



Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

Philosophy 101 Introduction

Philosophy; what is it and why does it matter? More importantly, as this is a Bible institute, why does it, or even should it, matter to a Christian? We must first briefly learn what it is before we can answer these questions. Philosophy is the study of the general and fundamental questions of reality, existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language. In more casual speech, “philosophy” can refer to “the basic beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group”. The word “philosophy” comes from the ancient Greek, which literally means “love of wisdom”.

We could spend many articles on the history of philosophy. Suffice it to say, Eastern philosophy is organized by the chronological periods of each region. Western philosophy on the other hand, has been traditionally divided into four eras - the Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary. We will address any historical issues as they are pertinent to answering our questions above.

Philosophy is divided into several sub-fields. Major areas of inquiry are; Epistemology, Logic, Metaphysics, Ethics & Political, Aesthetics, and ‘Specialized branches’. In the coming lessons we will focus on these areas as they pertain to our discussion of a Christian worldview.

Epistemology is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, such as the relationships between truth, belief, perception and theories of justification.

Logic is the study of the principles of correct reasoning. Arguments use either deductive reasoning or inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning is when given certain statements (called premises), other statements (called conclusions) are unavoidably implied. While Inductive reasoning also has a premise, it seeks to supply strong evidence for (not absolute proof of) the truth of the conclusion. While the conclusion of a deductive argument is considered certain, the truth of the conclusion of an inductive argument is considered *probable*.

Metaphysics is 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. Traditional branches of metaphysics include cosmology, the study of the world in its entirety, and ontology; the study of being.

Ethics & political philosophy or “moral philosophy,” is concerned primarily with the question of the best way to live, and secondarily, concerned with the question of whether this question can be answered. The main branches of ethics are meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics.

Aesthetics deals with beauty, art, enjoyment, sensory-emotional values, perception, and matters of taste and sentiment.

Specialized branches – Philosophy of language explores the nature, the origins, and the use of language. Philosophy of law (often called jurisprudence), Philosophy of mind explores the nature of the mind, Philosophy of religion explores the questions regarding religion, Philosophy of science explores the foundations, methods, implications, and purpose of science. Metaphilosophy explores the aims of philosophy, its boundaries, and its methods.

This is a very general overview of philosophy. I got most of this from Wikipedia so if you want to read more, that is a good place to start. To answer our original question, you can see just on the surface that Christians use many of these things to explain, teach and understand the faith. It is important for us as Christians to be ready to give an answer for the hope we carry through the Gospel, and philosophy provides some good tools for us to do just that.