

Philosophy as an A Posteriori Discipline

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Abstract

I shall maintain that philosophy aims to develop synthetic theories of the actual world that are evaluable by normal methods of scientific theory choice. (Q. What then distinguishes philosophy from science? A. It deals with theoretical issues whose resolution doesn't depend on new evidence.)

Some philosophers say that philosophy consists of conceptual analysis. I say they are mistaken about the nature of philosophy, including their own philosophical practice.

Many philosophers say that philosophy is synthetic, but not a posteriori. (1) Against those who argue that philosophical intuitions have a distinctive authority that does not rest on empirical experience, I argue that this is not borne out by the role intuitions play in thought experiments. (2) Against those who say that much philosophy rests on phenomenological reflection, I say that this renders it a posteriori. (3) And I say the same to those who hold that philosophy proceeds by establishing necessary conditions for the possibility of experience.