

REALITY

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The Philosophical Order

- ☐ Metaphysics
- ☐ Epistemology
- ☐ Ethics
- ☐ Politics
- ☐ Esthetics

This is a strict hierarchy. It is not possible to address ethics, politics or esthetics without having first done the ‘ontological and epistemological spadework’.

The presentation concerns only metaphysics. If we touch on the other categories, it will only be to elucidate some metaphysical point.

Basic Axioms

❑ Existence

‘Existence exists’, there is ‘something’ rather ‘nothing’, *etc.*

❑ Identity

A is A , A is not ‘*not A*’, and so forth.

❑ Consciousness

Consciousness is a property of a subset of living beings (*e.g.*, humans). This view is called ‘biological naturalism’. This axiom does not refer to the Cartesian ‘*cogito*’. It not a question of ‘I think therefore I am’ but, ‘*I am therefore I think*’ (quote from Gilson).

The axioms cannot be dispensed with. All the ‘isms’, existentialism, idealism, materialism, post modernism, pragmatism, skepticism, stoicism or whatever, try to deny one or other of them. But it is not possible to argue *for* any of these positions without employing the axioms themselves. There is an infinity of potential ‘Socratic’ dialogues whereby the protagonists can be led into contradiction.

Identity Implies Causality

- ❑ If A is A , B is B , C is C , *etc.*, then for change/movement to occur A must cause B , B must cause C , and so on (The principle of causality.)
- ❑ But then there is the problem of an infinite regress. There must be an ‘uncaused cause’, or a prime mover, or something, to get the ball rolling.
- ❑ What should we do to solve this problem? Typically some form of supernatural consciousness is chosen, a God, or a World Spirit or the ‘One’, or some such. But is this coherent? We would have to postulate some kind of free-floating intellect/consciousness which is not biologically grounded. The only viable alternative seems to be to make existence itself the primary.

Existence has Primacy over Consciousness

- ❑ The ***Primacy of Existence*** rather than the ***Primacy of Consciousness*** is a key realist principle. (Rules out idealism). Consciousness is a part of existence, not the other way round. The role of consciousness is that it (potentially) allows (some) biologically contingent beings to grasp reality.
- ❑ Three types of ***Primacy of Consciousness***;
 - Supernatural Version ('God's' Consciousness)
 - Personal Version (Subjectivism)
 - Social Version (Group Consciousness)

The Metaphysically Given is the Absolute

- ❑ What it says on the tin.
- ❑ This means physical reality, in the sense not of a static unchanging ‘thing’, but rather the various laws of nature, biology, chemistry, physics, and so on, which determine how the process unfolds.
- ❑ Social relations are real, but not metaphysically given. There must be a *Construction of Social Reality*, to use the title of Searle’s book. In turn, however, the social relations themselves then have causal effects on the material world. They cannot change the laws of nature, but they do affect the way in which the ‘matter’ gets re-arranged.

Idealism and Materialism Reject the Axioms

- ❑ If you look at any philosophical dictionary ‘idealism’ and ‘materialism’ are given as opposites.
- ❑ However, this is false. They both reject the axioms. Idealism rejects the primacy of existence, and materialism rejects consciousness.
- ❑ They both fail.

Realism Not Co-Extensive with Materialism

- ❑ Social facts, determined by collective intentionality, are immaterial but real.
- ❑ But they can, and do, have a causal effect on the material world (*e.g.*, the ‘line in the sand’, money, *etc.*)
- ❑ There *is* therefore a realm which is not material but nonetheless real. However it is neither spiritual nor supernatural.
- ❑ The ontology of the social world is different from that of the physical/material world. But they are still part of the same single ‘world’ of existence, and must be consistent with one another. No *dualism*.

Ontological *versus* Epistemological Objectivity and Subjectivity

- ❑ The ‘brute facts’ (physical facts) are both ontologically and epistemologically objective.
- ❑ Social facts are ontologically subjective (collective intentionality) but epistemologically objective.

Knowledge, Opinion and Truth in Social Science

- ❑ As social facts are epistemologically objective, even if ontologically subjective, there can *be* social science, and knowledge rather than mere opinion.
- ❑ An idealist ‘thinks’, but a realist ‘knows’ (Gilson).
- ❑ It is possible to aspire to the truth even though, of course, we might not actually get there in practice (knowledge is not the same thing as dogmatism).
- ❑ ‘Critical’ realism, the very starting point of which is the critique of knowledge, is untenable. ‘A realist critique of knowledge is like a squared circle ...’ (Gilson again).