

CORE TOPICS ADDRESSED BY THEORISTS

Theorists since at least the Ancient period have attempted to answer several basic and often overlapping questions:

ARTS: Sub-fields include:

Visual and Plastic Arts:

Film:

Literature:

Music:

COMMUNICATION: Are truth-claims separable from the words in which they are couched? That is, what role, if any, does language play in the production of our knowledge of the world? Moreover, how does language work? That is, how exactly do words mean what they do?

The main fields devoted to the study of language are called linguistics, philosophy of language, rhetoric and hermeneutics; logic scrutinises the validity of the arguments which we advance in support of our assertions

THE HUMAN BEING: What is a human being? Of what exactly do humans consist? Are we solely physical creatures (merely bodies) or is there a part of us that transcends the physical (do we possess a '*soul*,' *mind* or *consciousness*)? Is our mind distinct from and independent of the body and, by extension, the social and historical context in which we live or is it necessarily shaped by such factors? Do humans possess and *identity* or *self* which distinguishes them from other humans and non-humans?

The main fields devoted to the study of such questions are psychology and philosophy of mind.

KNOWLEDGE: If we make claims about, for example, the nature of reality, how can we be sure that they are true? In other words, how can we *justify* or prove our truth-claims? Is objective, scientific knowledge possible, or is all knowledge necessarily subjective? Is the way in which knowledge is produced about the physical world

The field devoted to the study of such questions is epistemology (from the Greek *episteme*, knowledge, and *logos*, discourse, propositions or words about or the study of something); the natural sciences is the field of study devoted to understanding the physical world.

MORALITY: Is it possible to discern right from wrong? Is there a correct way to behave and, thus to live our lives? How exactly we should treat our fellow humans? Is there an *absolute* standard according to which human conduct may be judged or is morality *relative* to particular social and historical contexts?

The field devoted to the study of such questions is ethics.

NATURE: What is the nature of the universe in which we live? Of what exactly does it consist? Is it solely a material phenomenon or is there a non-material spiritual element to it as well? Is the former all there is (materialism) or is the latter the 'true reality' (idealism)?

The field devoted to the study of the underlying nature of reality is called ontology (from the Greek *ontos*, being or what there is, and *logos*, discourse, propositions or words about or the study of something) while cosmology is devoted to theorising

the origins of the universe. The various sciences study various sectors of reality, e.g. biology studies the flora and fauna, chemistry the chemical properties of nature, and so on.

SOCIETY: What form do human societies take? How do we govern ourselves? What form ought societies to take? How should we govern ourselves? What are the various cultural practices through which societies strive to make sense of themselves and the world?

The general field devoted to the study of such questions is the social sciences; sub-disciplines include anthropology (the study of culture), the law, politics (the study of government and the rules which make for social order), and sociology (the study of social structure).