as not to make a promise one does not intend to keep. It is difficult to say whether there are conflicts of duties, and if so, how they are to be resolved. There really

is a categorical imperative, which is a product of the rational will itself, that commands all rational beings. It does so because as rational beings ourselves, we should treat others as rational beings as well. This means making them ends rather than mere means to our own ends. We should strive to be worthy of membership in a “kingdom of ends,” where all rational beings treat all others as ends. Moral principles cannot be extracted from experience or based on a mere concept of perfection. We can act on the basis of the categorical imperative if we are things in themselves and not objects of the nature, which are subject to the necessity of the causal law (see Kant’s metaphysics above).

Mill. As human beings, we act with the end of attaining happiness. Acts are thus judged on the basis of whether or not they promote happiness, which itself is pleasure and absence of pain. Pleasures can be ranked in terms of quality, and some pleasures are worth suffering a great deal of pain. More generally, actions should be judged on the basis of whether they promote the happiness of everyone. This is the principle of utility. It is meant as a metric of the goodness of an action rather than as a guide to how we should act in any given situation, which should be guided by experience about the consequences of various kinds of action. People now do not embrace the principle of the general happiness, but they would once the greatest obstacles to it—wretched social conditions—are alleviated. The basis for the principle of general happiness is a questionable argument that happiness is the one and only good, and that general happiness is a good because individual happiness is a good. Both virtue in general and justice in particular are not contrary to happiness, but rather are a part of happiness.

Sartre. Human beings live in a godless world in which they have no essence. That is, we are perfectly free to become what we will be, based on choices that have no objective basis. This gives rise to “anguish,” to which is added “despair” over the fact that our choices can be based only on probability. The best response to this situation is to face it squarely and resolutely. Although there are no pre-existing values against which to judge our actions, we create values on our own, and thereby we create a genuinely human community.

II. Metaphysics and Epistemology

Socrates. We understand the kind of thing something is by understanding the form in which it shares. The form, rather than some attitude toward the thing, makes it what it is. For example, pious acts are pious because they share in the form of piety, not because they are loved by the gods.

Plato. We understand the kind of thing something is by understanding the form in which it shares. The forms are simple, non-sensible, unchanging, divine beings. They are known by recollection from acquaintance before birth. The soul is immortal and resembles the forms in their simplicity.

Aristotle. There are no Platonic forms distinct from the world, but there are forms within the world. The form of a thing is its essence, which makes the thing the kind of thing that it is. All other qualities of things are its accidents. Both essences and accidents of things have species, and species belong to genera. Forms can be causes in things not involving motion, such as species and numbers. Other causes are the matter of a thing, the agent which brings about the change, and the end for which the change occurs. What occurs in nature does so for a purpose. Any series of causes must terminate in a cause that is not itself caused.

Anselm. The existence of God can be proved because its denial is unthinkable. God is that than which nothing greater can be thought. If one were to deny that God exists, one would be denying the

existence of that than which nothing greater can be thought. However, one could only do so by thinking something greater, which is impossible, given that one is already thinking that than which nothing greater can be thought.

Aquinas. The existence of God cannot be proved through the concept of that than which nothing greater can be thought. However, there are five ways of proving God's existence based on our knowledge of the world. One proof is that God is needed to explain the origin of the world, and another is that God is needed to explain the purposive activities of unthinking things. Evil is a privation of being and is allowed to exist in order to promote the good.

Descartes. Our preconceived opinions frequently lead us into error. To avoid error entirely, we may reject any of our beliefs that could be doubted in any way. Descartes proceeds as follows: I cannot doubt that I exist and that I am a thinking thing. I conclude from this that whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true. I can prove that God exists, both as the cause of my idea of God, and from the perfection found in the idea of God. I err because I make judgments about what is not clearly and distinctly perceived. Physical objects, which are extended, shaped, etc. exist because I have a strong inclination to believe that they do, and God, who is no deceiver, gave me this inclination.

Hume. All of the ideas we have of things originate in sense-impressions. We can gain knowledge only of the relations of ideas which can be found by comparing the ideas themselves, either directly or through deduction. Matters of fact are the subject of probability, based on experience. In particular, our idea of a necessary connection between things is based only on the impressions we have of a tendency to associate ideas, based on custom and habit that is the result of observing constant conjunctions. Human action is explicable in terms of constant conjunction and in this sense is "necessary," but we are able to perform actions "at liberty." We cannot use constant conjunction to draw conclusions about miracles or specific acts of divine providence. We should be skeptical about anything that is not a relation of ideas or a probable matter of fact.

Kant. The fundamental problem with metaphysics is that it proceeds without examining how the human cognitive faculties could produce metaphysical knowledge. Such knowledge must be *a priori*, i. e., independent of experience and synthetic, i.e., informative. It is possible only insofar as it concerns appearances only, and not things in themselves. The faculty of intuition supplies to appearances the forms of space and time. The faculty of understanding supplies categories and principles that apply to appearances. Against Hume, Kant attempted to prove that the principle that every event has a cause, though its application is limited to experience. His claim is that causal laws make experience possible, because only by appeal to them can we place events in an objective ordering in time. Kant argued that free will is possible insofar as we can regard a human as a thing in itself. However, as appearance, the human is subject necessity. Kant criticized the ontological argument on the grounds that existence is not a real property of anything.

Russell. Philosophers have grappled with the problem of the external world. The only objects of our direct acquaintance are sense-data and universals. From them we must infer the existence of public external objects. This is done by appeal to the best and simplest explanation for the patterns of sense-data that we experience. The knowledge we gain from this explanation is by "description," where the public object is: that which is responsible for the patterns of sense-data which we experience. We gain *a priori* knowledge by "acquaintance" with universals. Kant's account of such knowledge, which based it on the way in which the human mind must represent the experienced world, is incorrect. A

change in the constitution of the human mind could then change which mathematical propositions are true. But such propositions are true independently of the human mind.