Logic from Primates to iPad & Philosophy in Four Easy Steps

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Humans develop a social practice unique among primates: Language.

4th Century BC: Societal needs of the Athenian democracy require language to be truth-conducive and not to support sophistry. Plato develops grammar, Aristotle logic.

4th Century AD: Logic becomes “trivial,” i.e., part of the trivium (the three arts) every medieval student needs to master.

14th Century: Logical thinking becomes “trivial,” i.e., part of the trivium (the three arts) every medieval student needs to master.

≈ 1650: Thomas Hobbes suggests logical thinking is nothing but calculating.

≈ 1700: Leibniz takes a stab at building a mechanical calculating/thinking machine.


Step 1 Chose a social or cultural practice, e.g., language or advancing arguments (= logic)

Step 2 Get to know all the relevant facts and theories about said practice

Step 3 Identify and make explicit the norms implicit in that practice

Step 4 Either justify the existing norms or propose and defend better ones

What philosophers do …

Example 1 (logical norms): According to what norms is an argument valid, and why? Are there different norms and hence different logics?

Example 2 (scientific norms): According to what norms is a theory scientific, and why? Can we clearly demarcate science from pseudo-science?

Example 3 (ethical norms): According to what norms is an action morally good, and why? Do the same norms apply in every situation?

Example 4 (metaphysical norms): According to what norms do we say that an object exists, and why? Do Harry Potter, subatomic particles, or gravitational force exist the way rocks and tables do?