

### Session 3. Philosophy: Metaphysics and Ethics

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“Since philosophy is foundational to every discipline of the university, philosophy is the most strategic discipline to be influenced for Christ.” (Moreland and Craig)

#### Session overview

- Continue our quick tour through the field of philosophy
- Prior session: Logic and epistemology
- This session: Metaphysics and ethics

#### Logic and epistemology review

- Philosophy is simply just thinking hard about something (Plantinga)
- Philosophy plays out in one’s worldview (pair of glasses)
- One key: The law of noncontradiction; an “idea” cannot be both true and false in the same sense at the same time.
- Logic is simply the study of the rules of reasoning
  - Goal: Reach a conclusion.
  - Improve one’s ability to form good offense.
  - Defend against others’ unsubstantiated beliefs.
- Epistemology is a “branch of philosophy that tries to make sense out of knowledge, rationality and justified or unjustified beliefs.”
  - Correspondence theory of truth
    - Truth-bearer is the content of declarative sentences/statements that are true or false
    - Truth-maker is the state of affairs (facts)

#### Key passages

- God is an infinite being, creatures are finite beings  
**John 1:2, Revelation 4:11, Acts 17:28**
- Christian ethic has a superior justification  
**Romans 8:3-4, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

#### Metaphysics

- The study of “what we know about reality” (GF, 20)
- Metaphysics involves the investigating such things that exist.
- Consider “knowledge”:
  - Knowledge – “A clear and certain perception of that which exists, or of truth and fact; the perception of the connection and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of our ideas.” (1829 Webster’s Dictionary)
  - Knowledge – justified true belief (Plato)

- Forms of knowledge:
  - Know that: (Polanyi) physics of balancing a moving bicycle
  - Know how: (Polanyi) riding a bike
  - Know how: Wisdom (actual choice, Tacit)
  - Know what: Facts (autonomous, unrelated)
  - Know why: Understanding (science)
  - Know when: Tactical (not routine, but common)
  - Know where: Strategic (not routine, rare, and major)
  - Know who: Networks
- Propositional knowledge (feasible set)
  - Truth (subset of propositional knowledge)
  - Belief (subset of propositional knowledge)
  - Knowledge (subset of intersection of Truth and Belief where there is warrant or justification)

### *Selected definitions useful in metaphysics*

- *Existence* “is either the belonging of some property or the being belonged to by a property or, more simply, the entering into the nexus of exemplification.” (MC, 191) For example, let *z* be
  - Substances (e.g., atoms, mountains)
  - Properties (e.g., color, goodness)
  - Relations (e.g., greater than, father of, sets (e.g., {1, 2, 3, 4, 5}), numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3), and propositions (e.g., grass is green)).
- *Being* is defined as the existence of “that which is” or a “something.”
- “Beings are similar (analogous), but not identical to one another. Yet there is a unity of being, since God is the one being; everything else *has* being because He gives it being (**John 1:2, Revelation 4:11**).
  - ‘In him we live, and move, and have our being.’ (**Acts 17:28**).
  - God is an infinite being; and all creatures are finite beings.

### *Alternate views of existence<sup>1</sup>*

- Atheist perspective: The universe can be defined as entities that are contained within the “total spatiotemporal system of matter and (impersonal) energy, that is, as the sum total of material objects, in some way accessible to the senses and to scientific investigation.”
- Theist perspective: The universe can be defined as entities that are contained within the universe as well as “nonspatiotemporal abstract entities.” Abstract entities are “immaterial (i.e., nonphysical) entities that do not exist inside space and time; instead they are and spaceless.”

### *Abstract entities debate*

Consider two propositions:

*P*: “Abstract entities exist”

$\neg P$ : “Abstract entities do not exist”

(*U-S*) Universe – “total spatiotemporal system of matter and (impersonal) energy, that is, as the sum total of material objects, in some way accessible to the senses and to scientific investigation.” (MC, 183)

(*U-A*) Universe – “sum total of everything whatever that exists including nonspatiotemporal abstract entities as well as the spatiotemporal universe of physical entities.” (MC, 184)

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<sup>1</sup>Moreland and Craig, p. 183-184.

(A) Abstract objects – “immaterial (i.e., nonphysical) entities that do not exist inside space and time; instead they are timeless and spaceless.” (MC, 183)

If  $x \in U-S$  (read  $x$  is an element of  $U-S$ ), then we can ask where and when it is.

If  $x \notin U-S \Rightarrow x \in A$  (read  $x$  is not an element of  $U-S$  implies  $x$  is an element of  $A$ ), then asking where and when it is incoherent.

- $x = \{\text{atoms, mountains, planes, stock certificate, mortgage document, plastic credit card}\}$ ,  
 $x \in U-S$
- $y = \{\text{properties (e.g., color, goodness), relations (e.g., greater than, father of), sets (e.g., } \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5\}\text{), numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3), and propositions (e.g., grass is green)}\}$ ,  $y \in A$
- $P \vee \neg P \Leftrightarrow U-S \vee U-A \Leftrightarrow (U-S) \vee (U-S \ \& \ A)$ : (Read:  $P$  or not  $P$  if and only if  $U-S$  or  $U-S \ \& \ A$ .) Either abstract entities exist or they do not. Within this framework, clearly how one views the universe hinges on the existence of abstract entities.
- Naturalism:  $\neg P \vee U-A$ : Naturalism typically denies the existence of abstract entities.

Naturalism is “physicalist in flavor ... reality is exhausted by the spatiotemporal world of physical objects accessible in some way to the senses and embraced by our best scientific theories.” (MC, 184)

- For naturalism to have any merit, the naturalism apologist must show that mental entities are not real. That is, the mind does not exist.
- Further, they must deny that properties and relations are in fact abstract entities.
- Finally, they must show that abstract entities are not real.

### *Metaphysics and budgeting*

- Budgeting-logical documentation of money flows
- Seek to estimate the balance sheet
- What are assets and liabilities worth? Metaphysical at its core.
- Value of future earnings power and implicit liabilities
- Our value estimates are subject to wild changes in response to economic events
- Need to change our actual financial decision-making behavior
- Future actions must comport with our present financial plan derived from the budgeting exercise
- We are not “dancing to our DNA”
- We can choose to rise early and work diligently towards successfully executing the financial plan

### *Connecting metaphysics with finance<sup>2</sup>*

- “The primary and essential character of wealth is metaphysical, not physical, and is the direct result of the creativity of mind, not the availability of raw materials—the sum product of individual efforts, not the manipulated static resources of collective nations or governments or lands.” (p. 12)
- Two views of wealth
  - Wealth is primarily metaphysical, the result of ideas, imagination, innovation, and individual creativity, and is therefore, relatively speaking, unlimited, susceptible to great growth and development.

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<sup>2</sup> Warren T. Brookes, *The Economy in Mind* (NY: Universe Books, 1982).

- Wealth is essentially and primarily physical, and therefore ultimately finite. The modern presentation of this view argues that since usable energy is steadily diminishing into entropy, all wealth is really *cost* to be shared more equitably.
- “Our economic future is not now and never has been tied to the physical assets we now see, but to the vast untapped potential of creative thinking—the metaphysical process which can show us entirely new reserves and new and easier ways of doing things, extending value and increasing wealth without depleting our planet.”
- “You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. You cannot help the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich.” Abraham Lincoln

## Ethics

- Ethics is the study of what is right and what is wrong.
- “Ethics can be understood as the philosophical study of morality, which is concerned with our beliefs and judgments regarding right and wrong motives, attitudes, character and conduct.” (MC, 393)
- Ethical categories (illustrated with fleet of ships on high seas)
  - Social: How can we keep the ship from bumping into other ships?
  - Personal: How can we keep the ship from sinking?
  - Normative: Why is the ship out there in the first place?
- The Christian ethic has a
  - Superior source—God
  - Superior manifestation—Jesus Christ (our complete moral example).
  - Superior ethical declaration—the Bible
  - Superior motivation—the love of Christ.
  - Superior justification for ethics—our holy and sovereign God says so. (GF, 369)
- Christian perspective indicates that “morality is not a mere legalistic assent to a written code; it is a dynamic relation to a living Person.”

“A mirror will show a man the dirt on his face, but it will not wash the dirt away.” (GF, 370)

### *Alternative views of right*

- Might is right – “justice is the interest of the stronger party” (Thrasymachus, GF, 353)
- Morals are mores – “Ethics is identified with the ethnic ... ‘is-ought’ fallacy” (GF, 354)
- “Man is the measure of all things” (Protagoras, GF, 354)
- Race is right – “mankind rather than man is the measure of all things” (GF, 355)
- Right is moderation – ‘golden mean’
- There is no right – ‘antinomian’ (against-law)
- Right is what brings pleasure – “hedonism claims that what brings pleasure is right and what brings pain is wrong” (GF, 356)
- Right is the greatest good for the race – utilitarianism ‘the greatest good to the greatest number of persons (in the long run)’ Bentham (GF, 357)
- Good is what is desired for its own sake
- Good is indefinable – known only intuitively, “ultimacy of ‘good’ makes it resistant to definition in terms of something else” (GF, 358)
- Good is what God wills – voluntaristic (God wills it), essentialist (God can only will in accordance with His unchangingly good nature)

### *A Christian view of right*

- Christian view of right
  - Deeply internally coherent
  - Corresponds well with empirical observation
  - Experientially relevant
- Origins of the right – “unchanging nature of a God of perfect love and justice,”
  - “God’s will is subject to His own unchanging nature,” (**Malachi 3:6, 1 Samuel 15:29, Hebrews 6:18**)
  - God is love (**1 John 4:16, John 3:16**)
  - Morality is based in the unchanging nature of a loving Father
    - Just (**Deuteronomy 32:4**)
    - Impartial (**Romans 2:11**)
    - Longsuffering (**2 Peter 3:9**)
- God’s revelation of right in the universe – general revelation
  - Found in the expectations of the human heart
  - Moral law discovered more by one’s reaction than actions
- God’s revelation of right in the Bible
  - Divinely inscripturated truth of God (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**, noon day Sun)
  - Provides more information than general revelation (flash of lightning)
- Absolute nature of the right – “infinitely perfect God who wills men to be good in accordance with the perfection of His own nature” (**Matthew 5:48**)
- Christian ethic discovered, not created by men

### *How do we know what is right?*

- Results – the good is the expedient (W. James)
- Self-destructive nature of the contrary (I. Kant)
- Intuition – “since the good is not definable in terms of anything other than itself, it follows that one must know it intuitively” (GF, 375)
- Self-evidence – law of benevolence in ethics is a first principle like that of the law of non-contradiction
- Appeal to human authority
- Appeal to divine authority

### *Christian justification of right*

- Faith (Fideism) – “no evidence or argumentation can bear upon a religious belief in God or in His Word” (GF, 378) “seem to be correct *ontologically*” (**Romans 9:20**)
- Note “‘belief *that*’ demands evidence, and it is prior to ‘belief *in*’ someone”. (GF, 379) For example, belief that Jesus rose bodily from the dead precedes belief in Jesus’ words.

- Reason – an epistemological argument for the Bible being the final authority of right (GF, 380ff)
  - (A) “Theistic God exists”
  - (B) “Miracles are possible”<sup>3</sup> Miracles are defined here as “an act of God in the natural world that confirms the message of God through His prophet or apostles (Hebrews 2:3-4). ... Miracles are not contrary to nature; rather, they go beyond natural events.” (GF, 380)
  - (C) “Jesus is God in human form”
  - (D) “Whatever God says is true”
  - (E) “Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God”
  - (F) Using this logical structure, the Bible is the Word of God because
    - $A \rightarrow B$  (A implies B)
    - $B \rightarrow C$  (B implies C)
    - $\{C \wedge D \wedge E\} \rightarrow F$  (C and D and E implies F)

### *Ethics and budgeting*

- Mechanics of budgeting is deeply logical
- Concerned with the epistemic certainty with which we have estimated our assets and liabilities (explicit and implicit)
- Adopt a financial strategy that is inherently metaphysical so we modify our financial behavior in such a way as to successfully implement this strategy
- Still the budget may be busted and we fail
  - Why? One reason is the lack of personal accountability.
  - Accountability is a pivotal ethical component.
- Every worldview will have deep influence on the budgeting process
- How does our budget-based strategy affect other people (social ethics)?
  - Does a bit of financial distress cause us to cease all charitable giving?
  - How does our budget-based strategy impact our personal health and well-being?
  - Ultimate objective with our budget-based strategy?
- Ethics plays a dominant role in finance
- Ethical perspective deeply impacts our view of personal finance
  - Consider the following conclusion reached by Professor Sheldon Solomon in response to understanding death, “I am an infinitesimal speck of carbon-based dust born in a time and place not of my choosing here for an incredible brief amount of time before my atoms are scattered back into the cosmos. That need not be a terrifying thought.”<sup>4</sup>
  - If life lacks meaning and purpose and hence there is no moral law—no need to worry, right?
  - A more rational alternative: I am an eternal soul of divinely-infused dust created in a time and space of God’s choosing here for an incredible brief amount of time before my bodily death and subsequent resurrection where, for all eternity, I will glorify God throughout the cosmos. That is indeed a wonderful thought.
- One’s chosen philosophical foundation drives all aspects of life, including personal finance
- Pick your foundation carefully upon which to build our lives.

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<sup>3</sup>Miracles are covered in detail in sessions 11 and 12.

<sup>4</sup>Emma Pattee, “Covid-19 makes us think about our mortality. Our brains aren’t designed for that.” *The Washington Post*, October 7, 2020, accessed online.

“Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.”<sup>5</sup>

Contact: Robert Brooks, (205) 799-9927, [rbrooks@frmhelp.com](mailto:rbrooks@frmhelp.com), [www.robtebrooks.org](http://www.robtebrooks.org).

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<sup>5</sup>Habermas, Jürgen, *Time of Transitions*, Polity Press, 2006, pp. 150-151, translation of an interview from 1999.

## **Key Bible Passages**

**John 1:2** He was in the beginning with God.

**Revelation 4:11** “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

**Acts 17:28** for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

**Romans 8:3-4** <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

**2 Corinthians 5:14-15** <sup>14</sup>For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup>and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

**Malachi 3:6** “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

**1 Samuel 15:29** And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”

**Hebrews 6:18** so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

**1 John 4:16** So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

**Deuteronomy 32:4** “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

**Romans 2:11** For God shows no partiality.

**2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

**Matthew 5:48** You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**Romans 9:20** But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “‘Why have you made me like this?’”

**Hebrews 2:3-4** <sup>3</sup>how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup>while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.