

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS 1, 2, 3, AND 7, OF MODERN CHALLENGES TO PAST PHILOSOPHY

Our symposium presentations will draw primarily upon Chapters 4, 5, and 6, rather than Chapters 1, 2, and 3. But since these first three chapters provide the foundation for Chapters 4, 5, and 6, we think that an outline of the first three chapters might be helpful. We also include an outline of Chapter 7 because neither presentation will focus upon it, and because it's an important concluding thought about the book's entire project.

[1] Chapter 1 – Problems and Perspectives

[a] Thesis T: Investigating past philosophical sources is an excellent means of promoting one's own first-order philosophical inquiries.

{1} First-order philosophical inquiry is the pursuit of philosophical questions as a means of assisting one's own search for the truth about reality. In contrast, second order philosophical inquiry is the pursuit of philosophical questions in order to achieve purposes other than assisting one's own search for the truth about reality, e.g., the philosophical historian's purpose of defending an interpretation of a past philosopher's views, i.e., "getting the views of X straight."

[b] In light of our purpose to articulate the essence of philosophical inquiry in Chapter 2, we argue that there are essences, and that certain fundamental human powers and practices, such as the power and practice of philosophical inquiry, have essences in their own right.

[2] Chapter 2 – The Essence of Philosophy

[a] Philosophical inquiry is the sustained effort by an individual philosophical inquirer to formulate a systematic world-view, where that sustained effort is motivated by the desire to find answers to certain kinds of ultimate questions. Such questions fall into two categories: human-condition questions and Aristotelian-wonder questions.

{1} Human-condition questions are those that everyone asks, on some level of consciousness, simply in virtue of being human. The fundamental human-condition question is, "How should I live?" Responses to that fundamental question potentially involve responses to a host of related questions, which we call derived human-condition questions.

{2} Aristotelian-wonder questions are those questions that are pursued for the intrinsic fulfillment of deepening one's understanding of the world.

{3} Although it is possible that, for an individual inquirer, these two motivations generate distinct, or at least partially-distinct, classes of

questions, in the ideal state of philosophical unification for an individual inquirer, the class of questions generated by Aristotelian wonder and the class generated by human-condition concern would be identical. This ideal state of unification would fully instantiate the essence. One basis for such a unification is a theistic world-view.

[b] There are additional elements of the essence of philosophical inquiry: (1) proceeding dialectically, (2) being aware of one's inherent fallibility and of the inevitability of having to make philosophical choices under conditions of uncertainty, (3) avoiding Kierkegaardian infinite parentheses, (4) drawing upon multiple sources, including a priori insights, one's own intuitions and experiences, the intuitions and experiences of others, and scientific and mathematical inquiries, and (5) using the methods of argument, explanation, distinction, definition, and generalization, and, in addition, formulating guiding principles for using those methods.

{1} These additional elements of the essence of philosophical inquiry are necessarily tied to (i.e., ordered to) the two foundational philosophical motivations – pursuing human-condition questions and pursuing Aristotelian –wonder questions. Each of these additional elements must be understood as used in the pursuit of one or both of those two fundamental pursuits. There is an important sense in which they can't be detached from the umbrella of those two fundamental projects in a way that would expand the scope of philosophical inquiry beyond its proper limits. For example, using dialectical argument as a means of selling life insurance would not suffice to make the activity of selling life insurance a philosophical activity itself.

[c] We do not claim that the foregoing list of elements exhausts the essence of philosophical inquiry.

[3] Chapter 3 – Arguments for taking past philosophers seriously.

[a] The arguments for Thesis T are based upon Chapter 2's analysis of the essence of philosophy.

[b] Practical arguments are normative arguments whose conclusions are intended to guide choices. The arguments for Thesis T are formulated as practical arguments because Thesis T is itself a normative proposition.

[c] The general schema for these practical arguments is the following:

Addressed to: Those who are inclined to engage in philosophic inquiry.

{1} You have an excellent reason for engaging in philosophical inquiry that possesses attribute, X, for your own first-order purposes.

- {2} If you have an excellent reason for engaging in philosophical inquiry that possesses attribute, X, for your own first-order purposes, then you have an excellent reason for investigating past sources of philosophical inquiry for your own first-order purposes.
- {3} Hence, you have an excellent reason for investigating past sources of philosophical inquiry for your own first-order purposes.
- [d] This schema can be converted into an explicit practical argument by substituting for the variable, X, any one of the elements of the essence of philosophy specified in Chapter 2, e.g., being a dialectical inquiry, being a human-condition inquiry, being an Aristotelian-wonder inquiry, being a systematic inquiry, being a definitional inquiry, being an a priori inquiry, being an inquiry about fallibility, being an inquiry about uncertainty, being an inquiry about first-person inquiry, etc.
- [e] Premise {2} of any one of these fully-explicit practical arguments can be supported by citing examples of past philosophers whose writings helpfully focus upon the particular attribute in question.
- {1} These practical arguments must be understood in a special way. Listing past sources of philosophical wisdom and asserting their contemporary relevance for first-order purposes may not carry much epistemic force for those who are not already acquainted with those sources. They won't be able to fully evaluate the force of such arguments unless and until they investigate those sources for themselves. This type of practical argument is not unusual. Many practical arguments must be understood as being implicitly tied to an appeal of the form: "I've just offered you a practical argument, but I encourage you to try out its recommendation for yourself. If you do, I predict that you will then apprehend the epistemic force of the argument. If you don't, you will have precluded yourself from potential illumination."
- [f] The argumentative procedure of this chapter may lead some to assume that, unless they accept every nuanced detail of the analysis in Chapter 2 of the essence of philosophical inquiry, they need not bother with any of Chapter 3's practical arguments based upon that analysis. But that's not necessarily so. Anyone who believes that philosophical inquiry has an essence, and who proposes an analysis of that essence that only partially overlaps with our analysis, can justifiably use those of our practical arguments that focus upon that overlapping subset of attributes. Indeed, even more generally, such an inquirer would have the all materials needed for proposing his or her own version of Thesis T.

[4] Chapter 7 – Philosophy, Time, and Eternity

- [a] Even if all we have urged is accepted, two crucial questions remain.
- [b] First, is the pursuit of philosophy via earlier writers an efficient means of throwing light on living issues? All gold is valuable, but some is locked into surroundings that make recovery extremely expensive. Does it simply take too long to attend to past philosophy with any degree of seriousness? Some insist that there is no point in reading a text unless you seek out the author's meaning, or at a minimum, the meaning that the sentences can bear. In the case of past philosophy this seemingly sensible rule throws the first-order philosopher into an infinite Kierkegaardian parenthesis. For six separate reasons, we argue that the first-order philosopher should gently lay aside the rule, while respecting its spirit.
- [c] Second, first-order philosophizing is bound to drown in a sea of dialectic. And if so, does this mean, contrary to Aristotle, that the highest end of human existence – perfect bliss – is unattainable in this world? Maybe, but as Aristotle himself urged, no natural desire can be in vain. This suggests the possibility that the human end is to be reached only in eternity.