# What is Philosophy?

Aristotle usually calls philosophy a μέθοδος or an ἐπιστήμη, using these words almost as synonymns.

> Ἐπειδὴ τὸ εἰδέναι καὶ τὸ ἐπίστασθαι συμβαίνει περὶ πάσας τὰς μεθόδους, ὧν εἰσὶν ἀρχαὶ ἢ στοιχεῖα, ἐκ τοῦ ταῦτα γνωρίζειν ... δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τῆς περὶ φύσεως ἐπιστήμης πειρατέον διορίσασθαι πρῶτον τὰ περὶ τὰς ἀρχάς.[1]

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> Τίς μὲν οὖν ἡ φύσις τῆς ἐπιστήμης τῆς ζητουμένης, εἴρηται, καὶ τίς ὁ σκοπὸς οὗ δεῖ τυγχάνειν τὴν ζήτησιν καὶ τὴν ὅλην μέθοδον.[2]

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> ἡ μὲν οὖν μέθοδος τούτων ἐφίεται, πολιτική τις οὖσα.[3]

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> ...διὰ τὸ μὴ καλῶς ἔχειν ταύτας τὰς νῦν ὑπαρχούσας, διὰ τοῦτο ταύτην δοκῶμεν ἐπιβαλέσθαι τὴν μέθοδον.[4]

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> ὥστε δῆλον ὅτι καὶ πολιτείαν τῆς αὐτῆς ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμης τὴν ἀρίστην θεωρῆσαι τίς ἐστι....[5]

But sometimes he speaks more preciesly, using ἐπιστήμη to name one way of having a μέθοδος and the other way of having it a παιδεία.

> Περὶ πᾶσαν θεωρίαν τε καὶ μέθοδον, ὁμοίως ταπεινοτέραν τε καὶ τιμιωτέραν, δύο φαίνονται τρόποι τῆς ἕξεως εἶναι, ὧν τὴν μὲν ἐπιστήμην τοῦ πράγματος καλῶς ἔχει προσαγορεύειν, τὴν δ'οἷον παιδείαν τινά.
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> πεπαιδευμένου γάρ ἐστι κατὰ τρόπον τὸ δύνασθαι κρῖναι εὐστόχως τί καλῶς ἢ μὴ καλῶς ἀποδίδωσιν ὁ λέγων.[6]

Hence, we should first consider what it means to call philosophy a μέθοδος and why it is a μέθοδος.

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[1] Aristotle, *ΠΥΣΙΚΗΣ ΑΚΡΟΑΣΕΩΣ Α,* 184a 10–16. [2] *ΤΩΝ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΑ ΦΥΣΙΚΑ Α,* 983a 21–23. [3] *ΗΘΙΚΩΝ ΝΙΚΟΜΑΧΕΙΩΝ Α,* 1094b 10–11. [4] *ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΩΝ Β,* 1260b 35–37. [5] *ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΩΝ Δ,* 1288b 22–23. [6] *ΠΕΡΙ ΖΩΙΩΝ ΜΟΡΙΩΝ,* 639a 1–7.

Μέθοδος comes from the Greek words μετά, meaning after or over, and the word ὁδός, meaning road. Hence, it names knowledge over a road or knowledge that follows a road. A road in our knowledge is nothing other than an order or a "before and after" therein.

The reason why philosophy is a μέθοδος or knowledge over a road is because it is a work of reason and every work of reason has some order.

> ...processus scientiarum est opus rationis, cuius proprium est ordinare; unde in omni opere rationis ordo aliquis invenitur, secundum quem proceditur ab uno in aliud.[7]

Hence if philosophy is a knowledge over a road or knowledge that follows a road, it involves two things:

- One is a knowledge of the road to follow, which Aristotle and Plato call a παιδεία.
- And the other isgoing down that road to its end which results in ἐπιστήμη.

Ἐπιστήμη comes from the Greek word for "coming to a halt or stop", and thus names the knowledge of reason after its movement, or thinking and reasoning, has reached its end. We might translate ἐπιστήμη then as "a reasoned out understanding" or "a reasoned out knowledge" ("understanding *reasoned out*" to include the other forms of thinking out which come before thinking out or reasoning out a conclusion.) Παιδεία, which comes before ἐπιστήμη, just as knowledge of the road to follow comes before going down that road to its end, is named from the Greek word for "child" since the child is before the full grown or developed adult. We might transliterate παιδεία into English as *paideia*.

In the *Timaeus,* Plato has Timaeus speak of the importance of having παίδευσις of the roads (Plato's definition of παίδευσις is παιδείας παράδοσις,[8] the handing down or transmission of παιδεία) and Socrates greatly approves what Timaeus has said.[9]

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| Νῦν δ'οὖν τὴν διάταξιν αὐτῶν ἐπιχειρητέον ἑκάστων καὶ γένεσιν ἀήθει λόγῳ πρὸς ὑμᾶς δηλοῦν· ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐπεὶ μετέχετε τῶν κατὰ παίδευσιν ὁδῶν, δι'ὧν ἐνδείκνυσθαι τὰ λεγόμενα ἀνάγκη, ξυνέψεσθε. | Now, however, we must try to take up the disposition and generation of each of these, showing them to you in unaccustomed speech. But since you partake of the roads having learned παιδεία, you will follow the things said through what is necessary to show them. |

But Aristotle calls philosophy more an ἐπιστήμη than a παιδεία because we name something from its end and παιδεία is clearly for the sake of ἐπιστήμη. Likewise, he calls philosophy more an ἐπιστήμη than a ζήτησις or search because it is a search in the beginning, but a reasoned out knowledge in the end. (Philosophy is not and endless search). Hence, too, Socrates in the *Euthydemus,* in his conversation with Cleinias, speaks of philosophy as the κτῆσις επιστήμης.

> Φιλοσοφητέον ὡμολογήσαμεν τελευτῶντες· ἦ γάρ; Ναί, ἦ δ'ὅς. Ἡ δέ γε φιλοσοφία κτῆσις ἐπιστήμης· οὐχ οὕτως; ἔφην. Ναί, ἔφη.[10]

[7] Thomas Aquinas, *In Libros Aristotelis de Caelo et Mundo Expositio,* Proemium, n. 1. [8] *Republic,* 416b. [9] *Timaeus,* 53C. [10] *Euthydemus,* 288D.

Philosophy, then, is knowledge over a road or knowledge that follows a road. And in the end it is a reasoned out knowledge. But it also involves knowledge of the road or roads to follow.

In each part of philosophy, we need to know of what it is a reasoned out knowledge adn what road we must follow.

The first distinction of roads in our looking knowledge is into three, but they come in an order. The first road can be without the second adn the second without one of the third roads. And the first road enterss into the second and determines many things found in the second road. And the second road enters into the third roads and determines what must be found in them in general.

Since a road in our knowledge is an order therein and both nature and reason make order, there can be both a natural road in our knowledge and roads made by reason. And since the nature of thing, or what it is, is first in a thing (a thing must be what it is before it can be anything else), the first road n our knowledge is the natural road. The natural road in our knowledge is the road from the senses into reason since man is by nature an animal with reason. (Animal is defined by having senses, but man is not just an animal. He has reason in addition. But what is more general comes before what is more particular).

The second road in our looking knowledge is the road of reason as reason. This is the road from reasonable guesses to reasoned out knowledge. It includes the common road of reasoned out knowledge. This road is studied in logic.

The third road (or roads) in our knowledge is the private road of each reasoned out knowledge. Since the matter considered in each reasoned out knowledge is different, the road of each will be somewhat unique. The private road of each reasoned out knowledge should be learned in the beginning of each reasoned out knowledge after we have considered what its matter is.

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