

1. STARTING OUT

The word *philosophy* derives from two Greek words which mean love and wisdom. The philosopher is one who loves wisdom.

If you want to be wise, to be a philosopher, you must learn to do one particular act, to distinguish, to take a thing and divide it in your mind, for it is only by doing so that you can better understand its reality.

What is the philosopher concerned with ? Let us start with the traditional example the teacher uses, a table.



Here we have it, four uprights with a flat surface about 2 foot 7 inches (800 mm) off the floor. Your parents use it to feed their family ; it provides a facility on which you may do your homework. We all take it for granted, hardly thinking of it other than as an item of furniture. Yet the humble table is immensely valuable as a basis for our study.

There are a number of different levels at which the thinker can analyse the table.

At the first level is the scientist. He considers its component parts and identifies them : wood, steel (bolts, screws and nails and perhaps angle braces), glue, varnish or paint. If necessary he can identify each of its material elements in detail. He proceeds, always, according to the sensed qualities the components manifest. He could tell us about the wood, its hardness, its workability, its suitability or unsuitability for a table. He could give the characteristics of the steel (in differing grades) of the various fixings. He could tell us of the make-up of the glue, of the varnish or paint. Interestingly, he would not need—once he had looked over the table and performed his tests—to spend any more time with the table as he worked on his analysis. He can walk away from the table and consider these elements in themselves.

There is a second level of abstraction, where the geometrician or the mathematician considers the table. Even less than the scientist would he need to spend time with it. He considers its rectangular-ness, or squareness, or roundness (if it is a round table) and dimensions and may provide us with the implications of its shape and size.

Then there is a third level of abstraction from the table's reality, and this is the level at which the philosopher works. He is not concerned with its physical make-up, or its dimensions or its shape. What concerns him is the most fundamental thing that can be said about it, namely, that it exists. He is concerned with it as a being. Now, you may think to yourself, 'What on earth can be said of a table as a being ?' There is great deal that can be said, as we will see.

To reiterate ; there are three levels of abstraction according to which we can consider the table :

<i>Third</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>First</i>	[The thing
			[
philosophical	mathematical	scientific	[a table

Table considered philosophically

A table is a thing made by human hands with a certain shape, function, ordination and utility. But what is it that makes it a table rather than, say, a ladder, a door, a chair, or a small boat ? The materials out of which it is built could, conceivably, have been made into any other of these four artefacts. What is it that makes it be a table ? Now, philosophy has its own terminology just as any other field of knowledge or expertise and you may find the terms I use somewhat curious. I will call this factor, at this stage, 'table-ness', which is, if you like, the essence or epitome, of what it is to be a table. The factors at work in the production of the other four we might call 'ladder-ness', 'door-ness', 'chair-ness' and 'boat-ness'. We know what this influence is as well as we know what a ladder, a door, a chair and a boat is, but we can have difficulty giving it a proper name. But we all know what a table is and can identify one when we see it.

The next thing to note is that before the table came into existence, it existed, in a sense, in its builder's head. In fact, if he was wise, the builder would first have reduced what was in his head to writing (specifications) and plans involving views of the table in each of the three dimensions, respectively, the plan, the elevation and a section. But let us note—indeed, let us *insist*—that before it came into existence in the real, the table first existed in the builder's head. This entity in the builder's head—call it an idea if you like—when blended with the materials became the table. So there were two influences that worked together to produce the table. The one (the materials) is clearly material. The other is, just as clearly, *not* material because the builder had it in his head, and you can't have something material in your head : let's call it *immaterial*. It was from the blending of these two that the table resulted.

Yesterday, I was at Catie's place and she was finishing sewing a dress. As with a table, so it is with Catie's dress. Before she cut the materials, indeed even before her mother purchased them, she had in her head the general idea of what she wanted to make. Perhaps she found a close approximation in a pattern. She did ! I see she is nodding. The pattern, of course, was simply the plan of the dress in the head of the designer which he, or she, put down on paper.

Next, let us note that in producing the table or the dress, these two influences operated in different ways. The plan or pattern (what was in the head) obviously determined *what* was being produced. The other, the *material* influence worked, equally obviously, by being determined. The materials might (in the case of the table) as easily have turned out to be a ladder, a door, a chair or a small boat. The dress might have been a blouse. The materials were, so to speak, quite indifferent as to what they would turn out to be.

	['table-ness' — the <i>immaterial</i> influence — which determines
Table	[
comprises	[
	[materials — the <i>material</i> influence — which is determined

The next thing that we should ask ourselves is 'Which of the two influences is the more important, the material or the immaterial ?' Clearly, the *immaterial* influence is the more important for it is this, not the *material* influence, which makes the thing produced by the builder be a table rather than a ladder, a door, a chair or a small boat, or which results in a dress rather than a blouse. In each case the matter, as we have said, couldn't care less !

Now in philosophy to the influence which determines the table to be what it is we give the technical name *form*, and the influence which is determined we call, for obvious reasons, *matter*. These influences are the intrinsic causes of the table.

	[Form	— which causes <i>by determining</i> ;
Causes of	[and,	
the table	[
are :	[
	[Matter	— which causes <i>by being determined</i> .

Now things like tables, ladders, doors, chairs and boats, (and dresses and blouses) are called in philosophy 'artificial', from two Latin words *ars* (the noun, *art*) and *facere* (the verb, *to make*). They are made by human hands. In contrast are the things found in the world which are (and are called) 'natural', none of which are made by human hands. These two categories cover the totality of material things.

	[<i>natural</i> (found)
Material	[or
things are	[
either :	[
	[<i>artificial</i> (made by man).

Now, just as artificial things like tables, ladders, doors, chairs and boats, dresses and blouses, are comprised of form and matter, so are the natural things like rocks, trees, dogs, cats, cattle and men. We will develop this teaching on natural things in the next lesson. But let us conclude the present one by acknowledging the distinctions, 1. that every material thing is comprised of a certain form and matter, and 2. that any material thing is either natural or artificial.

About the project on which we are embarked, the pursuit of wisdom, this is what Sacred Scripture has to say :

*I prayed and understanding was given me : I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom was given me.
 I preferred her to kingdoms and to thrones, I esteemed her beyond riches which were not to be compared with her.
 Nor was she to be compared with any precious stone ; for all gold in comparison with her is but sand, and silver like clay.
 I loved her above health and beauty, and I chose her above light, for her light cannot be extinguished.
 All good things came to me with her, and innumerable riches through her hands.
 I rejoiced in all of them ; for wisdom went before me while I was unaware that she was mother of them all.
 What I learned without self-interest, I pass on without reserve ; I do not intend to hide wisdom's riches.
 For she is an inexhaustible treasure to men ; and those who acquire them win God's friendship, commended as they are to him by the benefits of her teaching. [Wisdom 7 : 7-14]*