

Chronicles of Diversity

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Philosophy & Science

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Since I first wrote this paper many years ago, I have come to regard religion, as it is generally practiced, as the theist side of philosophy, in contrast to the more famous atheistic form of philosophy.

Yes, I really did submit this paper to the class, the professor gave me an A-, because it really wasn't what he was expecting. But his comment stated that it definitely typified what he was trying to teach us that quarter and gave me an A for the whole class. (That was really scary!) So with limited editorial modifications:

Philosophy and Science

A Problem Even a First Grader Can Understand

Jerry Wallace was one of the youth upon which the future of the nation depends. He lived with his parents in the upper-middle class suburb of Pine Hills. Jerry was better educated than any age group up to his time. The school which Jerry attended was one of those new progressive elementary schools which owe their existence to John Dewey and others.

Jerry sat in his first grade Introduction to Philosophy class that November day when his teacher, Miss Aris Totle, gave Jerry an assignment which would frustrate him for many hours into the future: Write a short formal paper dealing with the topic of science and philosophy, to be turned in before the beginning of the Thanksgiving vacation.

"Cool!" said Jerry, and then asked his first question, "What is a 'formal paper'?" followed rapidly by: "What is science?" and "What is philosophy?"

Miss Totle gave Jerry some answers which only a true philosopher could understand and then asked the class if there were any further questions. The class, it seems, completely understood the task, for there were no hands raised, and Jerry had to continue in his own disbelief.

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That evening at dinner, Jerry's father noticed that Jerry wasn't eating, and asked if some thing was troubling Jerry. Jerry explained what had happened at school that day and then asked, "Father, what is philosophy?" and then "What is science?"

Jerry's father paused for a moment and then replied, "Eat your peas, they're good for you!"

Jerry couldn't see anything of use in that statement, but his father he thought (far wiser than Jerry) must know what he was talking about. Jerry decided to think about this later in his study room.

In his study room Jerry sat and tried to decide where to begin the vast undertaking. He finally decided the best place to start was the dictionary. Jerry pulled down the copy of the "American Heritage Dictionary": and found the following definitions:

Philosophy

SYLLABICATION: phi·los·o·phy

NOUN: Inflected forms: pl. phi·los·o·phies

1. Love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means and moral self-discipline. 2. Investigation of the nature, causes, or principles of reality, knowledge, or values, based on logical reasoning rather than empirical methods.

Science

SYLLABICATION: sci·ence

NOUN:1 a. The observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of phenomena. b. Such activities restricted to a class of natural phenomena. c. Such activities applied to an object of inquiry or study.

And

CONJUNCTION:1. Together with or along with; in addition to; as well as. Used to connect words, phrases, or clauses that have the same grammatical function in a construction.

Then when looking in the "Webster's New International Dictionary" Second Edition (unabridged), he found the definitions to cumbersome for his limited use and stuck with the Old American Heritage.

Jerry sat in his room for another hour or so, trying to think of something to do—, suddenly he grabbed his coat and hat and scurried down to his local university library.

With very little effort he quickly accumulated two tables full of volumes written by philosophers and scientists, who said they knew what they were writing about. Jerry discovered some interesting facts that didn't seem to help his problem much, but too interesting to leave behind on the shelves. Some of these were:

In science, that standards are not set for all time, only to such a time as that the means of collecting the data can be improved.

Science tends to work with the more physical world, while philosophy tends to be more linguistic.

In philosophy, there is no clear cut problem and method in which to proceed.

Philosophy, at times deals with questions which have a more moral and ethical base than those problems of science.

In science, the answers which one arrives seem to be taken as absolute truths, which in philosophy questions of even these truths are often asked.

Most philosophical achievements are not as well published for the man on the street as those in science.

Jerry found many other interesting things in his first trip to the library, some have to do with this paper, some not, to which I am not at liberty to say.

These results were not what Jerry had hoped to find. In fact, he found one author which said one thing, then he very quickly found another author, which with the same evidence, had an entirely different conclusion.

Jerry took a long slow walk home, determined not to have wasted those many long hours in the library. As he neared his house one thing did come into his mind that clearly set science and philosophy apart. This one thing was that when a scientist tried to write about philosophy, it read just like a scientist trying to write about philosophy, and when a philosopher tried to write about science, it read like a philosopher trying to write about science.

The scientist used words like they were all universally true in the context he was using them in, and never explained his logic. The philosopher spent all his time with the terms and logic and never got to the point.

Jerry liked to use the example of a champion bridge player writing about a late night poker game. This of course was nothing he could turn into class, so upon reaching home he went to bed deciding to start fresh again tomorrow.

The next evening sitting in his study room (after spending another fruitless day in the library) Jerry remembered those golden pearls of wisdom his father placed upon him the night before: "Eat your peas, they're good for you!"

Jerry began to think seriously about this leading statement: Father knows that peas are good for me because of vitamins, minerals, and other things. A scientist thought about these things and found out what was in the peas that would make one grow strong, and why these things were needed in the body.

Jerry now had the problem of science solved so that a first grader could understand, but he still had the problem of philosophy for the first grader. Jerry's mind was working rapidly now. Since, he didn't eat the peas last night, he felt that this must hold the key to the solution of the problem. Then, he remembered something he had read in one of the volumes in the library, something by Kant, something about a categorical imperative (Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.)

Since Jerry didn't like peas, and he didn't know any of his friends which did either, he thought that this would make an ideal universal law: "No boy should have to eat peas." (He thought about including all vegetables, but remembered that he sometimes liked corn.)

Jerry now had a solid idea on which to write his formal paper. He had gone from utter despair to success (without any peas). He rapidly typed out his paper and turned it in well before the Thanksgiving deadline. The complete text follows:

Philosophy and Science

A Problem Even a First Grader Can Understand

by Jerry Wallace

Miss Aris Totle, First grade teacher

Science is what my father uses when he tells me to eat my peas.

Philosophy is what I do when I don't eat them.

And is the word that holds the whole report together.