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The Nature of Philosophy and its Rules

Edwin Joseph, B.A., M.S.

It is often thought that philosophy is the exercise of thinking new thoughts and imagining new ideas. While this is true, there is a bit more to the discipline. Philosophy has rules. Along with those rules are methods that coincide. Of course, there exists a great deal of philosophy that interrogates the methodology of other philosophers or certain schools of thought, but even while interrogating those perspectives, the philosopher still participates within certain rules of engagement. These rules can be looked at as *philosophical antecedents*. That is, the number of assumptions or guidelines one tries to follow in heed of exploring or making philosophical claims. One such antecedent is:

[1] the motive of a philosophy *must aspire to or inhabit the nearest and most practical good for all people*. Philosophy, while often critical should seek positive and helpful outcomes even if the style of the writer is somewhat pessimistic. The thrust of a philosophic claim should not be exclusively antagonistic. It should come from a place that is seeking the betterment of social concern with more attention towards what can help the discourse rather than attacking the presumable opponents to it. Therefore, it must present its ideas in a holistic matter that details and explains its observations and how they relate to defining a problem, theoretical or otherwise.

This may sound a bit modern, but principles of this kind were embedded even in the ancient Greeks. One could take it for granted today, but the early philosophers took heed to notions of this kind perhaps even more so than their contemporary counterparts, as the ancients were more concerned with civics and personhood. In contrast, today's philosophers are by and large analytic or have been swept up by some form of social activism.

[2] It has to have **biological coherence**, meaning it has to respect the uncovered and self-evident truths, needs, and functions of human beings, and where possible, that of the entire natural world. That sounds like a huge feat, and it is, which is in part why it is so challenging to produce universal claims.

[3] It has to have **physical coherence**, meaning it has to respect and work within the limits of what we know to be true and or self-evident by the likes of the material world. This one might strike you as unlikely as philosophers are not physicists, but when evaluating characteristics of the natural world and how human beings interact with it, the philosopher must do so by reflection upon what is known by the best guesses of the sciences.

[4] It has to maintain **historical coherence**. A contemporary philosophy or critic of a philosophical position must not avow their own claims without engaging with prior persons or texts which have covered the same topic. In the event of engaging with and responding to prior ideas and text, the philosopher expands the discourse, hopefully in a meaningful way.

[5] It has to maintain **societal coherence**, meaning it has to purvey a philosophy or critique that is helpful, supports or furthers the state of civility. This, at least, is the philosopher's aspiration.

Charting back to the first claim, **philosophy aspiring to the nearest good...** the most meaningful takeaway from this antecedent is that philosophy should always try to teach from a positive frame of reference as one of the primary jobs of the philosopher is to defend concepts. Philosophy assumes the role of a sort of guidance counselor, albeit a challenging one that often criticizes a claim or perspective to make its point. This is something very well depicted when looking back to the ancient Greeks with people like Plato and Socrates. Philosophers traditionally take on the role of reckoning with the current or anticipatory grievances of an individual, populist, or nation. However, they do so with embrace and a supposition of optimism even though they often write very pessimistically. Figures like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are examples. Though it is debatable, I would hold, as does Alain Badiou, that the character of the philosopher is one that is a priori optimistic. Even while writing critically and pessimistically, the very act of philosophizing involves hopefulness as

we are aimed at pronouncing more transparent and usable perspectives to help us understand the dynamics of our journeys through life.

