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An Attempt to Define and Explain Philosophy and Outline Its Subject-Matter

Dr. Samson Brown Muchineripi Marume
Senior Lecturer, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe
Roy Robson Jubenkanda
D.Phil. Candidate, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe
Cornelius Wonder Namusi
D.Phil. Candidate, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe
N. C. Madziyire
D.Phil. Candidate, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

Abstract:
Those scholars, who are either experts or enthusiasts in studying systematic philosophy, may find reason to be upset by an academic intruder into their territory who perceive their area of study, that is, philosophy, to be defined as a rational attempt by humankind to pose problems and their solutions in connection with a view of reality, that is, a world-view, and a view of life.

Keywords: rational attempt, problems and solutions, view of reality, view of life, and pose and discuss

1. Introduction
This article specifically focuses on the broadest fields of study, namely, *systematic philosophy.*

2. Purpose of the Article
The purpose of this article is threefold: to *define* and *explain* the concept of philosophy and briefly *outline* its subject-matter.

3. Definition and Explanation of Philosophy and Outline of Its Subject Matter

3.1. Definition of Philosophy
The first most obvious thing to do is to ask the question: What is philosophy? We shall try to give a definition of philosophy which is sufficiently broad to typify all philosophical inclinations or trends. This definition may be found in many introductions to philosophy, though it may not be framed in quite the same words. According to the Shorter Qxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (1959:1488), for example, philosophy in the original and widest sense is the love, study, or pursuit of wisdom, or of knowledge of things and their causes, whether theoretical or practical. However, from wider comparative studies, philosophy is seen to mean a rational attempt by humankind to pose and discuss problems and their solutions in connection with a view of reality (that is a world-view) and a view of life. Five concepts emerge from this definition as follows: (a) *rational attempt; (b) problems and solutions; (c) view of reality (world-view); (d) view of life, and (e) pose and discuss. We analyze each of these aspects*

3.2. An Analysis and Explanation of Each of Five Elements Identified in Studying Philosophy.
The first of the five identifiable elements is *rational attempt*. By rational attempt we mean that the philosopher appeals to the human rationality. Concisely, it means that the philosopher tries to account for factual data as well as the logical requirements that any inquiry must meet. This is to say that s/he relates his/her exposition to that which is in principle accepted by others. This is more examined when we take rationality as an integral characteristics of philosophical thought.

3.2.1. Problems and Solutions
The second element to be used is the concept problems and solutions. By problem and solutions: we mean the absence of a connection between data. When a problem arises, a number of apparently isolated data occur, but in a context in which we suspect there is some underlying unity. This aspect is dealt with fully in connection with methodology. By solution we mean the devising of a system of concepts in terms of which the connection between apparently isolated data can be explained. Before solutions are put forward, the

specific problem must naturally be formulated and this can only be done within the context of a particular situational coherence of data.

3.2.2. View of Reality

The third element is the view of reality, commonly known as the world-view. The problems formulated by the philosopher differ from those posed by the scientist. This fact is accepted by all philosophers. But or the exact nature of these philosophical problems does not exist as yet.

There are philosophers who hold that reality is the totality of all the objects studied by the scientist and that the philosopher must provide the answer to the question: What is this total reality (cosmos)?

These are other philosophers who contend that the totality of phenomena has an underlying substance, cause, or designer, and that philosophers must, therefore, ask: What is this underlying substance, cause or designer which reveals, manifests or makes itself visible in the world of phenomena.

Yet another group of philosophers poses the question differently. The question is set out as follows: Which fundamental concepts are necessary for understanding human existence in the world? This reality is interpreted as the reality of human existence. To understand the reality of human existence, we need certain basic concepts. Which then are these concepts and what are they?

The fourth element is the view of life. Man's existence involves a variety of activities. Sometimes man tries to describe situations, sometimes he/she evaluates, for instance, when s/he prefers one thing to another. His/he choice is not merely arbitrary. The best example is that man/woman tries to explain or make his/her behaviour understandable by appealing to the general acceptability of the norms, standards or criteria which s/he employs when s/he chooses or values. Because these criteria determine the direction or nature of human existence, we speak of a view of life. In this respect questions arise: Which concepts are necessary for placing the nature of the questions regarding the proper, the beautiful, the good, etc in their correct context and for judging the answers to these questions? The philosopher does not ask: 'What is good or what is beautiful?' The questions are outside a philosophical context. The philosopher only wants to understand man's moral behaviour or aesthetic actions by investigating the application of certain fundamental concepts especially the differences between concepts. Philosophy does not provide rules, norms and principles. Its main task is to elucidate the rational procedure of referring to rules, norms and principles.

3.2.3. Pose and Discuss

The fifth element is to pose and discuss. The philosopher formulates problems by means of language. This means that s/he uses words/terms/concepts with a particular meaning. Problems appear as linguistic expressions in the form of a question. Philosophically, posing a problem means that it is formulated with a clear understanding of the background and implications of the problem. The discussion of the posed problem comprises: (a) describing the context of the problem, (b) pointing out certain flaws which must be removed and (c) deducing what type of answer (solution) is relevant.

In sum, we can safely state that we have fairly and reasonably succeeded in defining the concept of philosophy and have also identified its five important elements of and further, concise explanations were given of the following elements: (a) rational attempt;(b) problems and solutions; (c) view of reality; (d) view of life; and (e) pose and discussion.

3.3. An Outline of the Subject-Matter of Philosophy

An extensively elaborated available literature survey on systematic philosophy does reveal a broad outline of the subject as follows:
1. What is philosophy?
a. Characteristics o philosophy, comprising(1) rationality and (2) universality encompassing such concepts as: (a) comprehensiveness and (b) generality
2. subject-matter of philosophy
2.1 as the results of special sciences
2.2 as analysis
2.3 logical analysis
3. branches of philosophy comprise:
3.1 epistemology
3.2 metaphysics
3.3 ariology, including, (a) ethics and (b) aesthetics
3.4 methodology comprises (a) mathematics and (b) statistics
3.5 history of philosophy
(a) Classical Greek philosophy
(b) Mediaeval (Christian) philosophy
(c) Modern philosophy including – renaissance and -reformation
(d) Contemporary and history

4. Summary

This gives a general picture of what philosophy is and its subject-matter in brief.

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