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What is Philosophy?

The Origins of Philosophy

Why does philosophy matter? To answer this question we must face the issue of what philosophy is anyway. It is of little help to be told that this is itself a characteristically philosophical question. Yet the questing for the presuppositions and the assumptions which give sense to what we do is a typical job for the philosopher. Some may cynically say that philosophy is just making simple things seem difficult. It is, some may sneer, taking something straightforward and pretending that it is more complex than we thought. It is quibbling about the meanings of words. There is some truth in all this, in that philosophy must refuse to take anything at face value, in an unexamined way. A philosophy that stays at the level of common sense is not worthy of the name, not least because what we all take for granted now may often be the outcome of the philosophical arguments of previous generations. Philosophy must always encourage us to stand back from our beliefs, and look at how well-founded they may be. It involves each of us being willing to distance ourselves from our opinions, and to realize that just because we hold them does not make them true. They may well be, but we cannot take that for granted without being willing to subject them to rational scrutiny.

This idea of philosophy is as old as Western civilization. It may have little to do with being 'philosophical' about one's pain or misfortune. It certainly does not provide a philosophy of life which can help to make sense of one's existence, or give purpose to one's activities. That, some might argue, is the province of religion, if of anything. The idea of philosophy as rational questioning is derived above all from Socrates in the Athens of the fifth century

BC. He irritated those with whom he entered into dialogue (and dialogue was his preferred way of doing philosophy). His activities were compared to those of a sting ray fish, in the numbing way that he exposed the fact that they often took for granted the very point at issue. He numbed those he talked to, because his object was, at least in the first instance, to show that they did not know what they thought they did. His ultimate aim was to obtain knowledge, but his technique aroused hostility, because he attacked people's complacency. Indeed, he became so unpopular that he was eventually put to death by his fellow citizens in the Athenian democracy. Philosophy can certainly often seem negative, and even destructive. It challenges, and makes people realize that what they take for granted is not necessarily true. Yet this can also be a very constructive exercise. It is much better to have beliefs that can be rationally defended. It is important to know why you and others should hold them. Otherwise, when eventually you are challenged, your trust in your beliefs can be shaken merely because you have not got the means to defend yourself.

It was once said that all philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato. This is an exaggeration, but there is a grain of truth in it. Plato was Socrates' pupil, and it is only through his work that we know of Socrates' method of doing philosophy. He was also Aristotle's teacher, and a major influence on later Christian theology. The Greek world of the time was also open to influences from the East as well as being the major formative influence on later Western thought. With Plato, Eastern mysticism and Western analytic thought combine in a potent mixture. Many of the most basic themes in contemporary philosophy were first explicitly taken up in Athens. Two in particular exercised Plato. These were relativism and materialism. The first was concerned with the nature of truth, and whether there could be different 'truths', depending on who believed them. Is truth the same for everyone, even when people do not believe it? Materialism, on the other hand, was, and is, concerned with the ultimate make-up of the world. Is it only material?

The impetus to relativism came from the simple fact that the Greeks of Plato's time were only too well aware of the vast differences of belief that existed even in their part of the world. There were not just many city-states in Greece, each with their own laws and customs. Greeks were coming more and more into contact with such countries as Persia and Egypt, and their customs seemed even more alien. This process was to culminate in the conquests of Aristotle's pupil, Alexander the Great, who played a major role (in the fourth century BC) in the spreading of Greek culture and the Greek language throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, as far as India.

This ferment led to the questioning by Greeks, and Athenians in particular, of the validity of local customs and beliefs. Protagoras, for example, provoked Socrates and Plato with his talk of a true belief being only true for those holding it. You can be confident enough of the rightness of your opinions when they are never challenged and when everyone around you believes the same. When, however, you discover that not just individuals, but even whole nations, think and behave very differently, you do not need to be a profound thinker to wonder who is right, or indeed whether there is such a thing as being right or believing the truth. Do any of us believe anything because it is true? Do we even have knowledge of truth? Or does something merely appear true as a result of believing it? Might things then be true for some people or nations, but not perhaps for others?

The Contemporary Situation

Although the present world seems very different from that of Plato, we confront exactly the same issues. Our horizons are wider than the Eastern Mediterranean, but the problems remain the same. In a very settled society, perhaps of a hierarchical nature, people could accept that the way things were organized were the way they had to be. The beliefs people had, say about religion, were the ones everyone had. They seemed a part of the natural order of things. A quiet English village, a hundred years ago, would be unlikely to have people of different races and creeds walking down the street. Now, however, all that has changed. Air travel has made contact between continents easier, and there has been a huge growth in contacts between people of different backgrounds. Television and the Internet make instant communication right across the world a matter of everyday life. No one can be unaware of the vast variety of beliefs and customs and we often have to live and deal with people who make very different assumptions from ourselves. There is the same kind of ferment across the populations of the world that was once reserved for the male citizens of the Athenian democracy. How can one decide who is right and who is wrong, what is true and what is false? Do we have to? Does any of it matter? Can I just cling to what I was brought up to believe, regardless of what others think?

This last question contains within it the seeds of trouble. First, I must recognize that if I had been brought up in a very different society, my beliefs would have been different. The content of belief seems a very chance affair, depending on all kinds of external influences. Am I to say that the only

reason for my holding a belief is that I hold it? Should I then go on holding it? Should I pass on to my children my set of pre-packaged prejudices, if that is all they appear to be? Is there firmer ground on which I can stand, and, better still, can I appeal to any standards that everyone ought to accept? We get drawn to the heart of philosophy with these questions. Just what is the difference between the opinions I happen to hold at the moment, and real knowledge? Is knowledge even possible? What do we mean by 'knowledge' anyway? One important factor will be that my opinion is merely mine, and yours may be completely different. A claim to knowledge, on the other hand, is not just a report about myself and my attitudes. It is a claim about what is the case. Actual knowledge, whatever else it may be, must include not just a tentative claim to truth, but a claim that is itself correct and ought to be accepted by everyone. Knowledge is of truth, and unless we revert to Protagoras' confused talk of 'truth for me' or the more general 'truth for our society', truth has a universal claim. What is true for me has to be true for you, if it is really true. What is true for you should be accepted by me as well. I cannot myself know that it is raining if you go outside and discover that it is not.

Plato came to similar conclusions, and wished to stress the importance of objective truth, namely what is true independently of the fact that particular people happen to believe it. Yet in doing so he illustrated an important part of Socrates' philosophical method. In discussing the nature of knowledge, or virtue, or whatever else might be considered important, it is crucial to know what we are talking about. Clarity of thought, and precision of language, are philosophical virtues. Socrates, therefore, was prone to ask those with whom he was in dialogue what knowledge, for example, actually is. The answer he gets in conversation with Theaetetus is typical. Theaetetus, a bright young Athenian, confidently gives Socrates a series of examples of what one can know. He talks of geometry and other things one can learn. He even refers to crafts such as cobbling. Socrates' response is also typical. With his characteristic irony, he responds that Theaetetus is very generous, because when asked for one simple thing, he has given a whole list. The point is that all of the things he mentions may be instances of knowledge, but they take us no nearer to understanding what knowledge itself is, or how it differs from true belief.

A caricature of a philosopher in an argument used to be of someone who prefaces every remark by saying that it all depends what you mean by a particular word. Indeed, in the middle years of the twentieth century, a whole industry of something called 'linguistic philosophy' sprang up in Ox-

ford and elsewhere. It stressed the importance of clarity in the use of words, but often went further and suggested that the whole purpose of language was to analyse and clarify how language is used. It helped to spawn the science of linguistics, but it ran the risk itself of mistaking an important element of philosophical method for its prime purpose.

Such philosophy was often accused of sterility. For instance, an important moral issue is whether it could ever be justified to punish innocent people. Can one frame someone for the greater good? Terrorists might be deterred if someone appeared to have been captured for committing an atrocity. Some linguistic philosophers were tempted to duck this crucial question by saying that since the word 'punishment' implies guilt, one cannot by definition punish an innocent person. It would have to be given a term of its own, such as 'social hygiene'. This may have had the virtue of clarifying the normal use of the term, but it signally failed to get to the heart of the issue. The root question is not so much how we should describe our actions but what we should do in particular situations.

Words are tools, and we must keep our tools sharp, but philosophy is in the business of using tools and not just admiring them. Arguments about the meanings of words, or the analysis of concepts (the way we think), help us to understand what we are talking about, and what is at stake. It must however be a preparation for something far more serious. In the case of Socrates, his purpose was to clear away false assumptions before building up an understanding of what knowledge is, so that it can be acquired. Indeed Plato's ultimate aim was political and moral. He wanted cities to be ruled by philosophers who possessed the knowledge that could be used for the benefit of everyone. He did not want political authority to be the exercise of arbitrary power, as when the people of the Athenian democracy were led by unscrupulous demagogues. The latter cared more about their own position and influence than the content of their advice. Yet for a state to be governed by people with knowledge, it had to be agreed what knowledge was and how it could be learnt. Similarly, in the field of morality, Plato was adamant that the threat of Protagoras' relativism had to be faced. He had to show where moral truth lay and how it could be discovered. All this can lead to the charge of elitism, and indeed Plato's views were much admired in Victorian England, when it was believed that an educated elite had to be trained for the benefit of everyone. Yet if one believes that truth, in whatever area, is accessible to everyone, the charge of elitism can be irrelevant. The question of truth, and that of whether only a minority can acquire it, are quite different from each other.

There are clear resonances between these problems and those of the beginning of the twenty-first century. Politicians are not often thought repositories of wisdom, and can be sometimes cynically assumed to be more concerned for their own interests than those of the country they are supposed to serve. Talk of truth in morality is likely to be scorned. All too often, it is assumed that morality is a matter of taste. Very significantly, anyone who makes a claim about what is morally right will be told 'that is just your opinion'. Truth does not seem to be at stake, even though opinions themselves can be true or false. Opinions are important, but they are not enough. The difference between them and knowledge lay at the heart of what Plato was talking about. He produced examples of how, even when we were right by chance in our opinions, it was not the same thing as knowledge. A jury might be convinced by a powerful speech from a lawyer, and correctly judge the innocence of the defendant. Yet if the same lawyer had been on the opposite side, the jury would have found the person guilty. As Plato says, the jurymen (and they were men in Athens) were not in the position of an eyewitness of the crime who knew for certain what had happened. Even a true opinion, arrived at by accident, does not add up to knowledge, which is tied down in a more secure fashion.

Knowledge and Reason

What then is knowledge, and what can we know? This traditional question in philosophy is as live and important today as it was nearly two-and-a-half millennia ago. We shall not be looking specifically at truth in morality or politics in this book. Just, however, as many of Plato's writings ranged far away from those areas but were always haunted by them, even today questions of knowledge and truth, understanding and reality, have important practical applications, even though the latter are not always at the forefront of the argument. Plato was concerned with the nature of reality and our place in it, but however abstract his discussion sometimes became, he never lost sight of his overall purpose of establishing objective standards in morality, and of guiding those who were to be involved in political life. It is the same today. Discussions about the nature of reality and how far it can be known are undoubtedly essential for anyone who wishes to claim that moral matters are somehow connected with reality. We have to know what is meant by knowledge and whether it is possible before we can become clearer about the possible nature of moral knowledge. A general scepticism about

the possibility of knowledge or truth will have a knock-on effect upon our understanding of morality. A general commitment to relativism in all areas will make moral relativism inescapable.

The term 'knowledge' is itself a very slippery one, and Socrates' question about its nature is still relevant in our day. Philosophical theorizing about knowledge is called 'epistemology', after the Greek word for knowledge, 'episteme'. When we turn to other languages' terms for knowledge, it becomes very apparent that things are far from clear cut. The Latin word for knowledge, 'scientia', points forward to the English word 'science', which has a much narrower meaning. It refers to a particular kind of knowledge, and not knowledge as a whole. The French 'la science' and the German 'Wissenschaft' both conveniently cloak the difference between general knowledge and the more rigorous empirical methods of the physical sciences. For example, history would be naturally classified as a science, along with physics and chemistry, by many languages, but it is not so regarded in English. One of the crucial problems that has risen since the development of modern science from the time of Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century is connected with this point. Should knowledge be restricted to the results obtained by empirical observation and experiment, along with the theories that arise from them? It is highly controversial to say that science is the only source of our knowledge. What can be known, and hence is real, has then to be confined to what is within the reach of practising scientists.

Plato himself would have found this a familiar problem. He always wrote his philosophy in the form of dialogues, following the techniques and example of Socrates. It was natural for him to begin with issues that Socrates had clearly discussed, and to make Socrates the hero of the discussion. As time went on he introduced more of his own theories, and in his later dialogues he gave up using Socrates even as a mouthpiece. In one of these dialogues, the *Sophist*, Plato explicitly faced the problem of how to define reality. In what he termed a battle of the giants he sketched the fierce dispute that he said was raging between materialists and their opponents. He said the materialists tried to drag everything down to earth 'out of heaven and the unseen'. They defined reality in terms of body and were contemptuous of anyone who claimed that something without a body could be real. Needless to say, Plato was not in the materialist camp. He believed that the visible world was but a pale reflection of a greater reality. The latter was the source of objective standards of goodness, virtue and justice, as well as standards of other kinds of perfection such as mathematical ones. He was reacting to the origins of a philosophy based wholly on science. It had arisen in the Greek

world just before the time of Socrates. Its origins lay with Thales, the first philosopher, who said that everything was composed of water. It soon became more sophisticated and acquired a modern flavour with the atomists, who wanted to say that reality was composed solely of atoms, indivisible pieces of matter which were arranged in different ways to produce different kinds of objects. Even mind was to be explained in this way, much to Socrates' horror.

Plato showed himself to be a consistent philosopher. Although he is widely known for his opposition to materialism, and in particular for his doctrine of immaterial 'Forms' as objective standards, that did not stop him questioning even this doctrine in several of his later dialogues. Just as philosophy must always ask questions, the answers it gives must always be open to re-examination. There is no shame in philosophers changing their minds, and some of the greatest, Plato among them, have developed, refined and even changed their ideas over the years. Reason is never static. Otherwise it can lapse into the mere exercise of authority and the forging of tradition. Philosophy is not necessarily subversive of either, but it cannot accept them at face value. That is why forming philosophical schools and becoming admiring disciples of a great thinker, whilst understandable, can be very dangerous. An appeal to reason cannot be reduced to an appeal to the authority of an individual, any more than it should rely on the power of an institution. Even a philosopher like Plato, who was clearly much influenced by Socrates, believed that a love of truth, not an admiration for an individual, should be our motive. Indeed, it is generally accepted that many of Plato's own views were developed beyond anything Socrates had ever said. His own pupil, Aristotle, himself departed from Plato's position in fundamental ways. Yet, despite this, it is ironic that various kinds of 'Platonists' and 'Aristotelians' have, through the centuries, slavishly followed what they interpreted as their respective hero's views.

Debate between philosophers, at its best, can be a dialogue of reason with itself. It is never enough to learn what a particular philosopher thinks, or to be able to give a clear account of a philosophical position. Someone can learn all the arguments of Plato and Aristotle, or of more recent philosophers. That of itself does not produce a philosopher or even an ability to think philosophically. The important task is to engage with the issues for oneself, and to decide what one agrees with and what one repudiates. This must be done on a rational basis, and not through the unthinking application of one's own prejudices, or those of one's time and place. It is hardly surprising that it is difficult, if not impossible, to be both a consistent relativist and

a philosopher. The former relates everything to its own social context. The latter appeals to a reason that transcends the immediate circumstances that so clearly influence us. It aspires to some kind of universal validity. The relativist will insist that all rationality is itself situated in, and limited to, particular historical periods. Yet repudiating a reason that can transcend history will only mean that we are trapped in our own historical period. We will share its assumptions and have no basis for questioning them. In the same way, an appeal to reason raises problems for the convinced materialist. If everything is just 'body', or whatever contemporary science claims are the basic constituents of physical reality, what is reason? Is it just neural connections being set up in the brain? Once again, rationality seems to be questioned. Is it just the arbitrary behaviour of atoms, as the pre-Socratic atomists thought? Could it be explained by the behaviour of sub-atomic particles, as contemporary physicists might be inclined to think?

Progress in Philosophy

Both a global relativism rooting everything in its social contexts, and a literally mindless materialism, sweeping aside everything that cannot be understood in material form, arose in ancient Athens. Yet both doctrines are flourishing as never before, at the start of the twenty-first century, although it is actually very hard to combine them. Forms of materialism claim truth and would not be content with relativism. Relativists could only allow materialism as one of any number of the beliefs of different societies. The fact that Socrates and Plato were dealing with what appeared to be the same issues as are current today, itself gives the lie to any idea that each society has its own standards of thought, or its own criteria of what reasoning is. If we can stretch across the centuries, and even the millennia, to take hold of what Plato says, that suggests that both he and we are not just mere creations of particular societies. Philosophy is not just mere prejudice springing from a particular historical context. He and we, it could be argued, share in a common rationality that can allow communication, despite the obvious differences in our situations.

Modern forms of materialism and of relativism are bound to confront us in any inquiry about the nature of the world and how we can know it. What is the world we live in really like, no matter how it appears? Linked with this issue is the equally important question as to how knowledge of the world is even possible. The former, in philosophers' language, is a question

of ontology, of reasoning about what there is. The latter is a matter of epistemology concerning the basis of human knowledge. One of the most vexed questions in philosophy is the relation between the two. Some would not see that there is a difference. After all, we cannot talk of what we do not know. How, then, can questions about reality be separated from questions about our knowledge? There is, however, much more to be said, not least because questions about knowledge have to be, at least in part, about us and our capabilities.

Talk about Plato and his contemporaries may help to set the scene for a philosophical discussion. It shows that philosophy is not a recent phenomenon, but that it deals with questions that have been with us since the dawn of Western civilization. The minute that thinkers wanted reasons and were not content with the kind of myths Homer told in his poetry, about gods misbehaving, philosophy was born. The very distinction between myth and reason ('logos' in Greek) lay at the heart of Greek philosophy. This shows the venerable age of philosophy as a discipline. Does it not, however, show something less attractive? A cynic may ask why, if questions have been debated so long, is agreement no nearer now than in Plato's time? Science undoubtedly progresses, or so many claim. In the twenty-first century, physics will presumably progress even more, and perhaps produce a 'grand unified theory'. That, it is hoped, will be universally accepted, and will unlock the mysteries of the physical universe, unifying our knowledge of it. Why, then, does no one seriously suggest that any such thing will happen in philosophy? Similarly, scientists like pointing out to philosophers that in their disciplines there is no such thing as 'French biology', 'German physics' or 'Anglo-American science'. Yet applying such adjectives to philosophy may not seem so ridiculous. Science claims universality and in fact does achieve universal recognition. Why then does philosophy glory in its labels? Why does there seem to be no such thing as philosophical progress? Philosophers do not appear to know more now than their predecessors did in Athens. Perhaps the celebration of its ancient past merely underlines a basic weakness in philosophy.

These are important issues, although, in so far as they are talking about the nature of knowledge and truth, they seem themselves to be of a philosophical nature. We cannot escape philosophy once we start questioning ourselves and our assumptions, or our beliefs and our practices. Yet although philosophy may be inescapable, some may wish it were more obviously successful. What is at stake here is the legitimacy of the comparison between philosophy as a discipline and science as one. That itself involves us in exam-

ining the philosophical presuppositions of science. Science itself, despite its social prestige, cannot be taken at face value. Philosophy should not be too ready to accept scientific standards of success. Answers do not come ready packaged, once we are talking of profound questions about the nature of the world we live in and our relation to it. We are confronted by the limitations and fallibility of human understanding, as well as by its abilities and successes. Indeed, philosophy can prove a useful antidote to the arrogance which can be produced by dwelling on apparent scientific progress. Humans may be much more in control of their physical environment than they used to be. It is unclear how far they are in control of themselves. Philosophy can remind us that when we confront basic questions concerning our place in the scheme of things, and our relation to physical reality, our understanding is still limited. Just because humans have always found some questions difficult, and perhaps for that reason sometimes prefer not to ask them, that does not mean the questions and answers are not important. Indeed if, as seems inevitable, even science depends on philosophical presuppositions, we cannot achieve success in science without making philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world which the scientist is investigating.

Philosophy and the World

Anyone who begins to study philosophy discovers quickly that there is no obvious body of knowledge to be learnt. It is a method of thinking, rather than a collection of facts. That is not to say that one should not know what great philosophers have taught in the past, or what philosophers are arguing about in the present day. Yet knowing what is received opinion among a collection of philosophers is not as relevant to philosophical thought itself as the agreed views of the leaders of a scientific discipline would be for those who want to become expert in that science. Indeed, philosophy must be very ready to point out that even agreement in science has to be tentative and provisional. Agreement in any field does not constitute truth. The history of the world is full of examples of people who have been individually and collectively certain of their position, and yet been proved wrong. Certainty is no infallible guide to truth. If we all agreed, as once people did, that the earth is flat, that would not mean that it is so. Even if I am absolutely certain about something, that does not guarantee its truth. No doubt there have been people who, in moments of derangement, have been convinced that they were Napoleon, or even perhaps a fried egg. That, however, says

something about them and their current state, and nothing about what is really the case.

Philosophers, therefore, can take nothing for granted, and anyone thinking philosophically should not be reassured by a growing consensus. Even unfashionable views in philosophy, as elsewhere, may be right. Truth can never be arrived at by counting heads. Yet this is all very well, it may be said, but how then can we ever obtain knowledge? Granted that mere agreement is not enough, how can we find out what we ought to agree about? We must, in the end, be constrained by the nature of the world, which we all live in. If I believe it is not raining when it is, I will still get wet when I go out. If I live on the thirty-second floor, getting out through the window will still not prove to be a safe way of leaving the building. In other words, whatever we, or others, may believe, the important point is not that we think something, but the nature of what we think. The crucial point about beliefs is not so much that they are ours. They must at least purport to be about something independent of the belief. Whether or not they are true is then a matter of what the world is like.

Another way of putting this is that truth is not constituted either by private certainty or public agreement. It is an objective matter and is connected with the object of belief. It is a matter of what the belief is supposed to be about rather than who holds it. Objectivity is a matter of being connected with the nature of things, rather than of the attitudes that people hold. Only what is real can be a genuine source of truth. What then is real? What kind of things should we be looking for? We must have some conception of what the world is really like.

There have always been philosophers who have resisted this radical separation of the subject and object of belief. The emphasis on the importance of the objective reality of the world, and its independence from human judgement, has been challenged from several directions. Above all, 'idealists' have wanted to hold that reality is dependent on mind, although that does not necessarily mean the human mind. Bishop Berkeley, in the eighteenth century, wanted to ground reality in the mind of God. To be, he thought, was to be perceived. Since he believed that God perceives everything, this does not cause as much of a problem as might be thought. Even so, the world, that is everything, only exists as far as it is known and perceived by God. It has no independent existence. God does not know it because it exists. It exists because God knows it.

More sceptical philosophies would not presume to bring God into the picture in the first place. Those of an idealist persuasion would link reality to

human understanding. They would stress the central importance of the human mind. This, however, seems to make whatever exists, including the physical world, depend on human judgement. That makes the whole universe revolve around human beings in a logical, if not literal, sense. What exists only does so in so far as we think it does. Everything is centred on us. It is anthropocentric. Common sense would reject this as a ludicrous conception, but we must be careful, since, as we have already noted, common sense is likely merely to recapitulate the views of earlier generations of philosophers.

Most people in their everyday lives, like most working scientists, do not think of the world as a projection of their minds. They do not imagine that we are living in a dream of our own creation, even if it is one that others share. They assume that sticks and stones, tables and chairs, and, more controversially, electrons and other sub-atomic particles, are 'really there'. These things help to form the context in which we live our lives. The physical world constrains us. It is not always like walking into a brick wall when we thought there was a door there. Nevertheless, we all have experience of the world not conforming to our wishes. It is 'there', resisting, and not as malleable as we would sometimes wish. We cannot control it by thought. Indeed, it sometimes seems to be controlling us. Many would agree with the 'argument' of the venerable Dr Johnson against idealism. He is said to have kicked a stone and exclaimed: 'I refute it thus!' Needless to say, the philosophical arguments in its favour are too subtle to be dismissed so easily, and idealism constantly reappears in new forms. They constantly trade on the simple fact that we cannot think or talk about what we cannot think or talk about. Thought and language can then seem not just a means of access to reality. They can appear to have a major role in forming it.

The resistance of the world can lead easily to the view that what is real is whatever is physical. This means that what is real is not just what can be seen, touched, or otherwise experienced. That keeps too close a link between reality and experience. It is simply what physics deals with. Calling it 'matter' does not necessarily help, since matter itself seems difficult to define in contemporary science. It seems almost to disappear into energy. Certainly it is not composed of indivisible atoms, since each atom itself contains innumerable particles. It seems difficult to get down to bits of stuff, which could be imagined perhaps as little billiard balls knocking into each other or sticking together in various ways. Scientists and philosophers once thought like this, but modern physics makes such a simple picture impossible. The term 'materialist', therefore, is not very helpful, and many philosophers prefer to

talk of 'physicalism'. That deals with whatever physics accepts, while 'naturalism' could be understood as accepting more generally what is within the scope of the natural sciences as a whole. In this way, 'reality', a typically philosophical concept, suddenly becomes linked with contemporary science. This is not an oversight.

Many philosophers have come to feel that the methods of science alone can be a guarantee of knowledge. This is partly because of the undoubted success of science in helping us to predict, control and manipulate the physical world. Many are highly suspicious of anything beyond the scope of physics, and feel that once the constraint of empirical investigation is ignored, anyone can claim anything. The floodgates of superstition are thereby opened, together with every form of fanciful belief. For such people, philosophy should be the servant of the sciences, clarifying and systematizing their methods. It cannot then be thought of as an independent source of knowledge, or as an alternative method of investigation.

There are no philosophical laboratories, no philosophical experiments and no accumulation of philosophical knowledge in the manner of the sciences. Philosophers do not sift out experience through testing and experimenting. Philosophy is not an empirical discipline. It does not seem to depend on what we can discover about the world around us. Yet the crux is whether that means it cannot be concerned with truth. Certainly, throughout the history of philosophy, a place has been given for 'metaphysics', a study of reality transcending the world of appearance, or the ordinary world we experience. Metaphysics has never taken things at face value, and indeed is like modern science in looking for deeper explanations behind the ordinary world of sights and sounds. Part of the reason for making philosophy subservient to science is fear of the alternative. If philosophy is given its traditional place as the grounding for all other knowledge, we could easily begin referring to entities beyond the scope of science. Metaphysics can encourage talk of realities that do not merely 'transcend' physical reality, but are invisible, intangible, and in fact apparently totally undetectable.