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1.4 The fields of Philosophy

Ethics is a major field of Philosophy. What are the other fields of (Western) philosophy?

Metaphysics

Core of philosophy during the ancient Greek period.

Metaphysics is about **reality**.

- "What is real?"
- "What is the fundamental nature of reality?"

Metaphysics comes **before science**: science presupposes a particular metaphysical view of the world.

Metaphysical views include:

Monism: There is only one kind of reality.
Idealism: Only **ideas** are real.
Materialism: Only **matter** is real.
Dualism: There are two kinds of reality.
(For example, **supernaturalism** is a dualist view.)
Extreme monism: There is only **one** real thing in the world.

Epistemology

Especially central during the early modern period.

Epistemology is about **knowledge**.

- "How do we know?"
- "What counts as knowledge?"

Epistemology tends to be particuarly focused on **scientific** knowledge.

Epistemological views include:
Rationalism: Knowledge comes from **reasoning**.
Empiricism: Knowledge comes from **experience**.
Skepticism: Knowledge is **impossible**.
Pragmatism: Knoweldge comes from **practice**.

Logic and semantics

Dominant in the early 20th century.

Logic is about **reasoning** and semantics is about **meaning**.

Logic is about what makes a good argument, what makes **a good proof**. Since proofs were understood on the **Euclidean geometrical model**, the notion of **definition** became very important, thus linking logic to semantics.

Semantics is about words and **meaning**, and how we use language.

Both logic and semantics can be thought of as **normative** fields: logic is about what makes a **good argument**; semantics is about what makes **the use of a word correct**.

The Chinese philosophers were very interested in such questions of language. But they understood these questions quite differently than in the West, and one question that comes up in trying to bridge these cultures is: **"Can we explain the nature of meaning without appealing to a theory of ideas and idealism?"**

Ethics and value theory

Important throughout history, and making a particular comeback in the West in the 21st century. The Chinese classical thinkers took ethics to be central to their philosophy from the very beginning; they did not treat other fields such as metaphysics as independent fields so much as parts of ethics.

In segment 1.5, we will look at ethics and moral theory in more depth...