

Book Review of History of Philosophy by Professor A.C.Grayling

Professor Grayling writes in his book The History of Philosophy that logic is the “general instrument of philosophy, as math is in science.” His point is that logic is the tool that allows the philosopher to reason through great issues presented in philosophical study. When the philosopher undertakes philosophical inquiry in areas such as ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, or epistemology, logic is the tool that allows for the analytical dissection to arrive at the core of the universal truth. Without logic guiding the approach and framework, answers to fundamental questions are a game of haphazard guesses, speculations and theories, which by their very nature would be illogical. Illogical deductions ultimately have no import, and illuminate nothing – they are merely words.

Logic, as a philosopher’s tool, has three categories: deductive logic, inductive logic and informal logic. With deductive logic, the form of the argument is most important as one starts with premise A, then incorporates premise B, to arrive at conclusion C. The classic example is Aristotle’s use of deductive reasoning in asking broad questions about the nature of humanity: All men are mortal (premise A); Socrates is a man (premise B), therefore Socrates is mortal (conclusion C). It is a formal, concrete, logical way of deducing that Socrates, like all men, is subject to dying. Here, logic is the formal tool or instrument to answer the metaphysical, philosophical question: – is Socrates mortal? Inductive logic is another tool used to draw conclusions about issues from inferences. Inductive logic, however, can sometimes be faulty. A well-known example is: a man walks in with wet clothes and a wet umbrella; therefore, we can infer that it is raining outside. While we can reasonably infer beyond what the premise says about the wet man – we may not always be 100% accurate regarding the conclusion. What if, for example, the man had his umbrella opened when he walked by a lawn sprinkler which soaked his clothes. The goal of inductive logic is more often to assist in creating scientific predictions. Finally, there is informal logic – which is really not logical reasoning at all – but rather real-life arguments, debates and persuasions. This type of logic is actually not logic, because informal reasoning often contains efforts to win arguments not based on deductive or inductive thinking, but instead on trickery, bullying, or appealing to pity and biases.

Informal logic is a good example of a tool which is too blunt or poorly constructed to use to conduct meaningful reasoning on philosophical issues. Indeed, to go further, if you remove formal logic entirely, there can be no philosophical inquiry at all, and therefore there can be no true attempt to understand our world and existence. Just as without mathematics, there can be no understanding of chemistry, no ability to comprehend physics, and no ability to construct things through engineering. If we rid ourselves of logical reasoning, we are simply throwing out random guesses to address questions that concern us. So, for example, in Plato’s *Meno*, when the question posed is: “what is virtue?” -- without a logical analysis, the answer could be anything from “virtue is a flower” to “virtue is a good joke”. These rank speculations are completely off-point, do not even begin equate to the question, and are completely and wholly illogical. Once there is no logic, once random thoughts are substituted for a logical analysis, the questions cannot be answered at all – and philosophy dies with the first step of inquiry. Indeed, the philosophical questions themselves even become boring and irrelevant. If there are only ridiculous hypotheses thrown-out to dissect the question of what is virtue – it is pointless to even undertake the inquiry. Just as logic is the key to philosophy -- the lack of logic ends philosophy altogether.

In conclusion, logic is the very basis of philosophical inquiry. It is the main tool needed to begin to pose and contemplate questions that lead to understanding of our humanity and existence. Without logic, there are no answers – and an illogical inquiry even negates the questions.