

Methods: A Preliminary Survey

Plato

a) Definitions of terms in common use: everyone felt they knew what was meant by courage, temperance, justice, knowledge.

But a definition must hold for every instance of, say, courage and for no instance of anything else.

On that criterion no one was able to define words denote what everyone felt they knew precisely what was meant.

Not even Socrates could do so: his sole advantage was that he knew about his own ignorance but the others had to be taught that they were ignorant.

What was the point? Was it that we should always define any words we use? Debaters are apt to insist, Define your terms! Was Socrates on their side?

Can all terms be defined? Which can? How does one go about discovering definitions? Is there a method involved?

Illustration from chemistry. Mixtures and compounds. The properties of mixtures are a mix of the properties of the things that have been mixed together. The properties of compounds differ from the properties of the elements that constitute the compound: water is H_2O ; the properties of water are very different from the properties of hydrogen and those of oxygen.

b) The parable of the cave in the Republic.

Suppose in a deep cave a row of men are chained in such a way that all they can see is the far wall.

Suppose outside the cave the sun is shining brightly and that statues are being carried past the entrance into the cave.

Suppose that the prisoners in the cave can see the shadows of the statues moving along the far wall, but see no shadows of the men carrying them.

In brief, all they can see are shadows, and the shadows are not of real people but merely of statues. So for them the only known reality consists of shadows of mere statues.

Now if someone were to enter the cave and be able to release one of the prisoners, would the prisoner be willing to turn around and face the light of the sun, step outside the cave, and recognize the realities he now could see? Or would he be dazzled by the light of the sun and turn back to what had become reality for him?

The point was that Plato's Republic depicted a state that was not known to exist. Does it follow that the states known to exist really are true states, and not just shadows of states?

c) In the Laws Plato opts for leaving his ship (the Republic) and taking a life-boat instead (a deuteros plous).

The aim in the Republic was to depict justice by depicting a state in which men could be just. The Laws suppose that people may very well be unjust, and need to be forewarned and, if the warning is inefficacious, then tried, judged, and sentenced.

Aristotle

a) In his Analytcs Aristotle dealt with inferences: in the Prior Analytcs he dealt with valid inferences; in the Posterior Analytcs with inferences that communicate understanding.

An. Post. I 2: We suppose ourselves to possess unqualified scientific knowledge of a thing, ... when we think that we know the cause on which the fact depends, as the cause of that fact and no other, and, further, that the fact could not be other than it is.... Consequently the proper object of unqualified scientific knowledge is something that cannot be other than it is. McKeon's Basic Works of Aristotle, p. 111.

An. Post. I 6: The premisses of demonstration must be necessary and essential.

An. Post. I 8: Only eternal connexions can be demonstrated.

An. Post. II 19: Now of the thinking states by which we grasp truth, some are unfailingly true, others admit of error -- opinion for instance and calculation, whereas scientific knowledge and intuition are always true: further no other kind of thought except intuition is more accurate than scientific knowledge, whereas primary premisses are more knowable than demonstrations, and all scientific knowledge is discursive. From these considerations it follows that... it will be intuition that apprehends the primary premisses. McKeon, p. 186.

b) While An. Post. II 19 attends to the transition from sense-impressions to universals (McKeon p. 185), the De Anima II 1 distinguishes in animals between soul and body, where the soul is conceived not as a universal but as the concrete form of the body (McKeon p. 555).

The issue is put more generally in Metaphys. VII 17 where Aristotle asks what is meant by the question, What is it?

His answer is that "What.." means "Why..". Thus, what is an eclipse? is explained by saying why the moon is darkened in this fashion? It is darkened because the earth intercepts the light that otherwise would illuminate the moon. Similarly, what is a man? becomes why is this flesh a man? Because of the soul which is the form of the body (McKeon p. 810 f).

It is to be noted that, while An. Post. treats of scientific knowledge and so stresses universals and necessity, Metaphys. is concerned with reality and so treats of causes.

c) Aristotle divided the material universe into heavenly bodies and sublunary bodies. The former are eternal and indestructible and their movements are necessary. The latter are generated one from another in time. Their operations may be caused per se or caused per accidens (coincidental). What results from coincidence is not the effect of a cause per se but only of a cause per accidens; and the per accidens excludes from the sublunary world the determinism attributable to the movements of the heavenly bodies.

3. The Scope of Macroeconomics

Let me begin with an analogy. The motor-car industry primarily involves the design, production, and sale of motor-cars. But it stands in need of a population well enough off to purchase cars and capable of learning to drive them properly; also it needs public highways publicly maintained and their use controlled by traffic regulations enforced by traffic police; and beyond these needs there is a need of government departments that provide the people that initiate and direct and, when desirable, improve such services.